Where Process and Technology Meet!

Leveraging the Altiris Software Portal

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Consultant: James "Scott" Hardie
               shardie@xcendgroup.com

               XCEND Group, Inc.
               T 810.494.7144 Ext 228
               C 810.343.2990
               www.xcendgroup.com

ABOUT the XCEND Group

The XCEND Group is a Michigan based information technology consulting firm, specializing in helping customers design and implement cross platform lifecycle management solutions that reduce the cost of owning and managing IT assets.

The XCEND Group delivers the greatest level of expertise required to successfully design and implement lifecycle management solutions in complex heterogeneous enterprises by utilizing a unique adaptive consulting methodology known as the XFACTOR. We can direct and assist in the creation of strategy documents which can outline key business objectives around your implementation. From risk analysis to business continuity we manage it every step of the way. We work through executive sponsorship from key stakeholders to ensure that our customers realize the greatest return on investment possible. We recognize the difference between "installation" and "implementation". The XCEND Group holds relationships and certifications with the leading systems and lifecycle management vendors such as Altiris. We realize that the rapid pace of change in today's market place is challenging companies to become more efficient. Our goal is to match your company's needs with the right solution.

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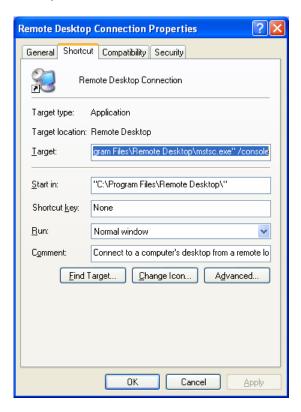
AUTHORIZED CONSULTANT

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Introduction

Many Asset Management teams and Desktop Engineering teams are inundated with the management, compliance, approval process and the software compliance requirements when it comes to the management and delivery of software in the enterprise. Thankfully Altiris has a great solution to assist with self help automation as it relates to an Altiris customer's enterprise software licenses. The Altiris Software Portal which is part of the Altiris Software Delivery Solution can be used to automate much of this process allowing information technology and business units to focus on more strategic activities. This white paper focuses on using the Altiris Software Portal to allow self service to end users requesting common software throughout the enterprise with minimal to no additional work to those responsible for software management. In particular the Altiris Software Portal should be leveraged for software in which the customer has a site license or is relatively inexpensive and or a common purchase within procurement and or purchasing departments.
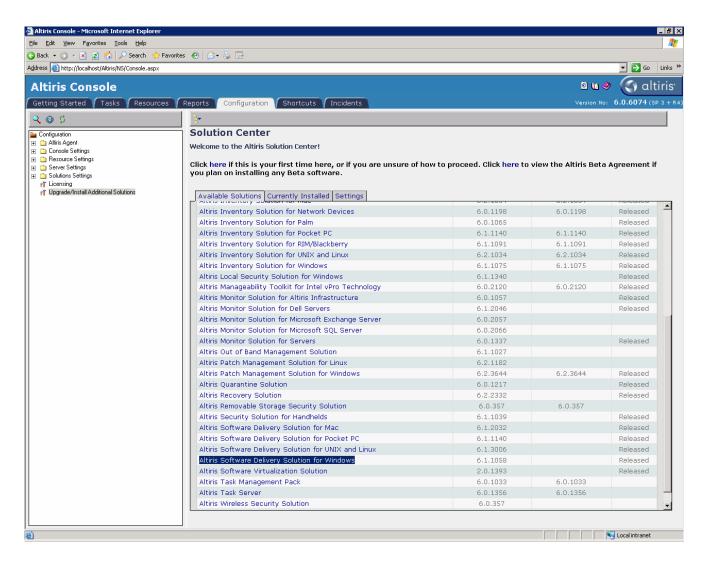
Installing Altiris Software Delivery Solution

To install Altiris Software Delivery Solution it is highly recommended to be logged on to the Altiris server locally with the Altiris Application Identity Account used during the initial install. If you can not be on the console directly use Microsoft Remote Desktop with /console switch as seen in the example below.

