

User Profiles

Section 9

Understanding User Profiles

Introduction

GENERAL

User profiles contain all of the customized user settings and links data to the user. Each user has one or more profiles associated with them. When you logon to a computer your profile is either downloaded from a server (usually the case in Active Directory and/or domain-centric environments), or applied by the local machine when you enter your account name and password.

User profiles are usually associated with levels of authority (Administrator, Power User, etc.). Your user profile defines your ability to manage and control your workstation. While many users believe that they should have Administrative rights on their local computer, they fail to understand that in having such an authority they also must accept the responsibility associated with those rights. An administrator profile has the ability to damage system files, destroy data without the ability to recover, and allow dangerous viruses to access your system through your account (if proper password security is not applied). Most users need Power User authority to conduct 100% of their daily duties.

ALL ARE GUESTS

Among the many changes that Microsoft made in Windows XP are some minor yet very important changes in the security model. If you have a local network, you'll definitely want to know them. If you're not connected to a network and other users don't remotely connect to your machine, this information will not affect you.

If you're running a network and have Windows XP Home Edition or Windows XP Professional in a workgroup (not in a domain), you'll need to know that all inbound network connections are authenticated as Guest. In other words, when someone tries to access files on your machine, they are authenticated as Guest on your machine, even if they have defined a different username and password. All remote connections are treated equally: Everyone who tries to access the remote computer will have the same permissions. It's very important to realize that any user who can access your computer from the network can access the shared files.

This puts your sharing infrastructure in an all-or-nothing mode. Either you allow all users access to your shared file or deny access to everyone. This might work fine in a home environment, but it's not recommended for corporate networks.

Prevent lost data when resetting passwords

When you're dealing with passwords, you should understand the difference between resetting and changing the passwords, and you need to be familiar with the consequences each of them might have. Normally, users change their password. Of course, they need to know their original password in order to change it.

But resetting a password is different. It doesn't require the user to know the previous password. By default, only administrators can reset passwords, but any user can change his or her own password.

Knowing the difference between changing and resetting passwords takes on a new importance in Windows XP, thanks to a new security feature, which can also cause a lot of trouble. Resetting a password will cause the loss of access to certificates, private keys, Web page credentials, and file share credentials. The password protects all of these areas. But if you don't know the original password, you won't be able to retrieve your data if you reset the password.

The best way to prevent this loss of access is to create a password recovery disk, which you can do in both Windows XP Professional and Home Edition. With this disk, you can reset the lost password and regain access to the lost data. Next time, we'll tell you how to create a password recovery disk.

- To create a password recovery disk, follow these steps:
- Go to Start | Control Panel | User Accounts.
- Select the username.
- On the left side under Related Tasks, click Prevent A Forgotten Password.
- Follow the wizard.

Please keep in mind that you can only create a password recovery disk for computers not joined to a domain.

Now, when you enter the wrong password, you'll see a yellow balloon that offers the Use Your Password Reset Disk option. Selecting this option will take you through a wizard. Then, you'll be able to access all your files again.

Of course, remember that you have to create the password recovery disk *before* you lose your password. It's a good idea to create it immediately once you start using your computer. Make sure you keep it in a safe place. If the disk gets in the wrong hands, other users could gain access to your files.