

Microsoft

Solution guide

Systems Management Server Feature Packs

Your (free) way to get the most from Microsoft's SMS

By Jeremy Moskowitz

The bad guys are always out there, trying to find a way into your Windows systems. Are you protecting yourself? Of course you're implementing service packs to fix many known problems. But what are you doing *between* service packs? Undoubtedly, you're aware of Microsoft's free downloads to fix discovered problems, including bug fixes, hotfixes, and security patches. You could label each of these items a *software update*. But how much time do you dedicate to managing your software updates? Do you spend half the day downloading, categorizing, and maintaining patches? Do you run from machine to machine, connecting to Microsoft's Web site one-by-one to deploy the patches you need?

With Microsoft's Systems Management Server 2.0 Software Update Services Feature Pack, you can stop the runaround, deploy your patches centrally, and have a set process to guarantee successful deployments. And with the addition of Systems Management Server 2.0 Administration Feature Pack, you can perform repetitive and difficult tasks easily.

The best news is that each of these Feature Packs is a free download for licensees of SMS 2.0. You can find the

Feature Packs at Microsoft's Web site, <http://www.microsoft.com/smsserver>

SUS vs. SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack

Several months ago, Microsoft introduced a standalone tool called Software Update Services (SUS) to assist in deploying software updates for Windows 2000 domains. SUS is an excellent tool for deploying OS software updates to your clients. But SUS supports only OS hotfixes for Windows 2000 and Windows XP clients (and when released, Windows .NET Server clients) that are members of a Windows 2000 domain. The standalone version of SUS can't distribute Microsoft Office fixes or OS service packs.

SUS is really best in small or medium homogeneous Windows 2000 (or near homogeneous Windows 2000) environments. But not every environment has 100 percent Windows 2000 clients. Indeed, if you have a larger environment, you might have additional non-Windows 2000 clients, or support multiple versions of Microsoft Office. These requirements are greater than

the standalone version of SUS can support.

For instance, if you use Windows NT clients, or have Windows 2000 clients in an NT 4.0 domain, you'll still need a way to deploy the latest software updates. Additionally, if you're concerned about Office 2000 and Office XP software updates, you would still need to augment the standalone version of SUS with something else to be fully protected.

This is where the SMS Software Update Service Feature Pack comes in. If you have SMS 2.0, you already have the infrastructure to address and deliver software to all Windows machines. The SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack helps you determine which patches are available for which clients and also helps you schedule updates. The SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack can manage and deploy all Microsoft software updates: OS updates *and* Office software updates.

SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack Components

SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack downloads as a single file, but

when uncompressed, contains several discrete parts:

- Security Update Inventory Tool—Prepares SMS 2.0 site server to download and distribute OS-specific software updates
- Microsoft Office Inventory Tool for Updates—Prepares SMS 2.0 site server to download and distribute Office 2000 and Office XP system-specific software updates
- Distribute Software Updates Wizard—Prepares SMS 2.0 distribution servers to deliver software updates to your clients and controls the deployment of the patches to the targeted client computers
- SMS Web Reporting—Adds a Web-based reporting tool to display many new reports
- SMS Additional Web Reports—Adds reports in addition to those provided by SMS Web Reporting; specifically, the status of loaded software updates in your enterprise

Because the parts are discrete components, you can deploy only the parts of the SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack you need. And best of all, the new features will run with your existing SMS 2.0—however it's installed. You don't need to reconfigure your sites, deployment processes, or administrative processes to use the new functionality.

The SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack also leverages other Microsoft technology you are familiar with and using. For analyzing the required OS updates on your clients, SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack leverages the Microsoft Baseline Security Analyzer (MBSA). For Office updates, SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack leverages the Microsoft Office Update Tool set (Invcn.exe and Invcif.exe.) All the required components are automatically downloaded and installed when you decide to install a specific component of the SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack.

SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack Requirements

The SMS Software Update Services

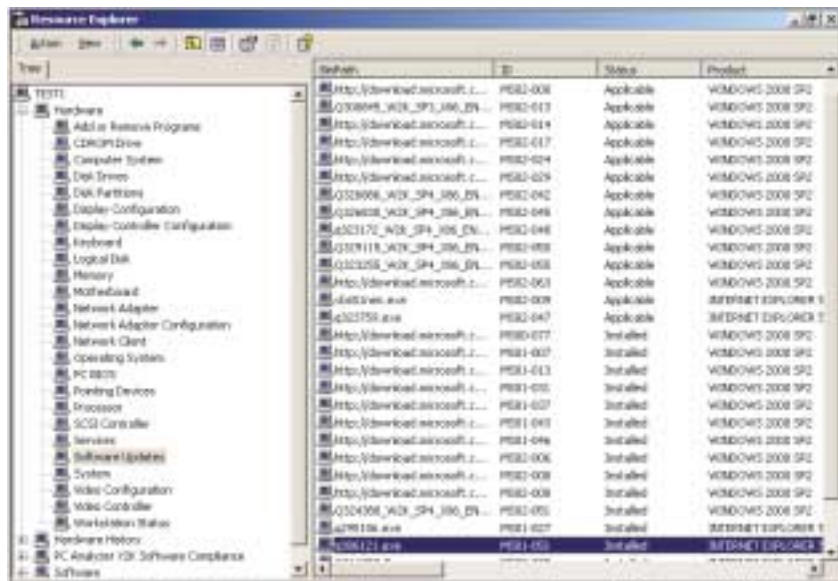


Figure 1: Hardware inventory now shows which software updates have or have not been installed

Feature Pack requirements are minimal; however, you must have a licensed SMS 2.0 site (or hierarchy of sites). SMS's SP3 is required (and supported); however, SP4 is recommended for all SMS site components. To use the SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack's Web Reports and Add-in Web reports requires Internet Information Server 4 (IIS 4) or higher. You can install all the server-side features directly on any or all site servers in the SMS hierarchy. To use SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack fully, you must have both the Hardware Inventory Client Agent and Advertised Programs Client Agent enabled and deployed to your clients.

Installing the SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack components you want by using the installation Wizard is easy. And if you decide later to modify your installation settings or remove a component, you can do so easily by using the standard Add/Remove Programs applet in Windows. Moreover, after you install a component, you don't need to reboot the SMS site server.

You'll probably start by installing the Security Update Inventory Tool, which determines which patches have been installed and which patches need to be installed, and by installing the Distribute Software Updates Wizard,

which prepares your clients to accept updates. You might also choose to immediately install the Office Update Inventory Tool to deploy Office updates, as well as the two Web Reporting tools. But as noted, you can choose which components you want to install and when you want to install them.

The SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack will automatically extend the functionality of SMS 2.0. Specifically, the hardware inventory subsystem is now ready to receive a list of which software updates have or have not been delivered to a specific client (Figure 1).

By using SMS 2.0's Resource Explorer, you can see which software updates are *Applicable* to a client (meaning available but not installed) or those updates that have been delivered and *Installed*. Resource Explorer also shows much useful information about the proposed software updates. In the screenshot shown in Figure 1, you can see listings for a Web link, Microsoft ID (for easy search online or in Technet), and to which OS or subsystem this applies. Additional fields such as the full text title of the software update, Knowledge Base article number, and when the update was installed also are present, but are not shown in the screenshot.

Additionally, the SMS 2.0 console has been automatically extended with new Collections, Packages, and Advertisements.

The goal of the new Collections is to let you have a workflow process for your software update deployments. First, the Security Update Tool (site code) Sync Host (and, if the components are installed, the related Office Update Tool (site code) Sync Host) Collection has the SMS client system, which will connect to the Internet, contact Microsoft, and build a database of the possible available software updates. You can choose to make this client system the site server or any other SMS client you wish. Next, the Security Update Tool (site code) (pre-production) (and, if the components are installed, the related Office Update Tool (site code) (pre-production)) give you an easy way to test your updates to a client sample—before sending the update to the general production population. You can find the general production population in the last new Collection—after you modify its membership rule to make it not collection limited.

The goal of the new Packages and Advertisements is to assist your clients with getting the latest updates. A Package and related Advertisement tells your Internet-connected computer to fetch the latest list of updates from

Microsoft's Web site server (by default, this occurs once a week). Another related Package and Advertisement pair ensures that your client systems tell the SMS site server which software updates they have installed.

