

## SERVICE PACK 2

**By Can Duruk**

Whether or not you love the Seattle based company, every PC user should be grateful to Microsoft. They were not only the first to come up with a Graphical User Interface (GUI) but they were also pretty good at implementing it. Though Harvard drop-out Bill Gates was successful in attracting some attention with Microsoft Disk Operating System (MS-DOS) and Windows 3.1, the real thing started with Windows 95 and the Rolling Stones hit “Start Me Up”.

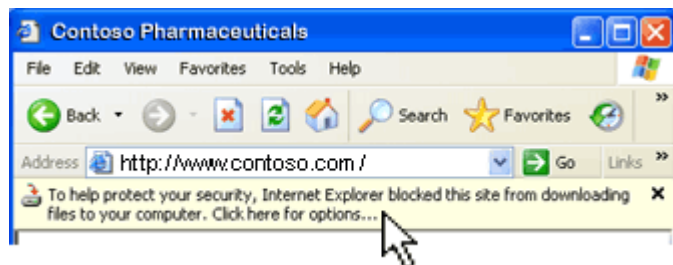
But it was not long before Microsoft received heavy criticisms for the new OS’s unreliability. It was common for an average Windows user to experience error messages in every session and the infamous kernel panics (the blue screen) were even come upon during Bill Gates’ own presentations.

There were people satisfied with Windows’ reliability but those people were experiencing serious compatibility problems. Those people were Windows NT users. With their reliable kernel and NT File System (NTFS), they could run their server without serious hitches but NT was far from becoming the home user’s favorite.

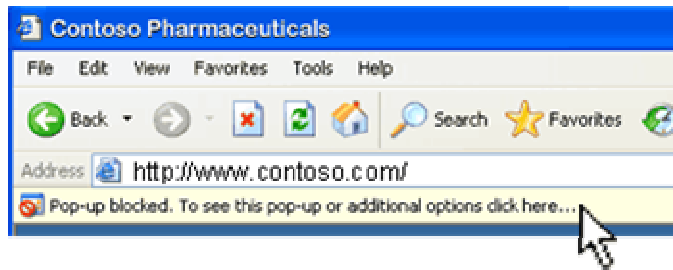
Luckily, Microsoft found a way to combine the advantages of NT and 9x operating systems in Windows XP. The new operating system, named after the word “eXPerience”, was based on NT kernel and was embellished with 9x usability and compatibility, along with sleek interface and brand new features. Truly, XP was a big step in Microsoft’s history. After years, they really came up with an OS that did not display kernel panics (because there are none), that did not lock up occasionally and was easy to use. The first service pack published for this OS was mainly about letting people “uninstall” the Microsoft software such as Internet Explorer, MSN Messenger so that Microsoft could save itself from the antitrust lawsuits.

Now, we face a brand new Service Pack from Microsoft, Windows XP Service Pack 2. This service pack, which consists of many patches combined together, simply deals with security. It deals not only with the user’s security but also the security of the Microsoft as well. Let’s look at what Microsoft has to offer with the new service pack which aroused real attention on many web sites.

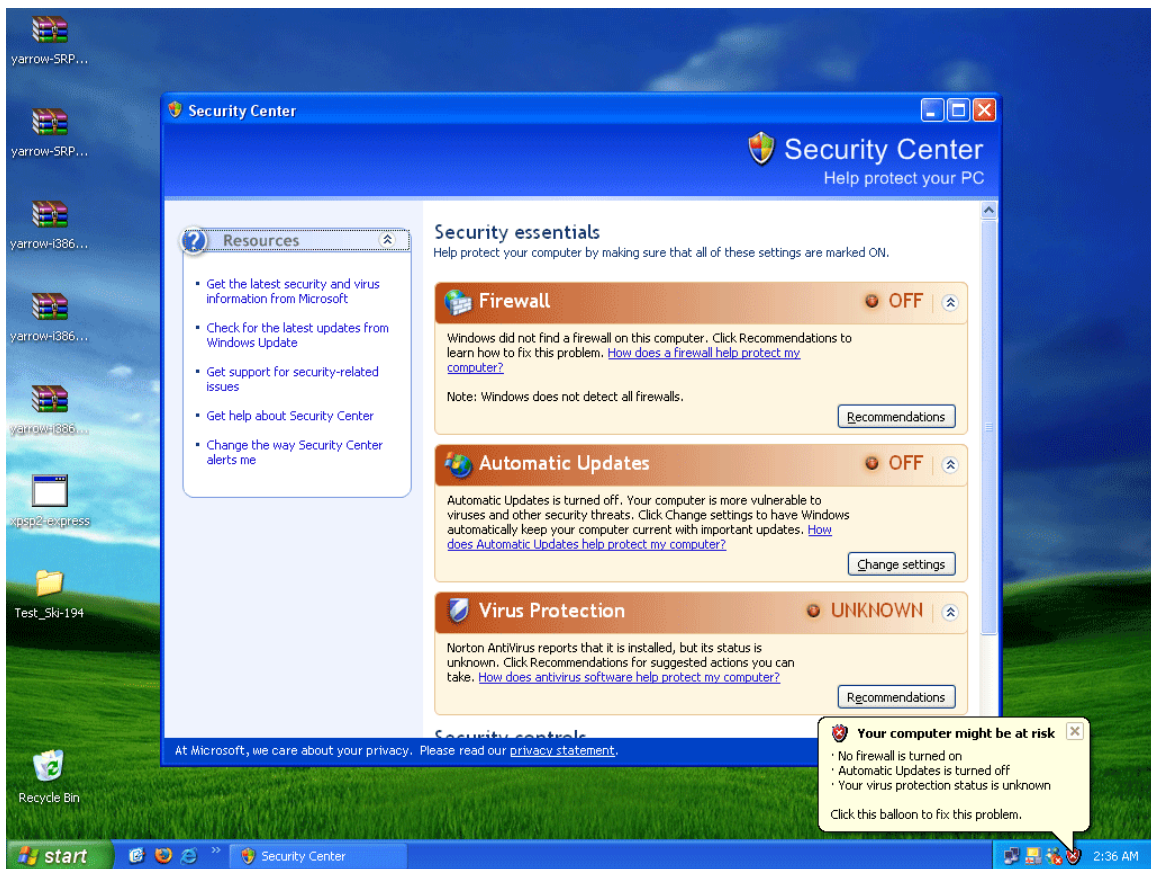
First of all, there have been some minor adjustments to Outlook Express, MSN Messenger and Internet Explorer so that the user would not open the malicious attachments and downloads. This will protect the user from careless little mistakes that could really be a problem afterwards.



