

What's New in Windows XP SP2?

Every year or so Microsoft releases a service pack (abbreviated SP) for Windows, and for some of their other major software products. A service pack includes all the improvements, hotfixes, security patches, and bug fixes released individually through individual Windows Updates prior to the release of the service pack.

Usually, the service pack includes some additional goodies of its own. This time, with the release the Service Pack 2, there are lots of extra goodies. This chapter is a quick overview of the most dramatic changes to Windows XP that you'll find in Service Pack 2. What's new in this chapter is only in relation to pre-Service Pack 2 Windows XP. If you're just now making the transition from Windows 98, ME, or 2000, just about everything will be new.

The New Security

If I had to summarize what's new in SP2 in two words, those words would be *Internet security*. Like the rest of us, I think Microsoft has had it with all the worms, viruses, adware, spyware, and every other type of *malware* (bad software). Not to mention the human slimedogs who are wasting all of our time and energy with this garbage for their own amusement or financial gain. So, Microsoft wisely decided to focus some major resources on that problem this time around and get everything rolled up into a single service pack that's easy to download and install.

It's difficult to miss the change. The once barely noticeable Internet Connection Firewall has been replaced by a much-improved Windows Firewall. The equally obscure Automatic Updates feature is now nearly impossible to miss. And even though Microsoft is still out of the antivirus software market, they don't make it easy for you to ignore the importance of protecting your computer against such threats.

The new firewall, automatic updates, and antivirus alerts and options have been brought together into a single Security Center window. The Security Center makes itself known automatically if there are any weaknesses in your PC's Internet defenses, through notification messages and a notification icon, as in the example shown in Figure 1-1.



In This Chapter

How Service Pack 2 makes the Internet a safer place to be

Take advantage of the new Wireless Network Setup Wizard

Start using Bluetooth devices to wirelessly sync your cell phone and PDA to your PC and printer

Take advantage of all that's new in Windows Media Player 10 and Movie Maker 2.1



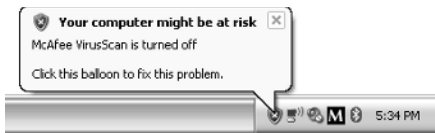


Figure 1-1: New Security Center notification and notification area icon

If there are no holes in your PC's defense, the Security Center stays out of your way. But you can easily get to it through Control Panel, or by clicking the Start button and choosing All Programs ⇨ Accessories ⇨ System Tools ⇨ Security Center. The Security Center, shown in Figure 1-2, makes Internet security a much easier task, even for the helpless newbies and casual users who are the most victimized group of users.



Figure 1-2: The new Security Center in Windows XP Service Pack 2

As you can see, the Security Center is divided into three main panes:

- ♦ **Resources:** Provides simple links explaining why security is important and tools for battening down the security hatches on your own PC
- ♦ **Security essentials:** Three simple buttons for turning on (or off) your firewall, automatic updates, and virus protection
- ♦ **Manage security settings for:** Icons that provide easy access to your Internet Options, Automatic Updates settings, and the new Windows Firewall

Part V of this book covers all the details on the new features of Service Pack 2. But goes beyond the Security Center to cover issues such as pop-up ads, adware, spyware, and more. If you already know your way around the Windows desktop, feel free to just go straight to that section at any time.

Virus protection la DEP

The hardware folks have also had their fill of hacker invasions. The next-generation 64-bit processors have built-in antivirus security in the form of DEP (Data Execution Prevention), which makes it much tougher for rogue software to sneak bad code into executable memory—a favorite technique used by viruses and worms to gain unauthorized access to your PC.

Windows XP SP2 takes advantage of the new DEP capabilities of 64-bit processors. But you don't have to wait for those processors to reach mainstream computing. Service Pack 2 will let you use software-enforced DEP, right now on your existing PC. For details see “Using Data Execution Prevention (DEP)” in Chapter 28.

Outlook Express virus protection

Outlook Express now offers an option to leave pictures and other external HTML content on the e-mail server when you download your e-mail. This saves you time, because you don't have to wait for all the picture content in junk e-mail messages to download. It also makes your computer more secure by keeping bad code in attachments and malformed JPEGs off your computer.

