

This feature article outlines the **potential drawbacks that can occur if you don't actively manage the “Update Now”** features within software applications.

Managing “Update Now” to reduce risk

is a feature article, in the **Managing Clouds and Moving Goalposts** © series of “Management Focused” articles by **PCProfile** <http://www.pcprofile.com>

“Here’s the punch line for managers - you need to understand the effects this may have on the ability of your business to function as individual users selectively or randomly choose to accept the “update now” conditions and lock you into an update cycle, only to then find that the software becomes degraded in functionality whilst you get to sort out licensing issues that you may or may not have been aware of in your organization.”

PCProfile believes that you have better things to do than worry about than this, but be warned, its coming to a desktop near you, and it could be disruptive!”



This feature has been sponsored by EMCO, www.emco.is leaders in software inventory, asset management and help desk tools and utilities for years.

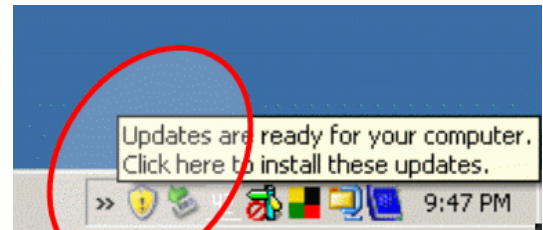


It's 2007 and you've just come back from a holiday break over the Christmas/New Year period and find that your system at work has a little balloon text message telling you that "updates are ready for your computer, click here now to install these updates".

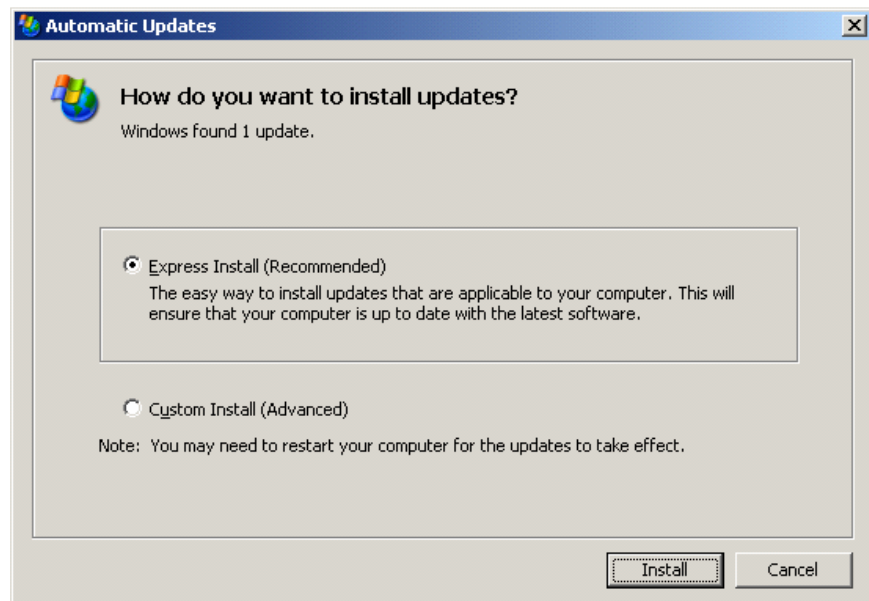
Updates are ready for your computer.
Click here to install these updates.

Before you go ahead and install the updates you need to be aware of the consequences that might arise under certain circumstances with your systems.

If you hadn't noticed before, the Task Bar at the foot (or the side of your desktop) will show a "balloon text" when you hover the cursor over the exclamation mark on the Icon on the Task Bar.



If you decide to proceed by clicking the Yellow balloon text, the following screen is displayed.

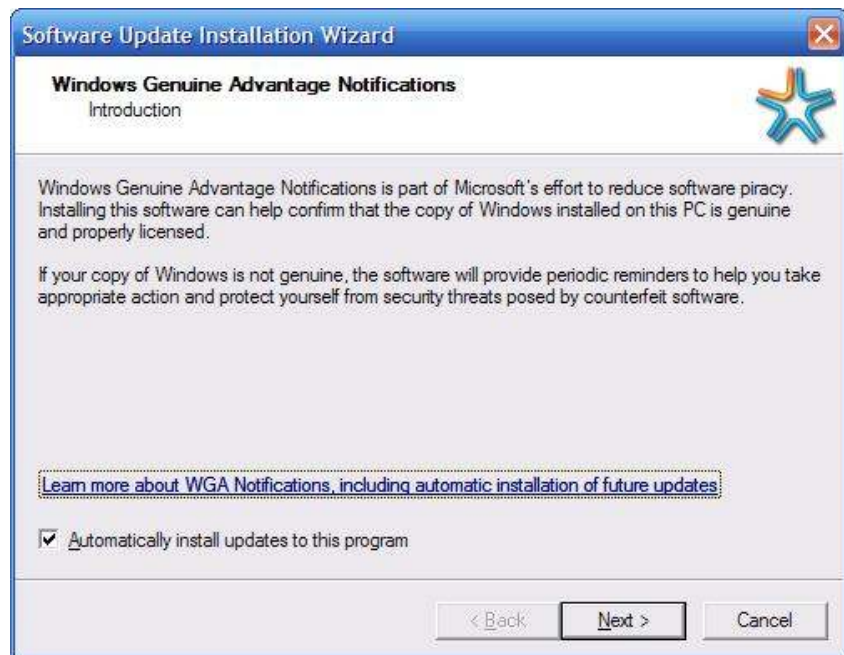


It is VERY important that you consider selecting the **Custom Option** as it then allows you to assess the potential impact of these updates and this will allow you to "opt-out" if necessary.

