

## 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 light-weight Ticker Tape Agent which is installed on all the workstations where you wish to show messages.

The Agents periodically poll a set location – their 'Message Control File' - 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 Detroit office look on the local *Detroit* file server.

The Message Control files on the London & Detroit file servers are administered by the Ticker Tape Administrator software which may be in one of the offices or any other 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.

*Note that this document is best read in conjunction with the in-built Ticker Tape help which provides some additional context and useful information, especially in regard to FTP and HTTP-based Sites.*

### **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
  - For small to medium sized estates, this is best achieved using the Agent Maintenance Wizard available on the Tools menu
  - For larger estates - hundreds or thousands of Agent computers across many Sites - being a standard MSI package, the Agent can be deployed using a variety of mechanisms including application deployment toolsets such as SCCM or SMS, Group Policy or login scripts

### **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 downloaded 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 a set of folders on your computer and are found, depending upon the O/S you're using, underneath either "*C:\ProgramData\AmberSoftware.co.uk\Ticker Tape Administrator\TestSites*" (for Windows 7) or "*C:\Documents and Settings\All Users\AmberSoftware.co.uk\Ticker Tape Administrator\TestSites*" (for earlier O/Ss)

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. The simplest way to do this is to use the Agent Maintenance as described on page 4 but, rather than importing a list of computers to deploy the Agent to as per the example, use the third deployment option to manually enter the name of the computer you're using.

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), *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, if using a Windows XP workstation, no more than *ten* other computers will be able to connect to your own XP machine at any one time.

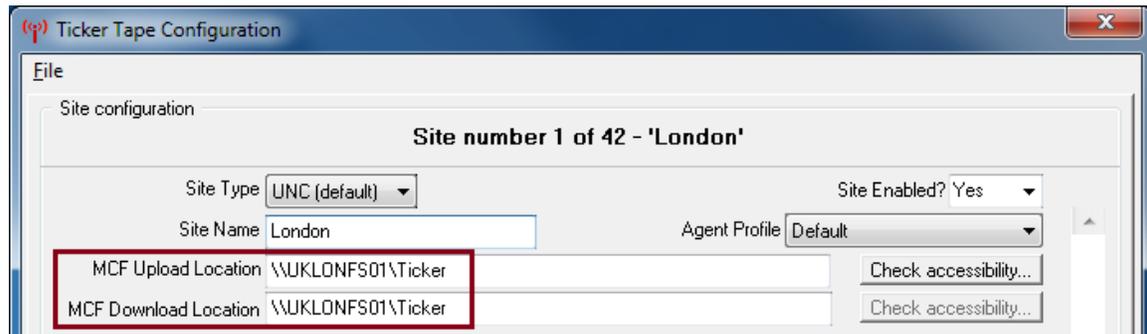
Once comfortable with the Administrator interface, it can be configured to work with real Sites - to do this, a location on a server with an appropriate *server-based* Operating System such as Windows 2000, 2003, 2008 or 2012 must be created and made accessible to all the Agents in that Site. The Site must also be appropriately configured within Ticker Tape Administrator so that it knows where new messages for the Site should be written to and where the Agents for that Site can download them from (this may or may not be the same depending on Site type)

As an example, referring to the diagram on page 9, 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 location 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' "MCF Upload Location" could therefore be entered as either;

[\\UKLONFS01\d\\$\applications\tickertape\messages](#) Or [\\UKLONFS01\Ticker](#)

With the Sites' "MCF Download Location" – the location that the *Agents* will be configured to get messages *from* - set similarly;



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 that particular Site so that it can show it within the Administrator interface.

### **Decide upon & configure the message control file locations**

Often, the Ticker Tape Agent computers will be grouped by their physical location with 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 – *but doesn't have to 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 configured Message Control File location for new messages from the Ticker Tape Administrator which will have been configured to update the Message Control File for each Ticker Tape Site - in order to do this, the user of the Ticker Tape Administrator software must be able to *Write to*, as well as *Read from* the Site's "MCF Upload Location"

The diagram on page 9 illustrates a typical configuration and shows;

- Three defined Sites, New York, Detroit and London, each with their own local 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, \\USDETFS01 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.

