Microsoft is testing a new Windows 11 Start menu with floating widgets

Microsoft has quietly started testing an intriguing change to the Windows 11 Start menu that could introduce a floating panel full of “companion” widgets. Windows watcher Albacore discovered the new Start menu feature in the latest test versions of Windows 11 that Microsoft has released publicly.

While Microsoft has not yet announced this feature, the “Start menu Companions” appear to be a way to allow developers to extend the Windows 11 Start menu with widget-like functionality that lives inside a floating island that can be docked next to the Start menu. It looks like developers will be able to build apps that provide widget-like information through adaptive cards — a platform-agnostic way of displaying UI blocks of information.

These companions will be configurable in the main Windows 11 Settings section, with the ability to install multiple companions and toggles to enable or disable them. Albacore mentions that these companions seem to be very web-centric, much like the widgets inside Windows 11.

If Microsoft decides to proceed with this Start menu feature, it could be the answer to the loss of the Live Tiles that were removed in Windows 10X and Windows 11. Live Tiles, the animated and flipping icons from the Windows Phone days, offered widget-like information on the Start menu but weren’t widely supported by app developers. Microsoft first introduced them in Windows 8, back when the company was trying to bridge the gap with its Windows Phone OS. Live Tiles were designed to

be “glance and go,” so you could quickly look at a phone or Start menu and see the information you needed.

https://www.theverge.com/2024/5/9/24153058/microsoft-windows-11-start-menu-companions