Launch the Altiris Console and browse to the Configuration Tab -> Upgrade/Install Additional Solutions and choose Solutions -> Altiris Software Delivery Solution for Windows as seen below. This will install the following components:
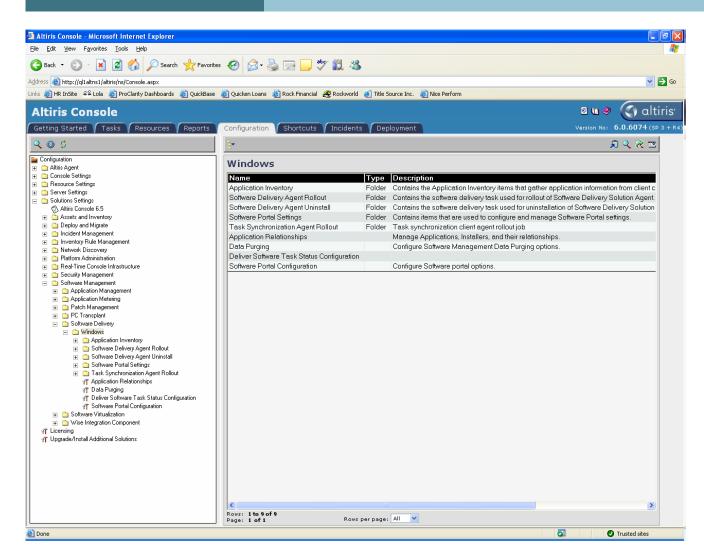
- Altiris Console
- Altiris Console Data
- Altiris Console Data Language Pack
- Altiris Console Documentation
- Altiris Task Management
- Altiris Report Pack for Task Server
- Altiris Task Server Documentation
- Altiris Task Server Language Pack
- Altiris Software Delivery Solution for Windows
- Altiris Report Pack for Software Delivery Solution for Windows
- Altiris Software Delivery Solution for Windows Documentation
- Altiris Report Pack for Software Delivery Solution

Once Altiris Software Delivery Solution and its components have been downloaded and installed you should validate that the solution has been installed correctly both by looking at the Altiris Log Viewer and by checking to see if the appropriate folder structure exists by going to the Configuration Tab -> Solutions Settings -> Software Management -> Software Delivery -> Windows. You should have a folder structure similar to what is seen below.

You will need to rollout the Altiris Software Delivery Agent(s) to your enterprise which is not handled in this white paper. Please refer to the Altiris Software Delivery Documentation to do so if you are not familiar with this process.
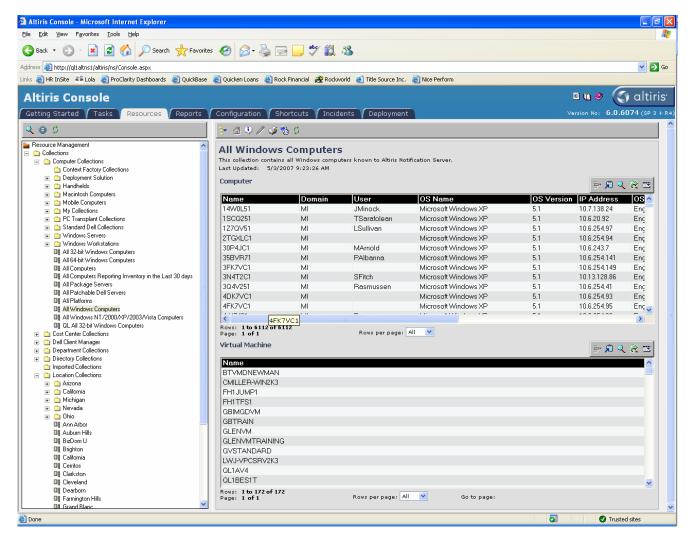
Choosing Applications for the Software Portal