Note that while the norm, making *all* the computers within a specific physical location members of the *same* Site is just one of a number of potential ways to define a Ticker Tape "Site." You could, for instance, also define a Ticker Tape "Site" as computers on a certain floor of your building or those with a particular function.

In summary, the "Site" that an Agent is a member of is merely the one that it's configured to poll ... this enables a great deal of flexibility when defining "Sites"

## **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 purposely very light-weight both from a CPU and memory perspective 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.

Depending upon the size and complexity of your estate, the Agent software can be deployed to computers either via the Ticker Tape Agent Maintenance Wizard (available from the main Ticker Tape Administrator interface) or by leveraging enterprise level application deployment technologies such as Microsoft's Systems Centre Configuration Manager (SCCM, aka SMS)

In general, the Agent Maintenance Wizard provides a quick and easy means to deploy the Agent software within small to medium sized estates (up to a few Sites with less than, say, 250 computers on each), while larger estates of many Sites or hundreds or thousands of Agents will likely wish to utilize their existing standard application deployment mechanisms to comply with their company policies.

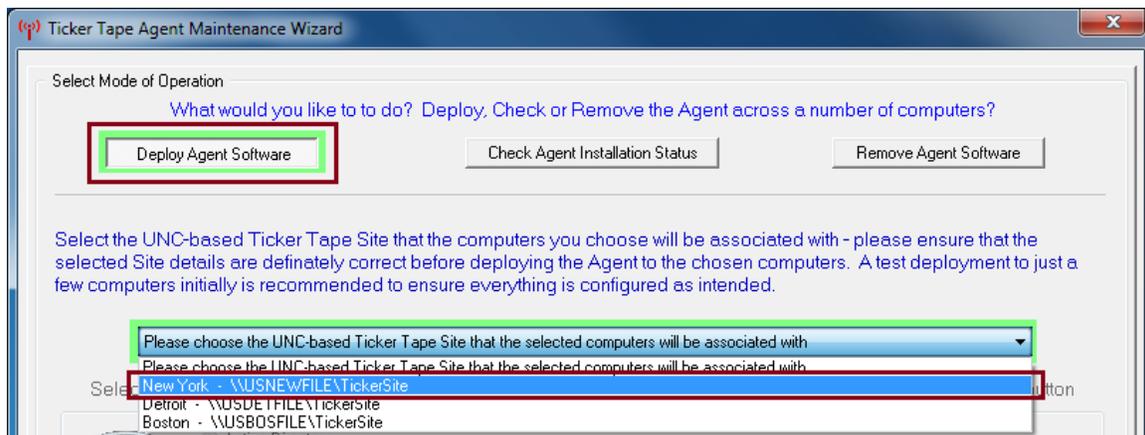
## **Using the Agent Maintenance Wizard to install the Agent software**

Introduced in version 1.4, the Agent Maintenance Wizard is ideal for quickly deploying the Agent software within small to medium sized environments.

