

Article: [COMPUTERS BEHAVING BADLY](#)

Topic: Windows Genuine Advantage

Author: Mark Ahearn

Last month, Microsoft released another weapon in their ongoing program to get all versions of Windows XP genuine. Called Windows Genuine Advantage (WGA), it is being included as a high priority download when performing Automatic Updates.

A lot of people are being caught out because of it. They have been surprised to find that their version of Windows XP is actually non-genuine and that they may have been a victim of software piracy. Some have been charged the price of a legit version but, in fact, the person who installed the software has used a product key that cannot be authenticated.

The first step in deciding if your copy is valid is to locate the Certificate of Authenticity (COA). On this little sticker will be the Product Key. This COA should have been removed from the original Windows CD and stuck somewhere on the box of your PC. Or, it may still be on the CD sleeve. If you can't locate it, ring the installer for advice of what was done with it.

Some reasons for failing the validation process are that a Volume License Key (VLK) may have been used by your system builder. VLK's are typically issued to large companies and provide their IT staff the ability to just use one product key to install multiple Windows XP versions. These keys get 'leaked' to the public or are reported stolen. Microsoft then blocks those keys from use.

Other reasons may be the key used on your PC has already been used on another. Maybe the key used was generated by an illegal or non-Microsoft certified process. Basically it doesn't matter why, if Microsoft deems your version has failed the validation process, you will now be, or eventually be, in a whole world of hurt.

What Microsoft is attempting to do with WGA is force all users to use genuine software in order to receive future security updates and new enhancements. We are already seeing software released that either checks you have the latest Service Pack for XP or checks your validity before allowing installation.

At the moment it is no real show-stopper as not being genuine only means you can get the high priority updates and not the optional software or hardware updates. But the time will come when Microsoft will tighten the screws and your PC will not be able to either get any updates or install any new software unless you have the Bill Gates Stamp of Approval.

mark@computersbehavingbadly.com