Windows Genuine Advantage Update Wizard

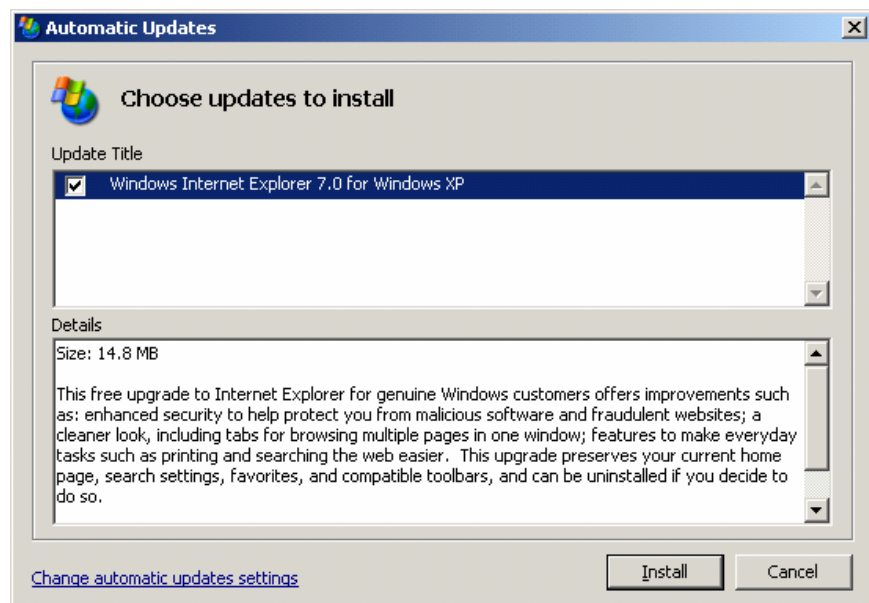
Under the Windows Genuine Advantage program being conducted by Microsoft (see [Windows Genuine Advantage](#) and <http://www.microsoft.com/oem/english/licensing/wga.mspx>) the following screen is presented for the user conducting the installation/update to acknowledge.

User feedback tells us that many will automatically click “Next” without recognizing the issues that may arise from launching the update.



Updates are being scheduled by Microsoft for Internet Explorer 7

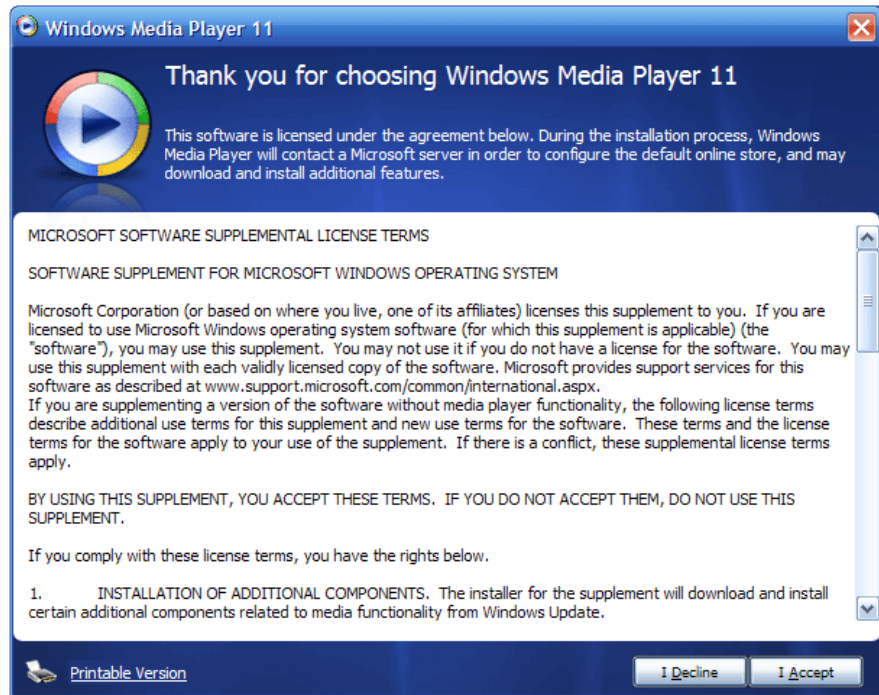
In this example, the Update was identified for Internet Explorer 7 <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/default.mspx>



More information is available at <http://blogs.msdn.com/wga/default.aspx>

The usual “Supplemental” License Agreement will be presented for you to accept or decline.

Updates are being scheduled by Microsoft for Windows Media Player 11, the license conditions are similar if not the same as for Internet Explorer 7



You MUST Validate your installed copy before proceeding

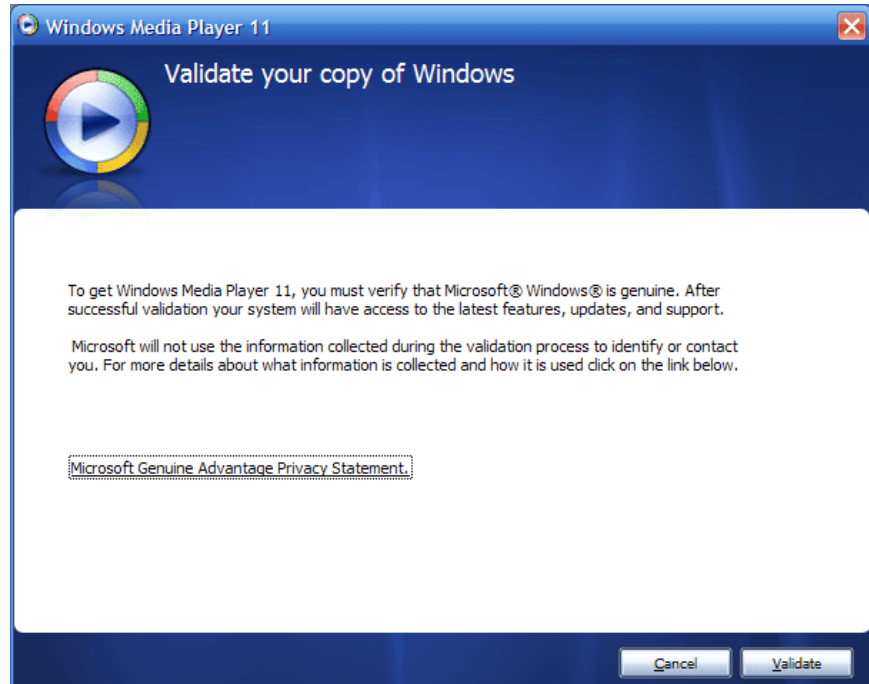
To receive these updates, (for both IE7 and Windows Media Player 11) you need to “Validate” your copy of Windows.

