

Patch Me Up

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Do you keep yourself up-to-date? Software companies—the makers of the programs you use on your computer—are likely to have released updates to their programs since you first installed them. Have you ever checked?

Updates are also known as patches, fixes, hot-fixes, bug-fixes, service packs, or a QFE (a Microsoft term meaning Quick Fix Engineering).

Some programs have mechanisms for checking automatically for updates, so long as the option is enabled! Microsoft Update, the new Windows Update, has all the patches and updates for a wide array of Microsoft software, including Windows, Office and server products like SQL and Exchange.

So what do they do? Well there are typically 2 reasons to release an update for a program. Firstly, to protect the program (and ultimately the computer and the data stored on it) from newly-exposed security threats. Those of you running a firewall (hopefully most of you!) should already be fairly well protected from these threats, but it is still worth updating your software.

The second reason for updates is to fix something that was supposed to work but doesn't. You will sometimes find your programs crashing at startup, or crashing when you try to perform a specific task. Often these are known problems and have already been fixed.

It is also possible that the programmers have found a better way to do something, making the software faster or more responsive—another

reason to keep yourself updated! Often however, they will want you to pay for the new version to get these enhancements, in which case you have to weigh up the advantages versus the price.

But beware—like the original code, updates can sometimes not work in themselves, or worse still break something else! It is worth checking what your undo options are before you start, especially on servers. On networks it is important to evaluate the advantages and stability of an update before taking the plunge!



Patches and Updates Dos and Don'ts:

- ✓ DO check every so often for updates
- ✓ DO consider seeking updates if you have a specific, replicable problem
- ✗ DON'T update business-critical machines without a backup plan!
- ✗ DON'T think updates solve *all* your problems!

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