

# Why is there a system sound called Asterisk? What sound does an Asterisk make anyway?

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A Twitter user who goes by the name [ASwisstone](#) asked [why there is a system sound called Asterisk](#). Yup there it is: `System.Media.SystemSounds.Asterisk`. What sound does an Asterisk make anyway?

If you dig into the reference source, you'll see that the `SystemSound.Play` method calls `SafeNativeMethods.MessageBeep` with the corresponding value `MB_ICONASTERISK`.

Okay, so this sound is intended to accompany an asterisk icon. But what is the asterisk icon?

The `MB_` prefix may be a clue. These are values that you can pass to the `MessageBox` function to specify what icon should be shown in the message box, and the sound plays when a message box is shown with the corresponding icon.

The documentation says that `MB_ICONASTERISK` produces “An icon consisting of a lowercase letter *i* in a circle.”

Wait a second, that's not an asterisk! It seems that each time we peel back a layer of the onion, the story just gets more confusing!

The story starts to become less murky when you notice that the `MB_ICONASTERISK` constant has the same numerical value (and same description) as the `MB_ICON-INFORMATION` constant.

Okay, now we can put the pieces of the story together.

Once upon a time, there was `MB_ICONASTERISK`, which presumably showed an asterisk icon. At some point, the asterisk was replaced with an information symbol and an alternate name for the flag was invented: `MB_ICONINFORMATION`.

To test this theory, I dug through the [pcjs.org](#) archive of old versions of Windows maintained by my retired colleague and doughnut enthusiast [Jeff Parsons](#) ([Previously](#) about Jeff.)

And lo and behold, we can see it in action: Fire up Windows 1.0, launch Notepad, and then hit **Ctrl** + **F** to call up the Search dialog. Search for some nonsense string and hit **Enter**.



The asterisk was also used in Windows 2.0 ([see for yourself](#)), but Windows 3.0 changed the icon to the information symbol. Nevertheless, the programmatic name remained “Asterisk”, for compatibility.

**Bonus chatter:** Mind you, Windows 1.0 didn't have support for any sounds aside from the plain old beep from the built-in PC speaker. Multimedia sound support didn't arrive until Windows 3.0.

**Bonus chatter 2:** At the same time that Asterisk became Information, the Hand was changed to a Stop sign.<sup>1</sup> The Exclamation didn't want to be left out of the party, even though its icon didn't change, but at least it was renamed to Warning.

<sup>1</sup> In Windows 95, the stop sign changed to a filled red circle with a white X.

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