Kerio Control

Reviewed by Brien M. Posey

TechGenix

Introduction

Network security tools are notorious for being complex. Many such tools require a steep learning curve, even for seasoned IT pros. However, GFI is bucking the trend with its Kerio Control. Kerio Control is a comprehensive network security application for the SMB, that has been specifically designed to be easy to use.

01 The Deployment Process

Kerio Control can be downloaded as an ISO file, or as a VMware or Hyper-V virtual appliance (physical appliances are also available). For this review, I opted to use the Hyper-V option. The download consisted of a virtual hard disk file (in VHD format). I simply created a Hyper-V virtual machine, and then attached the VHD file.

Once the VM had been set up, I booted it and was presented with a message telling me where to point my browser in order to access the administrative interface. If you look at the figure below, you can see that there is a message stating that you can press Enter to access the console. I used this option so that I could assign the VM an IP address that fell within the range used on my virtual network.
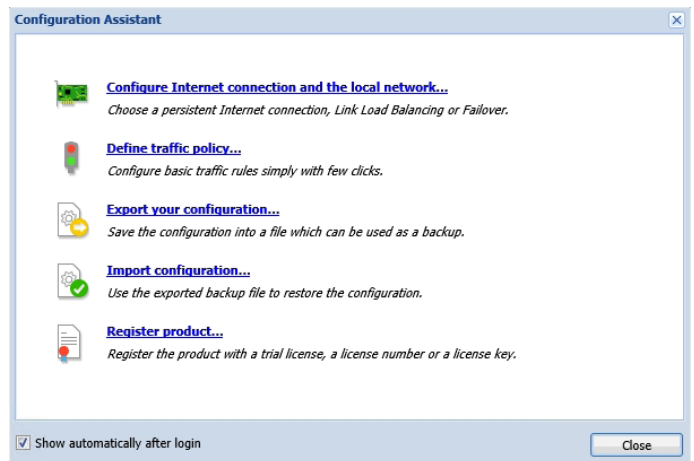
When I opened a Web browser on another machine and navigated to the specified URL, I was presented with the server's Activation Wizard. The activation process consisted of specifying a language, accepting the license agreement, and setting an initial password.

This is the screen that you see when you boot Kerio Control.

Once I had completed the Activation Wizard, I was taken to the Configuration Assistant. As you can see in the figure below, the Configuration Assistant helps with all of the initial configuration tasks, such as registering your license and configuring Internet connectivity. I found the process of configuring Internet connectivity and registering the product to be simple and intuitive.

With Kerio Control fully configured, I decided to turn my attention to its firewall. The Kerio Control firewall can be configured through a series of traffic rules. One thing that I especially like about Kerio Control, is that it displays the traffic rules in a simple and unambiguous way that should make sense to anyone who has basic networking knowledge. You

The Configuration Assistant helps with the initial configuration tasks.

definitely don't need to be a networking expert to configure the traffic rules. In fact, the most essential rules exist by default. GFI even went so far as to color code the rules to help illustrate what they do. You can see the traffic rules in the figure below.

