

19 January 2008

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Windows XP
Microsoft

[Windows XP Service Pack 3 \(SP3\) FAQ](#)

18 questions answered

Postponed from 2006 to 2007, as Microsoft resources focused almost exclusively on wrapping up the Windows Vista client, and then delayed yet again into 2008, with the deadline set by the summer of this year, Windows XP Service Pack 3 is long overdue, and at the same time in its final stages of development. At the end of December 2007, the Redmond company opened up the testing process of XP SP3 and made available for [download a public Release Candidate](#). The Standalone Update Package for Windows XP Service Pack 3 Release Candidate weighs in at just 336.1 MB and was dropped via the Microsoft Download Center. Not surprisingly, although it was mute for the most part of 2007 on both [Windows Vista SP1](#) and Windows XP SP3, the Redmond company is favoring, in terms of information disclosure, its latest Windows client. Starting at the end of 2007, Microsoft managed to become extremely chatty about Vista SP1. Not so much about XP SP3. The reason is of course understandable. Vista, made available but a year ago, is pushed to the foreground, with XP left to eXPire in the background. But although Microsoft is talking very little about XP SP3, there are quite a few details about the upcoming service pack. You will be able to find some of the most popular issues related to Windows XP SP3 in the FAQ below. If there are any additional matters you would like answered, related to XP SP3, please leave a comment and I'll get right on it.

1. What are the supported operating systems for XP SP3? Windows XP; Windows XP Home Edition; Windows XP Home Edition N; Windows XP Media Center Edition; Windows XP Professional Edition; Windows XP Professional N; Windows XP Service Pack 1; Windows XP Service Pack 2 and Windows XP Tablet PC Edition. But only the 32-bit versions of the operating systems enumerated above. And also only XP SP1 and XP SP2. Microsoft no longer supports the RTM version of XP, and this rule is also valid for XP SP3.

2. Is Windows XP x64 supported by XP SP3? No. XP SP3 is addressed exclusively at the x86 versions of Windows XP. In the first half of 2007, Microsoft serviced both Windows Server 2003 and Windows XP Professional x64 Edition with the release of Windows Server 2003 SP2.

3. Is XP SP3 an equivalent of Windows Vista/Vista SP1? No. In the company's own words: "Microsoft is not adding significant [functionality](#) from newer versions of Windows, such as Windows Vista, to Windows XP through XP SP3."

4. Is XP SP3 a repeat of XP SP2? No. Service Pack 2 for XP was an unique release for Microsoft. In contrast, SP3 will be nothing more than a standard service pack. "Other companies would have called this a major release and charged money for it", stated Jim Allchin, the former Co-President, Platforms & Services Division, just a week ahead of his retirement from Microsoft, referring to XP SP2.

5. Do I have to wait for the RTM version of XP SP3 or can I get a taste of the service pack ahead of the final version? Microsoft is offering a standalone version of [Windows XP SP3 RC for download](#). However, users have to understand that despite the Release Candidate label and the proximity to RTM, XP SP3 RC is still a beta and should only be deployed into testing environments.

6. Does XP SP3 Release Candidate come with an expiration date? Yes. All of the Redmond company's testing development milestones are time-bombed. This is also valid for XP SP3 RC, or any of its predecessor alpha builds. The expiration date is set for 180 days since the release. Users of the current beta releases of XP SP3 can open a Run dialog box, type "winver" and hit Enter. In the About Windows panel that will open, look for the expiration date associated with the evaluation copy of XP SP3.

7. How much will XP SP3 impact XP SP2? Expect little and you won't be [disappointed](#). The XP SP3 evolution will happen mainly under the hood, in terms of performance, security, and stability. SP3 will make available in a single package all the

security updates, hotfixes and out-of-band updates, along with only a few minor enhancements. Users will not be able to see any modifications in terms of the graphical user interface and functionality. The few extra features added will only superficially affect user experience.

8. Are parts of XP SP3 already available as standalone downloads? Yes. A few fragments of XP SP3 can already be accessed by XP SP2 users, but Microsoft will include them into the third and final service pack for XP. The features include the MMC 3.0 framework, MSXML6, Windows Installer 3.1, Background Intelligent Transfer Service 2.5, IPsec Simple Policy Update for Windows Server 2003 and Windows XP, Digital Identity Management Service, Peer Name Resolution Protocol (PNRP) 2.1 and Wi-Fi Protected Access 2 (WPA2).

