The evolution of Windows 8 charms

devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20180828-00

Raymond Chen

It's unclear what inspired the name for charms. It may have come from the item of jewelry, or perhaps from wine glass charms which are used at cocktail parties in certain social circles to identify which wine glass is yours.

Whatever the origin, the charms feature quickly gained the internal nickname Lucky Charms from the breakfast cereal.

I'm going to skip the prehistory of charms and just look at the evolution of the charm set.

Early design explorations came up with a list of _seven_ charms.

- Search
- Share
- Play To
- Print
- Pin
- Stash (I think this was sort of like a clipboard)
- Lookup (I don't know how this was different from Search)

After a few more design iterations, the list of charms evolved to

- Search
- Share
- Switch
- Start
- Devices
- Settings
- Language

(There's a long story behind the Switch charm, which I will have to tell some other time.)

Each charm opened a _blossom_, which was a radial menu that opened up _around_ the charm. This blossom idea didn't last long.

Eventually, the designers settled on these charms:

- Search
- Share
- Send To
- Start
- Connect
- Settings

We're very close to what shipped in Windows 8. Just two more tweaks.

The first tweak is that the *Connect* charm was renamed *Devices*.

The second tweak is that the *Send To* charm was removed. The story behind this is a bit more complicated.

As originally envisioned, the *Share* charm was for *social sharing*: emailing a Web page to your friend, posting to your Facebook page, that sort of thing. On the other hand, the *Send To* charm was for *sending data to another application*, like adding an item to a to-do list.

During the summer, we discovered that when our interns wanted an application to receive data from another application, it was pretty much a toss-up whether they registered the application as a *Share* target or a *Send To* target.

What this told us that segregating the two types of data sharing was interesting in a theoretical sense, but in practice, people didn't really make a distinction between the two. A last-minute design change was made to merge the *Share* and *Send To* charms into a single *Share* charm, and made it cover both social sharing and application sharing.

A happy side-effect of this reduction was that the number of charms was an odd number, allowing the Start charm to be placed in the center.

Raymond Chen

Follow