



Application Compatibility with Windows XP/Server 2003

(Getting Older Applications to Work)

One of the more common issues we discuss in our Windows XP and Server 2003 seminars and workshops concerns application compatibility. As much as those of us in the IT community would like to upgrade our older applications to new, 32-bit, Windows XP compliant versions, sometimes that's just not possible. Perhaps technical, political, or economic reasons dictate that we continue to use an application that was written for the Windows 95 environment, for example. Windows XP and Server 2003 include several tools that often can allow such applications to run.

Microsoft's application compatibility technologies fall into two broad categories: Those used to aid in migration strategies and those used to aid in the installation and operation of applications in the Windows XP or Server 2003 operating system environment. For the purpose of this paper, we'll focus on the second category of technologies used to aid in the installation and operation of applications running under Windows XP or Server 2003. More specifically, we'll focus on the application compatibility wizard and the compatws security template.

The Application Compatibility Wizard

Windows XP and Server 2003's compatibility mode can help by "tricking" the older application into thinking it's running under a different operating system. The compatibility wizard helps the application use different credentials or paths, for example. The application compatibility wizard can be accessed through the Windows Help and Support Center. Within the Windows Help and Support Center, click on the Help Topic "Fixing a Problem" (it's on the left hand side, second from the bottom), then under the "Fixing a Problem" menu, click on "Application and Software Problems" to start the wizard.

System administrators may wish to invoke application compatibility mode by right-clicking on the application's shortcut (or its executable file). Choose Properties, and on the Property sheet, click the Compatibility tab. You'll find a variety of settings similar to those found in the wizard.

There are many other tools and technologies available to assist the administrator in supporting legacy or non-certified applications. More information is available at <http://www.microsoft.com/technet/prodtechnol/winxppro/plan/appcmpxp.msp>

The compatws Security Template

Another way of enabling legacy applications to run under Windows XP or Server 2003 is to make users members of the Power Users Local Security Group.

Members of the Users security group cannot run applications that are non-certified for Windows XP, but members of the Power Users Local Security Group can. The problem is that members of the Power Users group can also create users, groups, printers, and shares. For some users, that may be an acceptable solution, but for others, it's not acceptable. In that situation, you can apply the compatws security template to affected computers through the Security Configuration and Analysis tool. The compatws template modifies the default file and registry permissions for members of the Users group in a manner that meets the requirements of most non-certified applications. Additionally, the compatws template also removes all members from the Power Users group.



Access the Security Configuration and Analysis tool by clicking on Start, then Run. In the Run dialog box, type mmc to open an empty Microsoft Management Console. Touch ctrl+m to open the Add/Remove Snap-In dialog box and click the Add button to open the Add Standalone Snap-In dialog box. Select the Security Configuration and Analysis tool. Click on Add, then Close, then click OK.

In the Security Configuration and Analysis console tree, right-click on Security Configuration and Analysis and choose Open Database... Give the database a name and click Open. The Import Template dialog box appears. Select compatws.inf and click Open. You can now analyze your computer's current security settings against the compatws template or apply the settings in the template to the computer. (Important: We strongly recommend that you first apply the settings to a test system to ensure that the results are what you want before applying the template settings to a production system.) To analyze the settings on your computer, right-click on Security Configuration and Analysis in the console tree and choose Analyze Computer Now... To apply the settings, right-click on the Security Configuration and Analysis in the console tree and choose Configure Computer Now...

Under normal circumstances, the compatws template should not be applied to domain controllers.

For more information about Microsoft's Predefined Security Templates, visit http://www.microsoft.com/resources/documentation/windows/xp/all/proddocs/en-us/sag_scedefaultpols.msp

This paper has discussed the application of a security template to a local computer. Information about importing security templates into Group Policy objects is available at:

<http://www.microsoft.com/technet/prodtechnol/winxppro/plan/appcmpxp.msp>

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More info including dates, locations, and a course outline is available at

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