Windows 8’s missing startup sound has been hiding in plain sight

A former Microsoft employee has revealed what the missing Windows 8 startup sound was supposed to be. Microsoft has used unique startup sounds in Windows versions for decades, but Windows 8 ended that tradition with a silent bootup process. While startup sounds eventually returned for Windows 11, the missing Windows 8 sound has been hiding in Windows 10 and Windows 11 for years now.

Jensen Harris, the former director of program management for the Windows user experience team at Microsoft, was behind the original startup sound removal in Windows 8. In a new YouTube video, Harris reveals what the missing Windows 8 sound is. (See video below.) It’s actually the same as the startup sound in Windows 10 and Windows 11, which isn’t enabled by default.

[embedded content]

So why did Microsoft decide to originally remove it? Harris explains that the increasing use of laptops led Microsoft to disable the startup sound in Windows 8, just as the company was trying to push more mobile PCs with Windows on ARM. It was a way to reduce distracting sounds, especially when you’re at a coffee shop booting up your laptop.

Harris did regret the removal, though. “I ended up somewhat regretting the decision to remove the sound, but by then it was too late to turn it back on by default,” explains Harris. Microsoft had been optimizing Windows 8 heavily, especially for ARM chips, and engineering teams had to remove all the

code that loaded the sound into memory and even code that supported the audio stack early in the boot process. Adding the sound back would have cost a second of the boot process and more memory usage.

“So I kept the sound in Windows hidden and just turned off,” explains Harris. The hidden sound is available in Windows 10 and 11 by opening up the Windows Logon.wav file found in C:\windows\media.

Microsoft had also been planning a special startup sound for the original Surface RT tablet. “It’s the Windows 8 startup sound, but with a grounding low note at the beginning,” explains Harris. “It mirrors the four-note progression of the Windows 7 startup sound, but it’s more complete and fuller.” Microsoft also disabled this sound as part of the bootup changes for Windows 8 and Windows RT.

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