ManageEngine
ADManager Plus

ADManager Plus Does

What ADUC and Powershell Can't

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Managing Active Directory is nothing new. Since Active Directory came into existence in 2000, the tasks of managing users, groups, and computers has not changed much. Unfortunately, the tools that come with Active Directory have not changed much either. Provisioning, managing, and deprovisioning users, groups, and computers are required tasks for any organization that is running Active Directory. However, there is no need to continue with the slow, inefficient, time consuming, and manual processes that we have been forced to adopt when using the tools that come with Active Directory.

The two main tools provided by Microsoft that most administrators use today to maintain Active Directory include Active Directory Users and Computers (ADUC) and PowerShell. Yes, PowerShell has a new Active Directory module, which is quite impressive for what it does, but that is really part of PowerShell itself.

A seasoned tool on the market, ADManager Plus, has been solving issues, making Active Directory administration more efficient, and providing in-depth and customized solutions for Active Directory admins for years. This tool can solve common user, group, and computer management issues with just a few clicks, whereas ADUC and PowerShell can take hours to develop and test a solution if they can

What ADUC is Good For

ADUC is an included Active Directory tool that is already installed on domain controllers. The tool, initially released in 2000, is designed to be the rudimentary tool that Active Directory admins can create, manage, and remove users, groups, and computers from the Active Directory enterprise.

ADUC can provide the following fundamental tasks:

- Creating a user with mandatory properties only
- Creating a group
- Creating a computer
- Creating the organizational unit hierarchy
- Organizing users, groups, and computers into organizational units
- Bulk user modification of only a few user properties
- Bulk user, group, and/or computer deletion

Of course ADUC allows for the manual management of most of the properties of a user, group, and computer, but this is only available for each object individually and is certainly not efficient for most Active Directory enterprises.
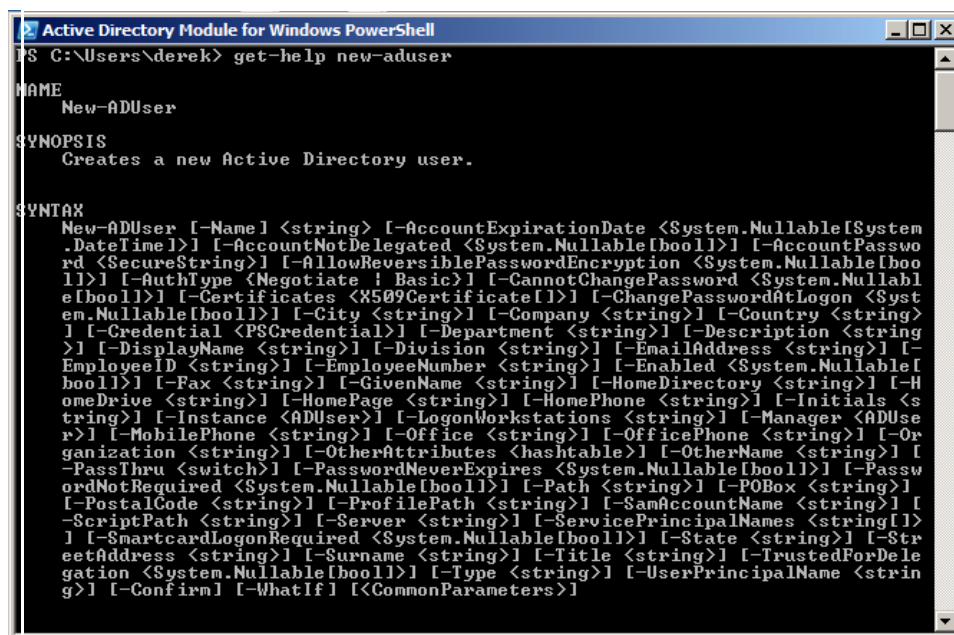
What Powershell is Good For

Powershell is Microsoft's flagship new management solution. Powershell is designed to provide a command line interface and management technology that an administrator can leverage to perform routine management tasks. Initially Powershell was more of a server management solution, as the Active Directory integration was not fully complete. However, since Microsoft have released their Active Directory module for Powershell the ability to control nearly all aspects of Active Directory and the objects within Active Directory has changed dramatically.

The Active Directory module provides the following controls over most Active Directory objects and configurations:

- New

- Add

- Move

- Set

- Remove

- Get

Managing user accounts is typically the most common object controlled in Active Directory. With this considered, Figure 1 illustrates the complexity around the new-aduser Powershell command and Figure 2 shows the examples that are associated with the new-aduser Powershell command.

Figure 1. new-aduser PowerShell command list of options.

