

Getting started with Ticker Tape

Overview

The Ticker Tape software allows you to quickly 'broadcast' messages to a group of computers which will then display it in a highly visible, yet unobtrusive and non-work impacting, ticker. The software comprises two specific components, the Ticker Tape Administrator, where messages are defined and controlled from and the Ticker Tape Agent which is installed on all the client computers where you wish to show messages.

The Agents periodically poll a set location to receive the messages that the Administrator software has allocated to them. The location that each Agent computer polls is defined during its installation and this allows you to group the computers appropriately so that, for instance, all the computers in the London office look for messages on their local *London* file server while those in the Chicago office look on the local *Chicago* file server.

The Message Control files on the London & Chicago file servers are administered by the Ticker Tape Administrator who may be in any location with connectivity to the two offices.

This makes the Ticker Tape software ideal for initially advising and keeping people apprised of issues affecting that office or the provision of access to I.T. services within or to it.

First Steps

Getting Ticker Tape deployed and in use within an enterprise is pretty straightforward and can be broken down into the following few steps;

- Install the Ticker Tape Administrator software onto a single computer
- Decide upon and create a shared Message Control file location on an appropriate server within each 'Site' and assign the correct permissions
 - 'Read only' access for the *Agents* within that Site
 - 'Read & Write' for the Ticker Tape *Administrator* user
- Update the Ticker Tape Administrator configuration to reflect the Message Control file location on each of the Site servers
- Deploy the Ticker Tape Agent software to the workstations within each Site, appropriately configured to poll their appropriate local Message Control File location

Install the Ticker Tape Administrator and configure its Sites

Installing the Ticker Tape Administrator is very easy and takes less than a minute. Simply double-click the TickerTapeAdministrator MSI which will then lead you through a small number of standard installation dialogs, one of which allows you to override the default installation location of
"%ProgramFiles%\AmberSoftware.co.uk\Ticker Tape Administrator"

As installed, the Ticker Tape Administrator has three *test* Sites configured, each of which is 'hosted' on the same computer that the Administrator software is installed. This is to allow you to quickly explore the Administrator interface and its use as,

other than being 'hosted' on your own machine (and therefore accessed extremely quickly), the Administrator software will interact with these local 'test Sites' as it would with any other actual remote Site.

In reality, these 'test Sites' are nothing more than directories within the installation directory of the Ticker Tape Administrator software and are found (in a normal default installation) at "C:\Program Files\AmberSoftware.co.uk\Ticker Tape Administrator\TestSites\TestSiteA ... C"

To enhance this simple test environment, it is recommended that you also install the Ticker Tape Agent to the same machine, appropriately configured to look for its message control file in *one* of the three local Site test directories.

Full details on how to install the Agent are shown on page 3. Follow the instructions there, specifying the *full UNC path* to one of the local Test Site directories for the MESSAGEFILE parameter. As a quick example, a typical installation command in this scenario would be *MSIExec /i TickerTapeAgent.msi MESSAGEFILE="\\<YourComputerName>\c\$\Program Files\AmberSoftware.co.uk\Ticker Tape Administrator\TestSites\TestSiteA"*

With the Agent installed also, you'll be able to experiment with the Administrator interface and see the resultant message displayed by the Agent on the same computer at the same time.

Note that while you can extend this simple test environment by installing the Agent on some other computers (as part of the same Site or others), please note that *non-Server* Operating Systems such as Windows XP are purposely limited by Microsoft to only support a very limited number of sessions from other computers. For instance, in the case of Windows XP Professional, no more than ten other computers will be able to connect to your own XP machine at any one time.

Once comfortable with the Administrator interface, it can be configured to work with real Sites - to do this a location on a (preferably) local server with an appropriate *server-based* Operating System such as Windows 2000, 2003 or 2008, within each Site must be created and made accessible to all the Agents in that Site. The Ticker Tape Administrator configuration must also be altered via the 'Edit/Configuration' menu option to tell the Administrator software where new messages for each Site will be written to.