For sites that have valid legal version of Windows, this “ought” to be no problem (more on that later)

The screen below illustrates the Validation screen for Internet Explorer 7



The screen below illustrates the Validation screen for Media Player 11



For sites that don't have a legal copy of Windows (or have a problem with their systems that causes an error condition to occur) what follows next, may cause some problems that have unexpected consequences.

OK, if the Copy is VALID what happens?

Nothing untoward. The installation should proceed as expected and the application will be available to use after a Restart of the system (usually requires "restart" for changes to take effect)

But what if the Copy installed isn't legitimate

This is where the fun starts for some sites.

Managers, now is the time to pay attention – especially if you have been bored up until now!

Here's the punch line for managers – you need to understand the effects this update process may have on the ability of your business to function as individual users selectively or randomly choose to accept the "update now" conditions and lock you into an update cycle, only to then find that the software becomes degraded in functionality whilst you get to sort out licensing issues that you may or may not have been aware of in your organization.

PCProfile believes that you have better things to do than worry about this but be warned, its coming to a desktop near you, and it could be disruptive!

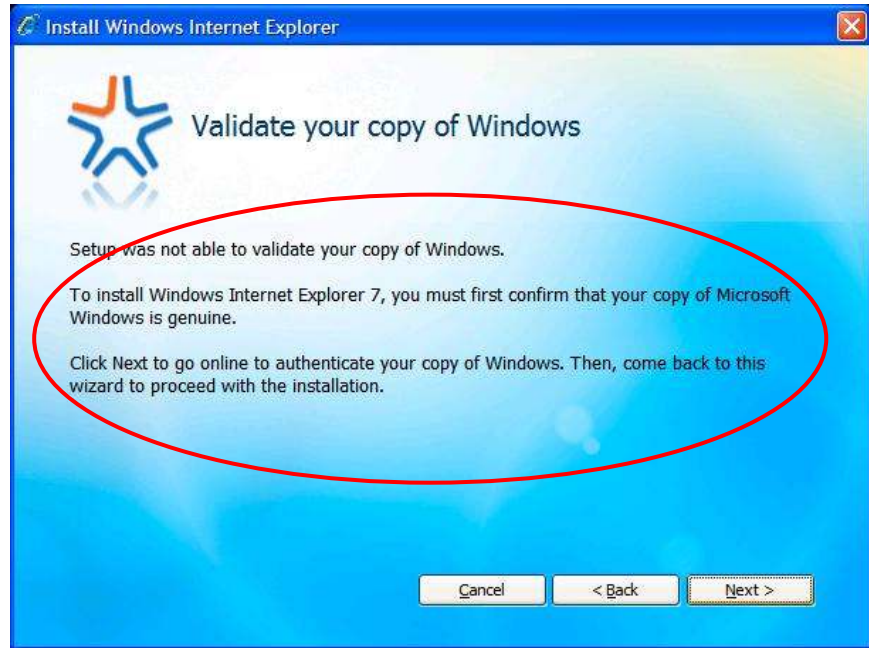
PCProfile Tip – Managers need to make sure staff are instructed to be cautious about the update cycle and that someone in management needs to take responsibility for coordinating the process so that minimum disruption occurs.

For most sites that have legal software this ought not to be a problem, but for others.....

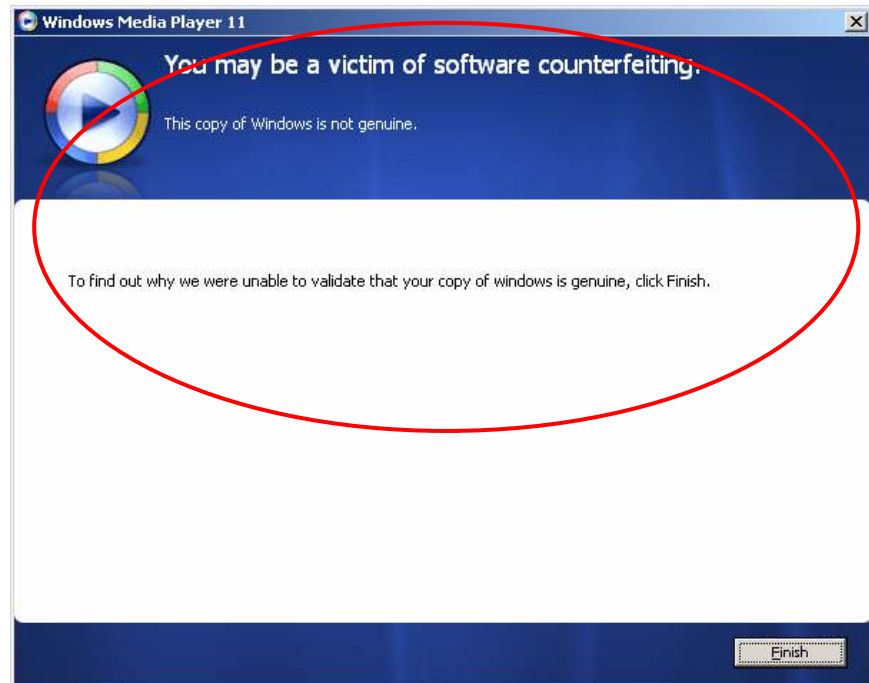
You “MAY” be a Victim with a “non-Genuine” copy of Windows installed.