Some of the easiest application choices for the software portal is freeware applications, utilities and or site licensed applications. Obvious choices are freeware applications like the Shockwave Player, Apple's Quicktime, Real Player, Windows Live Messenger, Flash Player, and Adobe Acrobat Reader. Site Licensed applications like WinZip, WinRar, Microsoft Office and or any other applications that you order for every user in the company or are provided as part of your hardware vendor's common application build like Sonic's Burning Software, or CyberDVD Movie Player software. These applications do not have to be installed on every computer nor should you install these applications onto every computer unless a user requires it. Adding unnecessary applications and or applications which will not be used adds unnecessary overhead to computers in the way of memory, disk space and or processor utilization. Inevitably this increases the minimum hardware specifications which may not be necessary. This correlates to more additional expense in the way of hardware closer to cutting edge. As hardware lifecycles in organizations sometimes increase from 4 – 5 years, its these machines that are nearing their end of life that are particularly impacted in the way of performance from unnecessary overhead from an already aging subsystem that struggles with the newer applications being deployed in the enterprise as a standard. Leverage the software portal to make these applications available to users without you having to be involved. Also to help facilitate software purchase requests you can leverage the software portal to have users request an application in which they will receive an accept or deny message while the Asset Manager leverages other Altiris functionality such as Inventory Solution, Application Metering Solution and Contract Management Solution to validate how many licenses they have purchased, how many are installed and how many are actually being used. They can decide if the user requesting the application should be granted access to it or not. This is a great way to facilitate requests as part of an approval process, especially a customer who does not own Altiris Helpdesk Solution which would allow them to build a better workflow and authorization process.

Choosing Targeted Users and or Computers

Once applications have been chosen you need to think about who you would like to target the Portal and or applications to be advertised to. Altiris has hundreds of collections that can be leveraged out of the box in addition to leveraging the collections built off the Altiris Active Directory Connector and or Asset Management locations, departments, cost centers, etc. For each application that has been chosen decide which collection(s) will be leveraged for the Software Portal configurations. You may have a pattern of applications targeted to different Portal Configurations or you may just have one. Finally think of the users and or groups within AD that you will advertise to. For your utility applications and site licensed software it may be as easy as leveraging Active Directory Groups by choosing "All Domain Users". For specific apps you certainly can use AD Groups.
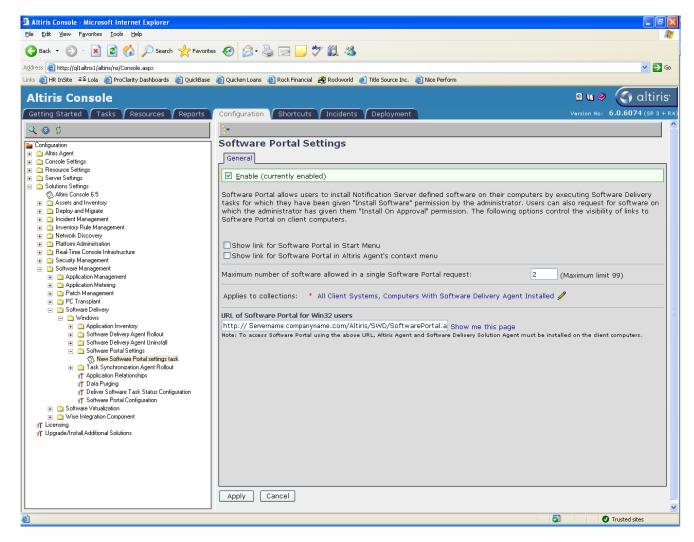
All Altiris Collections can be accessed through the Altiris Console by going to the Resources Tab -> Resource Management -> Collections.

