

Software Update Server and Tidbits

by Paul Cook

If you don't want one of the bad guys "owning" your Mac, you need to install Apple's security updates reasonably soon after they come out. Of course, you probably want many of the bug fix updates as well.

But even a small number of computers can saturate a normal Internet connection, if they all try to connect and download an update all at once. Then there is all the time consumed to actually run software update.

Apple actually has a pretty good solution to this problem. Part of this solution is built into OS-X v 10.4 Tiger Server. And while Tiger Server probably isn't economical for a home environment, it is a worthwhile investment for any Mac oriented business, government agency, etc.

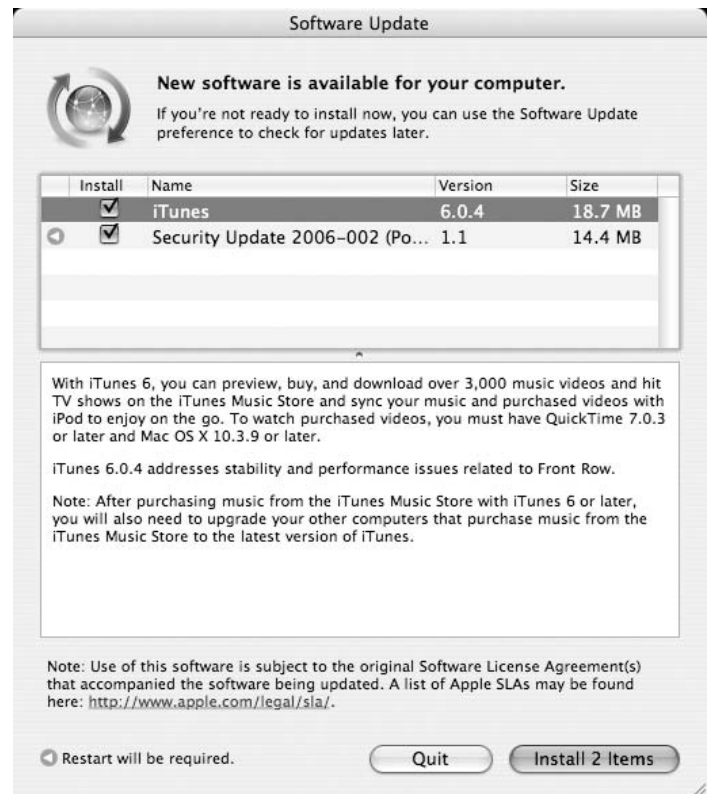
Built into Tiger Server is a Software Update Server. Software Update server allows your client Macs to locally download the updates from the local server over your high-speed local network. So now, instead of your clients each individually, having to go out to the Internet, each individually downloading those 100M update files, they can instead download them from a local server.

For example, the screen shot of the sample iTunes download shows it takes over 5 minutes just to download. Then the security update will take another 5 minutes. But in many ways, even this is an optimistic example. This example was a single machine at a site with an unusually high-speed connection. If you have multiple machines updating at once over a slower DSL, the times can easily be much longer. It is easy to see how with a local software update server, the whole update processes can often be done much more quickly.

Not only does using a local server eliminates contention for an Internet bottleneck and significantly improves update performance. It also gives you enhanced control. You can individually decide which updates to download and which to offer to your Macs. Or you can have it automatically download and offer everything.

If you are so inclined, this would allow you to propagate the security updates nearly immediately, but you wait a day or two on the other updates. Perhaps just to make sure there aren't update specific problems. Or you might decide that you want your users to use the "Combo" updaters instead of the incremental ones.

