



## FALL 2004 NEWSLETTER

**WINDOWS XP SP2** – Microsoft is releasing Service Pack 2 for Windows XP Professional and XP Home in August after extensive beta testing. SP2 is a major overhaul primarily focused on improved security against viruses, malicious code, popups, etc. Some new features like Bluetooth and wireless hotspot support are also included.

Microsoft is also changing their approach to better protect users who don't turn on the Internet Connection Firewall feature or use Windows Update to download security patches. With SP2 the renamed Windows Firewall is enabled by default, and Microsoft is encouraging users to enable the enhanced Automatic Update feature.

Given the major security enhancements, we believe Windows XP users should upgrade to SP2, and Windows 98 and ME users should consider upgrading to XP. There are some caveats however. The download is around 80 MB and will take 4 to 8 hours on a dialup connection, although Automatic Update can spread the download over several online sessions. (Microsoft is also promising that SP2 will be available on a free CD) There is a chance that some of your software might not function properly after upgrading to SP2, until you modify some security settings or obtain an update from the software vendor. If in doubt, check with the software vendor first.

Here are some highlights of changes in SP2:

- New Security Center icon in Control Panel consolidates control of many security features
- New Popup blocker with website allow list and override key
- Windows Firewall enabled by default, and now provides protection during startup and shutdown
- Support for multiple firewall profiles (useful for mobile computers)
- Inbound TCP/IP traffic for file/printer sharing and UPnP restricted to local subnet
- Messenger service (abused by spammers to send popup ads) now disabled by default
- TCP/IP modifications to limit use by malicious programs (e.g. restricting use of raw sockets)
- Prevent execution of malicious code from sections of memory marked non-executable
- Security features added to MSN Messenger
- Outlook Express option to read email as plain text (not HTML)
- Outlook Express option to disable download of external HTML (e.g. invisible image links used by commercial spammers to confirm that you have read their emails)
- Enhanced security for file downloads in Internet Explorer and Outlook Express
- Internet Explorer add-in manager to view and control plug-ins, toolbars, etc. that add themselves to your web browser, and to identify add-ins that are causing crashes
- Automatic Update feature expanded to allow automatic download of more than just critical updates, and to automatically prioritize the updates so the most important are downloaded first

After upgrading to SP2, it should not be necessary to use third party firewall or popup blocker software.

**LOCAL ACCESS NUMBERS** – KWOM has local access numbers from anywhere in "LATA 358" which corresponds to the Chicago metro area served by SBC. The complete listing is on our website at [www.kwom.com/access\\_numbers](http://www.kwom.com/access_numbers). Occasionally, one of our customers calls SBC about a high phone bill and is told "your ISP doesn't have a local number". This appears to be a canned answer, usually followed by a pitch to change your Internet service to SBC. You can check for yourself if it's a local call at SBC's website [www.sbc.com/localcalling](http://www.sbc.com/localcalling). Put in your areacode and prefix, and then check the resulting list to see if KWOM's number is a local call (typically an 8 mile radius from your telephone central office). If not, check our access number list for the correct number. The only way to resolve mysteriously high phonebills is to request a "call detail report" from the phone company. This should enable you to identify the called number(s) that are causing the local toll charges.

**TILDE FILE ON DESKTOP** – Have you noticed a file named "~" that keeps appearing on your desktop? This is a backup of your Outlook Express address book. Whenever your address book changes, the file username.wab is supposed to be backed up as username.wa~. A bug in the April 2003 security patch for Outlook Express caused this file to instead be saved as a file named just "~" and located in the folder you started Outlook Express from. If you start Outlook Express from a shortcut on your desktop, the tilde file goes on your desktop as well. It is harmless, so just ignore it.

**RECOMMENDED WEB BROWSER & EMAIL PROGRAM** – We get this question a lot, especially from people with older computers still using Netscape Communicator (which dates from 1998 and is pretty much obsolete). Around 50% of websites have some level of incompatibility with Communicator, and 10–20% of websites are totally incompatible. Most secure sites won't work because Communicator did not include 128 bit encryption, and many CSS, DHTML and scripting features won't work either.