Figure 2. new-aduser PowerShell command list of examples.

There is no question that PowerShell is powerful. However, as you can see in Figure 1, the complexity that comes with trying to use the technology can be quite overwhelming. Since PowerShell is so customizable, there are many parameters that you will need to work through and decrypt to get everything right – all of the syntax, details, and iterations – to create the users correctly. After asking many administrators around the world how long their initial PowerShell user creation attempts took, I find that an average time to get PowerShell to work for the creation of bulk users, with more than 10 attributes, takes approximately 6 hours. As we will see, this same task could take only minutes with ADManager Plus.

Another factor that needs to be considered with regard to PowerShell is combining "tasks" that need to be accomplished. For example, assume you need to find an automated solution that will first find all of the users that have not logged in for "X" days, then take that list of users and perform additional actions on them. The additional actions might be to disable the accounts and move them to a special organizational unit. All of these tasks can be performed with PowerShell, but the time, effort, knowledge, and money it would cost to generate such control could be more than you expect. On the other hand, as you will see in the use cases for ADManager Plus, these steps to find and control user accounts are quite simple.

What ADManager Plus is Good For

ADManager Plus is an [Active Directory management tool](#) that takes routine, complex, combined, and customized tasks that are performed on Active Directory objects and makes them simple. Most administrators like to work in a graphical environment when working with users, groups, and computers. A graphical environment makes management of the objects faster and more efficient. Also, a graphical environment can provide a summary of the management tasks being performed, so that error correction is built into the work flow.

ADManager Plus is a multifaceted tool that provides management, reporting, work flow, and automation of provisioning, managing, and deprovisioning of users, groups, and computers in an Active Directory environment. The design of ADManager Plus is second to none, as it is extremely simple to maneuver around the tool and discover the capabilities with just a few clicks.

The following are use cases that the techs, developers, and customers of ADManager Plus have come up with.

Customized User Creation Templates

ADManager Plus provides for easy to create, yet powerful to use, customized user creation templates. In most Active Directory environments, the creation of a user account requires knowledge of the user properties and the structure of Active Directory in order to create and configure a user account properly. ADManager Plus allows for the configuration of all user account properties and the placement of the user account in the correct organizational unit with the implementation of customized user account templates. With these templates, employees such as help desk, HR, and even department managers can be responsible for creating the new user accounts, instead of having domain administrators perform the action.

ADManager Plus has a user creation template technology that allows for the domain administrator to create a customized user creation template with ease. The true power of the customized user creation template is the drag-and-drop technology that is part of the tool. Here are the steps to create a simple, one-page, user creation template.

- Within ADManager Plus, select the AD Mgmt tab
- Select "User Management" from the left pane (this is by default)
- Select "User Creation Templates" from the list of links in the main window
- Select "Create New Template" from the User Creation Templates window
- Click "Drag-n-Drop" to enable the customization of the user creation template
- Bulk -   Simply customize your user creation template by adding, removing, and modifying the tabs, as you can see possible in Figure 3.
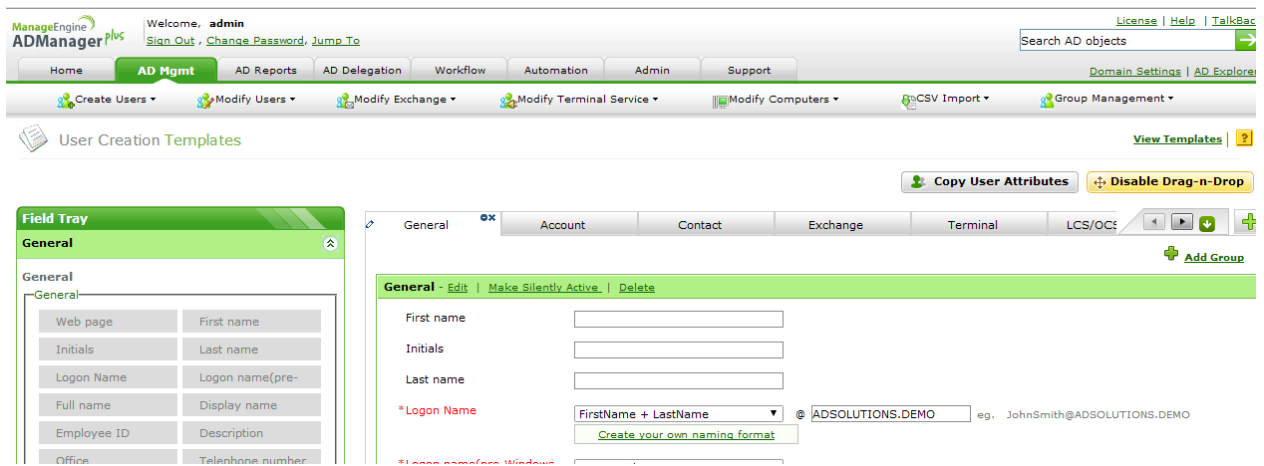
Figure 3. User Creation Templates with Drag-n-Drop technology let you can create a simple and easy template.