9. Is Microsoft including parts of Windows Vista into XP SP3? Yes. [XP SP3, just as Vista](#), will include "Black Hole" Router detection, Network Access Protection (in view of the upcoming release of Windows Server 2008), Microsoft Kernel Mode Cryptographic Module and enhanced security for Administrator and Service policy entries. Microsoft will also revamp the information associated with the Security Options User Interface. And on top of it all, XP SP3 will feature the same product activation architecture as Windows Vista.

10. With the activation changes of XP SP3 will users need new product keys? No. XP SP3 can be deployed on top of XP SP1 and XP SP2 with absolutely no issues. Users will not be required to enter, or re-enter their product key, or to re-activate the operating system. Furthermore, when performing a clean install of the XP SP3, users will have the possibility to deploy the operating system without entering a product key during installation. But they will have to deliver a product key by the end of the 30-day Initial Grace period and activate XP SP3.

11. How will Microsoft serve XP SP3? Microsoft revealed that XP SP3 will be dropped both via Windows Updates and the Microsoft Download Center. TechNet and MSDN subscribers will also be able to access the service pack through their accounts. And as is the case with Vista, XP SP3 will come as a slipstream installation, namely already integrated in the operating system.

12. What is the best way to deploy XP SP3 Gold? According to Microsoft, the ideal setup for the deployment of XP SP3 RTM is a clean install on top of either SP1 or SP2. In this context, all the users that have tested the pre-RTM versions of XP SP3 will have to uninstall the beta builds. Although the Redmond company informed that build-to-build upgrade is also supported, the preferred installation method for XP SP3 Gold takes pre-RTM variants of the service pack out of the equation.

13. How do I uninstall Windows XP SP3 Release Candidate? All you have to do is open a Run dialog box type `appwiz.cpl`, and then press Enter. Alternatively, you can make your way via Control Panel to Add or Remove Programs. Here you will have to identify XP SP3 (936929), and then hit Remove. The machine will have to be restarted in order for the uninstall to be completed. But even with a restart users should know that it will take Windows up to one hour before the service pack will be completely removed.

14. Why is Microsoft delivering XP SP3? The company revealed that XP SP3 is designed to "provide a new baseline for customers still deploying Windows XP, to help them avoid the inconvenience of applying individual updates [as well as to] fill gaps in the updates users might have missed by declining individual updates when using Automatic Updates, and to deliver updates not made available through Windows Update."

15. Won't XP SP3 impact the adoption of Windows Vista and Vista SP1? It is in fact possible that the concomitant availability of XP SP3 and Vista SP1 convince old guard XP users to stick to what they know best and not move to the latest Windows operating system. After all XP has reached a high level of comfort, it still runs great on older machines and XP SP3 might just do the trick for those that are looking to ride the operating system for all it's got until the end of 2009/early 2010 when Windows 7 is planned for launch. "Windows Vista provides the most advanced security and management capability, but for PCs that cannot be upgraded to Windows Vista right now, Windows XP SP3 ensures these PCs have all available updates and allows these PCs to leverage some new Windows Server 2008 capabilities, such as Network Access Protection (NAP)", Microsoft explained its move.

16. Will there be a Windows XP SP4? No. Windows XP SP3 is the final service pack for [32-bit Windows XP](#).

Microsoft will not be issuing any additional service packs for the x86 version of XP. The company has confirmed this officially. **17. And last but definitely not least: who's the daddy of XP SP3?** According to his official biography: "Steven Sinofsky is the senior vice president for the Windows and Windows Live Engineering Group - the user experience of Microsoft Windows and Windows Live services." Off the record, he goes by [Steven Codename Translucency Sinofsky](#). Just make sure to thank your SP3 daddy, all of you XP children...**18. When is XP SP3 due?** Despite having produced numerous indications that XP SP3 will be joining Vista SP1 and Windows Server 2008 for a release early this year, Microsoft continues to claim that the service pack is due by mid 2008. Up to this point, this is the official piece of information provided by the Redmond company about the availability of XP SP3 RTM.