TechGenix
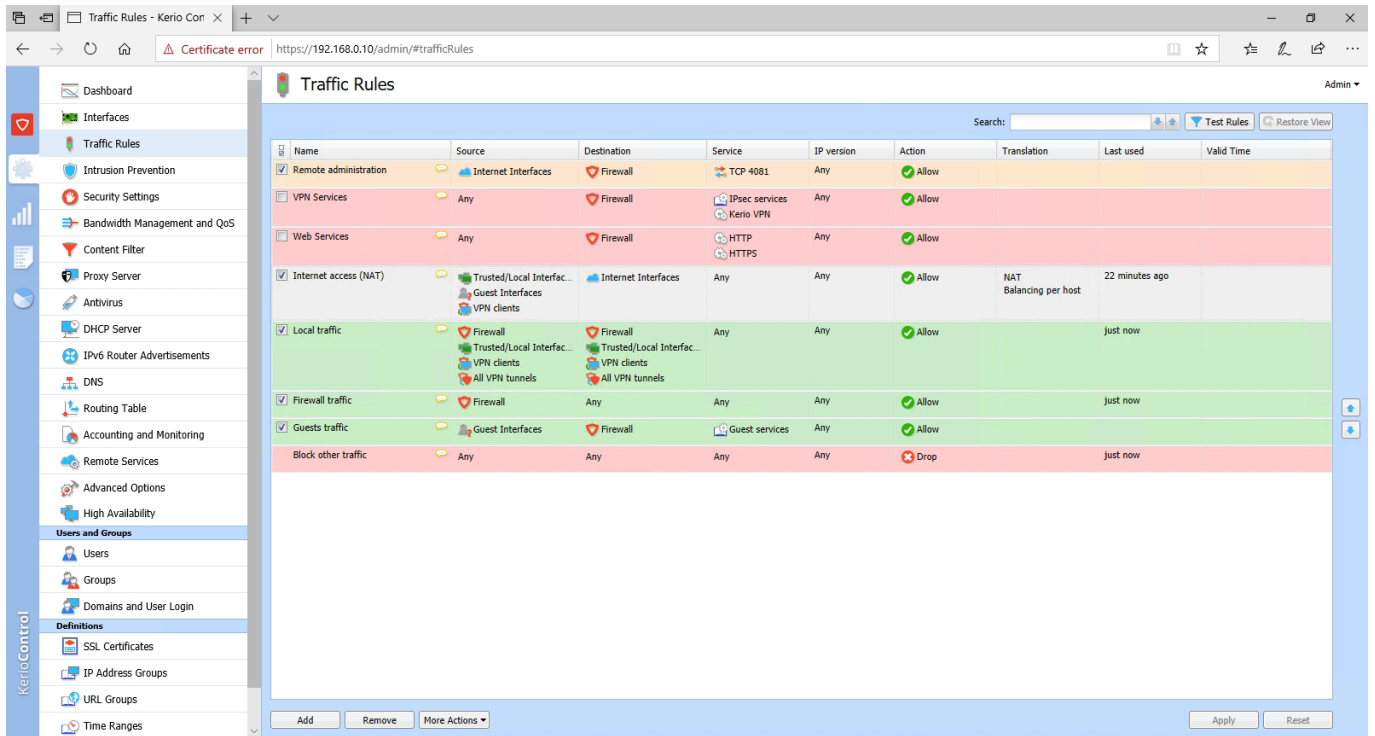
These are the default traffic rules that are built into Kerio Control.

Because these rules exist by default, I didn't have to do anything special to make Kerio Control function as a NAT router. Once I configured the machines on my test network to use the Kerio Control server as a default gateway, those machines received Internet access without any issues.