When you do want to see a picture in an e-mail, you just click its placeholder in the e-mail message and that one picture downloads on the spot. For more information, see “Minimizing Virus Threats with Outlook Express” in Chapter 28.

Built-in pop-up blocker

Internet Explorer in Service Pack 2 comes with its own built-in pop-up blocker that's simple to configure and easy to use (see Figure 1-3). You can crank the up the blocker to stop virtually all site pop-ups, and then selectively choose the sites in which you need pop-ups for non-advertising purposes on a site-by-site basis. See “Blocking Pop-Ups with Internet Explorer” in Chapter 29 for the goods on the new pop-up blocker.

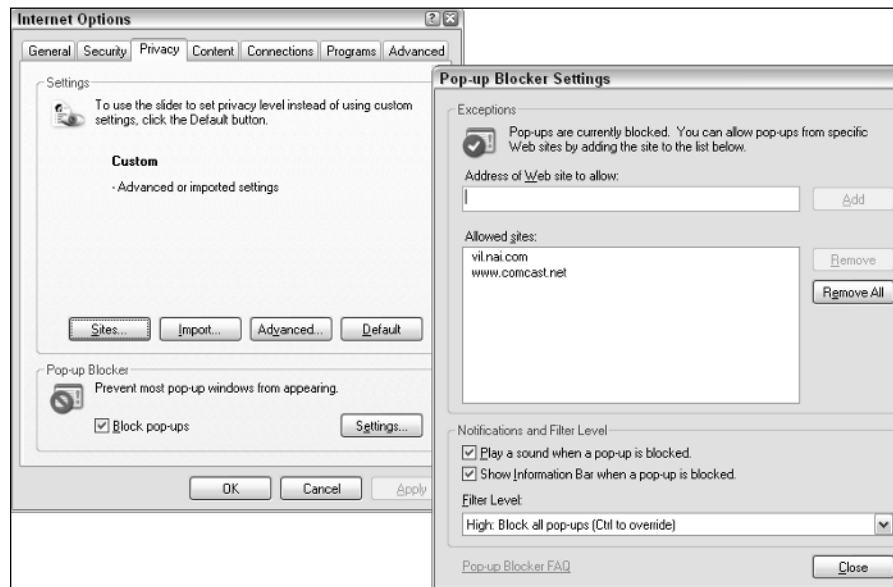


Figure 1-3: Internet Explorer's built-in pop-up blocker is easily configured in dialog boxes.

Stay in control with the Information bar

Not only does the new pop-up blocker prevent pop-up ads, but it also keeps you abreast of all content that wants to download. You don't have to worry about people sneaking unwanted programs or ActiveX controls into your computer and browser, because the Information bar (see Figure 1-4) will keep you informed and give you a choice. As discussed in Chapter 29, once you get the hang of it, you can streamline things by removing the message box and even the Information bar, without compromising your computer's security.

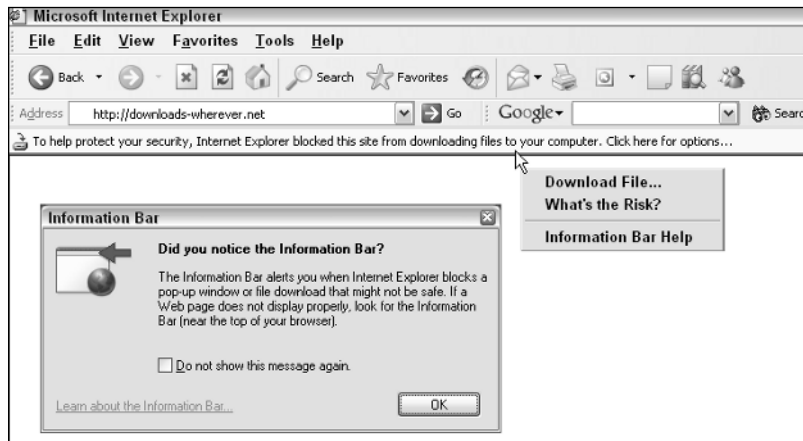


Figure 1-4: The pop-up blocker keeps an eye on downloads, too.