If the validation process determines that the installed version isn't legitimate;

For Internet Explorer 7 the resulting screen will show;



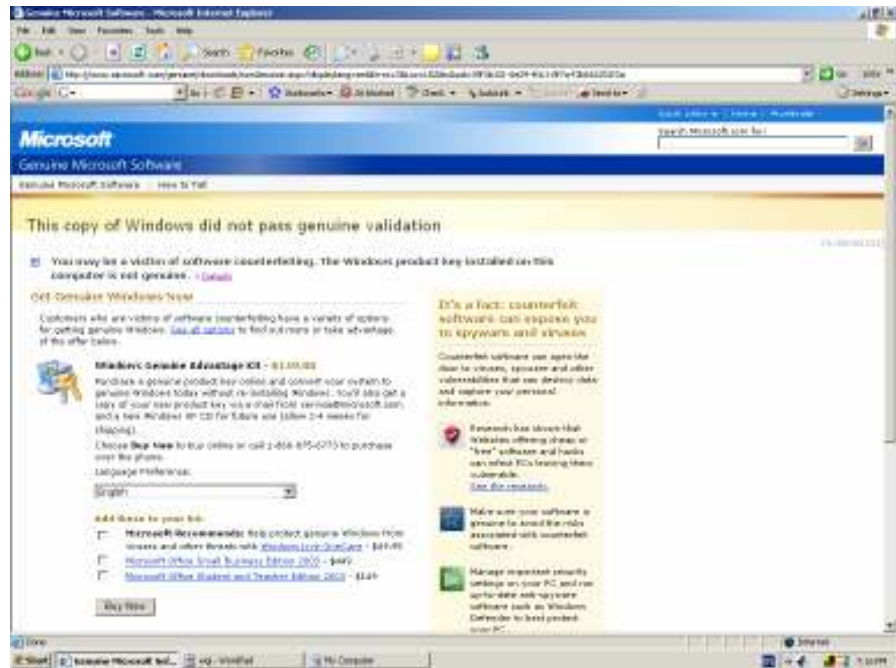
For Windows Media Player 11 the resulting screen will show;



Note the strong emphasis on the words “MAY be a victim”, as in some sites this has been occurring for legitimate versions, under certain conditions! Page 10 of this feature article identifies some of these conditions.

What Happens Next?

The following screens outline to you the steps you need to take to PURCHASE a valid copy of Windows Operating System



Obviously if the copy installed isn't LEGAL then you need to BUY a current license for this PC.

Cost according to the above screen is \$US149 (for Windows XP)

If you had the wrong number of licenses or had copied over software, then stop bleating, and go out and buy the right numbers of licenses for all your PCs.

But it would be wise to talk to an authorized reseller to ensure that you buy correctly according to your site requirements.

Just don't go and lash out at \$US149 per PC when there might be a better deal they can offer you under Volume Licensing arrangements!

PCProfile Tip – Conduct a site wide Software Inventory and assess your total current and future requirements across the whole organization so you purchase the right number of licenses, cost effectively!

KEY STEPS

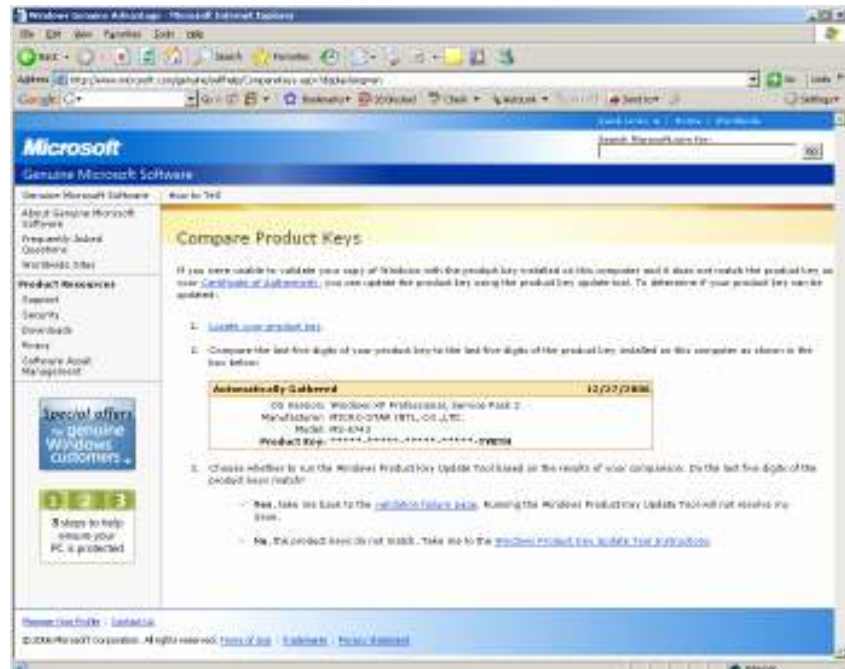
There are a number of key steps you need to take to validate your copy of Windows Operating System.

Locating your Product Key - 1

You can locate Product Key details as follows:



Locating your Product Key - 2



Are there other ways to get caught out?

