

Hardware and software firewall technology is developing fast, says **Christopher Moody**, as he finds out that these sophisticated guardians do more than protect your network or PC from the outside world

Firewalls are a staple of network security, but the range of tasks the firewall is expected to perform continues to expand. Today's firewall is only vaguely related to the stateless packet filters of a few years ago. In this group test *SC Magazine* reviewed

several products, both hardware and software, aimed at providing comprehensive boundary security for SMEs or branch offices. We expected a full set of firewall security features, as well as VPN services. We looked at the

security of the base configuration, support for policy controls, management and ease of use. While we expected all the products to perform basic blocking with ease, the additional features were the important differentiators.



Astaro Security Linux



Version	5.1
Supplier	Astaro
Price	\$330
Contact	www.astaro.com

Astaro's Security Linux 5.1 takes the open source Linux software and hardware it, but also adds commercial software for a complete security package. It comes with six components: firewall, VPN, anti-virus (provided by Kaspersky), content filtering, anti-spam and intrusion prevention.

Installation is fully automated from the bootable CD and surprisingly easy to configure. One of the best aspects of this software is its low system requirements, with only a 400MHz Pentium II

processor needed. While this spec will happily deal with a small firm, larger enterprises should run the software on a much higher specification machine.

Once installed, all the components are managed through the secure web interface, so you do not have to be a Linux expert. The web interface is really well designed and very simple to use.

The firewall is very easy to configure and has proxies for common services including HTTP, FTP and SMTP, letting it drill down into each connection and scan the content. The proxies are also used to pass data to the anti-spam and anti-virus engines and, in the case of HTTP, cache the traffic.

For other services, there is also a full stateful inspection engine for packet filtering. By default, the system is configured to block all traffic, so it is secure right from the start.

Unusually, for a product so cheap, it comes with load balancing as standard. While not as complex as the systems used in high-end devices, it helps scale the firewall as the network grows, while

building-in redundancy.

The open source Snort intrusion detection engine, which will also block damaging traffic is simple to manage, while the reporting tools help you find out which rules have fired so you can fine tune the system for your network.


For the price, you get a whole lot of features – many more than we can mention here. The management is among the best we've seen in this group test, while the powerful firewall keeps up with the best.

Considering the low system requirements, Astaro's Security Linux is a great buy.

SC MAGAZINE RATING	
Features	★★★★★
Ease of use	★★★★★
Performance	★★★★★
Documentation	★★★★☆
Support	★★★★☆
Value for money	★★★★★
OVERALL RATING	★★★★★
For	Lots of features at a good price.
Against	Could be difficult to install on newer hardware.
Verdict	Making the best use of open source and commercial software, Security Linux is a tough all-round security package.

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Christopher Moody

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