Ideally, for this simple template, you will want to remove all but one tab. Then, you will want to add back in all of the properties that you want configured for the user. Figure 4 illustrates what this template would look like for the user that is creating the new user account.
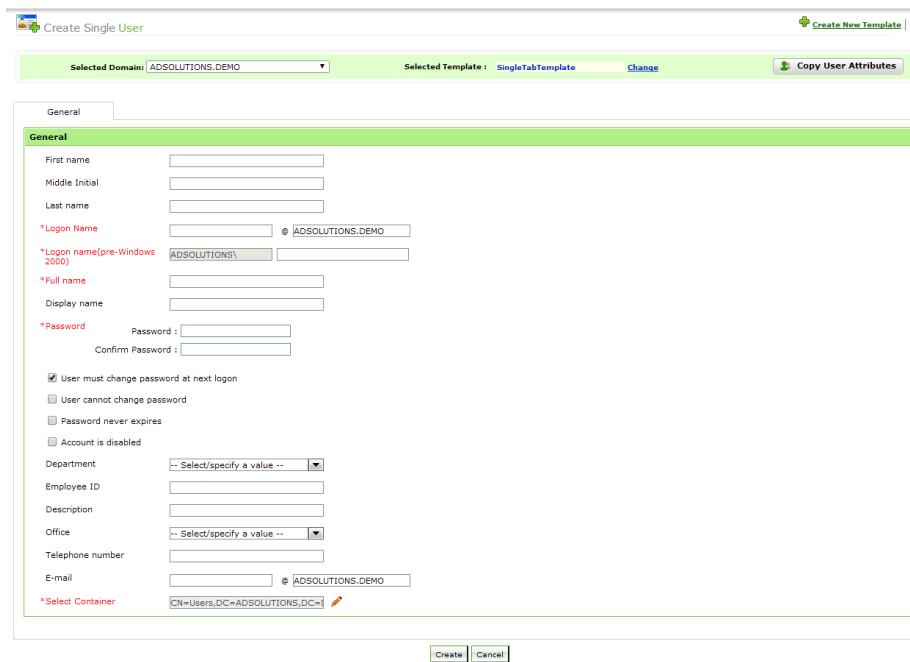

Figure 4. Customized user creation template with a single tab of properties.

Now, the user (HR, help desk, manager, etc.) only has to fill out a single form. The only needed properties are on the form and the mandatory properties are highlighted in red, so the user knows what the minimum properties are.

ReadOnly Properties On Customized User Creation Template

It is very common for companies to have required configurations for user accounts depending on the department that the user is associated with. On the flip side, as the first use case above indicated, it is also important to have a customized user creation template that is easy for non-admins to fill out.

ADManager Plus provides a simple, yet extremely powerful solution to this dilemma. Within the customized user creation template created for non-administrators, user properties can be configured and then marked as "ReadOnly." Here is how that works.

With the user creation template set to "Drag-n-Drop" enabled, hover over any of the template properties. When hovering over the far left of the template property, a menu will dynamically appear, which can be seen in Figure 5.
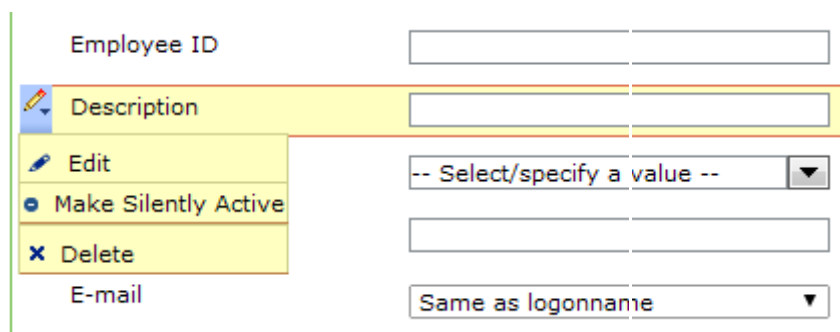

Figure 5. Drag-n-Drop dynamic menu for user creation template.