Once the list of available software updates is automatically downloaded from Microsoft, and the clients report what updates they already have installed, you'll be ready to distribute the remaining required software updates to your clients.

The SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack extends the SMS 2.0 console to ease this task. Simply right-click on any Collection and choose the new All Tasks | Distribute Software Updates option. This feature brings up a wizard (Figure 2) that guides you through the download and deployment of a specific OS or Office update. Of course, you'll want to test your pre-production Collections and then, after a successful test, continue your rollout to the rest of your production clients.

SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack Web Reports

If you have several SMS clients, you'll have considerable SMS data. Historically, the problem has been getting to that data. SMS has several existing methods for digging into that SQL Server data, but now another one is

available: the Web Reporting tool and the Web Reporting tool's add-in reports.

The Web Reporting tool adds a host of functionality, including an easy-to-read "dashboard" overview of the entire SMS landscape (e.g., site status, critical events notification, number of clients by site). The Web Reporting tool also adds dozens of useful standard reports such as categories of Hardware and Software inventory or SMS site and status messages. The Web Reporting tool also provides an easy way for you to create custom reports by leveraging the data already in the SQL Server database. You'll get all these features and more if you choose to install the SMS Web Reporting component of the download.

If you add the SMS Additional Web Reports, you'll get a number of reports specific to software updates (Figure 3).

These powerful reports let you determine which computers have which updates installed—en masse, without having to go to Resource Explorer to check each client. This feature is a huge time saver that lets you deploy your software updates much faster.

SMS Administration Feature Pack

Another free download from Microsoft, the SMS Administration Feature Pack, leverages your existing SMS 2.0 investment. The goal of the SMS Administration Feature Pack is to make it easier to perform repetitive or difficult SMS tasks.

SMS Administration Feature Pack downloads as a single file and then unpacks as four files, each a unique tool in the pack: the SMS Web Reporting tool, the Manage Site Accounts tool, the Elevated Rights Deployment tool, and the Transfer Site Settings tool.

The SMS Web Reporting tool, the same component found in the SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack, provides the Web console, which has the standard reports and dashboard view. The Manage Site Accounts tool solves a myriad of little

