

# **[VulnWatch] Vulnerability in IBM Windows XP: default hidden Administrator account allows local Administrator access**

**Source:** <http://www.derkeiler.com/Mailing-Lists/VulnWatch/2004-09/0018.html>

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**From:** Michael Scheidell (*scheidell\_at\_secnap.net*)

**Date:** 09/16/04

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To: <bugtraq@securityfocus.com>, <vulnwatch@vulnwatch.org>, <full-disclosure@lists.netsys.com>

Vulnerability in IBM Windows XP default hidden Administrator account allows local Administrator access

Systems: IBM Workstations, Laptops, etc.

Vulnerable: IBM Systems with preinstalled Microsoft Windows XP Professional RTM and SP1

Not Vulnerable: IBM Systems without Windows XP Professional

Severity: High

Category: Unauthorized Administrator Access

Classification: Default Authentication

BugTraq-ID: TBA

CVE-Number: CAN-1999-0504

Remote Exploit: No

Local Exploit: Yes

Vendor URL: [www.ibm.com](http://www.ibm.com)

Author: Jason Lash, SECNAP Network Security

Internal Release date: August 6, 2004

Notifications: August 6, 2004: [secure@ibm.com](mailto:secure@ibm.com), [security@ibm.com](mailto:security@ibm.com), [cert@ibm.com](mailto:cert@ibm.com), [askibm@vnet.ibm.com](mailto:askibm@vnet.ibm.com), [support@ibm.com](mailto:support@ibm.com), [askibm@vnet.ibm.com](mailto:askibm@vnet.ibm.com),

August 7, 2004: [security-alert@austin.ibm.com](mailto:security-alert@austin.ibm.com), [cert@us.ibm.com](mailto:cert@us.ibm.com)

Vendor Response: August 13, 2004

Public Release date: September 15, 2004

Discussion:

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From [www.ibm.com](http://www.ibm.com)

Innovation for Business Advantage: IBM helps you become more competitive and on demand by delivering products that offer industry-leading capabilities, improve productivity and reduce the total cost of owning a PC. No other vendor provides as wide a range of PC products, technologies and software to support on demand businesses than IBM.

Security: As information technology increases in importance, so do the number of threats directed against it; a comprehensive security strategy is essential to protect vital data and to ensure continuity of operations. IBM security solutions will help protect your system and business from network infiltration, data destruction, information theft and unauthorized surveillance.

Problem:

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IBM OEM XP and XP SP1 contain a default hidden administrator account. Use of this account will allow anyone with physical access to the computer to fully control the computer, add spyware, keystroke loggers, password stealing software and read all files, including temp files, local files, documents, and any email that has been stored locally. IBM does not inform the installer of this account, does not give them the option of putting a password on this account, and if a savvy installer FINDS the function to change the password for the Administrator account, they are warned that they could lose data. Security best practices REQUIRE a password on all administrative (and root) accounts.

Because IBM marketing directly targets large publicly traded businesses, government agencies, and research organizations, these systems are used in regulated industries. Healthcare organizations must be HIPAA compliant; financial institutions must follow GLBA regulations; publicly traded firms are required to adhere to the Sarbanes–Oxley Act; federally funded educational organizations are regulated by FERPA, and government agencies must comply with FISMA regulations. With such organizations comprising a major portion of IBM's market share, it would be advantageous to ensure that products incorporated into IBM systems would help achieve compliance with such regulations.

OEM Version of Windows XP Professional released by Dell, HP and others have not shown similar characteristics and has only been observed in IBM OEM installations.

This may not be the first report of this behavior. If others have reported on this issue before, please let us know: however, we searched the CVE database and only found a distantly related problem dating back to 1999 where there is a warning against default, missing or weak administrator passwords.

The Common Vulnerabilities and Exposures (CVE) project has assigned the name CAN–1999–0504 <<http://cve.mitre.org/cgi-bin/cvename.cgi?name=CAN-1999-0504>> to this issue. This is a candidate for inclusion in the CVE list (<<http://cve.mitre.org>>), which standardizes names for security problems.

A retail setup implementation of Microsoft Windows XP Professional Edition, "Out–of–Box Experience" (OOBE), requires that the installer be given the option to add an Administrator account. During the installation, the XP Installer states : "You must provide a name and an Administrator password for your computer. Setup creates a user account called Administrator. You use this account when you need full access to your computer." While setup will not require that a password actually be entered, it does stress that one SHOULD be entered. Additionally, the user is prompted to create a regular user account for general use.

