

Windows XP services that can be disabled

By Scott Lowe

One of the most effective ways to secure a Windows workstation is to turn off unnecessary services. This reference sheet lists the Windows XP SP2 services, describes each service's function, specifies whether you can safely disable the service, and outlines the ramifications of disabling the service.

The list assumes the machines is running Windows XP SP2 in a corporate network environment. The list offers one of the following three possibilities for safely disabling each service:

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YES = You can disable the service without causing any problems.

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MAYBE = The computer's role dictates whether you should or should not disable the service--read the *special considerations* for further information.

-

NO = The service is critical to proper Windows operation and should not be disabled.

Service Description Safely Disable?

Ramifications if disabled Suggested setting Special Considerations

Alerter Notifies selected users and computers of administrative alerts

Yes Programs that use administrative alerts will not receive them.

Disable Application Layer Gateway

Provides support for application-level protocol plug-ins and enables network/protocol connectivity

Maybe Programs that rely on this service, such as MSN Messenger and Windows Messenger will not function.

Enable Only enable when using the Windows firewall or another firewall. Failure to do so can result in a significant security hole.

Application Management

Processes installation, removal, and enumeration requests for Active Directory IntelliMirror group policy programs

Yes Users will be unable to install, remove, or enumerate any IntelliMirror programs.

Disable Automatic Updates

Enables the download and installation of critical Windows updates

Yes The operating system cannot automatically install updates, but can still be manually updated at the Windows Update Web site.

Enable Automatic updates help keep your computer current. If you do disable the service, perform regular, manual updates.

Background Intelligent Transfer

Transfers data between clients and servers in the background

Yes Features such as Windows Update will not work properly.

Disable Enable this services if you enable Automatic Updates.

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Service Description Safely Ramifications if disabled Suggested Special Disable? setting Considerations

ClipBook Enables ClipBook Viewer to store information and share it with remote computers
Yes ClipBook Viewer will not be able to share information with remote computers.

Disable COM+ Event System/System Application Allows management of Component Services by providing automatic distribution of events to subscribing COM components
No System Event Notification stops working, which means that logon and logoff notifications will not take place. Other applications, such as Volume Snapshot service, will not work correctly.

Enable Computer Browser Maintains an up-to-date list of computers on your network, and supplies the list to programs that request it. The Computer Browser service is used by Windows-based computers that need to view network domains and resources.

Yes Your computer will be unable to locate other Windows computers on the network

Enable Enable this service, if you need to share files with other Windows computers.

Cryptographic services Provides three management services:

Catalog Database Service, which confirms the signatures of Windows files;

Protected Root Service, which adds and removes Trusted Root Certification Authority certificates from this computer;

and Key Service, which helps enroll this computer for certificates

No The associated management services will not function properly.

Enable Required if you use the Automatic Updates Windows service; Also used by other Windows services, such as Task Manager.

DHCP Client Allows the system to automatically obtain IP addressing information, WINS server information, routing information, and so forth; is required to update records in Dynamic DNS

Maybe The system will be unable to obtain

an IP address, WINS information, and the like, from a DHCP server and will need to be configured with a static address.

Enable You can disabled this service if you do not use DHCP.

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Distributed Link Tracking Client Ensures that shortcuts and OLE links continue to work after the target file is renamed or moved by maintaining links in the file system

Yes Link tracking will be unavailable.

Users on other computers won't be able to track links on this computer.

Disable Distributed Transaction Coordinator Coordinates transactions that span multiple resource managers, such as databases, message queues, and file systems

Yes Distributed transactions will not occur.

Disable DNS Client Resolves and caches DNS names, allowing the system to communicate with canonical names rather than strictly by IP address

No The system will be unable to resolve a name and will be able to communicate only via IP address. A client may be unable to communicate with its domain controller.

Enable Stopping this service will result in the inability for the computer to resolve names to IP addresses.

Error Reporting Collects, stores, and reports unexpected application crashes to Microsoft

Yes Error Reporting will occur only for kernel faults and some types of user mode faults.

Disable

Event Log Allows event log messages to be viewed in Event log to assist in problem resolution

No Administrators won't be able to view logs, including the security log, increasing the difficulty of diagnosing problems and detecting security breaches.