Regain control of your Web browser

Have you ever found your default home page suddenly changed without your knowing it? Or mistyped a URL and ended up at some new, previously unknown search site? Are you plagued by pop-ups that seem to come out of nowhere?

The new Manage Add-ons tool in Internet Explorer, shown in Figure 1-5, makes it easy to disable the intrusions into your Web browser that are hijacking its ability to work the way you want. “Disable Mysterious Add-ons” in Chapter 30 shows just how easy it is to turn off, and get rid of, most of these unwanted browser parasites. Choose Tools ⇨ Manage Add-ons from Internet Explorer's menu bar to see the dialog box.

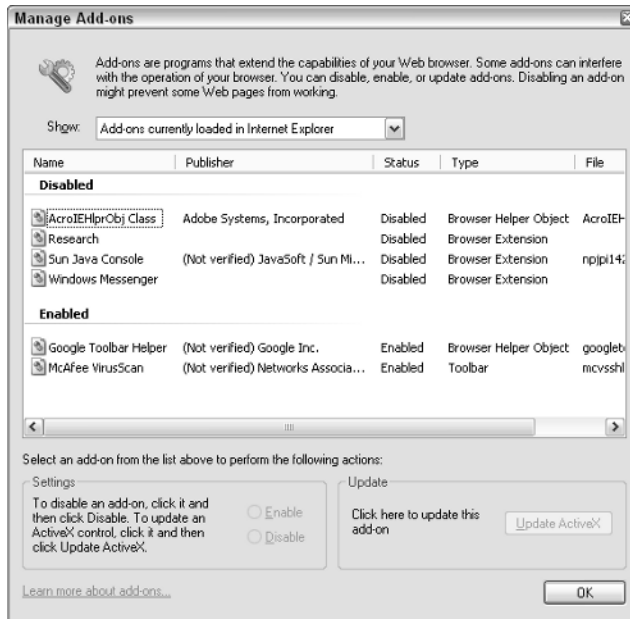


Figure 1-5: Get rid of ads and unwanted browser tools with Manage Add-Ons.

Wireless Network Setup Wizard

Setting a wireless network with new 802.11b and 802.11g standards has never been easier. Use either WEP or WPA to secure your wireless network. It's all Wi-Fi compatible, making it easy to access public Internet Wi-Fi hotspots found at many universities, airports, hotels, and other places. When you're on the road with your laptop, and within range of a public Internet access hotspot, you can just turn on your notebook, have it find the appropriate signal, and you're online without any cables or wires.

The new Wireless Network Setup Wizard makes (see Figure 1-6) it all so much easier than it's been in the past. "Setting Up a Wireless Network" in Chapter 61 tells the whole story.

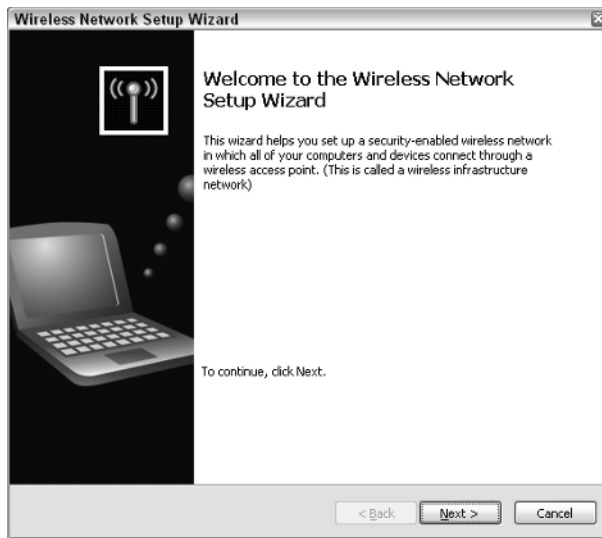


Figure 1-6: The new Wireless Network Setup Wizard

Safe and Secure Home Networking

The new Windows Firewall makes it much easier to set up a secure home network with full Internet connection, printer, and file sharing. You no longer need to figure out where you have to enable the firewall, and not leave all the ports on some computers wide open. The new firewall just battens down the security on all your network connections, opening just enough ports to allow computers within your network to share files, printers, and Internet access without exposing other ports unnecessarily. Chapter 61 shows you exactly how it's done.

