

Windows XP Service Pack 3 FAQ

Q: What is Service Pack 3?

A: Windows XP Service Pack 3 (SP3) is the final Windows XP service pack, a collection of previously-released fixes and product enhancements, as well as a few new features that are unique to this release.

Q: Windows XP SP2 was released over three years ago. Why the delay on SP3?

A: With Windows XP, however, Microsoft was forced to temporarily halt development on XP's successor, Windows Vista, in order to complete XP SP2. That's because this release, though provided to customers for free as a typical service pack, was in fact a major OS upgrade and was developed outside of the company's support structure, a first for any service pack release. After XP SP2 was completed, the people involved with that project moved onto other things, typically Vista or Windows Server 2008.

In the case of Windows XP SP3, Microsoft simply dedicated every available employee it could to completing Windows Vista, which by that time was years behind schedule. So it's only been since the beginning of this year that anyone turned their attention back to XP's next and neglected service pack.

Q: What are these new features I keep hearing about?

A: Windows XP Service Pack 3 will not include any major new features, but it will include four minor new features that improve the system's reliability and security. And that's about it. Nothing dramatic, as promised.

Q: That's it? Is there anything else?

A: Nothing major. Some features have actually been removed, like the taskbar-based Address Bar option.

Q: Why is Microsoft even bothering to release this update? Isn't everyone moving to Windows Vista?

A: Given the relative security, stability, and reliability of XP with SP2, and the subsequent release of Vista, XP SP3 may seem like a pointless update, but nothing could be further from the truth. Many businesses will roll out new XP-based PCs in the coming years, and as anyone who's had to update an XP SP2 system can tell you, the 100+ updates that Microsoft has shipped since SP2 can be a nightmare to deploy. If you're already running XP and have been regularly updating your systems all along, the release of XP SP3 will be a minor event. But if you have planned XP deployments in the future, look very carefully at this release and consider it the baseline for your next generation of PCs. Or, you could always consider Vista, which will of course be updated with genuine new features far longer than will XP.

Q: When will Microsoft ship XP SP3?

A: Microsoft finalized Windows XP Service Pack 3 on April 21, 2008 and will release it publicly to the Web on April 29, 2008.