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## **The importance of PTFs and Technology Refreshes on IBM iSeries**

We have seen a concerning trend among our iSeries clients to ignore IBM PTFs on their systems. After all, the system is working fine, and it will all get taken care of on the next version release. So, why not wait? The purpose of this document is to provide a further understanding of the importance of PTFs.

PTF stands for Program Temporary Fix. The “temporary” part of this means that it is an interim fix until the next release of the OS comes out. At that time the “fix” will be incorporated into the new release code.

Starting with V6R1, IBM has greatly slowed down the frequency of new OS releases, opting instead to add new functionality as well as fixes by issuing TRs (Technology Refreshes). This means it is more important now to keep up on PTFs because it will be a longer time before the new OS version comes out. In addition to updating the PTF level, The TRs add additional capabilities to the existing OS. Some of what has been added to V7R1 are User Profile Enhancements, Object Audit Enhancements, Data Encryption, Security Enhancements, and updated programming tools. These have all been delivered via TR to V7R1. In addition, there have been several TRs for V7R2.

These enhancements may or may not benefit you, so why should you care?

- If you ever use IBM software support, the first thing they ask is what your PTF level is. If you are back level, they will generally want you to get caught up before they will even start working on your issue.
- When IBM identifies a widespread problem, such as the recent Websphere Application Server Java vulnerability, they develop a fix. However, that fix is based on the most up to date version of the OS level it is for. They do not go back and test those fixes on OS versions that are not current with the latest PTFs and TRs So, while the fix is tested and verified, there is no guarantee that it will work on a system that is back level on PTFs.

- Skipping too many PTF/TR levels can cause incompatibility between your OS and your Microcode. This can prevent you from upgrading your server to a new OS level until the microcode is updated, causing additional downtime, and in some cases, requiring that the upgrade be reverted until the problem is fixed. Current PTF's cannot be installed if the Technology Refresh level is too far behind. It requires that additional steps be taken to update the system Licensed Internal Code (LIC).
- IBM's trend has to been to add the same OS functionality to all current OS levels. So, for example, new features and functionality included in V7R2, are added to V7R1 via Technology Refreshes. This means you can operate at an OS level longer without upgrading to some new release to obtain some functionality that you or your software vendor requires.
- IBM Licensed programs such as Websphere products are patched through the same process, but require extra steps, and are dependent on your overall PTF and TR level. These Licensed program patches are essential to enhancing performance and securing these products from Intrusion.

We strongly recommend that our clients keep up to date on PTFs and TRs. Talk to your software venders, they will tell you the same thing. Once you learn the process, managing and applying PTFs is not difficult. Or, if you prefer, talk to us, we can handle your updates on a turnkey basis, with very little interruption to your users or processes.

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