If you have a PC with Windows 98 or later, we strongly recommend Internet Explorer / Outlook Express 6. (Some contact manager software may require Microsoft Outlook, otherwise Outlook Express is easier to use for Internet mail.) If you have a Macintosh with OSX, we strongly recommend Apple Safari and Mail.

The choice is less clear if you have a Macintosh with OS8 or 9, or if you are really really fond of Netscape. Most people in this situation upgrade to Netscape 7.0 (Macintosh OS8/9) or Netscape 7.1 (Windows). (Note that Netscape 7.0 for Macintosh PowerPC is still available if you follow the Browser Central and Product Archive links at the Netscape website) You should understand however that Netscape is now a brand of AOL. Another choice is Internet Explorer 5 for Macintosh and either Outlook Express or Entourage. Mac OS8/9 users should probably consider upgrading to OSX if your hardware supports it.

**SPAM FILTERING OR CENSORSHIP?** – There is an interesting article in the July 2004 issue of PC World titled "When ISPs Think They Know Best – Is your Internet Service Provider protecting you from spam or censoring your inbox" ([www.pcworld.com/howto/article/0,aid,116012,00.asp](http://www.pcworld.com/howto/article/0,aid,116012,00.asp)). AOL, Earthlink and MSN use spam filters that block email messages containing text or even links to websites that other users identified as objectionable. This stops spam but can also block your legitimate emails if they contain controversial topics or links to websites that someone else dislikes. Hence the worry about censorship.

Many national ISPs filter everyone's email, because this cuts the amount of email they have to store and deliver by at least half. As tempting as this is, we do not filter your email unless you request it. The optional Postini filtering service we offer does not block emails or URLs just because another user objected to the content. And you can tailor the filtering to your preferences. The filtering thresholds for bulk email, special offers, get-rich-quick offers, adult content, and racially offensive language are adjustable in 5 levels from lenient to aggressive. You can specify lists of approved and blocked sender addresses and domains. And the last 2 weeks of quarantined email is available at a password-protected website in case you think a legitimate email has been falsely identified as spam.

**OUTGOING MAIL PROBLEMS** – Many email problems are caused by antivirus software, which inserts itself in the path between your email software and the Internet. If you have a dialup connection and Outlook Express is set to "Hang up after sending and receiving" (Tools>>Options>>Connection) this can cause a problem with outgoing mail. Outlook Express thinks it sent the email, but while your antivirus software is still scanning it, Outlook Express disconnects you from the Internet.

**DISABLE NETCENTER NEWS IN NETSCAPE MESSENGER MESSAGE PANE** – By default, Netscape Messenger (the email part of Communicator) shows a Netscape news website in the message pane when you aren't displaying an email. It is possible to disable this by adding the following line to the bottom of your prefs.js file with a text editor while Netscape is not running:

```
user_pref("mailnews.start_page.enabled", false);
```

See [www.pchell.com/support/netscapenews.shtml](http://www.pchell.com/support/netscapenews.shtml) for details.

**DSL PRICING** – We have separated out the telecom tax and FUSF surcharge from our DSL pricing to make it easier to compare with SBC which takes the same approach. We also now include a free Speedstream 5100 modem, although our definition of "free" means "no charge", while SBC defines it as "you pay shipping, handling, and sales tax on the price before rebate".

If you compare to SBC's standard month-to-month prices, you'll find that we are competitive. We don't require yearly contracts with \$200 early termination penalties. You don't have to bundle with any other services. And you don't have to install the SBC/Yahoo software on your computers. For businesses we offer a premium service that includes static IP address and managed Siemens 5930 business gateway (integrated modem, router, firewall, 8-port 10/100 switch, VPN accelerator, and optional dial backup).

Sorry, we can't match the special offers that require yearly contracts and/or bundling with phone services. Those prices are below our cost to share the phoneline, and we can't make up the loss with profits on phone services or advertising like SBC and Yahoo can.