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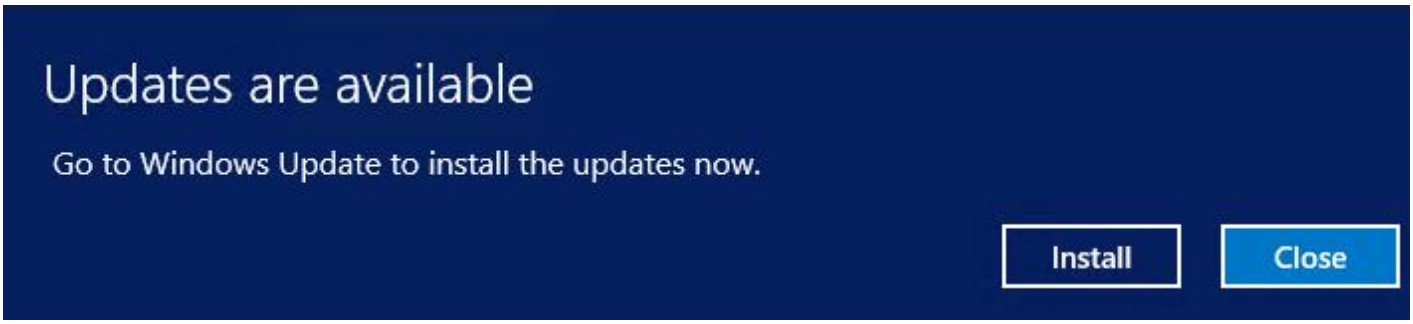
Latest Service Packs - To Install or Not to Install?

It is interesting, when working with many different clients, the questions about installing Windows Updates and SQL Server updates comes up and often the discussion leads to the pros versus cons of each. The need to apply updates and the balance with the business requirements.

Pros and Cons of Windows and SQL Server updates on Production SQL Servers:

PRO:

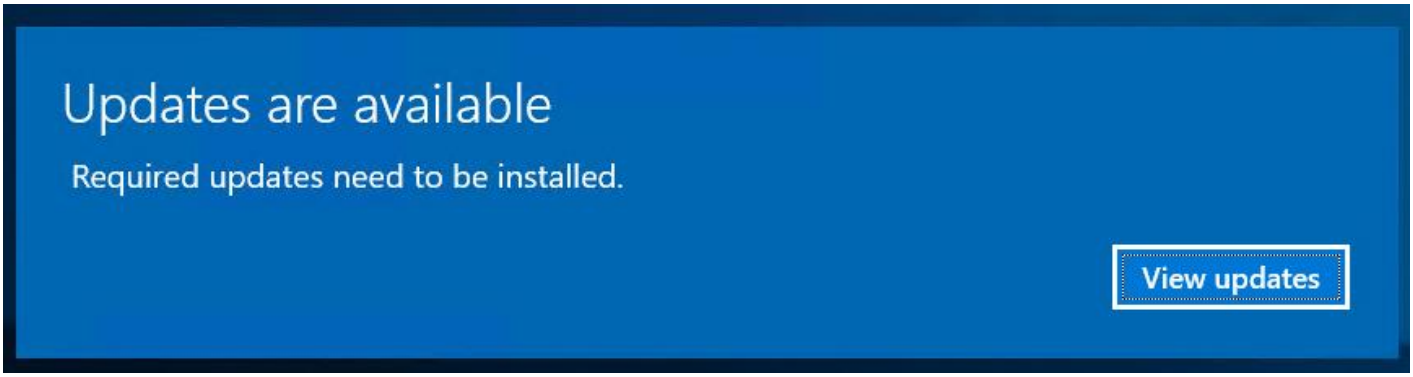
- Service packs contain the latest round of bug fixes for the operating system and SQL Server.
- Service packs contain security patches that may help prevent future exploits, such as ransomware and other security issues.
- You get rid of the nagging “Windows Updates are Available” message every time you log in to windows. The updates available message could lead to someone accidentally clicking the “install updates” option and having an unscheduled downtime during normal business hours.



CON:

- Risk: Any changes to a system can introduce risk. I have on a rare occasion seen an update fail and break the current SQL Server. This is rare, and can be mitigated by using a Virtual Machine Snapshot option.
- Downtime: Unless in an HA environment with AG’s or some other HA option, the install of the service pack and updates usually requires at least one reboot, and can require a couple reboots. Downtime with regular updates is usually less than an hour (depending on hardware speed).
- Risk: Bad service pack. Occasionally Microsoft has released a service pack that has caused issues. These are usually retracted within days of their release. This can be mitigated by not installing the bleeding edge update that was release this week or last

week.



Let me know what you think, are there any Pros or Cons that you would include in this list?