Microsoft has been heavily criticized over the years for distributing operating systems that lack a security kernel; however, in recent years, the giant company has made public commitments to improving security from the ground up. Indeed, Windows XP Pro seems to be the company’s most stable operating system yet.

Recently, as I was preparing references for a lecture on operating systems security, I came across a site on the Microsoft _TechNet_ that may be helpful to readers of this column. The “Security Guidance” page at

< http://www.microsoft.com/technet/security/guidance/default.mspx >

provides links to six major areas of white papers, checklists, and other useful documentation on security from the Microsoft perspective:

- Security Guidance Center Home
- Security Topics
- Products and Technologies
- How-Tos
- Checklists
- Modules.

The first page is an overview that features some of the topics in the more detailed sections.

“Security Topics” provides links to lists of articles bearing on

- Architecture and Design
- Assessment
- Auditing and Monitoring
- Cryptography, Certificates, and Secure Communications
- Desktop Security
- Developing Secure Applications
- Disaster Recovery
- Identity Management
- Network Security
- Patch Management
- Policies and Procedures
- Server Security
- Threats and Countermeasures.

“Products and Technologies” links to lists about
• Active Directory
• ASP.NET
• Exchange Server
• Internet Authentication Service (IAS)
• Internet Information Services (IIS)
• Internet Security and Acceleration Server (ISA)
• .NET Framework
• Office
• Software Update Services (SUS)
• SQL Server
• Systems Management Server (SMS)
• Web Services
• Windows 98
• Windows NT
• Windows 2000
• Windows XP

“How-Tos” goes to an index of articles cross-indexed according to the classes

• Assessment
• Cryptography, Certificates, and Secure Communications
• Desktop Security
• Developing Secure Applications
• Disaster Recovery
• Identity Management
• Network Security
• Patch Management
• Server Security.

Many of the listed articles are appropriate for several of the categories.

“Checklists” include a number of lists cross-indexed by the following categories:

• Architecture and Design
• Developing Secure Applications
• Network Security
• Securing a Windows Server 2003 Server
• Securing Windows XP
• Server Security

and again, several articles appear in several categories.

Finally, the “Modules” page includes these topics:

• Guide: Antivirus Defense-in-Depth
This page also points to 64 individual white papers on a wide range of security topics.

I looked at only a few documents in this vast collection, so I cannot claim to have evaluated all of them or even a significant sample; however, those I did examine seemed acceptably clear and concise. Specifically, I looked at “How to Use MBSA,” “How to Implement Patch Management,” “Checklist: Managed Code,” (which unfortunately begins, “This checklist is a companion to the odules…”), “Checklist: Securing Your Network,” and “Securing Your Network.” The latter included references to several Cisco security documents – a generosity of spirit that encourages me to think that Microsoft is indeed changing its ways for the better.

* * *

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