Enable Fast User Switching Compatibility Enables management for applications that require assistance in a multiple user environment

Yes Fast User Switching will be unavailable.

Disable Doesn't work in domain environments anyway.

Help and Support Enables Help and Support Center to run on this computer

Yes The Help and Support Center will be unavailable.

Enable

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HID Input Enables generic input access to Human Interface Devices (HID), which activates and maintains the use of predefined hot buttons on keyboards, remote controls, and other multimedia devices

Maybe Hot buttons controlled by this service will no longer function.

Disable Required for some "hot buttons" on newer keyboards. Can be safely enabled if these buttons don't work with this service disabled.

IMAPI CDBurning COM Manages CD recording using Image Mastering Applications Programming Interface (IMAPI)

Maybe This computer will be unable to record CDs.

Enable This service can be disabled if you don't have a CD-RW drive in your system.

Indexing Service Indexes contents and properties of files on local and remote computers; provides rapid access to files through flexible querying language

Yes Files will not be indexed. Indexing can speed searching.

Disable Uninstall this service if you don't plan to use it.

Internet Connection - Firewall (ICF) / Sharing (ICS) Provides network address translation, addressing, name resolution and/or intrusion prevention services for a home or small office network

Maybe Networking services such as Internet sharing, name resolution, addressing and/or intrusion prevention will be unavailable.

Disable If you share your Internet enable this service.

IPSEC services Provides end-to-end security between clients and servers on TCP/IP networks

Maybe TCP/IP security between clients and servers on the network will be impaired.

Disable If you connect over an IPSec secured connection, don't disable this service.

Logical Disk Manager Waits for new drives to be added and passes required information to the LDM administrative service; required to ensure dynamic disk information is up to date

Yes New disks will not be detected by the system.

Enable Leaving this service enabled makes it easy to add new drives to the system. In a very high security environment, this should not be allowed.

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Service Description Safely Ramifications if disabled Suggested Special

Disable? setting Considerations

Logical Disk Manager Administrative Starts and allows configuration to take place when a new drive is detected or a partition/drive is configured

Yes None; runs only when needed. **N/A** Started by the Logical Disk Manager service only when needed. Do not disable if you have the Logical Disk Manager Service enabled.

Machine Debug Manager Manages Visual Studio debugging **Yes** Visual Studio debugging information will not be available.

Disable Messenger Transmits net send and Alerter service messages between clients and servers. This service is not related to Windows Messenger

Yes Alerter messages will not be transmitted.

Disable Microsoft Software Shadow Copy Provider Manages software-based volume shadow copies taken by the Volume Shadow Copy service

Yes Software-based volume shadow copies cannot be managed.

Disable Leave set at Manual if you intend to use Windows Backup.

NetMeeting Remote Desktop Sharing Enables an authorized user to access this computer remotely by using NetMeeting over a corporate intranet

Yes Remote desktop sharing will be unavailable.

Disable If you use NetMeeting, don't disable this service.

Network Connections Manages the network and dial-up connections for the server, including network status notification and configuration

No Network configuration will not be possible; new connections can't be created and services that need network information may fail.

Enable Network DDE Provides network transport and security for Dynamic Data Exchange (DDE) for programs running on the same computer or on different computers

Yes DDE transport and security will be unavailable.

Disable

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Network DDE DSDM Manages Dynamic Data Exchange (DDE) network shares

Yes DDE network shares will be unavailable.

Disable

Network Location Awareness (NLA) Collects and stores network configuration and location information and notifies applications when this information changes. This service is a part of ICS

Maybe Services such as ICS & ICF will not function.

Disable Enable if this computer has Internet Connection Sharing enabled or if you are using the Internet Connection Firewall.

NT LM Security Support Provider Allows users to log on to the network using NTLM

Maybe Users with versions of Windows prior to Windows 2000 will be unable to log in to the network.

Disable Enable this service if this computer needs to log on to pre-Windows 2000 computers or domains

Performance Logs and Alerts Collects performance data for the computer or other computers and writes it to a log or displays it on the screen

Yes Performance information will no longer be logged or displayed.

Disable Plug and Play Allows an administrator to add hardware to a server and have the server automatically detect and configure it

No The system will be unstable and incapable of detecting hardware changes.

Enable

Portable Media Serial Number Retrieves the serial number of any portable media player connected to this computer

Yes Protected content might not be downloaded to the device.