Configuring the Software Portal

Now that you have decided on collections lets go ahead and configure who will have access to the Software Portal(s). Within the Altiris console browse to the Configuration Tab -> Configuration -> Solution Settings -> Software Management -> Software Delivery -> Windows -> Software Portal Settings -> New Software Portal Settings Task.
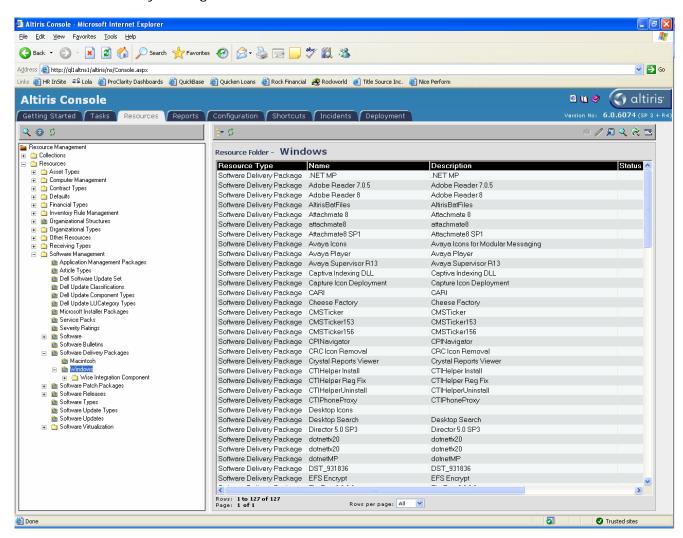

Depending upon if you have the Altiris Agent hidden from users or visible will dictate potentially if you will check either the "Show link for Software Portal in Start Menu" and or "Show link for Software Portal in Altiris Agent's context menu". If you are hiding the agent you will not be showing the context menu because they cannot see the agent and you may choose to show it within the Start Menu or not. If the agent is visible to the users you may have one, both or none checked. Choose what makes sense for your organization.

The "Maximum number of software allowed in a single Software Portal request" is entirely up to you. You may go with the default or allow up to 99 simultaneously requests. This is entirely up to you and your process. What is important is that the task is enabled and applies to any machines you want the Software Portal to be available to that have the Software Delivery Agent installed. If a user does not have the Software Delivery Agent installed or you have not rolled it out to your users they will not be able to have applications installed through the portal since it uses the Software Delivery Agent for delivery of the advertised packages. One note is that you could have multiple Software Portals with different settings targeting different users as well. So there is some flexibility in your choices and settings. Once you activate the portal go ahead and click Apply.
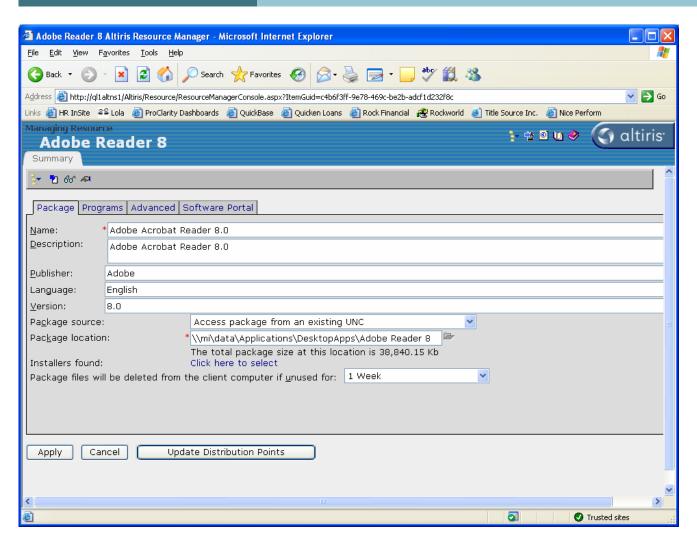
Creating Software Delivery Packages