02 Anti-Virus

One of Kerio Control's most noteworthy features is its antivirus capabilities. Whereas legacy antivirus products often focus on scanning files to determine whether or not they contain malicious code, Kerio Control is able to scan network traffic. As you can see in the next figure, Kerio Control is able to scan both HTTP and FTP traffic. Additionally, the software can check inbound email for malware through SMTP and POP3 protocol scanning.
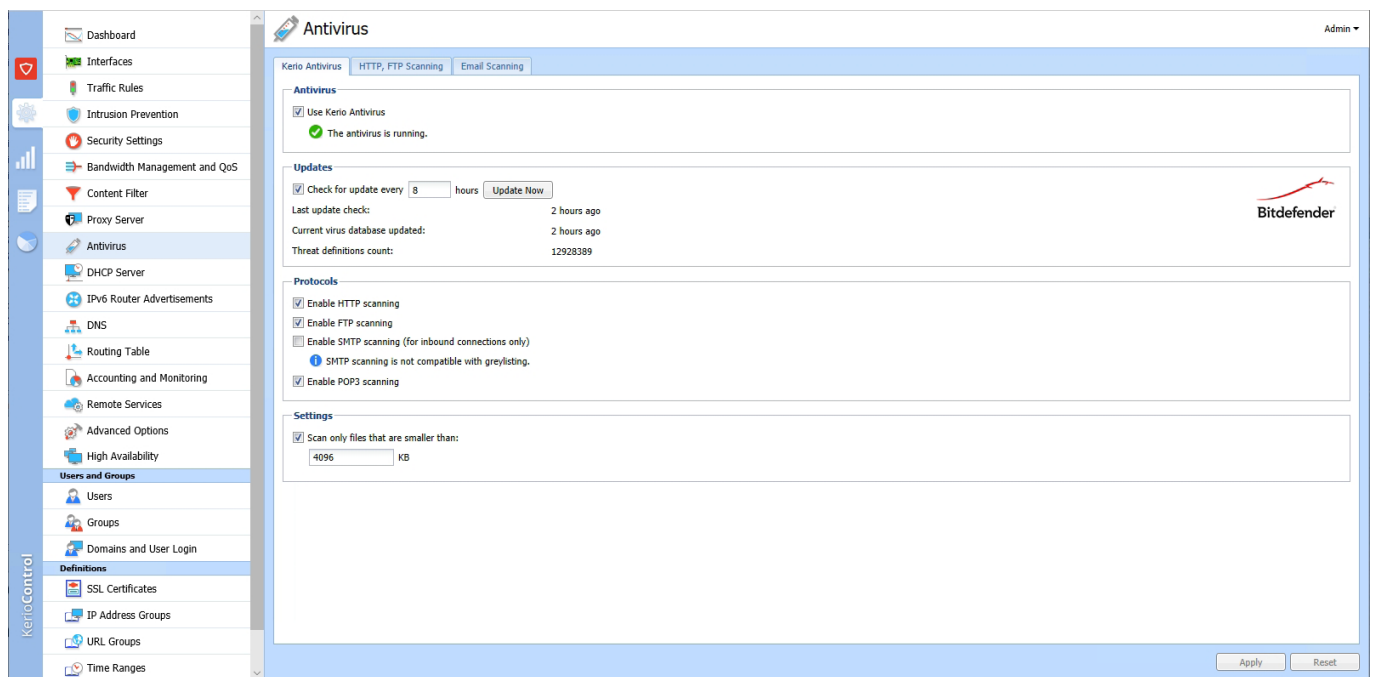
Kerio Control is able to perform network level malware scanning.

03 Web Content Filtering

Another key capability found within Kerio Control is its ability to filter Web content. The content filter interface is nearly identical to the interface used for managing traffic rules, but allows admins to regulate the types of Internet traffic that are and are not allowed within the organization. As you can see in the next figure for example, Kerio Control is configured by default to block advertisements and banners, audio and video files, peer to peer traffic, and traffic related to hacking and malware. As such, the content rules are not merely designed to prevent users from accessing inappropriate content, but they can also be used as a tool for shielding the organization from attack.
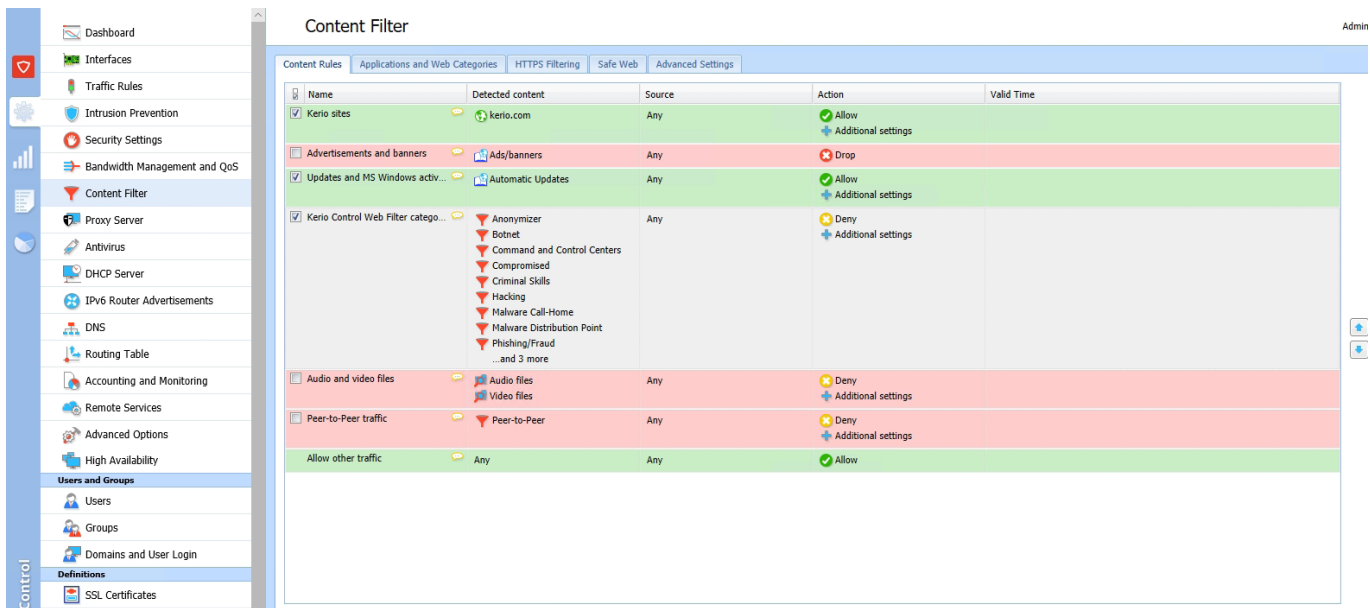