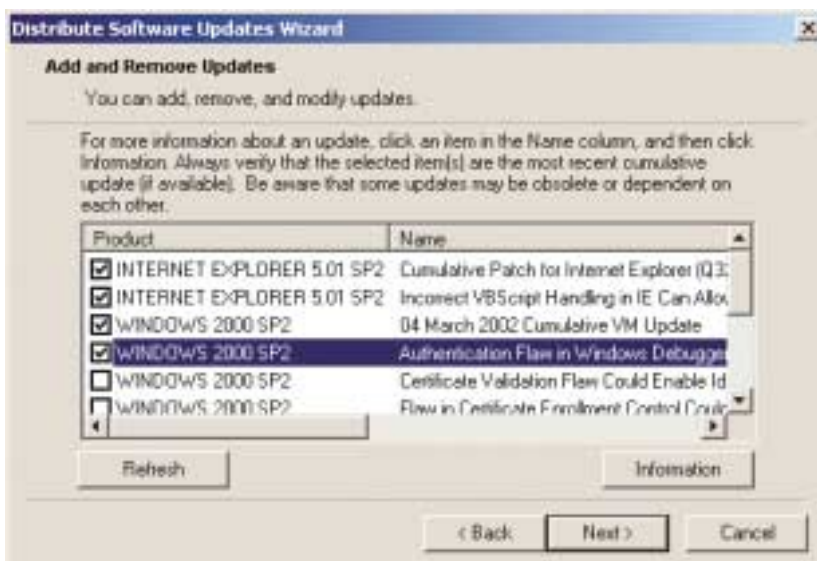


Figure 2: The Distribute Software Updates Wizard

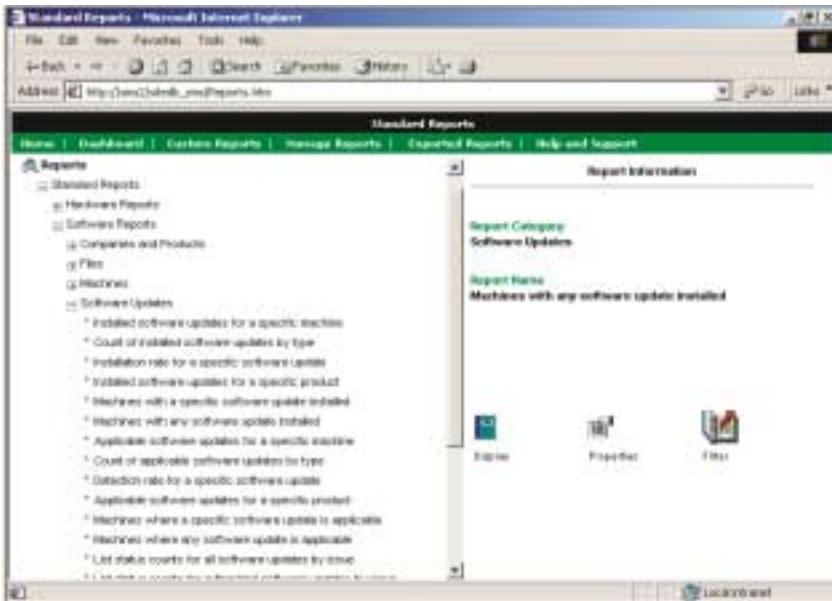


Figure 3: SMS Additional Web Reports

SMS administrator woes. The tool's job is to maintain all the account properties of the SMS service accounts. Among other things, the tool lets you easily change attributes on the many SMS accounts, including names and passwords—across all your sites and all your domains. If you have a corporate mandate to change passwords every so often (including SMS service account passwords), this free update will come in handy, because it makes small work of what was once a very large task. You can also adhere to SMS best practices by easily adding additional SMS client connection accounts. With the Manage Site Accounts tool, you can add SMS-client connection accounts quickly to both the domain and to SMS in one easy step.

The Elevated Rights Deployment tool augments the abilities of the regular SMS software distribution mechanism. This tool comes in handy if you have an application that requires administrative rights, installs required components, and then requires a reboot. After the reboot, the installation may still require administrative rights and continue on to finish the installation and configuration. Until now, SMS would lose control of the application upon reboot. Now, when you need to install an application that

requires a reboot while running with administrative rights, SMS maintains control the entire time.

The Transfer Site Settings tool lets you quickly make sweeping changes in one, two, or even hundreds of sites. For instance, if you received a corporate mandate to change how often clients in a site deliver hardware inventory data, you would have to connect to every site, traverse the Site Settings, manipulate your settings in the site, and repeat for every additional site you want to change. With the Transfer Site Settings wizard, you can quickly and easily take the settings you want from one site and deploy those settings to multiple sites—all in one step. You may also transfer both package and collection settings as well. Instead of modifying the settings on every collection or package at every site, the wizard will do all the work for you. A wizard guides you through picking the source and destination sites, as well as choosing which settings you want transferred. The process is that easy.

Feature Pack Benefits

Both the SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack and the SMS Administration Feature Pack add powerful functionality to your existing SMS 2.0 deployment. The SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack provides an end-to-end software update deployment environment. The standalone version of SUS is great, but only if your needs are to deploy OS-only updates to Windows 2000 (or greater) clients in a Windows 2000 Active Directory. The SMS Software Update Services Feature Pack download will leverage your existing SMS environment to deploy to all software updates to all clients in all domain configurations.

The SMS Administration Feature Pack adds functionality to SMS that did not exist, or that was difficult to achieve. With these new tools, you can more effectively manage your SMS accounts, site hierarchy, and package deployment. Both Feature Packs come with the SMS Web Reporting tool, which enables an easy-to-use interface for digging into the SMS site database and discovering more about your SMS client systems.

Best of all, both Feature Packs are free downloads available at <http://www.microsoft.com/smsserver>. They will make an excellent addition to your existing SMS 2.0 investment.

Jeremy Moskowitz is a founding partner of BrainCore.NET, a consulting company specializing in Microsoft training and services. Jeremy has performed Win2K, NT, and Microsoft Systems Management Server (SMS) planning and implementation for some of the nation's largest organizations. He has written several books, including *Windows 2000: Group Policy, Profiles, and IntelliMirror* (Sybex). You can reach Jeremy at www.braincore.net.

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