In order to distribute packages you need to create software delivery tasks. However for the Software Portal this is not necessary all you need are packages created. Packages can be created by going to the Resources Tab -> Resource Management -> Resources ->Software Management -> Software Delivery Packages -> Windows.
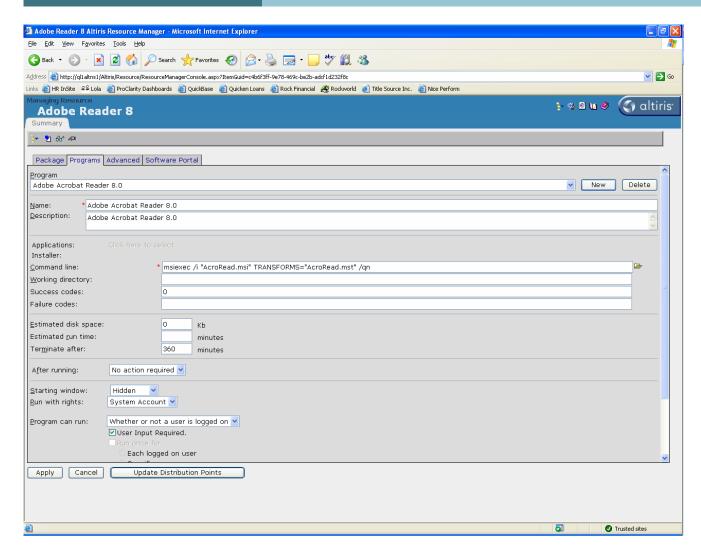

Right click on Windows folder and choose New, Software Delivery Package. You will now have the ability to create your package. Give it a Name, Description, Publisher, Language, and Version. Choose where the package source is located and browse to where it is located if appropriate. Check the package total size to ensure it's mapped to it correctly and also ensure the size of the package is something you feel comfortable in distributing in the environment. I will show Adobe Acrobat Reader 8.0 as an example.

Create a Program on the Programs Tab that it will run and configure all the settings as seen below for your package.
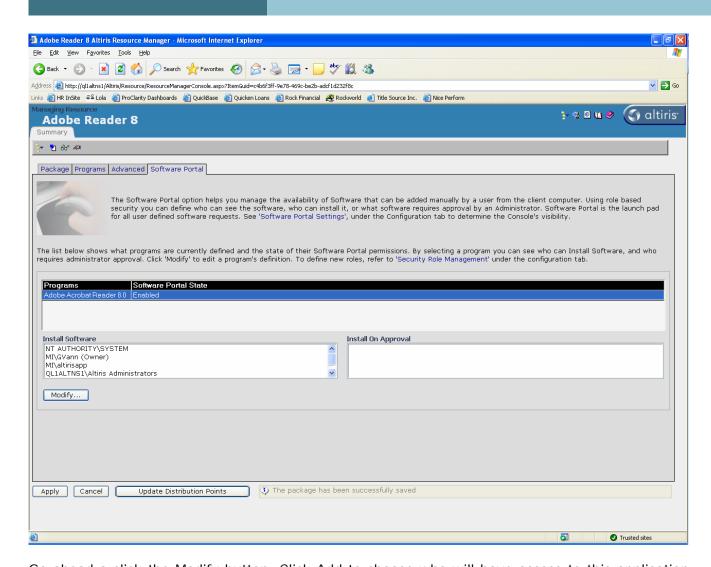
On the Software Portal Tab is where we will choose to whom we will advertise this package to through the users who have access to the Software Portal.
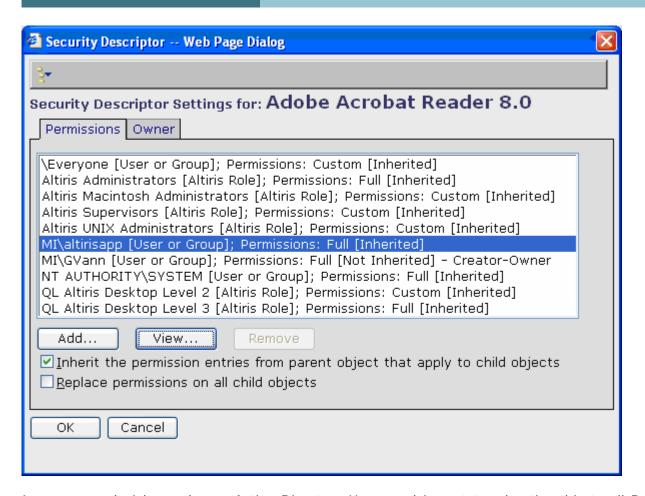
In the "Install Software" you will see the users who have the ability to install the software automatically and in the "Install On Approval" those that will require approval first from an Altiris Administrator or Asset Manager.

