

Is Cron Limiting Your Automation Strategy?

By Pat Cameron

If you currently use cron to schedule jobs on your UNIX servers, you may have encountered the following situations: Your job schedule requires a higher degree of flexibility—including cross-system reactivity and built-in notification—than cron can provide. Or, your IT department is required to comply with SOX, PCI, HIPAA, or other regulations. If these sound familiar, Skybot Scheduler, the enterprise scheduler for your Windows, UNIX, and Linux servers, is the solution.

Check out some advantages that Skybot Scheduler offers.

Cross-System Scheduling

Cron controls jobs on the server where it's running. If you have an enterprise with dozens or even hundreds of servers, each server must be managed separately. This creates a lot of overhead during setup, and even more work if you need to update the same job on every system. It also increases the chance of human error when setting up your schedule. Skybot Scheduler simplifies this process by letting you control jobs on all your enterprise servers—including your Windows, UNIX, and Linux systems—from one central console.

Advanced Scheduling

Cron lets you set a specific time to run a job, and then runs it. But what happens when you have a schedule that's too complex to follow a repeatable time pattern? Skybot Scheduler lets you create calendars and specify each day that job should run—years ahead of time. You can even create a Date List to tell a job when NOT to run.

For finance departments that don't use a standard calendar, Skybot Scheduler lets you create fiscal calendars that define when the fiscal year starts, the last day of each period, weekly working days, and working days throughout the year. You also can create exceptions to your normal schedule to accommodate holidays and other days when you don't want a job to run. With Skybot Scheduler's advanced scheduling capabilities, you can automate processes that you've never been able to before.

Event-Driven Scheduling

If you have many jobs that need to run in a specific order for your schedule to complete successfully, cron requires that you must schedule each job to run at a specific time. And, you need to leave enough time between jobs to ensure that each job completes before the next one begins. But, what happens if all the events don't complete as planned? What if a job takes too long to run or fails?

With Skybot Scheduler, you don't have to rely on timed jobs in your schedule. Skybot Scheduler can react to any combination of job statuses, Job Monitor statuses (ran too long, ran too quickly, or did not start on time), Agent Event Monitors (files, directories, daemons, or services), or SNMP Monitors to

ensure that your jobs and processes run when they're supposed to, even if the triggering job or event is on another server. If something doesn't go as planned, you are notified automatically.

Graphical Interface

To use cron, you must be familiar with the format of crontab files and a UNIX text editor. And, more manual programming means more chances for human error. Skybot Scheduler offers an intuitive Web-based interface that lets you see exactly what is happening on your enterprise. Setting up complicated, cross-system jobs only takes a few minutes. You don't need to be a programmer to implement a comprehensive schedule.

Role-Based Security

Skybot Scheduler offers role-based security that ensures your users have access to only the parts of the product they need to perform their jobs. It also makes managing user privileges easier for system administrators, because they can change privileges for a large group of users on one screen.

Skybot Scheduler provides a virtually limitless combination of security options. You can segregate jobs by department, division, geographic location, or customer. Managed service providers, cloud computing applications, and large organizations all can benefit from Skybot Scheduler's role-based security.

History

To view cron history, you need to know where the cron logfile is kept, and how to search UNIX text files. But, Skybot Scheduler provides an easy-to-use, detailed history of your jobs, Agent Event Monitors, Job Monitors, and SNMP Trap Monitors. If there is an error in a job, it's easy to find and fix the problem, quickly. For example, Skybot Scheduler creates a status record each time a job is submitted so that you have a history of each batch job run. It updates this status record when the job enters a job queue, when the job starts running, and when it completes. You see the description of the job, when it ran, how long it took to run, whether it completed normally or terminated, and the history of the times it ran. You can access history for your server and all connected systems from one central console.

Auditing

To remain compliant with government regulations, you need to be able to show auditors who changed what and when they did it. Skybot Scheduler's auditing provides an enormous boost for reaching compliance with today's regulation requirements—Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX), PCI, and HIPAA. It tracks who created a new job and who changed the job setup or commands. You can even track who made changes to the product, such as changes to the system settings, user accounts, or agents.

Built-In Notification

How do you know if your cron job is running late, or didn't run at all? With Skybot Scheduler, you can specify what to do if a job runs too long, completes too quickly, or starts late. You can end the job, send an e-mail or text message to an operator, or send an SNMP trap to open a problem ticket. You also can receive notification or launch another job when service daemons end or an attached server drops. And, when you've agreed to provide a certain level of service, Skybot Scheduler helps you keep your word. Using Skybot Scheduler, you'll easily meet, or exceed, your Service Level Agreements.

Central Console

If you use cron to manage jobs on all your UNIX servers, you need to log into each server separately and use a command line program to review or edit your jobs.

Skybot Scheduler uses your Web browser as a central console to set up jobs and manage processes across your enterprise. When you log into Skybot Scheduler, the home page instantly lets you know if the product is running, if any jobs failed, and if there are any actions you need to take. From there, a listing of jobs, job completion history, access to connected agents, and much more is just a click away.

Conclusion

Skybot Scheduler is the new face of enterprise job scheduling. It simplifies the tasks of scheduling jobs across multiple systems running Windows, UNIX, and Linux. With Skybot Scheduler you can build an event-driven schedule, quickly and easily, across all your systems for coordinated batch processing, cross-system monitoring, and true enterprise scheduling.

Switching from a cron schedule to Skybot Scheduler is easy. Skybot Scheduler lets you import crontabs and convert them to Skybot Scheduler jobs. You can select all jobs, individual jobs, or a subset of jobs to import, and manage the environment for each job. Importing your cron jobs mean all of Skybot Scheduler's tools—Dashboard, Job Flow Diagrams, and Reports—are available to view and manage your existing UNIX and Linux jobs and processes.

Visit www.skybotsoftware.com or call
1.877.506.4786 for more information
or a **FREE 30-day trial**.



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