

How did the X-Mouse setting come to be?

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Commenter HiTechHiTouch wants to know whether the “X-Mouse” feature went through the “every request starts at –100 points filter”, and if so, how did it manage to gain 99 points? The X-Mouse feature is ancient and long predates the “–100 points” rule. It was added back in the days when a developer could add a random rogue feature because he liked it. But I’m getting ahead of myself. Rewind back to 1995. Windows 95 had just shipped, and some of the graphics people had shifted their focus to DirectX. The DirectX team maintained a very close relationship with the video game software community, and a programmer at one of the video game software companies mentioned in passing as part of some other conversation, “Y’know, one thing I miss from my X-Windows workstation is the ability to set focus to a window by just moving the mouse into it.” As it happened, that programmer happened to mention it to a DirectX team member who used to be on the shell team, so the person he mentioned it to actually knew a lot about all this GUI programming stuff. Don’t forget, in the early days of DirectX, it was a struggle convincing game vendors to target this new Windows 95 operating system; they were all accustomed to writing their games to run under MS-DOS. Video game programmers didn’t know much about programming for Windows because they had never done it before. That DirectX team member sat down and quickly pounded out the first version of what eventually became known to the outside world as the X-Mouse PowerToy. He gave a copy to that programmer whose request was made almost as an afterthought, and he was thrilled that he could move focus around with the mouse the way he was used to. “Hey, great little tool you got there. Could you tweak it so that when I move the mouse into a window, it gets focus but doesn’t come to the top? Sorry I didn’t mention that originally; I didn’t realize you were going to interpret my idle musing as a call to action!” The DirectX team member added the feature and added a check-box to the X-Mouse PowerToy to control whether the window is brought to the top when it is activated by mouse motion. “This is really sweet. I hate to overstay my welcome, but could you tweak it so that it doesn’t change focus until my mouse stays in the window for a while? Again, sorry I didn’t mention that originally.” Version three of X-Mouse added the ability to set a delay before it moved the focus. And that was the version of X-Mouse that went into the PowerToys. When the Windows NT folks saw the X-Mouse PowerToy, they said, “Aw shucks, we can do that too!” And they added the three `SystemParametersInfo` values I described in an earlier article so as to bring Windows NT up to feature parity with X-Mouse.

It was a total rogue feature.

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