
WINDOWS SHAREWARE FEATURE

SuperBar boosts productivity by automating repetitive tasks

By Chris Morton

From time to time, we like to tell you about shareware that's simply too good to ignore. In this article, we'll introduce you to SuperBar, a Windows utility that lets you add a highly flexible, custom toolbar to any Windows application, including those

that already feature toolbars that are far too rigid to be truly useful.

A superbar for every application

One of SuperBar's outstanding features is the fact that you can use it to create a customized

toolbar for each and every application. There's no limit to the number of superbars you may use in your Windows installation.

Let's consider any of Windows' applets, such as Cardfile, Notepad, Terminal, or Write. For Cardfile to be more useful, you should be able to quickly toggle between Card view and List view. If you use Cardfile as much as we do, making multiple menu selections with the mouse to simply switch between the View menu's Card and List commands quickly becomes annoying. The simple addition of two buttons on a superbar—modified just for Cardfile—makes all the difference. SuperBar also offers an easy way to record macros of multistep functions you execute often. You can then assign them to a superbar button. For example, if you add a superbar to File Manager, you can instantly access DOS utilities or multistep search engines, as shown in **Figure A**.

Even some powerhouse applications, such as Adobe PageMaker 6.0, lack a customizable toolbar, despite recent upgrades to many software packages. In fact, it was the absence of a user-modifiable toolbar in PageMaker that led us to hunt for a utility that has the power and flexibility of SuperBar.

Obtaining SuperBar

SuperBar is distributed online as shareware. Its author, William Woods, is a member of the Association of Shareware Professionals (ASP), a respected organization that scrutinizes members' software. Should you continue to use the program after a suitable trial period, it's your responsibility to register SuperBar for \$20 plus \$2 for shipping and handling. If you have access to the Internet, you can download the latest SuperBar version, 2.0o, from

<http://ourworld.compuServe.com:80/homepages/superbar>

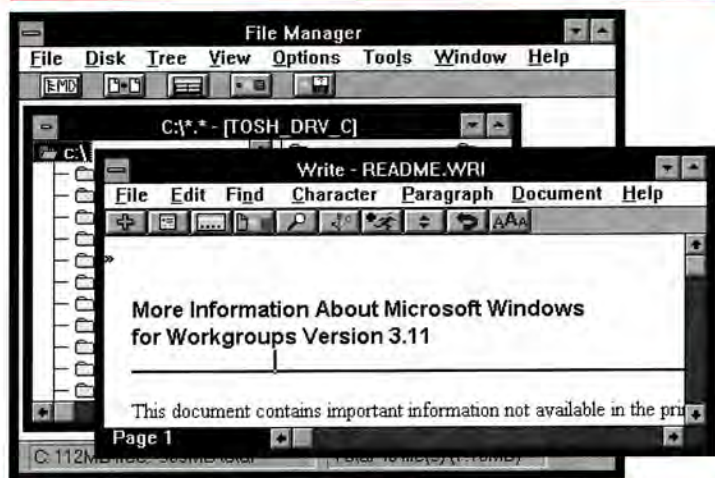
You can also pose questions to the program's author. CompuServe members will find SuperBar in the WINSHARE forum in Library 6. You can reach William Woods at P.O. Box 9904, Newport Beach, CA 92658-9904.

Setting up SuperBar to load automatically

SuperBar ships with its own setup utility, which, along with executable and other ancillary files, adds a few dynamic-link library (DLL) files to the \WINDOWS\SYSTEM directory.

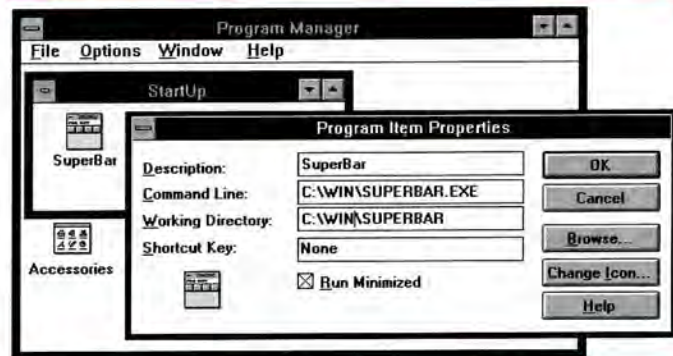
It then creates a SuperBar group in Program Manager. To enable SuperBar to load automatically with every Windows session, your best bet is to copy the SuperBar icon from this group to Program Manager's StartUp group. To do so, start by pressing the [Ctrl] key while you drag the SuperBar icon and drop it in the StartUp group. Next, make sure the StartUp group is open and hold down the [Alt] key while you double-click the SuperBar icon in the StartUp window. When the Program Item Properties dialog box appears, click the Run Minimized check box, as shown in **Figure B**, and then click OK. Now, when SuperBar loads during the Windows boot process, it will appear on your desktop as a minimized icon rather than an open application window.

Figure A



By using SuperBar, you can easily add a custom toolbar to any Windows application.

Figure B

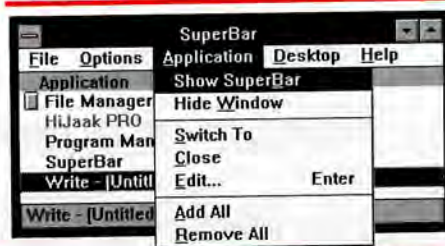


Copy the SuperBar icon to the StartUp group and click the Run Minimized check box.

