

SP2: Now or Later?

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For all the users of Microsoft's Windows XP operating system, time is running out before the forced addition of SP2. While it's been a long wait for Microsoft to release this "all inclusive fix" to the latest security threats, this release has come with a different twist. For the familiar Windows Update process, users that have set their PCs to automatically update their systems, the release still hasn't been applied. Microsoft consciously has released SP2 in a phased approach, first allowing the IT community to test the functionality of the release with all the other programs that the enterprise user may be running. Thank you Microsoft!

For the home or small business user, without the benefit of an IT staff, the time is running out.... Microsoft has accelerated its plans for pushing SP2 on its users. What does this mean to the average user? Plenty. Based upon our test results with both the XP Home and XP Pro Operating Systems, applying SP2 comes with a mixed bag of results. Generally, for the non-networked user with a "clean" machine, you'll have no problem with the update, though even on a high-speed network connection, the application takes over an hour. For dialup users, be prepared to be very patient!

For users that have AdWare, Spyware, Worms, Trojans, or Viruses, or that operate a home or small business network, you'll experience the most trouble. Just applying the update is enough, but the end result will likely leave you with either a "hung system", if there are OS infections, or network resources unavailable due to SP2's upgraded firewall.

After testing both the XP Home and XP Pro deployments, both on "clean" machines, and several that were infected, our best advice is to ensure that your machine is clean BEFORE you apply the update. Also, due to the amount of time required to apply the update, and the unexpected results that you may encounter as a result, get caught up on your work and plan to force the update on your schedule before Microsoft forces you to do it on theirs. Ridding a PC of infections is the biggest key before upgrading, and don't just rely on your out-of-date virus scanner to do the job. There are specific programs designed to detect and eliminate Ad-Ware and Spyware that should be used before applying the update. Suitable programs that are free for personal use can be downloaded and used for this purpose. If the end result of the cleanup activity is that there is still some form of infection, we advise to seek the assistance of a PC professional prior to upgrading to SP2.

Links to free programs for cleaning Ad-Ware and Spyware can be found on our website at www.CompetitiveNetworkSolutions.com as well as other PC-related guidance.