



WINDOWS XP SP3 NOW AVAILABLE

After a series of delays, Microsoft has released the last major update for its Windows XP operating system to broad distribution.

Windows XP Service Pack 3 is available from Microsoft's automated Windows Update service or as a file that can be pulled from the Download Center on the company's Web site.

Microsoft had planned to broadly offer Windows XP SP3 earlier, but the release was delayed by a series of bugs -- including one that rendered the update incompatible with PCs that have Microsoft's Dynamics Retail Management system installed.

Microsoft is now offering a patch that resolves the conflict. The service pack should offer a number of enhancements over the current version of the OS, which Microsoft is phasing out after June 30. It includes all updates issued since Windows XP Service Pack 2 was released in 2004, as well as some new elements.

Among them: a feature called Network Access Protection that's borrowed from the newer Windows Vista operating system. NAP automatically validates a computer's health, ensuring that it's free of bugs and viruses before allowing it access to a network.

Windows XP SP3 also includes improved "black hole" router detection -- a feature that automatically detects routers that are silently discarding packets. In XP SP3, the feature is turned on by default, according to Microsoft.

Additionally, Windows XP SP3 steals a page from Vista's product-activation model, meaning that product keys for each copy of the operating system don't need to be entered during setup. The feature should prove popular with corporate IT managers, who often need to oversee hundreds, or even thousands, of operating system installations.

Some users may balk at a feature in XP SP3 that prevents them from downgrading their browser from Internet Explorer 7 to the older IE 6 once the service pack has been installed. XP SP3 also won't install on systems running beta versions of the yet-to-be-released IE 8.

Microsoft said the restrictions are designed to prevent system instabilities.

10 TIPS FOR KEEPING ID THIEVES BEHIND BARS

The pressures on small businesses are great enough without having to worry about technology. But technology changes every day, seemingly every minute. For small business owners and employees on the go, this means work doesn't stop just because you're a road warrior. In fact, many of our customers

HP WARNS AMD DESKTOP OWNERS TO WAIT ON SP3

Hewlett-Packard is warning owners of AMD-based HP desktop PCs to wait for a fix to a driver glitch before installing Microsoft Windows XP service pack 3.

Microsoft is also developing a prerequisite fix that must be downloaded before SP3 will automatically install prior to its proactive distribution of SP3. HP recommends consumers with AMD-based desktops wait until after HP's or Microsoft's updates have been deployed on their systems to install service pack 3.

A glitch related to computer makers' deployment of XP service pack 1 Sysprep images from Intel-based desktop PCs to non-Intel machines can cause the non-Intel desktops to freeze up or enter an "endless reboot" cycle when XP SP3 is installed. The problem, according to a Microsoft Knowledge Base article, has been narrowed down to an orphaned registry key that remains on some non-Intel desktops that causes an attempted load of a non-existent Intel processor driver, Intelppm.sys, after installing SP2 or SP3.



The glitch seems to largely affect HP desktops built on Advanced Micro Devices chips, though some users have complained of similar system crash and reboot problems following the installation of SP3 on PCs from Dell, Lenovo and Gateway, and chipsets from Asus. At least one reports the problem on an Intel-based PC.

HP's said the glitch isn't widespread in the computer maker's product line. The issue with SP3 was identified by early adopters of AMD-based PCs who have proactively downloaded the new service pack. This has only affected a small number of AMD-based HP consumer desktop systems, and no other HP products are affected by this issue.

The affected HP systems do not have an Intel driver loaded onto them, but there is a services registry entry that SP3 appears to be recognizing as an instruction to load the Intel driver, and when it can't find it, it causes the failure.

We recommended affected parties contact HP or WTI customer support for assistance in resolving the issue. An HP Customer Care article has also been posted with instructions on recovering from the error. HP is "working diligently with Microsoft on a software update" that will be proactively distributed to HP customers through the vendor's automated HP Update service. The patch is named SP37394 and can be found via search on HP's Web site.

NEW TECHNOLOGY

Have you ever found yourself in a situation wishing you had a computer on hand to take notes, send e-mails or modify a presentation? Do you travel a lot and get tired of lugging around a full-size notebook? Or are you a student keen to learn wherever you go – from classroom to home, from field trips to vacations? Having a second, full-featured but lightweight notebook for your work or studies could make your life much easier.

The HP 2133 Mini-Note PC is an affordable way to have it all. This full-featured, ultra-light, extra-small notebook PC offers mobile workers and students who are in and out of different rooms and meetings all day, easy access to all the functionality of a much larger computer, without the bulk. Durable and feather-light, this notebook lets you do everything you can do with a larger computer, including access the Internet, send and receive e-mail, and work on documents as easily and securely as if you were sitting at your desk. It even includes an optional integrated camera for web conferencing and taking snapshots.

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Starting at only \$499, the HP 2133 Mini-Note PC is exceptionally affordable. Now there's no reason to scrimp on features with a lightweight computer. The price, durability and size make it perfect as a full-featured study aid or second notebook to take on the road and keep on hand as a useful tool throughout the day.

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TIPS.....

tell us they are even more productive on the road.

Protecting yourself, your equipment, your employees and your business from technological threats in this mobile world can be a dizzying challenge for any small business owner. Before you hit the road, consider these tips and best practices to steer clear of on-line identity theft:

1. Don't ignore your security updates, such as those from Microsoft Windows if you're on a PC. When that little annoying pop-up window says you have updates, pay attention! Those are critical to making sure you have the latest tools to protect your computer.

2. Always have the latest and updated antivirus and anti-spyware programs on your computers. While there are many sufficient free versions, paying for the top-of-the-line programs is always safest. Consider anti-virus software programs from McAfee, Trend Micro or Symantec that often have anti-spyware tools built in. Another great anti-spyware program is Webroot Spysweeper.

3. Turn the "file sharing" setting off on your business's notebook computers. While this feature might be convenient in the workplace, it's critical to turn it off when you're traveling so that nobody can view your company or personal files. Password-protect any file that contains sensitive information. Microsoft Windows XP has this built right in.

4. When you compress a file you can secure, encrypt and password protect it. Don't forget your password. Other programs that have this ability are WinZip and WinRAR.

5. Disable the wireless radio on your notebook computer when not in use. Newer models have built-in wireless cards that are often visible when your computer's power is on.

6. When utilizing a Hot Spot to access the Internet, make sure you either pay for the access or sign in through some sort of "landing page" which tells you who the Hot Spot provider is. Avoid logging on to a "copy cat" network set up by a hacker.

7. Use a password to log on to your computer at all times—at the office and especially when traveling. Do not use any personal identification or obvious codes when creating these passwords, such as your Social Security number, birthdate or company name. Ideally, you should also use an alphanumeric password combination and change it every month.

8. When traveling, bring a travel router with a built-in firewall with you. Linksys (a division of Cisco Systems, Inc.), 3Com and NETGEAR offer mobile solutions. These routers should be configured and tested by your IT manager or consultant before you travel.

9. Voice over IP (VoIP) is becoming more popular. Executives are traveling, they can literally bring their office communications system with them. Be aware of the security gaps that can be exploited through VoIP and the preventative measures you can take. Make sure that all software security updates have been downloaded and installed before using your softphone or VoIP equipment. Also make sure your firewalls are properly configured and that your VoIP traffic is encrypted. Ask your VoIP provider about this.

10. Set up a virtual private network (VPN) for your notebook computers. This will encrypt and protect any emails or communications conducted within the VPN. But be sure to follow the other tips to protect your business.