In contrast, the IBM setup implementation of Microsoft Windows XP Professional Edition does not include such steps. The existence of an administrator account is never mentioned. Instead, the setup asks: "Who will use this computer? Type the name of each person who will use this computer. Windows will create a separate user account for each person so you can personalize the way you want Windows to organize and display information, protect your files and computer settings, and customize the desktop. These names will appear on the Welcome screen in alphabetical order. When you start Windows, simply click your name on the Welcome screen to begin. If you want to set passwords and limit permissions for each user, or add more user accounts after you finish setting up Windows, just click CONTROL PANEL in the START menu, and then click USER ACCOUNTS." By default, none of the accounts added in this step have passwords. Nor is there an option to set passwords during the install. While this is not unique to the IBM install, it is a known weakness in the Windows XP OOBE, including retail and OEM versions. Because the Administrator account was never requested, this leaves the system in a very vulnerable state.

By using the Computer Management application and looking under 'System Tools→Local Users and Groups→Users', we see that the Administrator account has been added and enabled. This account IS NOT

password-protected. If the installer sets a password for EVERY user shown under the User Accounts tool in the Control Panel, THE DEFAULT ADMINISTRATOR ACCOUNT STILL EXISTS WITH NO PASSWORD.

The Installation Setup never informed the user that the account existed. If a user attempts to manually set a password for the Administrator account, they are greeted with the following warning: "Password for Administrator: Resetting this password might cause irreversible loss of information for this user account. For security reasons, Windows protects certain information by making it impossible to access if the user's password is reset. This data loss will occur the next time the user logs off. You should use this command only if a user has forgotten his or her password and does not have a password reset disk. If this user has created a password reset disk, then he or she should use that disk to set the password. If the user knows the password and wants to change it, he or she should log in, then press CTRL+ALT+DELETE and click Change Password. For additional information, click Help. [Proceed] [Cancel] [Help]." This warning exists in all versions of Windows XP, but it is not presented from the Control Panel Users Accounts tool. If a password is changed from the Control Panel's User Accounts section, no such warning is issue; but, again, the Administrator account is hidden from User Accounts.

In summary, Due to the lack of an Administrative Setup screen for the IBM Windows XP OOBE flow, it is more difficult for a security-conscious organization to manage a Windows XP-based IBM environment. In order to protect a system, several unintuitive additional steps must be taken on each systems in the environment, despite warnings against taking such steps.

SECNAP has tested this situation against IBM Windows XP RTM, as well as IBM Windows XP SP1. The vulnerability has existed since IBM began shipping systems with Windows XP. Due to the recent release of XP SP2, an opportunity exists for IBM to remedy this issue in a timely fashion. SECNAP also recommends that IBM notify all existing registered clients using the vulnerable systems to upgrade, possibly to a IBM-released patch, or modified version of SP2, that would additionally address the issues.

#### Exploit:

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Local: Press CTRL+ALT+DEL,DEL to get a login prompt. Enter user name 'Administrator' and NO PASSWORD and Click OK.

Network: Because remote logins using accounts without passwords is disabled, it is not typically possible to login to the system using RDP or remote shares.

#### Mitigation:

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Under control panel, go to Administrative Tools. Open Computer Management. Go to System Tools->Local Users and Groups->Users. Set a password for the administrator account. Set a password for all other users accounts.

#### Vendor Response: 8/13/2004

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IBM is cooperating with SECNAP concerning these issues. The IBM plan of action is as follows:

Release a patch to our manufacturing lines that will change the preload to include the standard Microsoft Windows "Set an Administrator Password" Screen as part of the Microsoft Windows XP "Out-of-Box Experience." These are the standard screens defined by Microsoft for OEMs to display during first boot. This patch will be cut into manufacturing during September with all world-wide systems and languages being updated no later than the end of October. This will include both SP1 and SP2 systems (SP1 will be phased out rapidly as Microsoft releases the different language versions to OEMs).

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Provide a "Tip" on the IBM Support Web Site explaining the potential for an Administrator account with no password to be set up and with detailed instructions on how to correct this.

Deliver a Message via the IBM Message Center to inform customers of a potential exposure and providing the same detailed instructions on how to correct this. Customers must "Opt In" to get message center messages.

Credit:

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Jason Lash, SECNAP Network Security, [www.secnap.com](http://www.secnap.com)

Original copy of this report (once published) can be found here

<<http://www.secnap.com/security/20040806.html>>

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