

# Should all windows appear in the taskbar?

---

 [devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20070117-01](http://devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20070117-01)

January 17, 2007



Raymond Chen

No new content today, just some follow-up discussion on the topic of windows that don't appear in the taskbar. The rules for which windows appear in the taskbar have been documented in MSDN for years, so changing the rules now would mean doing so after the game has ended. Consequently, this is not the sort of change that can be made lightly. First point is that the taskbar is called the “taskbar” and not something like the “open windows bar”. The name already suggests that the purpose is to display tasks, not open windows. I find it interesting that people, in their zeal to turn the taskbar into a “windows bar” end up removing other features, such as “How do I make a window appear in the Alt+Tab list but not in the taskbar?” Are the people who want to create such a window “just plain wrong”? (There are so many of these people that the Windows Forms folks added a `ShowInTaskbar` property just for this purpose!) Think about it the next time you complain that Windows doesn't let you do something—there is somebody just like you on the other side who said, “No, that's just plain wrong”. Besides, if you decided that all windows must appear in the taskbar, that means that the taskbar would be cluttered with tooltip windows, floating toolbars, desktop toolbars (those things that stick to the edge of the desktop), all sorts of stuff. Do you really want that? “The point of the taskbar is to show you what you have open.” Strange, I don't remember you at the design meetings or the usability sessions. One commenter noted that it took “several service packs” before Microsoft “fixed” the “problem” where property sheets didn't appear in the Alt+Tab list. That was actually a design decision. I remember asking this question at the internal meeting when the new user interface was revealed. The answer was, “If you want to re-open the property sheet from the keyboard, just go back to the original object and ask to see its properties again.” You may not like that decision (I sure didn't), but it wasn't a bug. It was on purpose. (A decision which was revisited and changed in Windows 2000, by the way, not a service pack.)

Another commenter argued that any windows that don't appear in the taskbar should be always-on-top. I suspect a lot of people would be upset that all property sheets suddenly became always-on-top. Among other things, it would mean that you would have to close all your property sheets and control panels before you ran a business presentation or played a game.

Raymond Chen

**Follow**

