

Why doesn't the Programs and Features control panel show Last Used On information?

devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20190730-00

July 30, 2019



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A customer observed that the *Last Used On* column in the *Programs and Features* control panel doesn't appear by default, and if they turn it on, the column is simply blank. The customer wanted to confirm this behavior and asked if there was a way to obtain the *Last Used On* information by some other means.

I thought it was odd that the customer asked us to confirm what they were seeing. "When I hold my arms above my head, my shoulder hurts. Can you confirm that?" Um, it's your shoulder. We can't tell you how your shoulder feels.

I'm guessing that what they wanted was not a confirmation that their eyes were not deceiving them, but rather a confirmation that the behavior is intentional.

And yes, it is intentional.

The *Last Used On* information was always a guess, and a really dodgy one at that. As we noted earlier, if the application itself does not provide the information, the *Programs and Features* control panel runs some really coarse heuristics to find the program, consisting mostly of matching words in the program name in the *Programs and Features* control panel against the words in the program name in the Start menu.

There is no way to provide *Last Used On* information in the application registration (which makes sense since that is a dynamic concept not know at registration time), so for the *Last Used On* property, the system is always guessing.

The heuristic is bad, and it eventually was recognized as so laughably bad that it simply wasn't worth trying.

The column still exists in case there are programs which programmatically extract data from the *Programs and Features* control panel. They will still have a column to manipulate, but the column never contains any useful information.

The customer insisted upon an alternative mechanism that gave them the *Last Used On* information. I got the impression that they use this information to decide which programs their employees are using.

I guess if you want to know for real when a program is run, you can turn on AppLocker auditing. But the *Programs and Features* control panel doesn't try any more.

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