Helios UB2 review

High performance, cross-platform server suite aimed at graphics market

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Manufacturer: JPY

Pros: Supports multiple client operating systems; comprehensive range of services; can be installed under virtualisation

Cons: User interface slightly dated; comparatively expensive
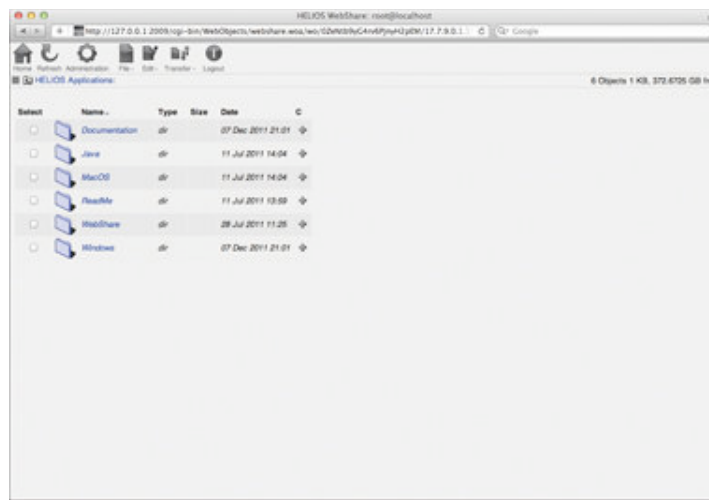
Price: From £1,710

Star rating: ★★★★

The Helios UB2 ('UB' stands for 'unbreakable') is a modular server suite, offering file, print, web-based file server and prepress services that the German company is pitching directly at those looking for an Xserve replacement. It's aimed particularly at the high-end graphics market – design studios, advertising agencies, publishers and printers – with large numbers of big files to shunt around.

The UB2 supports a broad range of client operating systems, though the product likely to be of most interest to network admins dealing with Mac clients is EtherShare. The UB2 update sees EtherShare upgraded to include Lion support, Spotlight searches of files (names, content and metadata) located on Helios volumes and the ability to save Time Machine backups to the server. Support for mDNS (Bonjour)-enabled printers and automatic setting up of PPDs make the package even more attractive to its intended market, especially given Apple's replacing of Print Services with the more basic CUPS in Lion Server.

We installed EtherShare under Mac OS X 10.7.2 to give its newly added Lion-compatibility a thorough trial, and found that we needn't have worried: the installation proceeded without interruption. Once installed, we entered the requisite licensing information in the Helios Services application and opened the Helios Admin utility, the main hub from which any UB2 network is run.

At this point we should say that, for those familiar with the visual richness of the more recent incarnations of Mac OS X – both server and client versions – the user experience with the Helios suite will be a bit of a culture-shock, and a certain amount of acclimatisation might well be necessary. Fortunately, the documentation included on the installation disc is pretty comprehensive, and the team at Helios' UK distributors, JPY, proved very knowledgable.

The user interface might be redolent of earlier server operating systems, but that doesn't detract from the UB2's capabilities

Oh yes, and that 'unbreakable' epithet? Helios claims that its server solutions 'run stably over decades', a claim we'd normally have taken with a small mountain of salt had we not been so impressed with the product in operation.

Macworld Buying Advice

For those willing to take the time to submit themselves to the initial unfamiliarity, and the steep learning curve, then, the Helios UB2 is a product worth serious consideration.

http://www.macworld.co.uk/mac-creative/reviews/index.cfm?reviewid=3337571