# How Product Activation Works

Reinstalling Windows XP

Doing so might mean that you have to re-activate the operating system, right? Nope. Not if you backup the license file first. Believe it or not, the entire hoopla about Windows Product Activation comes down to one little file. For whatever reason, one of my PCs just suddenly decided to freak out, and since it had been upgraded from Windows 2000 anyway, I figured it was time to start from scratch, but didn't want to have to place that call to Microsoft. No sweat. Just backup the c:\windows\system32\wpa.dbl file, install Windows XP as you normally would, restart in Safe Mode with Command Prompt. Replace the wpa.dbl file with your backed up version, and you should be back in business. Mind you, the information in that file will be specific to the product ID entered during installation as well as being tied to the hardware in that machine only. If you try moving this file to another computer, it won't work, even if it's the same model, right down to the amount of RAM. This is because of unique information obtained from the network card, processor, hard drive, etc., so when it doesn't match up, it will gripe.

Windows Product Activation (in Windows XP) is turning out to be less of a problem than most of us had anticipated. Sure, there are a few people who can afford to make six hardware changes within 120 days, but most of us stick with (or add on to) what we already have. A question has arisen regarding what happens when you have to reinstall the new OS on the same machine. Do you have to reactivate it? Yes. Maybe. When you run all the way through the WPA wizard, a WPA.DBL file is created in your "System32" directory. Copy this file to another folder for safe keeping. Now, whenever you reinstall Windows XP on the same machine, you should be able to avoid the WPA process by copying WPA.DBL back to the "System32" directory. While I haven't run through this process myself, it should work as long as you haven't changed the machine drastically since the WPA.DBL was created. Just make sure you're using the "latest" copy of that file, otherwise you mayfind yourself on the phone with Microsoft. Who, according to them, will give you the benefit of the doubt every time.

And reader "arrondee" was one of several readers who described various experimental hacks and patches used to defeat all or some of WPA:

Disconnect from the internet, install xp, reboot in safe mode, run regedit, modify

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\MICROSOFTNT\CurrentVersion\Winlogon
(change Activation Required value to zero)

then

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\WindowsNT\CurrentVersion
(change RegDone value to 1)

So, WPA is already broken, easily circumvented, no barrier at all to someone who is serious about using an illegal copy of XP, and mainly just a hassle for legitimate users--- but we should all be "pleased" and "excited" because it's maybe less of a hassle than the early worst-case scenarios seemed? Give me a break.

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