Windows Updating -- Four Types

Presented to the Lexington, MA Technology Users Group
By Bob Primak, July 1, 2020 via Zoom Meetings

Adapted from Fred Langa, AskWoody Plus Newsletter
ISSUE 17.9.0 • March 2, 2020 (paid content)

To Meeting Attendees

- I will gladly try to answer questions and we can have comments and shared experiences.

- But please put questions into the Chat feed, and I'll try to see who has questions or comments.

- I'd like to get through most of the demo parts before opening things up to questions and comments.

The Problem

A reader asks:

"Windows' Programs and Features lists 183 programs installed on my PC. But PatchMyPC reports that my '39 applications' are up to date, and SUMo lists '467 products loaded,' of which 71 require a 'Major update.'

"When I look at those 71 apps, the vast majority are Adobe (I have a monthly license), Corel, and Oracle. All are bits and pieces of the primary apps. I'm dubious about updating these 'bits and pieces' because the main app might no longer work with these updated components."

Four Types of Windows Software

- 1) Windows (OS) Updates

- 2) Programs for system and subsystem components

    - Drivers

    - Driver Related Software

    - Firmware or BIOS

- 3) OEM vendor/integrator/update tools

- 4) Applications to make the computer do something useful (Application Software)

OS Updates

Windows Update: *No surprise here. I use it to keep the operating system and associated Microsoft software, such as MS Office, up to date.*
This runs automatically, and even more so as of the May 2020 (Version 2004) Feature Update.

There are ways to control the timing of these updates, but we all need them sooner or later.

Deferral options are moving out of the user interface (Settings) and into Group Policy and the Windows Registry.

OS Updates

You do need to update your Windows Store Apps once in awhile.

This is usually automatic, but it wouldn't hurt to do the Store Apps updating process now.

This needs to be done on a per-user (per-account) basis.

Current video codecs security issue addressed through App Store.
https://www.askwoody.com/2020/win10-codec-security-hole/

OEM vendor/integrator/update tools

I use these to check for brand- and model-specific updates. These tools are free and usually do a fairly good job of keeping your PC's drivers and ancillary OEM software in spec.

Examples:

HP Support Assistant, Lenovo System Update, Dell SupportAssist, and others from Toshiba, ASUS, and other vendors.

OEM vendor/integrator/update tools

- **Some people don't like these built-in tools.**

- They may have "phone-home" or logging of user activities.

- They can use up valuable local storage space.

- They can conflict with Windows features, or at least slow system performance.

- They eventually expire, leaving you with no further updates.

- *I prefer a clean version of Windows 10, but I do like being able to get driver updates and well-organized system control features.*

Programs for system and subsystem components

- Drivers should be those best suited to your overall hardware environment.

- Updating individual component drivers can do more harm than good.

- Your system vendor is the best source.

- Next-best is the component manufacturer.

- Stay away from third-party driver update utilities!

Programs for system and subsystem components

- I have a Drivers and Support Assistant from Intel which came with my system (an Intel NUC of the Skylake generation).

- We can look at how it operates. If anything has a new version which will be right for my PC, it will show up in the browser window.

Programs for system and subsystem components

- **Why a newer driver is not always better:**

- Existing hardware usually does not benefit from newer features in a driver.

- Newer drivers may not even work with older hardware.

- The one exception is for a serious security flaw.

- Best advice on drivers: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

- One more thing – Vendor drivers are usually better than generic Windows drivers.

Programs for system and subsystem components

- Recently there was a lot of tech press about firmware.

- Spectre and Meltdown are not threats to most users.

- No in the wild exploits with general distribution.

- BIOS flashing is tricky and can result in issues with

- System performance and other more serious hardware

- malfunctions.

Application Software

Applications to make the computer do something useful
I will be spending the majority of my efforts today on this class of Windows components, as these are the programs which cause the most confusion when using software updating utilities.

We have all this software on our PCs, and from different vendors.

How do we keep track of what truly needs updating?

Application Software

- **SUMo Software Updater by KC Softwares**

- There is a paid version which will actually download an update when you request it. I don't see the point in paying for this service.

- I go to the vendor's own web site to download the genuine installers. Some programs like Macrium Reflect and Paint.NET will actually update from within the program without downloading any installers.

SUMo Software Updater

- I can show what SUMo does and how I use its information.

- Like Fred Langa, I use this updater as a guide to what's available, not as a checklist of items "to do now".

- I use the option to show the Path to the detection.

- Driver software may not have an available update for my hardware, even if it is detected that one exists. (These are not the drivers themselves – SUMo is not designed as a driver update utility.)

SUMo Software Updater

- Here's how Fred Langa chooses which updates to get:

- The biggest problem with software updating utilities is

*R]eliance on **build numbers** as a sign of "needs updating." For example, if you're happily running, say, version X.x.x.xxxxx**6** of some particular software, it's highly unlikely that upgrading to version X.x.x.xxxxx**7** will do anything meaningful for you. In fact, replacing a smoothly functioning app for no reason other than a trivial bump in version/build number runs the risk of doing more harm than good.*

So you can afford to be selective.

SUMo Software Updater

- Another problem is how a "program" is detected.

- SUMo in particular scans many different locations, and often finds parts of larger software packages, dutifully cataloging each component as if it could be separately updated.

- **Which is often not the case!**

SUMo Software Updater

- So we can look at the Path where the software was detected.

- This may show us what larger title the component belongs to.

- The decision to upgrade a large or expensive program or suite is always up to the user. Again, the farther to the right of the decimal the update is, the less likely you really need it.

- Eventually you will probably want to upgrade, but not necessarily right now.

- One exception – Security software. I get every update for this type of software.

SUMo Software Updater

- Examples of SUMo in action:

- Macrium Reflect Free and ViBoot – just one update.

- Adobe, Corel and Oracle – Suites with components.

- Driver related software.

- Security Software Components – you may not be able to update these at all.

- Free vs. Paid Version Numbers.

- Unknown Title – How to search for "What the heck is this?"

Four Types of Software – Conclusion

- So I hope this helps with figuring out which software really needs updating.

- Vendor sites and changelogs are pretty boring reading, but that may be your best guide as to whether you need the new features.

- Tech reviews are also helpful.

- If you can't remember why you installed something, maybe it's best to remove it.

Four Types of Software

- Questions?

- Comments?

- Did I get something wrong?