▌ Content Rules allow you to regulate Web content within your organization.

In addition to the content filtering capabilities shown in the figure above, Kerio Control can also enforce the use of safe search, and block pages containing various words or phrases. The software also contains a whitelist option that can be used to override the filters for sites that are known to be safe.

TechGenix

04 Additional Infrastructure and Reporting Features

Kerio Control includes a number of infrastructure components that can help to make life a bit easier for smaller organizations. For example, the software provides DNS caching, which can help users to experience more responsive browsing. There is also a built-in secure VPN functionality, and the Kerio Control server can even be configured to act as a DHCP server.

One of the things that impressed me about Kerio Control is that it can be configured to map groups and user accounts from the Active Directory. By doing so, it becomes possible to keep track of activity on a user by user basis. The software includes reporting capabilities that allow you to track which sites users are visiting, and how much network traffic users are generating, among other things. You can see an example of this in the figure below.
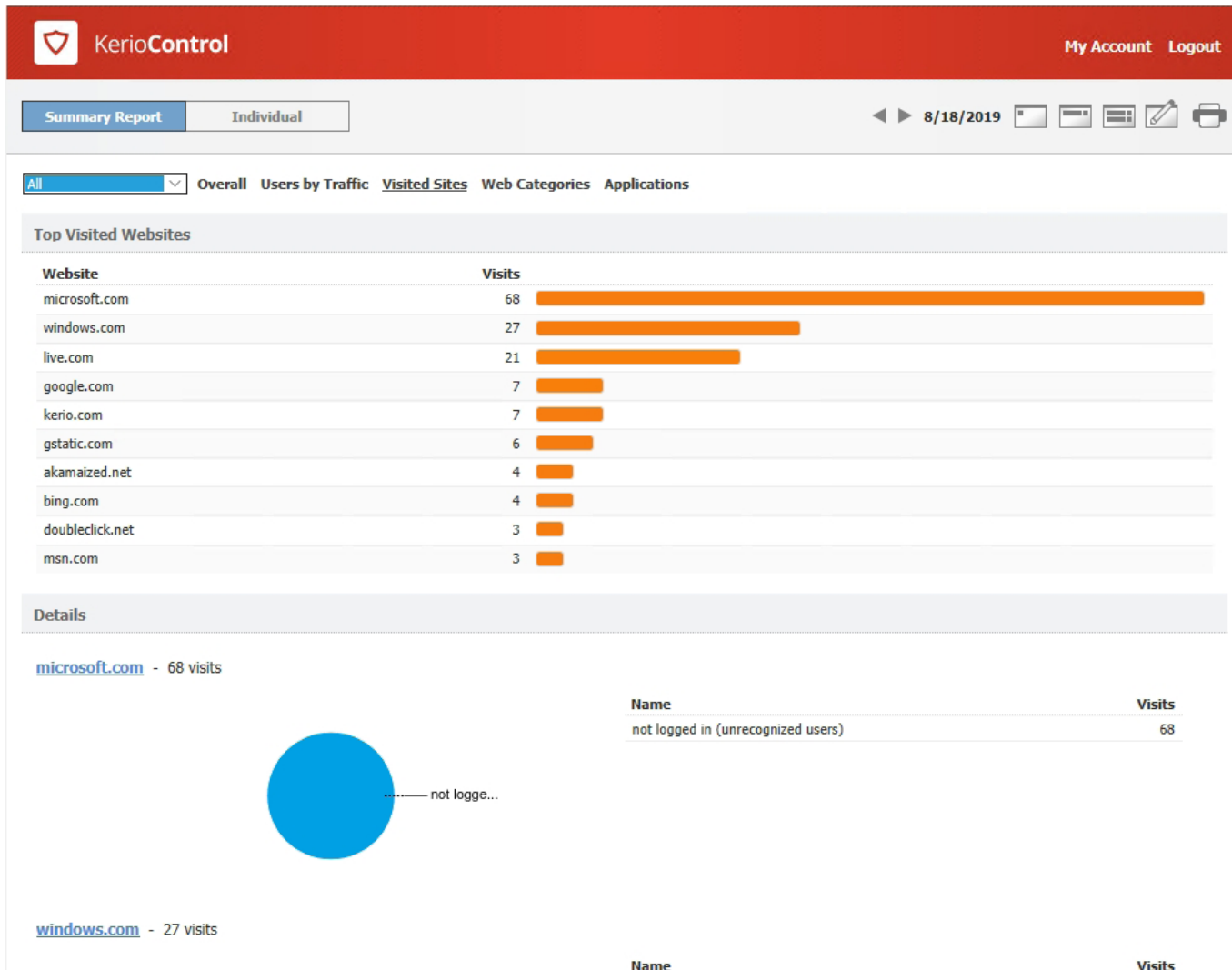
Kerio Control provides rich reporting capabilities.

