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Windows XP Home vs. XP Professional

So what is the difference between XP Home and Professional? Other than the price that is… Home edition retails for around $199.99 while Professional edition is around $269.99. Microsoft has released two mainstream operating systems, one targeted at home users (XP Home), and one targeted at businesses and professionals (XP Pro).

The main difference is that Professional is a managed operating system, having a far greater range of customizable options and settings available to an administrator. Home edition is for the home user who does not know very much about computers. It comes pre-setup for the most common functions. Professional edition's customizable features allow far greater control over the operating system.

So why XP Pro? XP Professional edition can do everything XP Home can do and more. Remote desktop is one example. While it is true

XP home edition has the functionality to allow a remote user to log in and access the computer, XP Professional edition has the ability to be the one logging in. This is a great advantage to mobile users who need to log in and access their office computers, or to IT staff who can do remote troubleshooting.

XP Pro has the ability to support two processors. Not much of an advantage to most home users, but this allows for a very high-end computer for business solutions. XP Home has no dynamic disk support and will only support the standard simple disk type.

XP Pro also has some added security features. Individual

file encryption and file level access control are just two examples. These functions allow administrators to significantly limit the people who can access specific data. This sort of fine control is not necessary for a home computer, or home network, but it is vital when dealing with sensitive business or financial data.

In addition to the increased security there is increased functionality. Roaming user profiles allow users to log on to any computer as their domain account and have their personalized settings imported.

In short, Microsoft Windows XP Home edition is an excellent choice for a home user who will likely not know much about computers, or have need of advanced features. This being said, Home edition is simply not adequate for business use. The extra security and functionality alone are worth the extra money for the Professional edition.

Backup Issues and Their Dangers

Why do we backup? This seems an easy enough question with an easy enough answer. We backup because we don't want to lose our data. What you don't know is; you may be hindering your backup efforts and not even know it. There are several common problems that you should be aware of.

1. Damaged or corrupt tape: This is a very common problem with tape drive backups. Occasionally the tapes simply go bad. If you notice your backup is failing on the same day every week, chances are good you have a bad tape.

2. Dirty write heads: Dirty write heads on the tape drive can seriously degrade the ability of your drive to backup your valuable data. Cleaning you tape drive with a cleaning tape at least once a month will increase backup speed and reliability.

3. Incorrect Tape: Leaving Monday's tape in the backup drive on Tuesday can cause headaches for you and your technician. If you ever need to restore data from a tape, more time and effort would be required if the correct tape is not used each night. This problem increases the time it

takes for a tech to troubleshoot your problem, which means a higher bill for you.

4. Offsite Media Storage: Very few clients actually take their backup tapes off site at the end of the day.

While it may be a hassle, and seem unnecessary, off site storage of your backup will allow you to recover data in case of some disaster. If there was ever a fire, the computer can be replaced, but the data can not.

5. Regular checking of your backup: It is crucial for you to check your backup every day. Most backup software has a notification process

that will send you an email when it completes, or when it fails to complete. It is important to check that daily and to report multiple failures to your technician immediately. You may find your data is not being backed up as you thought it was.

No one knows how important your data is more than M&H Consulting. It is worth protecting. Clients who have Tech For A Day maintenance through M&H Consulting have their drives cleaned, and backup logs checked as part of the Tech For A Day service. We also have a program in place where we will check your nightly backups for you on a daily basis. For more information on any of our services please feel free to contact us: 866-9-MH-Tech.

"We have all the latest security patches, we just didn't have room for your work software."

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Windows Firewall Benefits

Hardware firewalls and the windows firewall overlap in many areas. One or the other is sufficient for normal home use, but for business use you would want the added security of overlapping firewalls. Most offices tend to have the Windows firewall turned off, but there are certainly some benefits to its use. The windows firewall by default will block anything it doesn't recognize as a "good" program. While this can be a hassle when first using windows and when first installing a program, its interactive configuration allows you to allow or deny programs as they are used. What this means is, you don't have to remember what programs you are going to be using when setting up the windows firewall, you don't have to tell it what to do until a situation comes up. A hardware firewall on the other hand is an excellent firewall, but it doesn't "think" as well as a software firewall, requiring more configuration in order to gain sufficient security.

The ability of the windows firewall to differentiate between solicited and unsolicited information may be all the justification you need to run the windows firewall. Having the computer recognize that you didn't ask it to download the newest virus is an excellent feature not provided by the hardware firewall. When the computer detects your virus download "request" it gives you the option of blocking the process from the internet, possibly saving you from getting a virus.
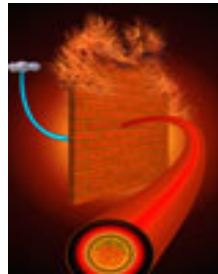
Another nice feature of the windows firewall is its ability to be turned off. If you decide you don't want to worry about your network connection, you can tell the windows firewall not to filter your Ethernet connection.

While it is possible to shut off the hardware firewall, you don't have the same amount of fine control.

Both the hardware and windows firewall have a logging function, and the hardware option often has the ability to email you with the results. Having both the windows and the hardware firewalls on and logging may give you more information on the success or ineptitude of a hacker. For example, if your hardware firewall log shows there are no attempts to get past its security, and your windows firewall shows three unsuccessful attempts to enter your computer, this could indicate someone knows how to get past your hardware firewall, or someone is trying to access your system from within your LAN. This duplicate logging may allow you to adjust your security to successfully block future intrusion attempts.

Below is a comparison chart of functionality between an example Netgear Firewall and the windows firewall.

Netgear WGR614 v5 Firewall

• Stateful Packet Inspection Firewall.

• Packet Filtering.

• Blocks unwanted traffic from the Internet to your LAN.

• Denial-of-Service (DoS) Protection.

• Automatically detects and thwarts DoS attacks such as Ping of Death, SYN Flood, LAND Attack, and IP Spoofing.

• Parental Control.

• Keyword and URL blocking.

• Prevents objectionable content from reaching your computers. The router allows you to control access to the Internet content by screening for keywords within Web addresses. You can configure the router to log and report attempts to access objectionable Internet sites.

• Trusted IP access.

• Blocks access from your LAN to Internet to Internet locations or services that you specify as off-limits.

• Time scheduling.

• Email and logging notification.

• Can log security events such as blocked incoming traffic, port scans, attacks, and administrator logins. You can configure the router to E-mail the log to you at specified intervals. You can also configure the router to send immediate alert messages to your E-mail address or E-mail pager whenever a significant event occurs.

Windows Firewall

• Differentiates between solicited and unsolicited requests.

• When someone on the Internet or a network tries to connect to your computer, we call that attempt an "unsolicited request." When your computer gets an unsolicited request, Windows Firewall blocks the connection. If you run a program such as an instant messaging program or a multiplayer network game that needs to receive information from the Internet or a network, the firewall asks if you want to block or unblock (allow) the connection.

• Allows exceptions to be set up to allow a program you use regularly to access the internet without you being harassed by windows firewall.

• Windows Firewall can be turned off, either entirely or for a specific network connection.

• Helps block computer against viruses and worms.

• Asks for confirmation before allowing certain unsolicited or unknown connections.

• Creates a record (a security log), if you want one, that records successful and unsuccessful attempts to connect to your computer. This can be useful as a troubleshooting tool. It can also create a security log.