

Rose impresses with Ultraconsole UC1-1X8U

by André Johansen

Our IT purchases reflect the accelerating pace at which servers become smaller and less expensive. The problem? It's spelled KVM - keyboard, video, and mouse - and where will all this stuff be stored?

This article looks at Rose Electronics' latest addition to the KVM family - a small KVM switch called Ultraconsole that has a fixed configuration. We checked out an 8-port Ultraconsole, but 4-port and 16-port models are also available.

Forget old dummy switches

The specially customized, built-in operating system is fenced in by a menu system that offers lots of attractive features. You can also password-protect the menu system to prevent unauthorized changes to the settings. At the factory, defaults are set so that user IDs or passwords need not be specified.

You can also specify each server that you connect to Ultraconsole so that you, as system administrator, can keep track of what you're doing. This isn't a problem if you just have a few servers connected to the switch. But if you have a few more, it's a good idea to specify each server based, for example, on the host name, and to assign a label to the server, which indicates the number in the KVM switch that corresponds to just that machine. Then you connect the KVM switch to one or more consoles that you use to get at your servers.

But what do you do when you notice that you filled all the ports on your Ultraconsole? No problem. You just buy another expansion cable and connect it to a new Ultraconsole and voilà, you've expanded the number of ports. And the switch can support ordinary KVM and serial access. Consequently, you can easily connect all servers that don't have graphic cards and all your network equipment to the same KVM switch that you plug into your graphic-equipped machines.

Computers connected to Ultraconsole can be coordinated in groups. After that, you can create profiles that are then applicable to users who have different access authorizations, depending on the profile. For example, in the profile, you can specify if the users are authorized to connect to one specific server and if they have exclusive rights to one machine.

Here, exclusive right means that all logged-in users are automatically logged out when the privileged user logs in, so that the privileged user gets sole access to the system. There is no opportunity for other users to log in as long as one user with exclusive right is logged into a system.

Security isn't a given

It's important to remember that all traffic between Ultraconsole and your workplace is transmitted totally unencrypted. So you should ensure that no one can sniff out the traffic before you set up the system. One solution to this security problem is to buy an Ultralink, a Rose product that can encrypt all data in the cable, including the video stream with SSL. But if you don't have plans to start administering your servers from sites other than the computer room, well... then the wire-tapping risk isn't really a big problem.

The KVM switches offer access to servers on the BOOT level, exactly as if you are sitting at the console in the computer room. So access must also have considerably more protection compared to ordinary login via the Internet or the local network.

KVM switches are nothing to play with

Via this type of switch, you can, for example, start a server from a CD (under the condition that it can be inserted) and then set the *administrator* account password (in Windows 2000) or the *root* account password (in Unix) to zero. Ultraconsole is missing a function to log access to different systems at user and group levels. A possible solution is to connect a logging computer via the RS232 port.

Nevertheless, you can easily expand this smooth little KVM switch for larger installations. It's an attractive product because it offers support for most large computer manufacturers and is easily updated in Flash.

- nok.idg.se/arkiv/listpdf.asp (for subscribers)
- www.rosel.co.uk/pdf/ultraconsole.pdf

Facts

Product type: KVM switch

Supplier: Rose Electronics

Approximate price: SEK 16,000 for the 8-port Ultraconsole UC1-1X8U

N&K thinks: Ultraconsole is a small, smooth KVM switch that can be easily expanded for larger installations. It's an attractive product because it offers support for most large computer manufacturers and can be easily updated in Flash.

André Johansen majored in data processing, signal computing system architecture (SCSA), and scalable CMOS n-well analog (SCNA). He works as a system analyst at Örebro University. You can reach him at andre.johansen@adm.oru.se