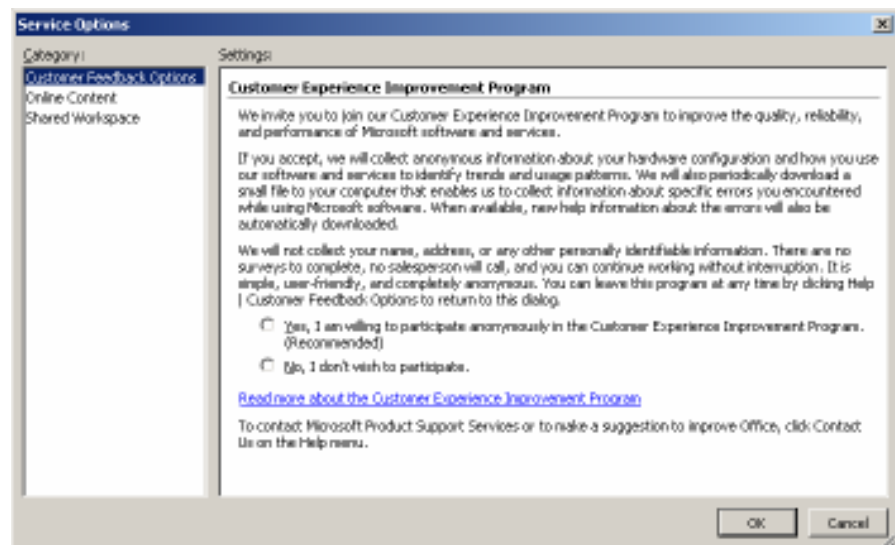
The Microsoft Customer Experience Program has also started “popping up” as a balloon text inviting end-users to “take part” in the program.

A Clip from the Task Bar on the Desktop



Customer Experience Program

PCProfile hasn't tested this one yet but we are pretty certain this will also lead you through the Windows Validation process, ie; why else would Microsoft want to gather “experience” information from “non-Genuine users”?



What about other vendors?

Usually when Microsoft sets the lead with an authentication/anti-piracy program other vendors follow.

You can expect then that this sort of validation/authentication process will creep into other vendor application software patches, fixes and updates.

In itself, this is not a bad thing as the software vendors are really entitled to check (some will argue and disagree here) that if you are using a copy of their software that you acquired it under the license terms and conditions it was sold under.

If you acquired the software illegally, or hacked and cracked the software, or installed more copies than what you paid for by using a key generation program to generate keys and license numbers, then you really have no argument at all and your business will suffer accordingly as software applications become crippled as the authentication process is applied, vendor by vendor.

Our big concern however is that you are there to run a business to achieve certain goals and objectives and whilst software compliance isn't your reason for living, you need to pay attention, as there are consequences you may not be prepared for, if you ignore what is happening in the software industry.

PCProfile Tip - The best tip we can give you is to make sure that you understand what is happening, make sure your users understand the implications and that you take control of the whole process so that you can manage this situation rather than the situation managing you.

What Data is used to validate the installed version?

According to Microsoft's web pages:

"To help you validate your software, the WGA tools must collect a certain amount of configuration information from your computer.

The data collected includes:

- Computer make and model.
- Version information for the operating system and software using Genuine Advantage.
- Region and language setting.
- A unique number assigned to your computer by the tools (Globally Unique Identifier or GUID).
- Product ID and product key.
- BIOS name, revision number, and revision date.
- Volume serial number.

For more information about how this data is collected and used, see the document entitled Technical Market Bulletin on Product Activation in Windows XP found in the Additional Information section of the [Microsoft Product Activation page](#)

The WGA validation process does not require or collect any information that could personally identify you. Customers who have a genuine copy of Windows and who decide not to complete the validation process can still obtain critical software updates by using the Automatic Updates feature."

Known Error Conditions with WGA

There have already been some instances when sites with valid licenses and serial numbers and legitimate installations have failed the validation process hence these may have unwittingly become victims, not due to any wrong doing on their part.

This is very disruptive to running a business that can ill afford to be crippled when errors occur with functioning software.

To see if the error condition you are experiencing is listed, then start with the forums as there is a lot of comment there by sites that have experienced problems so far (Login is required via Passport)

<http://forums.microsoft.com/Genuine/default.aspx?SiteID=25>

eg; Windows XP-based computers that were installed by using a Volume License product key might be marked as non-genuine

<http://support.microsoft.com/kb/926333>

Other error conditions can be located by using the Search links below

<http://search.microsoft.com/results.aspx?mkt=en-US&mkt=en-US&q=wga&x=5&y=10>

You can also Google for "WGA" by using the link here

<http://www.google.com.au/search?hl=en&q=wga%2Bmicrosoft&meta=>

Microsoft Bookkeeping is being offered for free

It would be our expectation that whilst this new software is setup to be attractive to small business sites, then, as it is being offered for free, it will also be accompanied by a Validation process that checks to see that the installed Operating system & Internet Explorer etc is a legitimate version.

For more details see

<http://www.microsoft.com/smallbusiness/products/office/accounting-express/detail.mspx>

WGA Validation Tool

Microsoft also offers the “Windows Genuine Advantage” Validation Tool independent of any of the update links and this can be accessed here : <http://www.microsoft.com/genuine/downloads/Validate.aspx>



Why Validate?

See <http://www.microsoft.com/genuine/downloads/WhyValidate.aspx>

Actually it's in your interests to do so!

BUT make sure that Management controls the methods (and the timing) used by staff to validate software otherwise you might find some of the “lights go out” on your PCs at a number of sites, and if these are mission critical eg; the server etc then you could have some unwanted system outages that take time to recover from, causing unnecessary disruption to your business.

Are All Downloads heading the same direction?

Probably, as Microsoft has seen fit to restrict it's considerable investment in software development to only those users who have installed valid legal copies of the applications sold under license by Microsoft, see <http://www.microsoft.com/genuine/downloads/FAQ.aspx>

How Can You Tell if your software is Genuine without Validation?

For more information on “How To Determine” if your software is genuine PRIOR to undertaking Validation then have a good look at the details listed at;

<http://www.microsoft.com/resources/howtotell/ww/default.msp>

Defeating Microsoft WGA Validation Check

There are already some sites that claim to have done this, and as fast as they crack the code, then Microsoft issues another patch and fix to overcome or circumvent the hackers and crackers.