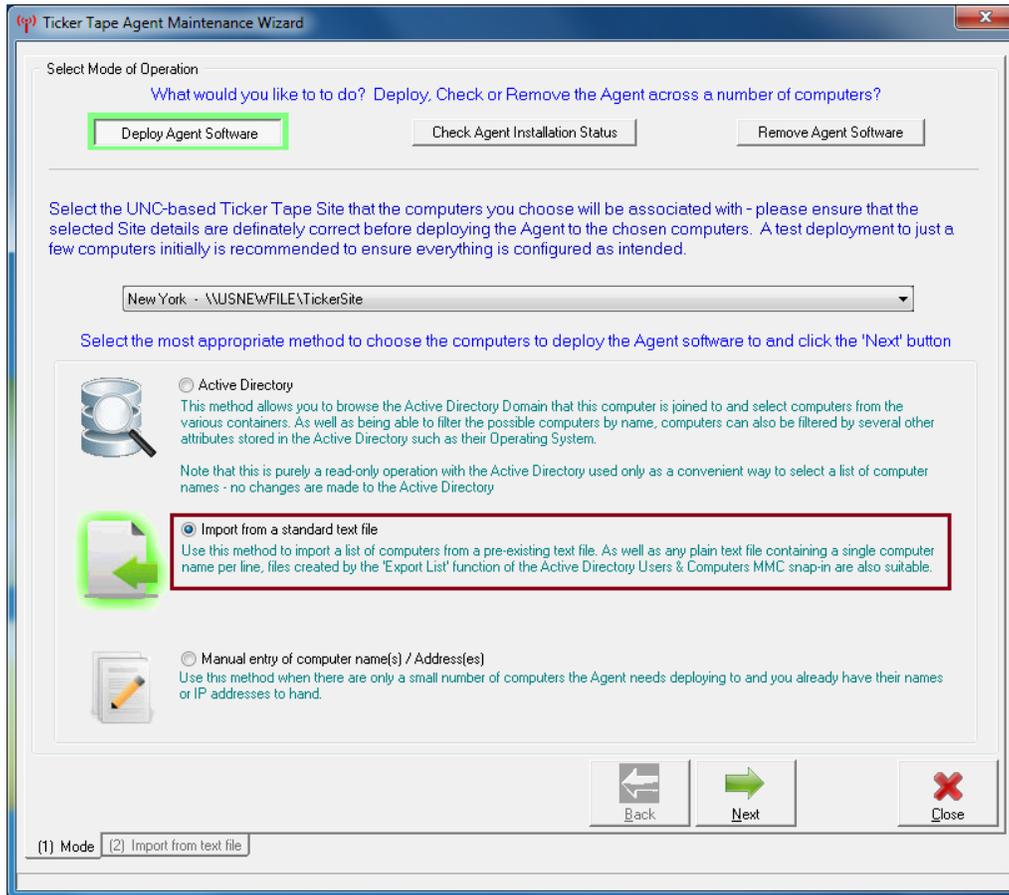
The Wizard allows you to deploy the Agent on a *per-Site* basis to a selection of computers chosen from your Active Directory, imported from a standard text file or manually entered. Before actively deploying the Agent using the Wizard, your Ticker Tape Site Message Control File locations should be correctly configured as described above and in the in-built Help.

Deploying Agents using the Wizard as is simple as;

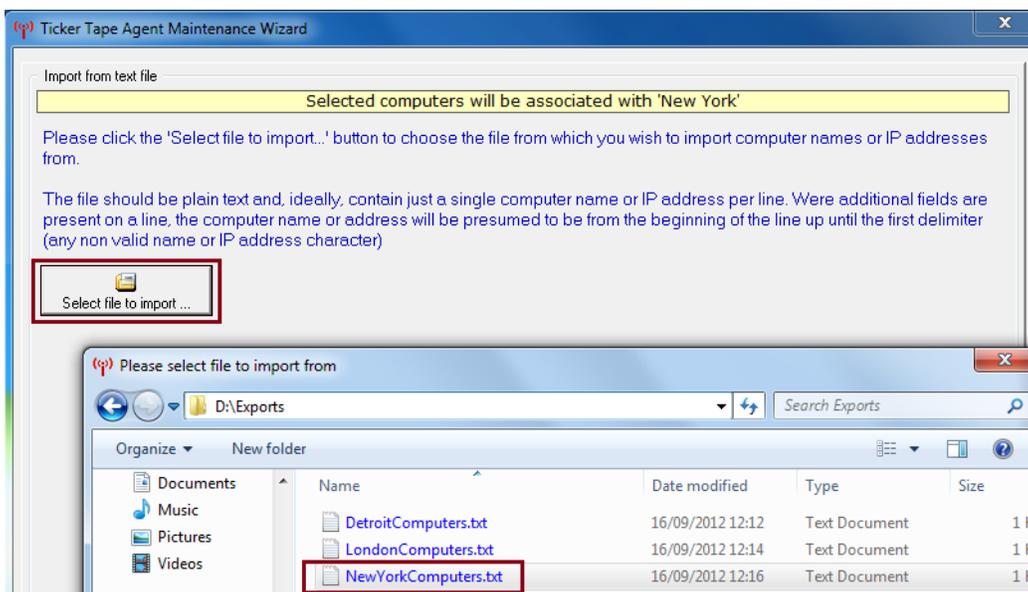
1. Select the 'Deploy Agent Software' mode, then choose the Site to associate the computers selected to with ('New York' here);