Bluetooth Is Really Here

If you've been wondering when all the hoopla about Bluetooth would turn into something you could get your hands on, wonder no more. Windows XP SP2 has complete Bluetooth support built right in. If you haven't heard about Bluetooth, you will now.

Bluetooth is a low-cost, efficient wireless connectivity technology that makes it easy for mobile phones, PDAs (personal digital assistants), PCs, printers, mice, keyboards, and other devices to communicate securely, wirelessly, and with very little effort on your part.

You can create a wireless Bluetooth network with all the Internet connection, printer, and file sharing capabilities of a TCP/IP network, without any of the headaches of TCP/IP. Just plug a device about the size of your thumb into a USB port, and you are most the way there. A single dialog box (see Figure 1-7) makes it easy to activate Bluetooth discovery and Bluetooth security. See “The World of Bluetooth” in Chapter 51 for the complete lowdown on Bluetooth.



Figure 1-7: The Bluetooth Settings dialog box simplifies Bluetooth connectivity.

UPnP, Too

Universal Plug-and-Play (UPnP) is a technology that promises to make virtually all networking nearly effortless. Just plug a UPnP device into any network port, and it's instantly installed for access to all device in the network. You'll even be able to do things like peek around the house from work, across the Internet, using wireless Bluetooth cameras placed throughout the house.

Unfortunately, there aren't too many devices to go along with the technology as I write this book. But that landscape is destined to change dramatically over the next couple of years. Windows XP SP2 is ready to take on whatever devices the hardware guys and dream up. As discussed in Chapter 63, you simply click one link in your My Network Places folder to gain instant access to whatever UPnP devices you make accessible to your computer or local network.

Windows Media Player 10

Though it is not officially a part of Service Pack 2, the timing was just about the same for Windows Media Player 10. The new Media Player 10, shown in Figure 1-8, offers a much-improved interface, built-in MP3 support, improved support for modern portable media players, High-MAT CD support, easier access to online media stores, and smarter automatic playlists. See Chapters 28 and 39 for the full scoop on Media Player 10.



Figure 1-8: The new Windows Media Player 10

Windows Movie Maker 2.1

Windows Movie Maker 2 was a big improvement over the version 1 that originally shipped with Windows XP. Service Pack 2 takes things a step further by including Movie Maker 2.1, which adds the ability to burn movies straight to CDs. The CDs are automatically created in High-MAT format for the best playback quality.

If you have a digital video camera with pass through capabilities, you can use that as a bridge between your older analog video camera and Movie Maker 2.1. See Chapters 41 and 42 for the complete story on making movies with Windows Movie Maker 2.1.

Service Pack 2 Support Center

Whether you've already installed Service Pack 2 or have been holding off, you can find all the information you need at the Service Pack 2 Support Center. That includes top 10 reasons to download SP2, What to do before you download, how to download or order on CD, and what to do after you download. It's all at SP 2 Support Center at <http://support.microsoft.com/windowsxpsp2> (see Figure 1-9).

