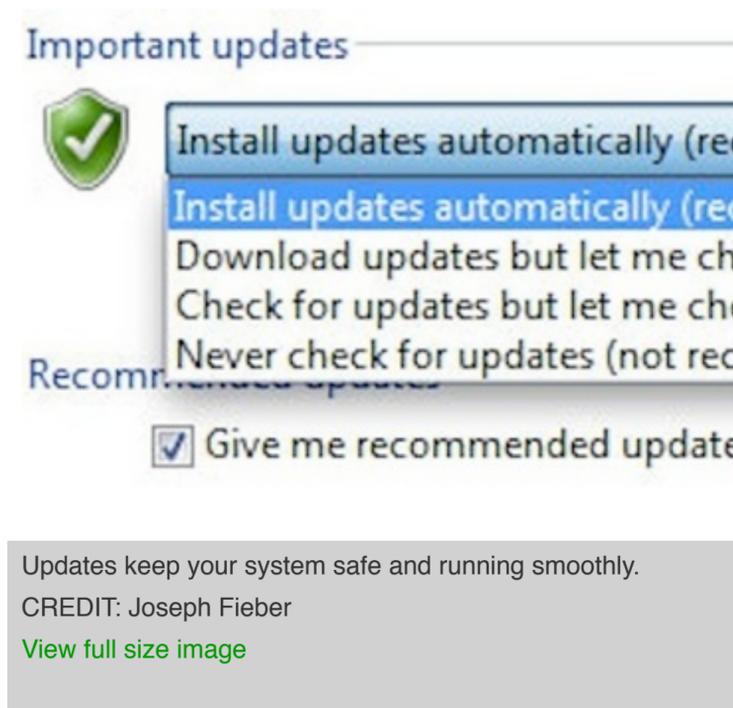


6 Key Software Updates You Should Be Doing



Have you updated the software on your computer?

A recent survey by Skype suggests that 40 percent of users don't do so when prompted, with 25 percent of them not understanding why they should.

Why update?

Software updates are released for three reasons: to patch a security hole, to fix bugs and to add features.

Security updates are the most important. Periodically, hackers find vulnerabilities in software that can allow accessing your files, tracking what you type and even taking full control of your computer. Timely updates can keep you safe.

Checking for updates

Most software now includes the ability to periodically check for updates. Apple's App Store and Microsoft's Marketplace check for updates to software purchased through them.

Microsoft's upcoming Windows 8 can be set to "wake" your computer up at night, even if it's not turned on, and check for updates.

Apple's new [OS X Mountain Lion](#) operating system does something similar with its "Power Nap" feature that allows downloading and installing updates while the computer "sleeps" in low power mode. Though these options greatly simplify installing updates, many still require your approval, so pay attention and respond when they prompt you.

What needs updating?

Any software code on your computer may need an update at some point. But these are the six most important categories:

1. Operating systems

The operating system essentially controls everything and inevitably offers many vulnerabilities that Apple and Microsoft regularly discover and patch. You should install updates as soon as you see a prompt to do so, or set the computer to install them automatically.

2. Web browsers

Web browsers are constantly evolving and need to be secure due to their direct access to the internet. Updates for Microsoft's Internet Explorer and Apple's Safari are provided through the operating systems update process. Google's Chrome, and more recently Mozilla's Firefox both get automatic updates, so no checking is required.

[See "[How Your Old Browser Threatens Your Security](#)"]

3. Productivity software

Applications like Microsoft Office or Adobe Creative Suite only occasionally need security updates, but more often need bug fixes that prevent crashes, freezes and commands not behaving the way they are supposed to.

4. Anti-virus/anti-malware software

New malware, including Trojans and viruses, emerge daily. This is why your anti-virus software should be set to automatically update itself at least on a daily basis.

[See "[2012 Best Anti-Malware Software](#)"]

5. Supporting software

Packages like Adobe Flash and Reader, Sun Java and Microsoft Silverlight play a supporting role for many applications and file types. Due to their popularity, they are often the target of hackers. It is especially important to update this type of software as soon as you see an alert.

6. Firmware and drivers

Firmware tells your computer hardware what it can do, and drivers allow the rest of your software to access the hardware. Firmware updates most often expand the capabilities of your hardware. As an example, an Apple firmware update enables the new Power Nap feature. Driver updates most often fix bugs and expand features, such as providing additional display resolutions for larger screens.

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