Go ahead a click the Modify button. Click Add to choose who will have access to this application and what level. For instance in the case of this utility application Adobe Acrobat Reader 8.0 I want to make it automatically available to all users in the organization without the need to approve the request so I will click Add.
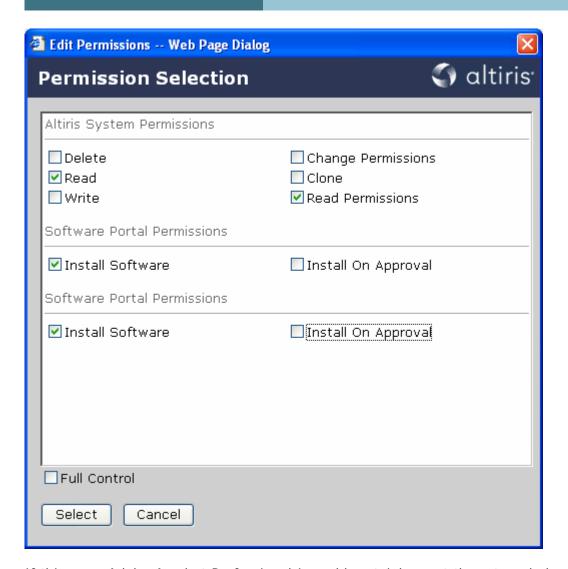
In my example I have chosen Active Directory Users and I want to advertise this to all Domain Users so I will choose Advanced and choose for it to search Groups within my AD domain. Domain Users will satisfy this need. Once you have chosen your Users or Groups. Click Ok.
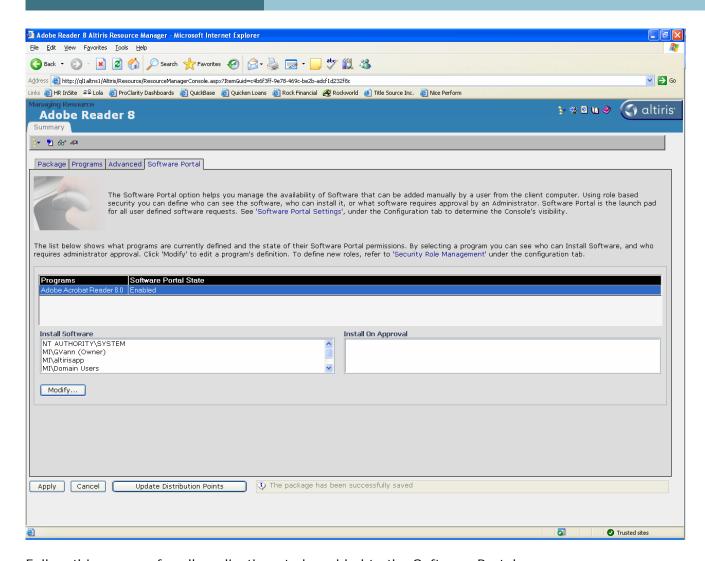
You will now have the ability to choose which permissions they will be granted. In this case I want to give everyone the ability to Read, Install the Software and I do not require them to receive Approval first.