Creating a superbar for an application

It's now easy to create a superbar for any application. First, run the desired application. Next, restore the minimized SuperBar icon from the desktop after Windows loads, or simply double-click the SuperBar icon in either the StartUp or the SuperBar group in Program Manager. Then, click an application once in the SuperBar window to select it, then choose the Show SuperBar command from SuperBar's Application menu, as shown in Figure C. You're now ready to switch to your application with the Application menu's Switch To command and begin customizing its superbar.

Figure C



Select a running application, then choose the Show SuperBar command from the Application menu to start customizing an application's superbar.

SuperBar's power source—and the secret to using it

SuperBar ships with a host of already-defined standard menu actions, such as the File/Open... sequence. However, SuperBar derives its real strength from Recorder, the macro utility that Microsoft includes in every copy of Windows 3.x. Perhaps you've tried using Recorder without much success and have given up on it. But with SuperBar's simplified Recorder interface and a little know-how, you'll be able to create macros that function correctly all the time.

To begin the process of recording a macro, right-click a blank area within your application's superbar and choose Record Macro. SuperBar responds by displaying its Record Macro dialog box, with Clicks & Drags as the default option in the Record dropdown list, as shown in Figure D. However, recorded mouse movements are relative to whatever happens to be open on your desktop at the time you create a macro. When replayed, that type of macro will most likely fail if your desktop doesn't display the same set of windows in exactly the same positions—an unlikely proposition.

Figure D



Change the default Clicks & Drags setting to Ignore Mouse if you want "bulletproof" macros.

When you're creating a macro, it's best to record only keystrokes by changing the Record field setting to the Ignore Mouse option. Since keystrokes are absolute values that Recorder can't misinterpret, your macros become virtually "bulletproof" and can even be shared with users on other PCs, provided those machines run the same applications that are manipulated by the macros. (For more information, see "Running Windows from the Keyboard," on the next page.) Now, to start recording your macro, click OK. To stop recording the macro, press [Ctrl][Break].

For example, suppose you want to create a SuperBar macro that will search your hard drive for all bitmap files. To begin, right-click in File Manager's superbar and choose Record Macro. Next, choose Ignore Mouse in the Record dropdown list and then click OK. Now, press [Alt][F] to access the File menu (remember, you can't use your mouse while recording this macro). Press H for Search, and then type *.bmp in the Search For text box. If you need to, press [Tab] and type C:\ in the Start From text box and select the Search All Subdirectories check box. Now, press [Enter] to execute your search, and then press [Ctrl][Break] to stop recording the macro.

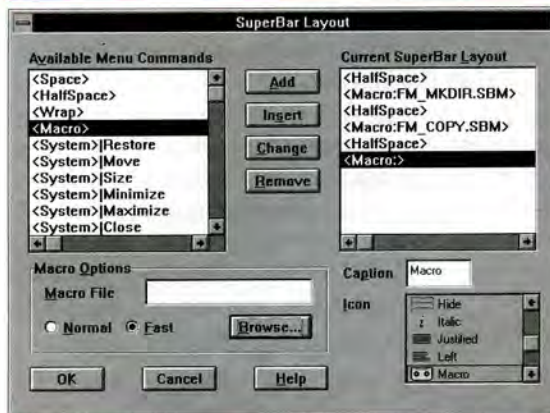
Next, you'll see the Save Macro File text box, where you'll be asked to give your macro a name. We suggest using some sort of naming convention to help you remember what each macro does—for example, BMSEARCH for our bitmap search macro in File Manager. So, type BMSEARCH in the File Name text box. By default, SuperBar adds its SBM extension to all macros and saves the files in its own directory.

Hooking up the macro

Once you've recorded a macro, you need to attach it to a superbar button for instant access. Right-click the superbar in your application window (it will appear above the program's own toolbars) and choose the Edit SuperBar command, then click the Layout... button in

the resulting dialog box. Choose <Macro> in the Available Menu Commands list, as shown in **Figure E**, and click the Add button. Now click the Browse... button, locate the recorded SBM file, and double-click it. Select an icon from the ones that appear at this point and click OK twice. You now have your first SuperBar macro button, ready to remove the tedium from repetitive functions.

Figure E



Use this dialog box to hook up macros and built-in commands to superbar buttons.

The payoff

Whether or not you're conscious of them, you typically carry out many repeated actions in

applications you use every day. Some, like Microsoft Office products, provide toolbars that you can customize to include one-button access to user-created macros. However, you often have to learn a separate macro language for each application, which sometimes requires a steeper learning curve than you had originally bargained for. By using SuperBar, you have a common method to deploy custom toolbars wherever you need them—even in applets, applications, and utilities that didn't include them as a standard feature. ❖

Running Windows from the keyboard

If you're unfamiliar with running Windows and Windows-based applications from the keyboard, consult the appendix of your *Microsoft Windows 3.1x User's Guide*, one of two manuals that ship with Windows 3.1x. To help get you started, look at the menu of any Windows application. To access the File menu, for example, press the corresponding shortcut key sequence—[Alt]F. To open a file from the File menu, again press the menu choice's corresponding underlined character—in this case, O. To navigate within any dialog box, you can use the [Tab] key along with the cursor movement keys and the [Enter] key.