Seriously if you are in business to do this sort of thing then you deserve to be punished (under Copyright laws) and have your business crippled.

If you run a legitimate business, then you need to be aware of staff in your organization who may be keen to install software under your nose so they can have the latest and greatest version BUT remember what you are in business for, ie; what are your goals and objectives.

Would you like it if your product was stolen, hacked and cracked? We think not, so why not focus on running your business and ensure that you manage your systems at all times to be within legal boundaries.

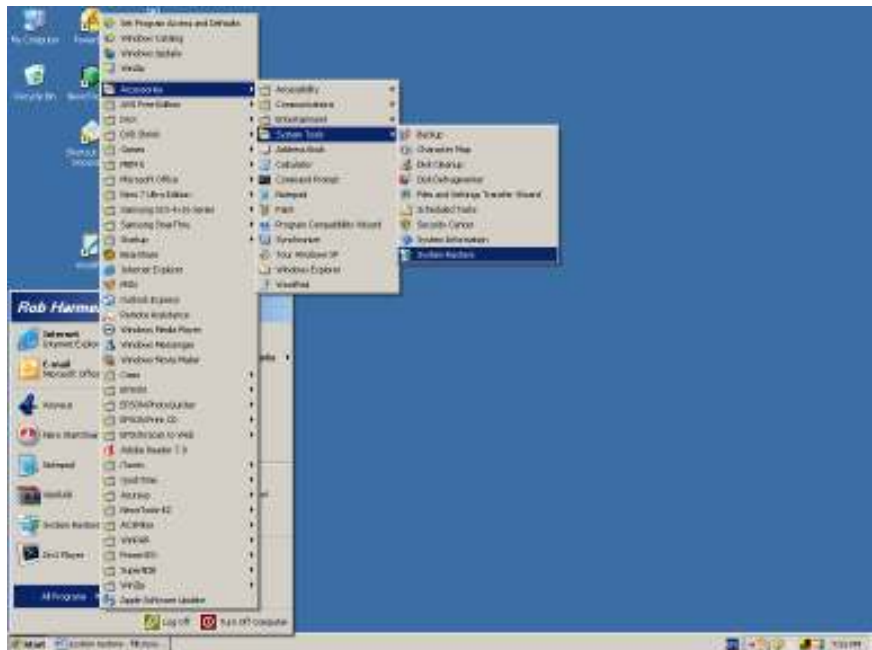
How do you Recover from a system that now appears to not function as before?

Fortunately there are ways to backout the changes if you follow them carefully, assuming that your system had been set up correctly in the first place by whoever installed it, irrespective of whether it is a legal version or not.

Recovery Step 1 – Backing Out the Updates

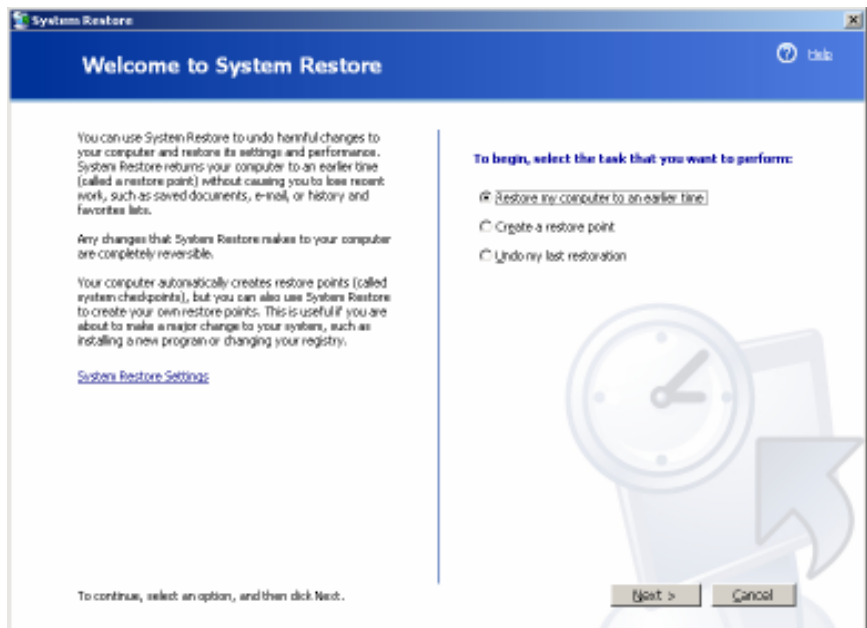
It may be possible for you to reverse out these updates, as long as the system has a system restore point that allows you to go back to a prior revision level.

This can be accessed via > All Programs > Accessories > System Tools > System Restore as shown below.



Recovery Step 2 – Backing Out the Updates

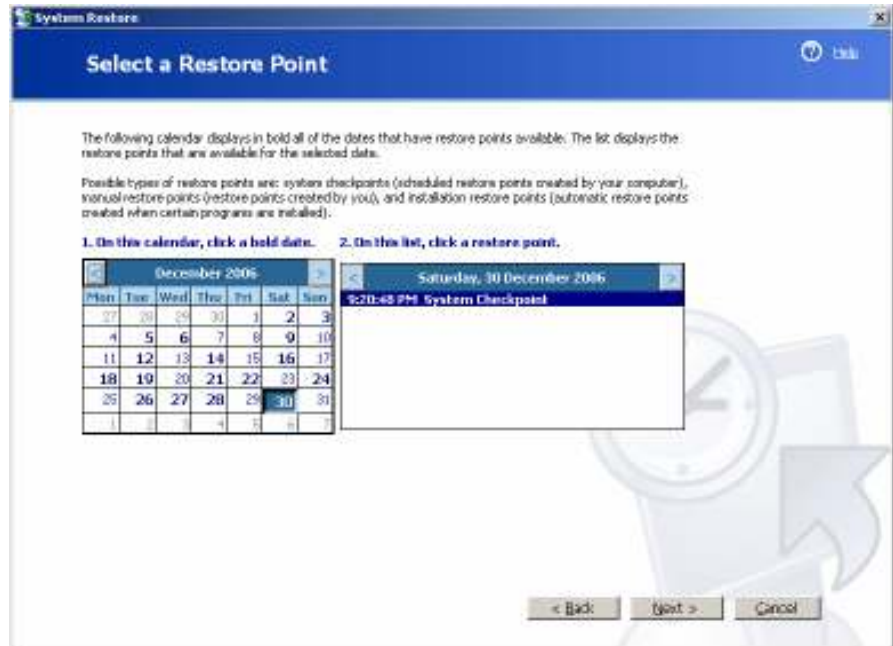
Clicking the above menu option will open up System Restore as follows;