Disable

Print Spooler Manages all local and network print queues and controls all printing jobs

Maybe Printing on the local machine will be unavailable.

Enable Disable this service if you don't have a printer.

Protected Storage Protects sensitive information such as private keys from exposure except to allowed persons and services

Yes Protected information will be inaccessible.

Enable

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QoS RSVP Provides network signaling and local, traffic-control, set-up functionality for (Quality of Service) QoS-aware programs and control applets

Yes QoS aware applications with either not function, or will not have their complete functionality.

Disable Enable this service if you use QoS aware applications.

Remote Access Auto Connection Manager Detects unsuccessful attempts to connect to a remote network or computer and provides alternative methods for connection

Yes Users will need to manually connect to other systems.

Enable Remote Access Connection Manager Manages dial-up and virtual private network (VPN) connections from this computer to the Internet or other remote networks

Maybe The operating system may not function properly.

Enable This service is run on demand by the Remote Access Manager

Remote Desktop Help Session Manager Manages and controls Remote Assistance

Yes Remote Assistance will be unavailable.

Disable Remote Procedure Call (RPC) Allows processes to communicate internally and across the network with each other

No The system will not boot. Don't disable this service.

Enable Remote Procedure Call (RPC) Locator Provides RPC name services similar to DNS services for IP

No Systems that are running third-party utilities looking for RPC information will be unable to find it. OS components do not use this service, but programs such as Exchange do.

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Remote Registry Provides a mechanism to remotely manage the system registry

Maybe Remote systems will be unable to connect to the local registry. Hfnetchk uses this mechanism. Disabling it can affect the patch utility's operation.

Disable Some programs require this functionality in order to operate.

Removable Storage Manages and catalogs removable media and operates automated removable media devices

Yes Programs that are dependent on Removable Storage, such as Backup and Remote Storage, will operate more slowly.

Enable Routing and Remote Access Enables multiprotocol LAN-to-LAN, LANto-WAN, virtual private network (VPN), and network address translation (NAT) routing services for clients and servers on this network

Yes Routing and Remote Access services will be unavailable.

Disable Better yet, don't install this service at all.

Secondary Logon Enables starting processes under alternate credentials. If this service is stopped, this type of logon access will be unavailable

Yes Users will be unable to use the "Run As" feature to elevate privileges.

Disable Security Accounts Manager Stores account information for local security accounts, which, when started, allows other services to access the SAM

Yes Services that rely on requests to the SAM database will not function properly. Group Policy objects may not operate properly.

Enable If you use don't use DHCP to obtain an IP address, this service can be disabled.

Server Allows the sharing of local resources such as files and printers, as well as named pipe communication

Yes Resources can't be shared, RPC requests will be denied, and named pipe communication will fail.

Disable This service must be enabled on Windows XP computers that share files or printers.

Shell Hardware Detection Provides notifications for AutoPlay hardware events

Yes CD-ROMs and other devices will not automatically function.

Enable Much easier to leave this enabled, and not much of a security risk.

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Smart Card Manages access to smart cards read by this computer

Yes This computer will be unable to read smart cards.

Disable If you're using a smart card reader, enable this service.

Smart Card Helper Provides support for earlier smart card readers attached to the computer

Yes The computer will be unable to read legacy smart cards.

Disable If you're using a smart card reader, enable this service.

SSDP Discovery Used to locate UPnP devices on your home network. Used in conjunction with Universal Plug and Play Device Host, it detects and configures UPnP devices on your home network
Yes Your computer will be unable to locate uPnP devices on the network.

Disable System Event Notification Required to record entries in the event logs; notifies COM+ subscribers about logon and power-related events
Yes Certain notifications will no longer work. For example, synchronization won't work, as it depends on connectivity information and Network Connect/Disconnect and Logon/Logoff notifications.
Disable Leave enabled for laptops so that power notifications are passed to the user.

System Restore Performs system restore functions, including saving periodic checkpoints
Yes Automatic system restoration will not be possible.
Disable While this service does use up some system resources, it can be invaluable for stand alone machines, particularly when a software install goes bad.