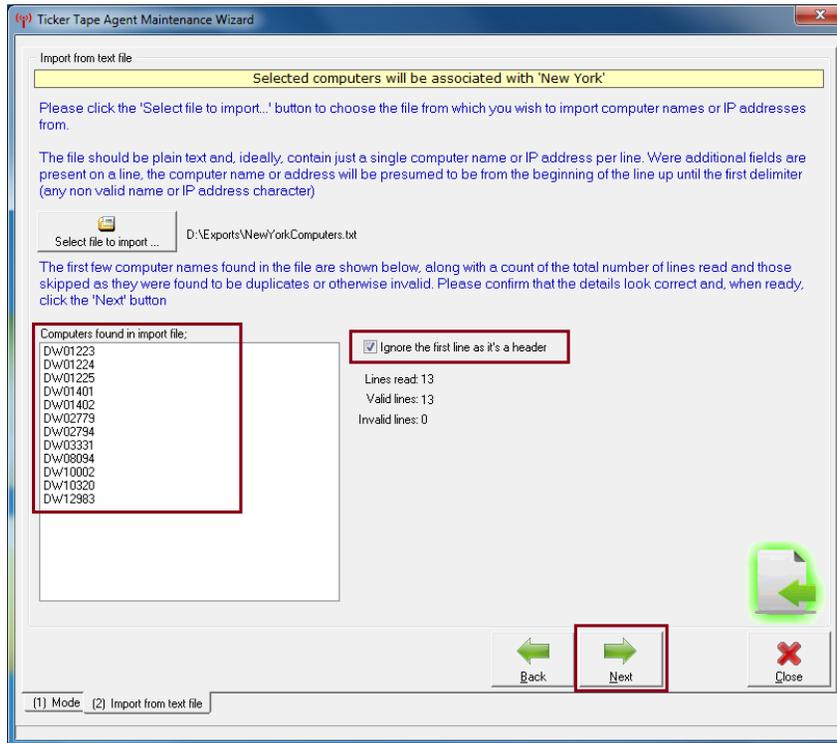
2. Choose which method to use to select the computers to deploy the Agent to ('Import from a standard text file' here);



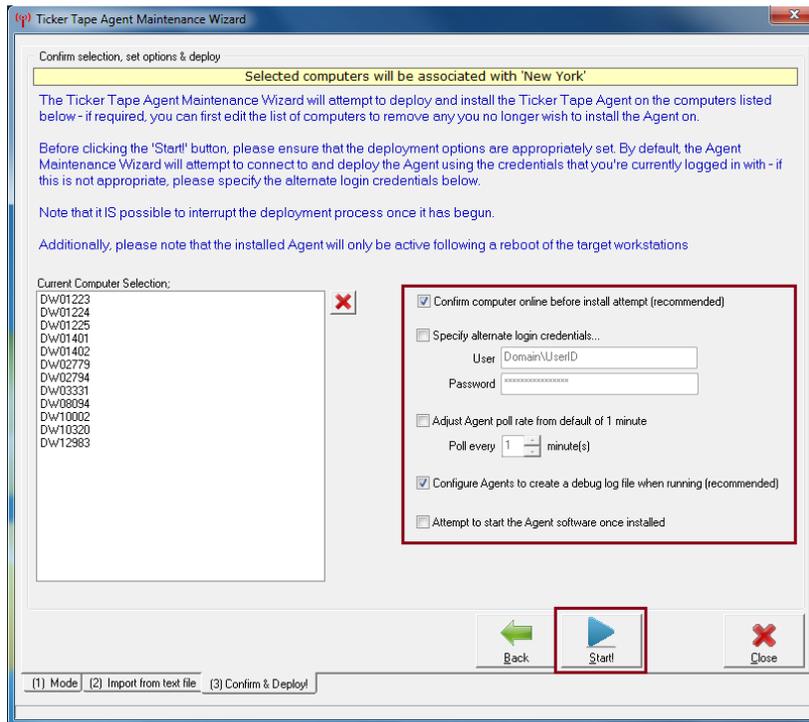
3. After clicking 'Next', browse to the file containing the list of computers;



