Xbox, PC get a little bit closer with the latest Xbox updates

reader comments

11 with 11 posters participating

Share this story

The May 2019 update for the Xbox One's system software is now rolling out, bringing some small refinements to the friends list, messaging, and game/app list.

Starting with the last one first, the app list will now ignore "a," "an," and "the" when sorting or grouping alphabetically. This is the kind of change that makes me amazed that they weren't already doing this, as it almost always makes for easier-to-use listings. Video games don't even have *The The* to contend with.

The Messaging change is rather inexplicable. There's a sensible change: incoming messaging requests from your friends are now prioritized, with requests from non-friends put in a separate category. But for some reason, Microsoft is going to wipe all group messages as a result. You can save backups of the messages for a limited time at Xbox.com, and messages with individual users are safe, but the group messages are all going. There's no obvious justification for this change, as even if there were some significant change being made to group messaging, one would expect Microsoft to handle migrating the messages from old to new.

The most interesting change, however, is the one to the friends list. Microsoft is adding indicators beside the name of each online friend to indicate if they're in a game on console, using the Xbox app on Windows, or using the Xbox app on a smartphone. This should make it easier to know who you can invite to games, especially as cross-platform play becomes more common. Moreover, it underscores Microsoft's move to make Xbox a gaming brand independent of any particular hardware: you're still part of the Xbox ecosystem if you're on PC or mobile. Xbox isn't the hardware: Xbox is playing games with your friends, wherever you and they are.

On the PC side, Windows 10's Game Bar is being renamed the Xbox Game Bar, and the latest preview also includes the "Looking for Group" feature used to find people playing the game you want to play. Start a search for people to join your game, and you'll be notified not just on the PC, but also on the Xbox, that someone has been found. This feature was previously available on Windows in the Xbox *app*, but putting it in the Game Bar makes it faster and easier to use.

All together, it feels like Microsoft is blurring the lines between Xbox, PC, and Mobile gaming, and we can only expect those lines to get even more blurred in the future. The Xcloud gaming service further erodes these platform differences—while the premium experience will be offered on the console or a high-end PC, game streaming should make many games playable on just about any hardware. The final missing piece would surely be the ability to play Xbox games on PC. There are already signs that Microsoft is working on this, but such a change would further cement this shift in emphasis from console hardware to gaming wherever you are.

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1506953