If this were Adobe Acrobat Professional I would certainly want them to only be able to Install On Approval. Click Select, hit Apply and when you have a message showing the package has been successfully saved close the window.
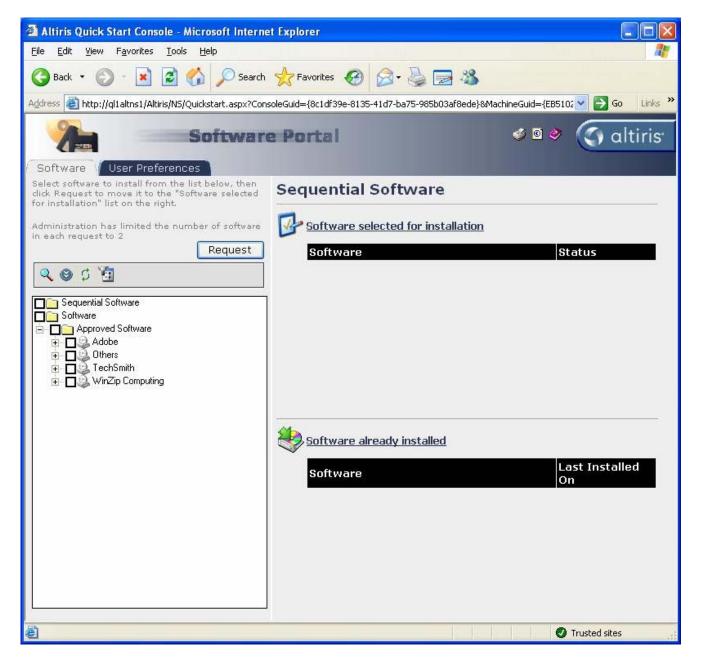
Follow this process for all applications to be added to the Software Portal.
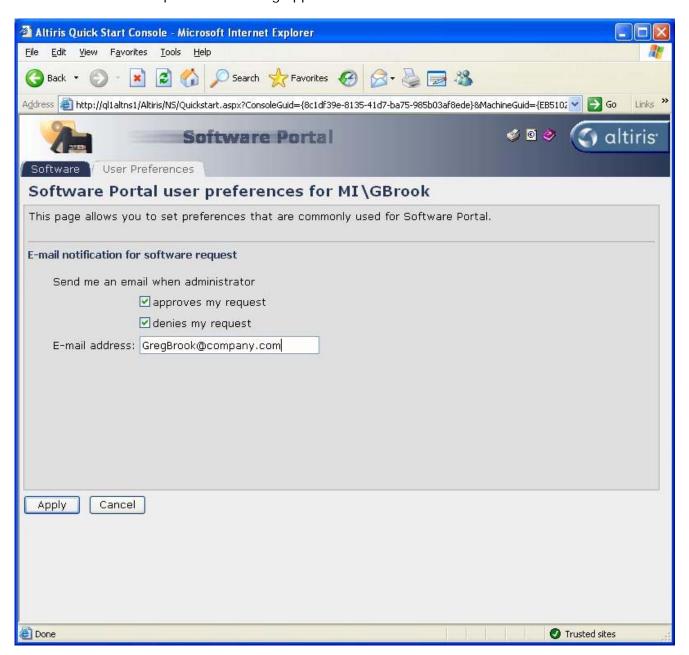
End User Self Service