**Recovery Step 3 –
Backing Out the
Updates**

A restore point calendar will show with system points that can be restored from in BOLD numerals.

Pick a day PRIOR to the current date as the most recent point to restore from to allow you to return to a stable system.



**FIXING THE
PROBLEM – Step 1**

Now that your system is functioning as before, start tracing back and find out WHY your system is being reported as non-Genuine and FIX the problem.

**FIXING THE
PROBLEM – Step 2**

To do this you need to undertake a full hardware and software inventory of all your PC assets. Look at the problem globally rather than on a case by case basis as there may be some benefits/trends that you spot that can be applied to improve your position.

PCProfile Tip – Many sites find they can rationalize the numbers of licenses needed when they adopt a Software Asset Management strategy that looks critically at the “needs” basis of the number of installed applications in use ie; not very user needs every application at the desktop!

**FIXING THE
PROBLEM – Step 3**

From the software inventory a consolidation report needs to be done that identifies how many instances of each application are installed on the physical assets.

Whilst doing the software inventory it is useful to know what version/revision level each application is at, so that you can assess the impact of “Update Now” issues pending.

You might be surprised to see that this will vary wildly across a PC population, depending on the install/patch/fix/update cycles applied.

FIXING THE PROBLEM – Step 4

Then you need to “match” the applications installed with “proof of purchase” records, (typically invoices from suppliers, credit card records, and volume licensing agreements etc) so as to make sure you can survive any scrutiny/audits when it comes to legitimate copies installed vs illegitimate copies installed.

FIXING THE PROBLEM – Step 5

Take control over the situation setting up very strong rules on software compliance, which prescribe who can “update” PCs, who can install software, where data is stored relating to proof of purchase etc .

Make sure staff clearly understand and know their rights and obligations should they choose to install versions of software that haven’t been correctly sanctioned or “authorized”.

PCProfile Tip – Adopt a “Lessons Learned Mindset” that means that you learn from your experiences, and minimize the amount of effort needed to conduct software audits, matched to inventory and proof of purchase records. Otherwise, it can be a waste of labour and effort and we are sure that this money can be better spent elsewhere within the business, as long as you set up your systems and processes to handle it better than “in the past”.

FIXING THE PROBLEM – Step 6

Manage the Update Now process by making sure that a register is kept of PCs that pass and fail the process.

For those that pass, its business as usual.

But for those that fail..... then some investigative or forensic methods may need to be applied to identify the miscreants (if that is the case), or alternatively to ascertain why the update failed (an error condition) and then to make arrangements with your Authorized Microsoft Reseller or vendor or Microsoft direct to have the situation remedied, should it be proven that the issue relates to an “error condition”.

WGA extract from Microsoft web site

In June of 2006, Microsoft expanded Windows Genuine Advantage to include a service called WGA Notifications. WGA Notifications was created to alert people using a non-genuine copy of Windows that they might be victims of software piracy and to help them resolve the issue.

WGA and data collection - None of the information collected by WGA will be used by Microsoft to personally identify or contact you.

See also

<http://www.microsoft.com/genuine/facts.mspx?displaylang=en> and <http://www.microsoft.com/piracy/activation.mspx>

The Bottomline according to PCProfile?

Many innocent users will cause havoc in your systems if they aren’t accurately instructed on how to deal with the issues relating to WGA and Update Now features. PCProfile believes that a coordinated approach needs to be taken by Management to control the process under their own terms.

Now is the time to make sure that you assess your position across the enterprise, mandate a policy of 100% software compliance by ensuring that budgets are set for software, (work on the basis of one for every PC unless you can negotiate a legitimate blanket deal), staff are signed up to your compliance policy, (facing termination if they install software without authorization), conduct audits on a random and

periodic basis and keep very good proof of purchase records fully documenting what you purchased in terms of licenses was acquired from a legitimate vendor and that you have the correct "bodycount" of licenses for every PC in your business.

Frankly, we don't care how much the software vendors are losing due to piracy! They could have solved the problems by now, as we have been business advisers on this topic for over 15 years. However, we do care about managing the business, as we know that the issue of software compliance is not core to your business activity!

"Can you afford to take the risk of running your business or your organization in "reduced functionality mode" whilst you sort out WGA and Product Validation or other software licensing issues?"

Whilst it might seem to be painful with Microsoft taking this stance, wait and see the effects from the other software vendors as they play follow the leader.

If your software is correctly installed and legal you ought not to have a problem, however, if its not, then..... the nightmare this will bring to your Help Desk will be very difficult to manage, as the lights go out on your applications as go through this "one by one by one Validation process".

Windows Product Activation may prove to be very disruptive if not managed carefully within your organization.

About the Author PCProfile has been in the anti-piracy advice business for over 15 years offering assistance and advice to managers to help them save their own jobs and their businesses! <http://www.pcprofile.com>

Why "Managing Clouds?"

"As soon as you see them forming they change shape and form again, sometimes turning into vapour, other times dumping rain all over you!and you really can't manage them at all!"

