

Grouping task bar icons patented by Microsoft

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Now task bar icon grouping is patented. Both the KDE and Gnome desktop panels can do this along with Windows XP. The patent is granted despite overwhelming amounts of prior art.

Microsoft now owns patent #6,756,999:

A method and system are provided for organizing, displaying, and accessing representations of one or more running tasks on a graphical user interface in a computer system. The system organizes like application files and clusters the corresponding taskbar buttons and, upon reaching a threshold limit, creates and displays a group button that contains the like application files and removes the like taskbar buttons from the taskbar. Further, upon reaching a second threshold limit, the system ungroups the application taskbar buttons, displays them on the taskbar and removes the group button from the taskbar.

The patent was filed March 6, 2001. BeOS' Tracker had the patented feature in 1999. The Amiga program Imagemaster, released in February of 1991, also does what the patent describes.

This patent is only valid in the USA.

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