That protection is done with Internet Explorer Information Bar which appears just under the address bar when a malicious ActiveX component, a download or a pop-up is blocked. Yes, the Internet Explorer also comes with an embedded pop-up blocker which lets you see the blocked pop-up if you like. In the past, people used to install programs like disciple pop-up blockers, search toolbars like Google Toolbar which could also block pop-ups or convert to browsers like Mozilla Firefox.



The real thing that comes with Service Pack 2 is a new icon added to Control Panel, Security Center. The center controls three essential things to ensure your security, the Automatic Updates, Virus Protection and Firewall. From that Center, you can see which of those three components is working (indicated by a green light) or not working (indicated by a red light). The center also tells you to update your Anti-Virus program (No, Service Pack does not come with an integrated anti-viral software; you have to use your own).



The Internet Connection Firewall, first presented in Windows XP also changes its name to Windows Firewall and comes with new features. With this firewall, you are able to

manage your socket connections as you wish. This means you can manage all of your connections at one place and let (or forbid) any program to establish a connection under any port. This new firewall is surely rich in features but it also has some disadvantages.

The firewall comes active as default and it becomes really a hassle if you have your own server of some sort and use programs that connect to Internet very often. You have to open all the necessary ports one by one and there is a good chance that the Firewall will keep you from opening some specific ports needed by some programs.

Along with the new service pack, Microsoft also revised the Windows Update service and updated it to Version 5 from Version 4. In fact, Version 5 was active for a long time before the service pack was released and could be reached by typing 5 instead of 4 in the Windows Update address, ([v5.windowsupdate.com](http://v5.windowsupdate.com)). The new Windows Update features new BITS (Background Intelligent Transfer Service) with high security against illegal versions of XP. Interestingly, this service pack is easily installed even on illegal versions of Windows XP, mostly because Microsoft wants to protect the whole Internet and its own web sites. The 60 seconds countdown most of you could remember was the result of a vulnerability of Windows as well as people's negligence to install Windows Update. Moreover, that 60 seconds countdown virus (MsBlast) also included a denial of service attack to Windows Update web site.

Such radical improvements in the Windows XP also bring some serious trouble along, unfortunately. There is quite a big fuss about some serious compatibility issues in Service Pack 2, especially on clients of any kind that uses some specific ports (i.e. FTP Clients, Instant Messengers) and Multiplayer games. There is a list of programs "that seem to stop working after installing Service Pack 2" on Microsoft web site and the list is quite long.

And the first big security hole in SP2 is already found by PC Magazine and was also published on the web. The vulnerability meant that Security Center could easily be tricked by a program with Windows Management Instrumentation component and the program could easily infect the computer. The Microsoft's answer to threat on Neowin.net does not seem satisfactory as well. Microsoft tells that a user should be granted administrator rights to run such a program but you should know that XP Home default user is already administrator and nearly everyone works in Admin Mode in XP Pro to avoid problems while installing programs and hardware.

Moreover, the release date for the new SP2 also seems inopportune, just before the end of summer. This is especially bad for schools because they won't have the necessary time to try the new Service Pack and bring solutions to possible problems. Even IBM has declared their hesitance to include SP2 in all their new PCs because of the possible compatibility problems the users would experience.

Despite of the possible problems this Service Pack may cause you, it is quite an improvement in terms of security. It is not an easy download for a dial up user (it is nearly 200 Megabytes) but you can still order a free CD from Microsoft web site. If you

are part of the fortunate people who have a broadband connection, just check the Microsoft web site for the problematic programs, make sure your programs would still work after the update (consult the program's web site) and start downloading the new SP2.

### Bibliography

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