Now that you have your Software Portal(s) published and your applications advertised you need to educate your users on how to access the portal. Depending upon the Portal configuration options you chose they may access the Altiris Software Portal from the Altiris Agent Context Menu, Start Menu, Add/Remove Programs, and or Start -> Programs -> Altiris -> Software Portal.
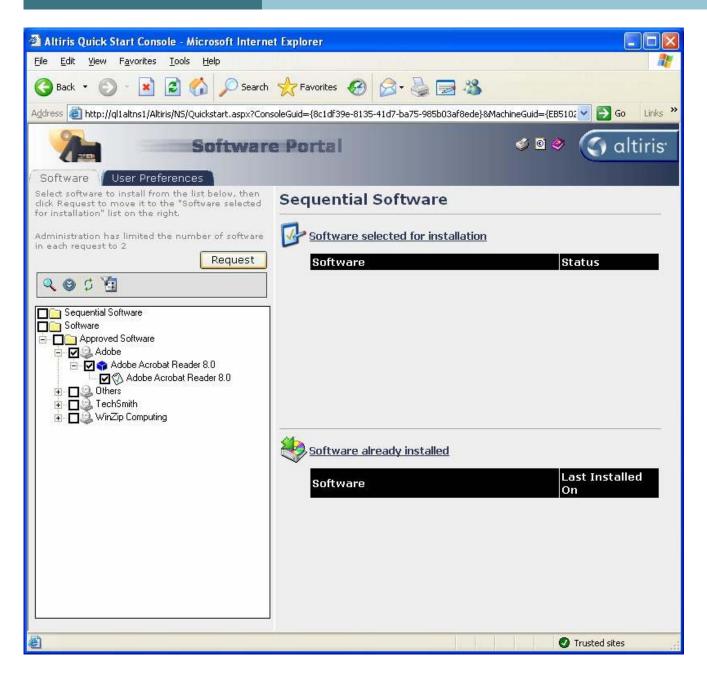
End Users will need to click on the User Preferences Tab and check that they want to be notified if an Administrator approves or denies their request and put in their e-mail address. This way they will always get an update as to the status of an application which requires approval when they can come back to the portal after being approved to have it installed.
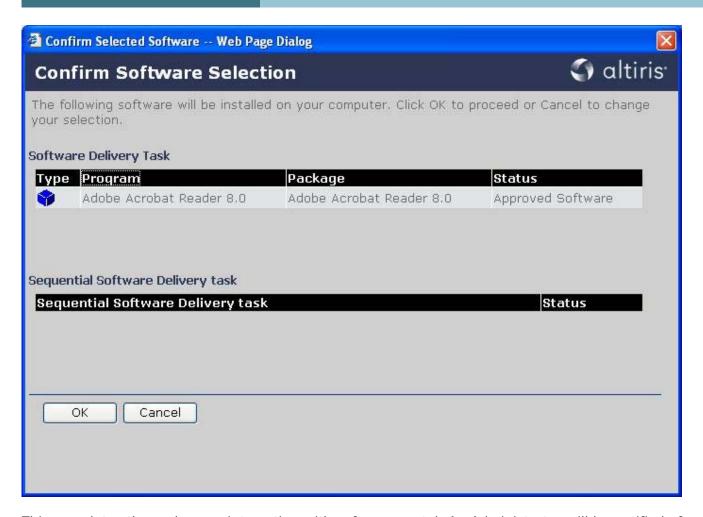

For applications in which they have been approved or do not require approval they can select the application and hit the Request button as seen below.

Once they hit request they will be given a status message that the software is already approved and or requires approval. If it has been approved it will automatically be installed via the Altiris Agent and the Software Delivery Agent and their will be nothing else that they need to do. Self Service at its finest.

This completes the end user's interaction with software portal. An Administrator will be notified of an applications requirement for approval where they can choose to either allow or disallow the approval.

Conclusion

The Altiris Software Portal applications which require approval should be looked at the user requesting it and if the customer owns Asset Management and has been tracking Software Compliance should look at the web reports for installed vs. purchased and decide if there are licenses available to approve the end user's request. If licenses are short or the organization is already out of compliance. The end user's request should be denied or put on hold until the Asset Manager has time to investigate if other licenses currently installed are going unused by leveraging Application Metering Solution and harvest licenses leveraging Software Delivery Solution which are not being utilized to either back under compliance which will stop the company ordering unnecessary additional licenses. This is another area in which a company's process really comes into play and the Altiris solutions owned, utilized and comfort level will dictate their own best practice.

The Altiris Software Portal is a very easy to use solution that any company can immediately take advantage of in saving Information Technology and Purchasing team members time and money while providing an easy way of users of getting what they need quickly and easily making them more efficient.