If Kerio Control is mapped to an Active Directory, the report shown in the figure above will show you which specific users accessed which sites. It is even possible to block Web access to users who are not logged in, so as to prevent users from acting anonymously.

TechGenix

05 Pricing

Pricing for a Kerio Control virtual appliance like the one that I based my evaluation on starts at $320 per year (covering the minimum of 10 licenses). Prices decrease per user at higher volumes. The Deluxe edition, which includes antivirus and web filtering capabilities costs $380 per year, again for the minimum 10 users. GFI offers several different Kerio Control hardware appliances with prices ranging from $575 to $1,599 per year, plus required software licenses.

You can find the full pricing information, and a listing of the various plans that are offered at: https://www.gfi.com/products-and-solutions/network-security-solutions/kerio-control/pricing

06 The Verdict

I always wrap up the reviews that I write for this site by assigning a numerical score to the product that I am evaluating. These scores range from zero to five stars, with five stars being the highest possible score. With that said, I decided to give Kerio Control a score of 4.9, which is a gold star review.

Throughout my evaluation, I consistently found Kerio Control to be completely intuitive. That's quite an accomplishment for a network security tool. So many of the competing tools that I have used in the past seem needlessly overcomplicated.

4.9/5

TechGenix
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ GOLD AWARD

The other thing that really impressed me about Kerio Control is the sheer number of features that it includes. As you may have gathered from the screen captures, its feature set goes far beyond what I am able to cover within a review.

Kerio Control is clearly an excellent choice for any small or medium sized business that needs a reasonably priced network security suite, that is reasonably priced and not overly difficult to use.
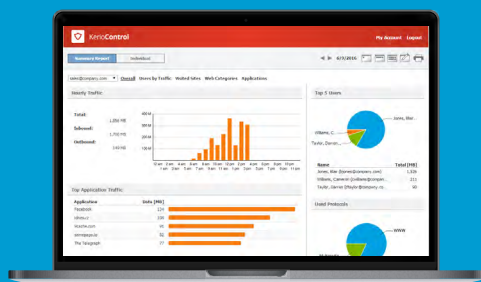
Get your FREE Kerio Control trial

TechGenix

TechGenix