

Microsoft Pushes Windows Server 2003 SP2 out the Door

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The service pack provides updates, security and stability enhancements, and the latest features for Windows Server 2003 and Windows XP Professional x64.

Microsoft has finally released Windows Server 2003 Service Pack 2, which provides updates, security and stability enhancements, and the latest features for the Windows Server 2003 and Windows XP Professional x64 operating systems.

This final release follows the second release candidate for Windows Server 2003 SP2, which was made available last November. It has seen twice as many downloads than the Windows Server 2003 SP1 Release Candidate did, Microsoft said in a statement.

Windows Server 2003 SP2 updates applies to all editions of Windows Server 2003 (32-bit x86, x64 and Itanium), Windows Server 2003 R2 and Windows Storage Server R2, as well as Windows Unified Data Storage Server, Windows Compute Cluster Server 2003 SP1, Windows Small Business Server 2003 R2 and Windows XP Professional x64 Edition.

But Windows Server 2003 SP2 may prove problematic for some customers and IT administrators.

A Microsoft Knowledge Base article warns that those customers who plan to upgrade from an evaluation copy of Windows Small Business

Server 2003 to the full retail version, upgrade from Windows Server 2003 to the full retail version of Windows Small Business Server 2003, or migrate to Windows Server 2003 from Windows Small Business Server by using the Windows Small Business Server 2003 R2 Transition Pack, must either not install Windows Server 2003 SP2 or else remove the second service pack until the upgrade or migration is finished.

Some Small Business Server users and IT administrators have criticized Microsoft for not giving them advance notice of the pending release of SP2 via Windows Update and Windows Server Update Services.

"You gave us admins a heads up before XP SP2 was Microsoft updated out to our boxes, so why can't you give us a heads up on this? Microsoft, you TELL us that's coming out before you shoot it out on Microsoft update will you," says Susan Bradley on her SBS Diva blog.

That blog also gives a list of useful resources for administrators, including links to a number of tools that administrators intending to deploy Windows Server 2003 Service Pack 2 may want to use for things like helping detect binaries that will require recertification and assisting in diagnosing and resolving computer problems.

But a Microsoft spokesman defended the way the service pack was released, telling eWEEK that the company "makes every effort to communicate our road map and plans to customers. We've discussed SP2 distribution plans in detail on our Web site since November, on the Windows Server blog, at our events and via other channels.

"To clarify: SP2 is an optional update from the Windows Update site. After three months on Windows Update site, SP2 will also be offered via Automatic Updates. Even there, SP2 will not install automatically until the End User License Agreement has been accepted," he said.

Customers who want to test SP2 for a longer period and would like to prevent SP2 from installing from Automatic Updates, can download and install the SP2 Blocking Tool at the Microsoft Download Center, the Microsoft spokesman said.

Among the new features and capabilities included in Windows Server 2003 SP2 is Windows Deployment Services, an updated and redesigned version of Remote Installation Services, which allows administrators to set up new computers through a network-based installation without having to be physically present at each computer and without having to install directly from DVD media.

Also included is the Windows Server 2003 Scalable Networking Pack, which lets customers improve the performance and scalability of network-based Windows Server 2003 workloads, such as file storage, backup, Web servers and media streaming.

Wi-Fi Protected Access 2 supports the new Wi-Fi Alliance certification for wireless security, making it easier for users to securely connect to Wi-Fi hotspots, while improved IPsec Filter Management reduces the IPsec filter set that needs to be managed for a Server and Domain Isolation deployment from potentially hundreds to as few as two.

Windows Server 2003 SP 2 also brings firewall per port authentication, which secures traffic between extranet environments and internal assets that are protected via IPsec domain isolation, while Microsoft Management Console 3.0 supports richer functionality in snap-in management tools, allowing users to add or remove snap-ins and providing improved error handling via the MMC console.

The enhanced MSConfig provides a single launching point for common support tools that will ease server diagnostics, while performance improvements for Windows virtualization and SQL Server are also

included.

"Windows Server 2003 SP2 is also the foundation operating system for the upcoming service pack of Windows Compute Cluster Server 2003. In addition to general bug fixes, the compute node deployment wizard of Windows Compute Cluster Server 2003 SP1 will be based on Windows Deployment Services, which makes adding a compute node as simple as plugging it into the network and turning it on," Microsoft said in a statement.

Windows Compute Cluster Server 2003 SP1 will be available for download and CD orders within the next 30 days. Download and order information can be found [here](#).

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