

# How to use Group Policy to remotely install software in Windows Server 2003 and in Windows Server 2008

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**System Tip** This article applies to a different version of Windows than the one you are using. ✕  
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For a Microsoft Windows 2000 version of this article, see the following Knowledge Base article: [314934 HOW TO: Use Group Policy to Remotely Install Software in Windows 2000](#)

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### SUMMARY

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This step-by-step article describes how to use Group Policy to automatically distribute programs to client computers or users. You can use Group Policy to distribute computer programs by using the following methods:

- **Assigning Software**

You can assign a program distribution to users or computers. If you assign the program to a user, it is installed when the user logs on to the computer. When the user first runs the program, the installation is finalized. If you assign the program to a computer, it is installed when the computer starts, and it is available to all users who log on to the computer. When a user first runs the program, the installation is finalized.

- **Publishing Software**

You can publish a program distribution to users. When the user logs on to the computer, the published program is displayed in the **Add or Remove Programs** dialog box, and it can be installed from there.

**Note** Windows Server 2003 Group Policy automated-program installation requires client computers that are running Microsoft Windows 2000 or later.

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## Create a Distribution Point

To publish or assign a computer program, you must create a distribution point on the publishing server:

1. Log on to the server computer as an administrator.
2. Create a shared network folder where you will put the Microsoft Windows Installer package (.msi file) that you want to distribute.
3. Set permissions on the share to allow access to the distribution package.
4. Copy or install the package to the distribution point. For example, to distribute Microsoft Office XP, run the administrative installation (**setup.exe /a**) to copy the files to the distribution point.

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## Create a Group Policy Object

To create a Group Policy object (GPO) to use to distribute the software package:

1. Start the Active Directory Users and Computers snap-in. To do this, click **Start**, point to **Administrative Tools**, and then click **Active Directory Users and Computers**.
2. In the console tree, right-click your domain, and then click **Properties**.
3. Click the **Group Policy** tab, and then click **New**.
4. Type a name for this new policy (for example, **Office XP distribution**), and then press ENTER.
5. Click **Properties**, and then click the **Security** tab.
6. Click to clear the **Apply Group Policy** check box for the security groups that you want to prevent from having this policy applied.
7. Click to select the **Apply Group Policy** check box for the groups that you want this policy to apply to.
8. When you are finished, click **OK**.

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## Assign a Package

To assign a program to computers that are running Windows Server 2003, Windows 2000, or Microsoft Windows XP Professional, or to users who are logging on to one of these workstations:

1. Start the Active Directory Users and Computers snap-in. To do this, click **Start**, point to **Administrative Tools**, and then click **Active Directory Users and Computers**.
2. In the console tree, right-click your domain, and then click **Properties**.
3. Click the **Group Policy** tab, select the group policy object that you want, and then click **Edit**.
4. Under **Computer Configuration**, expand **Software Settings**.
5. Right-click **Software installation**, point to **New**, and then click **Package**.
6. In the **Open** dialog box, type the full Universal Naming Convention (UNC) path of the shared installer package that you want. For example, `\\file server\share\file name.msi`.

**Important** Do not use the **Browse** button to access the location. Make sure that you use the UNC path to the shared installer package.

7. Click **Open**.
8. Click **Assigned**, and then click **OK**. The package is listed in the right pane of the **Group Policy** window.
9. Close the **Group Policy** snap-in, click **OK**, and then quit the Active Directory Users and Computers snap-in.
10. When the client computer starts, the managed software package is automatically installed.

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## Publish a Package

To publish a package to computer users and make it available for installation from the **Add or Remove Programs** tool in **Control Panel**:

1. Start the Active Directory Users and Computers snap-in. To do this, click **Start**, point to **Administrative Tools**, and then click **Active Directory Users and Computers**.
2. In the console tree, right-click your domain, and then click **Properties**.
3. Click the **Group Policy** tab, click the group policy object that you want, and then click **Edit**.
4. Under **User Configuration**, expand **Software Settings**.
5. Right-click **Software installation**, point to **New**, and then click **Package**.
6. In the **Open** dialog box, type the full UNC path of the shared installer package that you want. For example, `\\file server\share\file name.msi`.

**Important** Do not use the **Browse** button to access the location. Make sure that you use the UNC path to the shared installer package.

7. Click **Open**.
8. Click **Publish**, and then click **OK**.
9. The package is listed in the right pane of the **Group Policy** window.

10. Close the Group Policy snap-in, click **OK**, and then quit the Active Directory Users and Computers snap-in.
11. Test the package:

**Note** Because there are several versions of Microsoft Windows, the following steps may be different on your computer. If they are, see your product documentation to complete these steps.

- a. Log on to a workstation that is running Windows 2000 Professional or Windows XP Professional by using an account that you published the package to.
- b. In Windows XP, click **Start**, and then click **Control Panel**.
- c. Double-click **Add or Remove Programs**, and then click **Add New Programs**.
- d. In the **Add programs from your network** list, click the program that you published, and then click **Add**. The program is installed.
- e. Click **OK**, and then click **Close**.

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## Redeploy a Package

In some cases you may want to redeploy a software package. For example, if you upgrade or modify the package. To redeploy a package:

1. Start the Active Directory Users and Computers snap-in. To do this, click **Start**, point to **Administrative Tools**, and then click **Active Directory Users and Computers**.
2. In the console tree, right-click your domain, and then click **Properties**.
3. Click the **Group Policy** tab, click the Group Policy object that you used to deploy the package, and then click **Edit**.
4. Expand the **Software Settings** container that contains the software installation item that you used to deploy the package.
5. Click the software installation container that contains the package.
6. In the right pane of the **Group Policy** window, right-click the program, point to **All Tasks**, and then click **Redeploy application**. You will receive the following message:

Redeploying this application will reinstall the application everywhere it is already installed.  
Do you want to continue?

7. Click **Yes**.
8. Quit the Group Policy snap-in, click **OK**, and then quit the Active Directory Users and Computers snap-in.

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## Remove a Package

To remove a published or assigned package:

1. Start the Active Directory Users and Computers snap-in. To do this, click **Start**, point to **Administrative Tools**, and then click **Active Directory Users and Computers**.
2. In the console tree, right-click your domain, and then click **Properties**.
3. Click the **Group Policy** tab, click the Group Policy object that you used to deploy the package, and then click **Edit**.
4. Expand the **Software Settings** container that contains the software installation item that you used to deploy the package.
5. Click the software installation container that contains the package.
6. In the right pane of the **Group Policy** window, right-click the program, point to **All Tasks**, and then click **Remove**.
7. Do one of the following:
  - Click **Immediately uninstall the software from users and computers**, and then click **OK**.
  - Click **Allow users to continue to use the software but prevent new installations**, and then click **OK**.
8. Quit the Group Policy snap-in, click **OK**, and then quit the Active Directory Users and Computers snap-in.

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## Troubleshoot

### Published Packages Are Displayed on a Client Computer After You Use a Group Policy to Remove Them

This situation can occur when a user has installed the program but has not used it. When the user first starts the published program, the installation is finalized. Group Policy then removes the program.