The role of any manager is complex and difficult and with rapid changes taking place all around you it's difficult to know where to find practical advice on "how to manage" these changes. This is especially true when you think you have it all under control then find the rules change, again, and again.

This is when it's more like **"Moving the Goalposts"!**

About "Managing Clouds and Moving Goalposts" – PCProfile has been writing feature articles on a wide range of technology issues and many related to "management practices" or failing to understand what was happening around them.

The key issues we noted were that technology changes were happening so fast around managers it was a bit like trying to "manage clouds". The other issue was the rules keep changing, (nothing new here) hence the reference to "moving the goalposts".

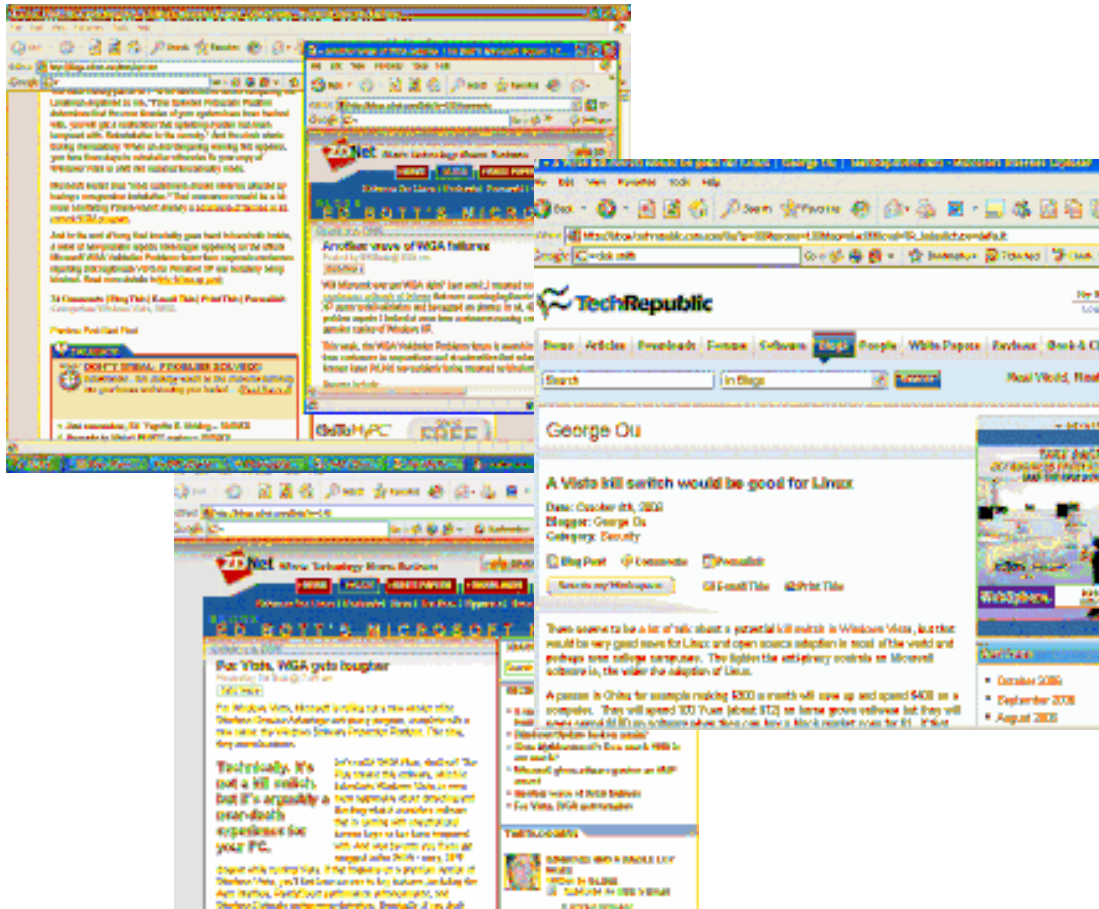
"Managing Clouds and Moving Goalposts" is a series of management focused articles on relevant technology issues that are impacting businesses across the world and are intended to inform with pragmatic solutions steps that can be undertaken to minimize risk.

Other articles in the series;

- Hasta La Vista http://www.pcprofile.com/Hasta_La_Vista.pdf
- Is Your IP Leaking - 1 – Open Source
- Is Your IP Leaking - 2 – Office Collaboration
- RMA Your worst nightmare
- Who Is Responsible for Software Piracy - 1
- Who Is Responsible for Software Piracy – 2
- The Risk of Old PCs
- File Sharing
- No Budget for Software
- We DON'T CARE how much they lose!

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Other WGA News stories, here are a few.....

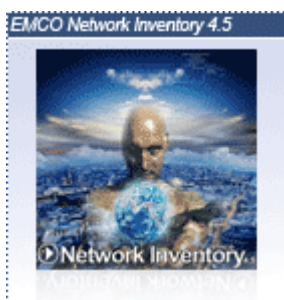


This feature sponsored by <http://www.emco.is/>



EMCO MSI PACKAGE BUILDER is targeted at one of the most time consuming tasks for system administrators - software installations and patch/update deployment and management, which typically includes monitoring of installed applications on all computers in the network, applications installation and un-installation, and deploying patches and fixes. **EMCO MSI PACKAGE BUILDER** significantly simplifies these tasks, because you are able to perform all these operations with remote computers directly from your workdesk, so you no longer need to visit each work station!

http://emco.is/msi_package_builder/features.html



EMCO Network Inventory 4.x is a powerful tool for hardware and software inventory and audits on networks. It performs a fast and detailed scan of all nodes on your network in order to collect information about the machines on your network. It enables you to scan all the nodes of your network with just one click. You can gather information on the remote machines on your network without installing any client side programs or stubs when using remote machines on NT4/W2K/XP Pro/2003 systems