time, such as minor security or performance issues. These glitches aren't significant enough to merit a new version of the software, but they're important enough to require fixing. Most of the patches correct security flaws that computer hackers have uncovered in their relentless attempts to prove that they are smarter than the security programmers at Microsoft.

Periodically, all the recently released patches are combined into a *service pack.* Although the most diligent network administrators apply all patches when they're released, many administrators just wait for the service packs:

- For all versions of Windows, you can use the built-in Windows Update feature to apply patches to keep your operating system and other Microsoft software up to date. Windows Update scans your computer's software and creates a list of software patches and other components that you can download and install. To use Windows Update, open the Control Panel, click System and Security, and then click Windows Update.
- You can configure Windows Update to automatically notify you of updates so you don't have to remember to check for new patches.
- You can subscribe to a service that automatically sends you email to let you know of new patches and updates.


TIP


TIP

Keeping a large network patched can be one of the major challenges of network administration. If you have more than a few dozen computers on your network, consider investing in server-based software that's designed to simplify the process. For example, Ivanti Patch (`www.ivanti.com`) is a server-based program that collects software patches from a variety of manufacturers and lets you create distributions that are automatically pushed out to client computers. With software like Ivanti Patch, you don't have to rely on end users to download and install patches, and you don't have to visit each computer individually to install patches.