The menu has an option for Edit, which is where you can configure the user property to be ReadOnly. By clicking on the Edit option, you will see the Edit page for that property. Ideally, you will configure the property with the correct configuration, then set the property to ReadOnly, which can be seen in Figure 6.
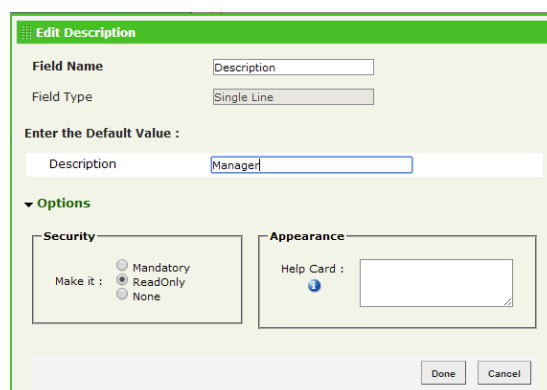

Figure 6. User properties can be set to ReadOnly.

Now, when the template is used to create a new user account, the non-administrator will see the configured property, but will not be able to alter it. This will ensure that the information regarding the new user account is known, but will maintain consistent configuration to match the other user accounts created by the template.

Mandatory Properties On Customized User Creation Template

Most Active Directory administrators are familiar with the concept that some user properties are flagged as "mandatory," requiring them to be configured for the user account to be created. The main user properties that Microsoft makes mandatory by default include:

- cn (Name)
- samAccountname
- objectSID

In essence, a user account cannot be created without these properties being configured. There are, however, cases where administrators want and need other properties to be mandatory. This might be due to scripts, code, references, etc. requiring these properties be configured in order for them to function properly. There are other properties, like Department, which might be used for access control, scripts, and applications.

ADManager Plus allows for any user account property to be made set to mandatory. The process is easy and similar to what was just done with the ReadOnly setting for a user property.

Like our previous use case – when in the user creation template and "Drag-n-Drop" is enabled – hovering over the far left of the template property, a menu will dynamically appear. The menu has an option for edit, which is where you can configure the user property to be mandatory. By clicking on the edit option, you will see the edit page for that property. You can either pre-configure the user property or leave it blank, setting the property to be mandatory, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. User properties can be set to mandatory.

Pre-Configured, Hidden Properties

Another powerful aspect of the user creation templates in ADManager Plus is the option to pre-configure properties, then make them hidden from view when the technician creates the account(s). This will ensure that the property is configured properly, however the technician is not aware of the setting, which might be a security setting. Ideally, this would be good for group membership. Figure 8 illustrates what this might look like.
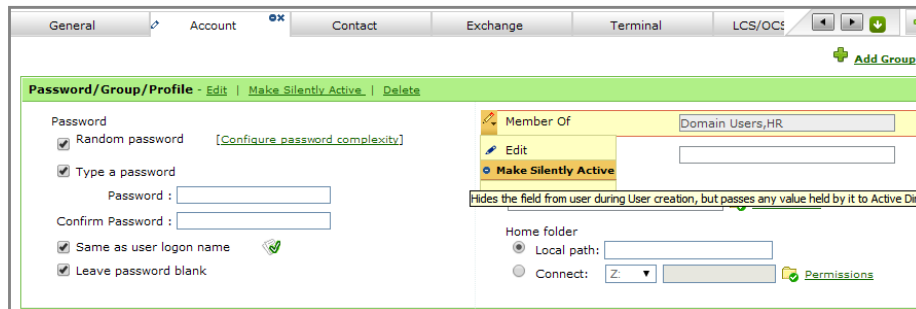

Figure 8. Pre-configured, hidden value.

As you can see, ADManager Plus is a very powerful and flexible solution. This is only the tip of the iceberg for what ADManager Plus can do, compared to PowerShell. ADManager Plus can also perform other actions at user provisioning, user management, and user deprovisioning. Examples of other actions that can be done within ADManager Plus include:

- Allow HR employee to "request" new user creation with automated process to

  get CSV from HR DB into user creation template.

- When employee is promoted, allow HR to ONLY modify the "title" for the employee

- Automate process to deprovisioning users that are no longer with the company

- Automate disabling users that have not logged in within company compliance regulations

- Provisioning of Office365 users

- Exchange mailbox creation at time of creating users

Summary

There is no doubt that PowerShell is powerful. There is also no doubt that PowerShell is complex and difficult. In many cases PowerShell will require high end development in order to perform tasks that are merely clicks in ADManager Plus. ADManger Plus is designed with the administrator and technician of Active Directory in mind. Easy to use, efficient to complete, and powerful in implementation is what ADManager Plus is all about. From user creation, through user management, to user deprovisioning, ADManager Plus is the powerful, yet efficient solution for any organization.

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