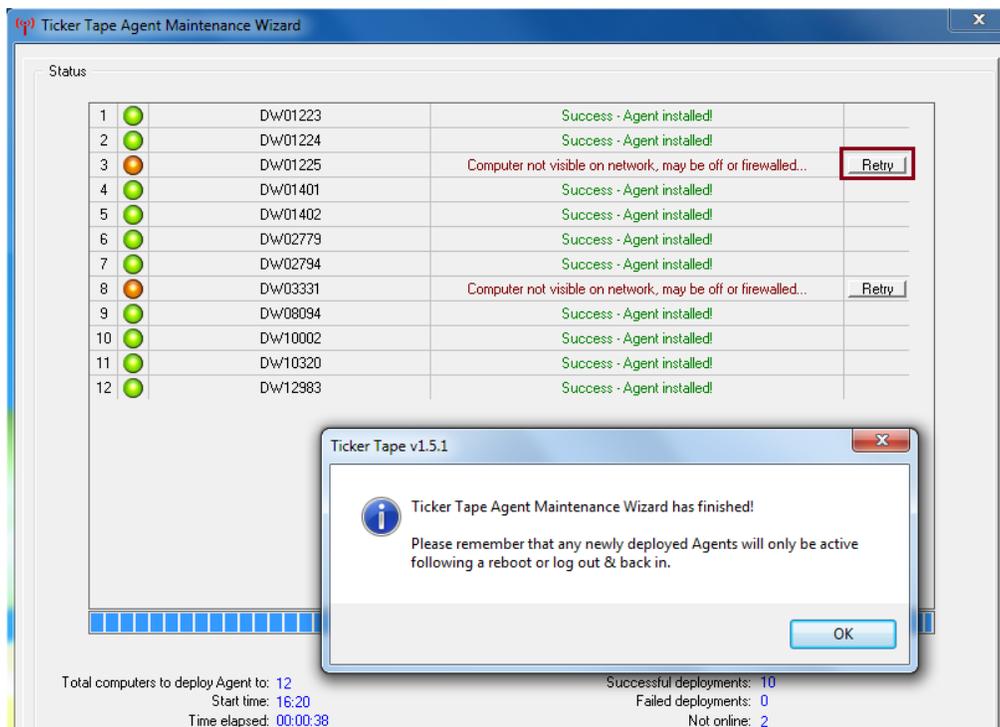
4. Check that the list of computers imported is as expected and whether the first line of the import file should be ignored (as is the case here) and click 'Next';



5. Confirm Agent Deployment options such as whether to check if the target computers are online before attempting the Agent installation and click 'Start';



6. Monitor the progress of the Agent installations. The process can be interrupted at any point and, if required, any failed deployments can be re-tried using the 'Retry' button;



As you can see from the above, the Agent Maintenance Wizard provides a simple means to deploy the Agent software.

Although the example above uses a standard text file import to supply the list of computers to install the Agent to, the alternate methods of manually entering the computer names or choosing them from your Active Directory follow the same principles and are just as straight-forward.

### **Using other mechanisms to install the Agent software**

The Agent software is supplied as an industry standard Microsoft Installer File (MSI) file and is available in the "Agent Install" directory underneath the main Ticker Tape Administrator installation directory - therefore, in most cases, this means the Agent MSI is in the "C:\Program Files\AmberSoftware.co.uk\Ticker Tape Administrator\Agent Install" folder.

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 /qn /i 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