Task Scheduler Enables a user to configure and schedule automated tasks on this computer
Yes Tasks will not be run at their scheduled times.
Disable

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TCP/IP NetBIOS Helper Required for software distribution in a Group Policy (may be used to distribute patches) and provides support for NetBIOS over TCP/IP and NetBIOS name lookups
Yes NetBIOS over TCP/IP clients including Netlogon and Messenger might stop responding. Disabling may also affect the ability to share resources.

Disable For small networks, this service may be essential if you share files with others. For larger networks with central file servers, keep disabled on desktops.

Telephony Provides Telephony API (TAPI) support for clients using programs that control telephony devices and IP-based voice connections

Yes The function of all dependent programs will be impaired.

Disable Only needed for modem/fax modem use.

Telnet Enables a remote user to log on to this computer and run programs; supports various TCP/IP Telnet clients, including UNIX- and Windows-based computers

Yes Remote user access to programs might be unavailable.

Disable Terminal Services Allows users to connect interactively to a remote computer; Remote Desktop, Fast User Switching, Remote Assistance, and Terminal Server depend on this service.

Yes May make your computer unreliable. To prevent remote use of this computer, clear the check boxes in the Remote tab of the System properties control panel item.

Disable Themes Provides user experience theme management

Yes Themes cannot be used.

Disable Uninterruptible Power Supply Manages an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) connected to the computer

Yes The UPS cannot communicate with the computer.

Disable Universal Plug and Play Device Host Used in conjunction with SSDP Discovery

Service, it detects and configures UpnP devices on your home network
Yes Your computer will be unable to locate uPnP devices on the network.

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Upload Manager Manages synchronous and asynchronous file transfers between clients and servers. Driver data is anonymously uploaded from these transfers and used by Microsoft to help users find needed drivers. The Driver Feedback Server asks the client's permission to upload the computer's hardware profile and then search the Internet for information about how to obtain the appropriate driver or get support.

Yes Certain file transfers will not take place.

Disable Volume Shadow Copy Manages and implements volume shadow copies used for backup and other purposes

Yes Shadow copies will be unavailable for backup and the backup may fail.

Disable Enable this service if you use Windows Backup on this desktop.

WebClient Enables Windows-based programs to create, access, and modify Internet-based files

Yes These functions will not be available.

Disable Windows Audio Manages audio devices for Windows-based programs

Yes Audio devices and effects will not function properly.

Enable Even though it can be disabled, without this service, you will get no sound.

Windows Image Acquisition (WIA) Provides image acquisition services for scanners and cameras

Yes Programs that require images, such as Windows Movie Maker, won't function properly.

Enable This service is required for some scanners and cameras. If you don't have a scanner or a camera, you can disable this service.

Windows Installer Adds, modifies, and removes applications provided as a Windows Installer (*.msi) package

Yes People can install no programs, or make use of Add/Remove programs.

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Windows Management Instrumentation (WMI) Provides system management information; required to implement performance alerts using Performance Logs and Alerts

No System management and performance information will be unavailable.

Enable WMI Driver Extensions Monitors all drivers and event trace providers that are configured to publish Windows Management Instrumentation (WMI) or event trace information

Yes (extension of WMI only)

Enable Windows Time Uses NTP to keep computers in the domain synchronized

Yes Time synchronization won't take place.

Enable Wireless Zero Configuration Automatically configured WiFi (802.11) network adapters

Maybe You will have to manually configure wireless networking.

Disable Enable this service if you're using wireless networking.

WMI Performance Adapter Provides performance library information from Windows Management Instrumentation (WMI) providers to clients on the network

Yes This service runs only when Performance Data Helper is activated.

Enable Workstation Provides network connections and communications using the Microsoft Network services

Yes The computer will be unable to connect to remote Microsoft Network resources.

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Scott Lowe has held a variety of jobs in the information technology field. Although he has been involved primarily in IT management and network/systems engineering, he has also served as a DBA, help desk technician, and several other job roles. He is currently the IT Director for Elmira College, a small private college located in Elmira, NY.

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XP Services List

From Smart Computing Magazine (Jan 2006, p36).

Click START/RUN and type **services.msc** and **click OK** to bring up the Services list. Just click once on an item and it gives you a good description. It also tells you which ones it is safe to turn off, and how to do it.

And it lists the **Dirty Dozen**...12 programs that you might not need and tells why, and it's OK to turn them off.

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