As an example, referring to the diagram on page 5, the message control file location for the London office could be stored in a directory call 'Applications\TickerTape\Messages' in the root of drive D: on UKLONFS01 - this could be referenced either directly, using the absolute UNC path or, more usually, via a *share* defined at the server (called 'Ticker' in this example)

Within the Administrator configuration for the Site, the path to the Sites' "Message Control File" could therefore be entered as either;

`\\uklonfs01\d$\applications\tickertape\messages`

Or

`\\uklonfs01\ticker`

When the Administrator software starts up it will contact each Sites' message control file location in order to establish the current status of the message in the Site so that it can show it within the Administrator interface.

Decide upon & configure the message control file locations

Normally, the Ticker Tape Agent computers will be grouped by their physical location ("Site") and the Agent software on the computers within that Site configured to look for their message control file in a shared location within the Site. In practice, this will usually be a directory on a *local* (LAN-based) file server that all the Agents within the Site have *Read* access to.

The Agents will periodically poll their defined Message Control File for new messages 'delivered' by the Ticker Tape Administrator software which will have been configured to update the Message Control File in each Sites shared location - in order to do this, the user of the Ticker Tape Administrator software must have the appropriate permissions to *Write* to, as well as *Read* from, each Site's Message Control File.

The diagram on page 5 illustrates a typical configuration and shows;

- Three defined Sites, New York, Chicago and London, each with their own file server where the Message Control File *for that office* resides.
- The Agents within each office are configured to look for their Sites Message Control File on their local file server (in this example, either \\USNEWFS01, \\USDETF01 or \\UKLONFS01) and have *Read* access only to the file.
- The Ticker Tape Administrator is located in the New York HQ and has both *Read* & *Write* access to the Message Control File on all three of the file servers.

Installing the Ticker Tape Agent on client machines

In order for the messages configured by the Ticker Tape Administrator software to be shown on client computers, the Ticker Tape Agent software needs to be running on them. The Agent software is light-weight and, once installed, runs silently and transparently in the background periodically polling its Sites' Message Control File for any updates sent out by the Administrator software.

The Agent software is an industry standard Microsoft Installer File (MSI) and is available as part of the installation of the Ticker Tape Administrator software, being copied to the "Agent Install" directory that sits within the Ticker Tape Administrator program directory - therefore, in most cases, this means the Agent MSI is in the "C:\Program Files\AmberSoftware.co.uk\Ticker Tape Administrator\Agent Install" directory.

Being a standard MSI, the Agent can be installed in a variety of different ways - from a simple command in a login script through to leveraging enterprise level application deployment technologies such as Systems Centre Configuration Manager (SCCM, aka SMS.) Advantage can also be taken of the flexible installation control options provided by the Microsoft Installer software, allowing you to deploy the Agent completely silently if you wish. For more information about MSIExec and a full list of

the switches you can use to control an MSI installation see [http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/aa367988\(VS.85\).aspx](http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/aa367988(VS.85).aspx)

An example installation command line is shown below – this particular command line tells the MSIExec software to install (/i) the Ticker Tape Agent completely silently (/qn) and specifies where the Agent should look for its Message Control File (that the Administrator software updates.) While the command line is reasonably straightforward, note that the location of its Message Control File is specified as a MSIExec 'public property' and as such *must* be in uppercase and specified *without* a preceding slash.

Msiexec /i /qn TickerTapeAgent.msi MESSAGEFILE=\\USDETFP01\Ticker

In this instance, the Agent will be installed and configured to look in the 'Ticker' share on the USDETFP01 server for its Message Control File - By specifying other different MESSAGEFILE public properties on the command line during installation you can control where specific clients poll for their message updates - effectively grouping clients into the 'Sites' you wish to define.

In reality, the computers in any particular 'Site' would *usually* be dictated by their physical location and would be configured to poll their Message Control File on a server that's local to them on the same LAN - the example installation line above could be used on the client computers physically located at the Detroit office for instance to configure them to poll a file server within that office. Agents within the London office could similarly be configured to look at *their* local file server by specifying a MESSAGEFILE public property of \\UKLONFS01\Ticker for example.

Sample Ticker Tape Architecture

