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Microsoft Revs Security Service

By [Kevin McLaughlin](#), [Barbara Darrow](#), CRN 9:00 AM EST Mon. Jun. 05, 2006

A decidedly retail-oriented onslaught of home PC care products sparked mixed reaction from value-added service providers that thus far have been shut out of the market.

Microsoft switched on its retail- and download-only [Windows Live OneCare](#) service last week. OneCare, like the [Symantec Norton 360](#) and [McAfee "Falcon"](#) subscription services to follow, promises to automatically update antispyware profiles and antivirus status, and ease backups and other updates on a subscription basis. Microsoft is charging \$49.95 per year for use on three PCs.

Neither Symantec nor McAfee, which last week preannounced their subscription-based security services, were willing to articulate exactly how channel partners would be involved in selling them.

A Symantec spokesman said the vendor plans to make Norton 360 available to white-box builders and VARs but declined further comment.

Norton 360 originally was intended to ship this summer but now isn't due until next March. Symantec also last week introduced Norton Confidential, a consumer security offering to combat threats from "crimeware" and phishing that the Cupertino, Calif.-based vendor plans to roll out by the end of the year.

Few VARs will put up a fight over such an inexpensive offering as OneCare who wants to quibble over margin on a \$17-dollar-per-year-per-PC service? But a growing number of home-focused service providers offer similar on-site services.

One Boston-area provider makes a good living helping home and SOHO customers sort through the supposedly easy-to-use Microsoft stack, for example. A good percentage of her house calls are spent helping customers decipher which updates to take and which to nix.

Mass-market chains, especially Best Buy, are likely beneficiaries of the retail service push even though there are no packaged goods to sell. Last month, Best Buy was the first national retailer to gain a Microsoft Gold certification.

As more road warriors work from home at least part time, services that protect home PCs benefit solution providers across the spectrum, some partners say. "Anything we can do to secure home PCs tapping into corporate networks is a good thing all around," said Gavin Livingstone, president of Bryley Systems, a security specialist in Hudson, Mass.

Steve Chan, vice president of ZipLip, a San Jose, Calif.-based ISV focusing on security and compliance solutions, agrees. "It's absolutely true that the bulk of telecommuters will benefit from this, but right now, most of our customers are higher end, and many of them end up using super-thin Citrix [Systems] entry points" connecting into secure corporate sites, he said.

All of the home PC care offerings will support Windows XP (usually Service Pack 2) and later versions of Windows, including Vista. The buzz for most seems to be: They let users set up their computer and forget about maintenance.

Windows Live OneCare is a "full PC care subscription service anti-virus, antispyware, performance tools to keep the PC running well, taking care of defrags, etc. It will assist in backup and restore. We know most consumers do not back up today," said Sam McManus, business strategy manager for Windows Live. She uses a pit-stop analogy to illustrate her point: Racing pit stop crews rush in to refuel and fix cars in a near-automated fashion while the driver just drives, she said.

"We are looking at being able to extend this to make it broadly available, but there are no specific plans for VARs and OEMs," McManus said.

ZipLip's Chan said the real story is the battle royale brewing between the big security vendors and Microsoft. "This is a fight between the big boys. They're all trying to address and solve problems for the consumers," he said. "We'll wait and see the implementations and how they work in the real

world."

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