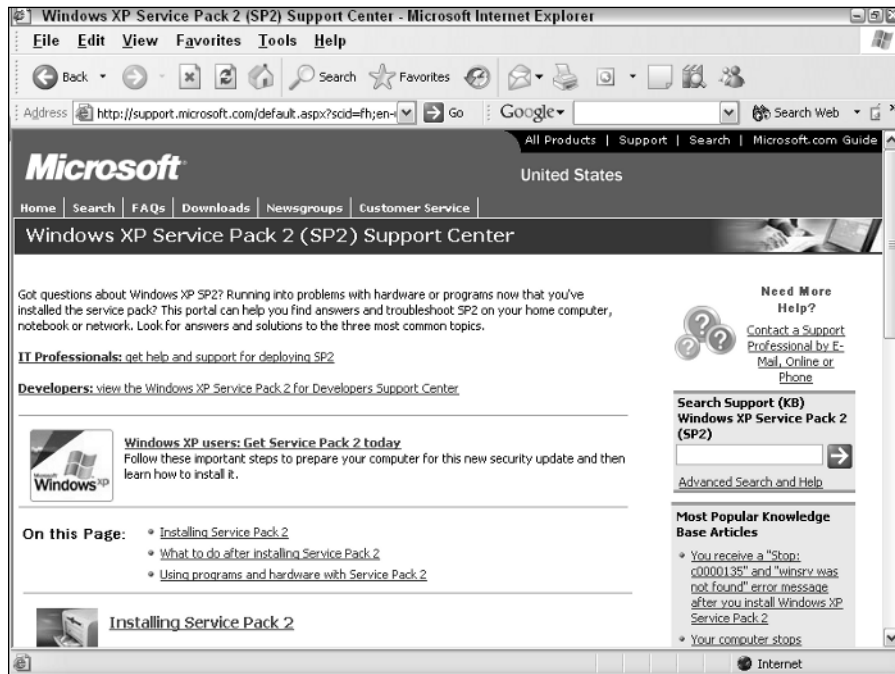


Figure 1-9: Microsoft's Service Pack 2 Support Center

And So Much More . . .

When I first started writing this book I assumed that it would be a revision of the first edition of my *XP Bible*. But I was wrong. The new features of Service Pack 2 pale in comparison to all the things that have changed and improved in the three years since I wrote the first edition. Cool new gadgets and better, faster, cheaper hardware have made it much easier to use out PCs as powerhouses of personal creativity and productivity.

Hard disk space is so inexpensive that there's almost no limit to the amount of stuff we can put in our PCs. Google searches have made it easier to find the information you need, when you need it, across the entire Web. Speech recognition in Word has improved to the point where dictating text to be typed is easy rather than a hassle. E-books make it easy to search an entire reference book in seconds, and you can even have the text read to you aloud.

It seemed that every time I reviewed an existing chapter to see what needed to be revised, I was faced with so many hardware and software improvements that had evolved in those three short years that there was nothing else to do but start all over from scratch. In short, I virtually rewrote the entire book rather than just plugging in a few sections on new SP2 features. It was a lot of work and took a lot of time, but I think you'll agree that it was time well spent!

Wrap Up

Like the rest of us, Microsoft finally got fed up with all the junk invading our computers, including unscrupulous Internet users who waste our time and energy for their own amusement or financial gain. Therefore, they used their formidable resources to really fight back in Service Pack 2, so we could fight back too. But Service Pack 2 alone doesn't tell the whole story of what's transpired since 2001 when XP was first released. Not by a long shot.

This book covers all the improvements to Windows XP, and personal computing in general, that all of us can use to boost our productivity and creativity in ways that one could only dream about in the twentieth century. In summary, the new Security Center in Service Pack 2 makes it much easier to:

- ♦ Protect your computer from viruses, worms, hackers, adware, spyware, and every other form malware flooding the Internet
- ♦ Block pop-ups and unwanted downloads with Internet Explorer's built-in pop-up blocker and security alerts
- ♦ Get rid of unwanted browser hijackers through the Internet Explorer's new Manage Add-Ons window
- ♦ Keep your entire home network secure with the new and improved Windows Firewall
- ♦ Easily setup a secure wireless network with the new Wireless Network Setup Wizard
- ♦ Start using modern Bluetooth devices to synchronize your mobile phone or PDA with your PC, or even to build a simple wireless network without all the usual networking hassles
- ♦ Be ready to take advantages of the new Universal Plug and Play (UPnP) devices
- ♦ Take advantage of all the cool new features of Windows Media Player 10 and the awesome new portable media devices that Media Player 10 supports
- ♦ Use new features of Windows Movie Maker 2.1 to transfer old videotapes to your computer, without the need for an expensive digital capture device, and burn your movies straight to the new High-MAT CDs.

And that's just the start!