What is a combo updater? Say for example that you want to



Available updates for your Mac



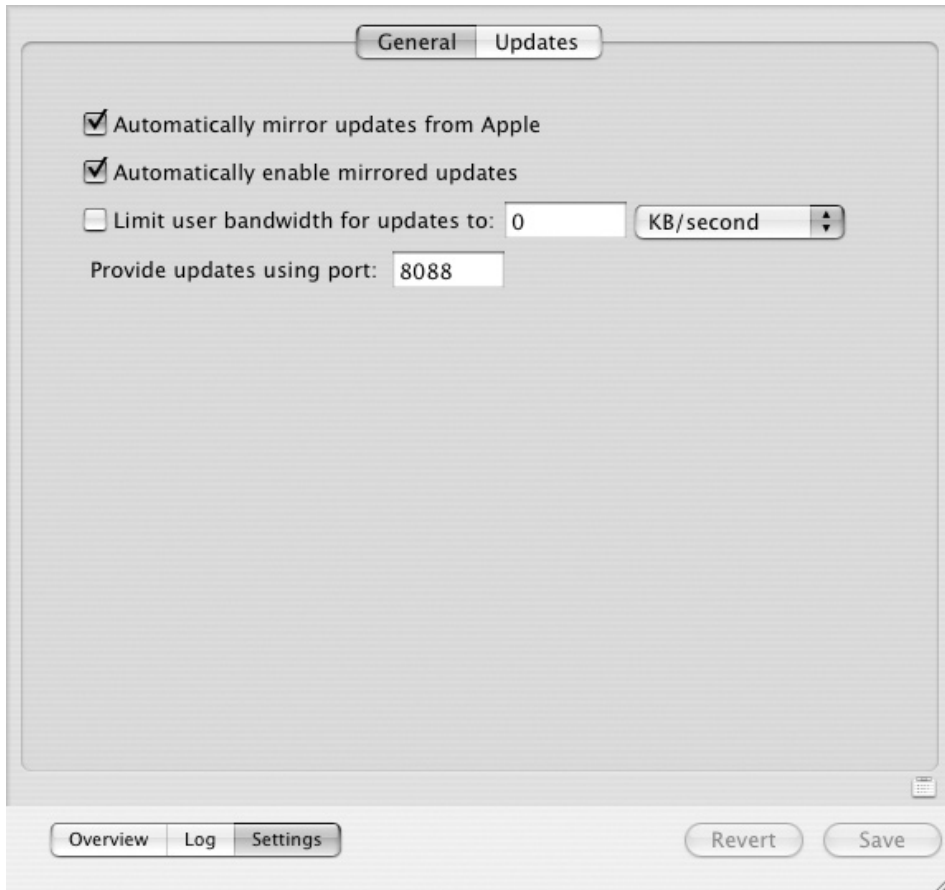
Your download progress

update from 10.4.4 to 10.4.5. There may be two choices for you. You may be able to use an incremental updater, which contains only what you need to go from 10.4.4 to 10.4.5. Or you may also be able to use a "Combo" updater that will allow you to update to 10.4.5 from any earlier version of 10.4 (i.e. 10.4.0, 10.4.1, 10.4.2, etc.) The Combo updaters are typically larger. But many admins prefer the Combo updaters because they seem to work better. If you have a problem after an incremental update, downloading and installing the Combo update will often fix things.

Senator Everett Dirksen in commenting on government spending is credited with noting, "A billion here, a billion there, pretty soon it adds up to real money." It's hard to imag-

Software Update Server continued

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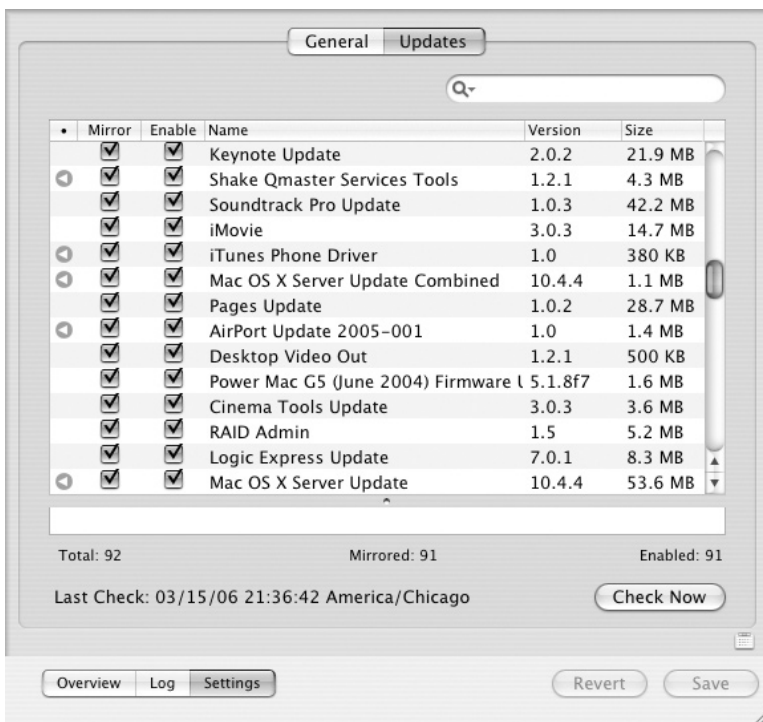
Your General Update Server preferences

ing anything as voracious as government's appetite for money. But be warned, cumulatively these software updates do have a way of eating server drive space, so allocate accordingly. "A few megabytes here, a few..."

Tiger Server's Software Update Server currently only works with updates for Tiger OS and updates for Apple applications, however if you have Tiger server, this is a very worthwhile feature to turn on. If you don't have Tiger Server, this is yet another reason to consider getting it.

The Software Update Server is quite easy to turn on and unless you want to do something unusual, there really isn't a lot to configure. And updating is far less of a pain for you and your users when it happens more quickly.

(As indicated, this is only part of the solution. It's a major improvement that updates happen fast. But how do you get them to happen without going to each machine? For details on the setup and other parts of the solution, check the documentation, or maybe a future article.) 🐼



The updates you have installed.