

SoundCron

Introduction

You hold, in that grubby little PC of yours, the newest copy of SoundCron. The version number is 2.0.1... Actually, this is the first official release of this software but it is in its second incarnation. The original version was completed in November of 1993 and only used at home and at work, mostly as a gag item. I have found, however, many uses for this little ditty and decided that it should be shared with the world.

Description

SoundCron is a mouse driven Visual Basic MS Windows (TM) application which is used to verbalize events through your sound board (or through *speaker*). Use it to announce when applications have died, when applications are activated, or when files have changed. I use it to announce when new phone messages have arrived. You could use it as an alarm clock or as a gentle reminder to tell your kids to go to bed at a certain time. You could also use it to announce when an application is finished (or is starting).

SoundCron is based on the UNIX concept of a cron table, where you can batch up jobs to run at various times of the day; except that it is used exclusively for sound files. It cannot be used to run applications nor execute scripts. It is merely a way to force sounds to be spoken or blurted at intervals.

SoundCron differs from pure cron tables in that it allows events to be triggered only if certain system events have occurred.

*(Note that the sounds used are any wave files currently on your system. You cannot use SoundCron to create sound files. You **can** create your own using any sound recorder that comes with your sound card or, you can download any of many files found in your local cyberspace.)*

Triggers (Conditions)

Before you start with SoundCron, there is one definition you should know: Triggers. Triggers are the conditions which can be used to cause a sound to be blurted. These are things like the existence of a file or the age of a file.

There are five triggers which can be used. Below are the five basic events under which the sounds are blurted (look for these fields in the *Conditions* area of SoundCron):

1 - always

No matter what. At the intervals specified, the designated sound file is blurted regardless of the state of the system.

2 - a file exists

The designated sound is triggered only if the identified file exists. I use this on my system to periodically blurt a warning that there is a phone message waiting (but only during the day).

3 - a file is newer than time <t> or newer than a file <fname>

The designated sound is triggered only if the identified file exists AND the file is newer than a given time. I use this method to blurt out warnings **very often**, if there is a **recent** phone

message (less than 8 hours old) that has not yet been listened to.

4 - an application is not running

The designated sound is triggered if an application is NOT running. I use this to monitor for applications that may have crashed or are finally finished (i.e. - downloading).

5 - if an application is the active application.

The designated sound is triggered if an application is the active application. This was my first use and was used to tell a user that they were naughty for launching a game on their computer when they should be working (just a joke). Subsequently, I have found it useful to monitor recorded scripts and tell me when that script has gotten to an important point.

What you need

You will need a MS Windows 3.1 based PC. You will also need an unzipper... there are lots around. Also, you will need 1 MByte of disk space. Other than that, everything should be included.

Installing Sound Cron

1) Unzip sndcron.zip.

2) Be sure you have the appropriate DLL files:

You must have vbrun200.dll, threed.vbx and grid.vbx somewhere on your system and reachable by your Windows environment. Place these in your /windows or your windows/system directory... that will make life much simpler. Of course, be sure that you are not replacing a better (newer) version that may already be in your one of your directories.

3) Be sure you Sound Cron can find the database:

SoundCron saves your work in a file called "sndcron.dat". The location and name can be passed through the command line (i.e. - sndcron a:/datafiles/sndcron.dat). It is best, at least until you get the feel of it all, to make sure the sndcron.dat file is in the same directory as sndcron.exe).

4) Be sure you know where your sound (wav) files are:

You will be searching for some .wav files. There is a browser, but it is not a very exciting interface. I have included a couple of .wav files as a test. When you first load SoundCron, you can incorporate these sound files.

5) Be sure you have your sound driver installed and running:

This is sound card dependant.

For those who do not have a sound card, you can still use speaker.exe which can be found all over the place (including on the Internet). I have included a copy for your convenience. It is a self extracting file... just run speak.exe and it will extract itself. Read the readme file... it is very easy to install. REMEMBER: If you have a sound card, DO NOT install speaker.exe, it is NOT necessary.

The Sound Cron Application

Sound Cron Fields

SoundCron should launch easily. Get it going and look carefully at your Sound Cron. You will see several editable fields. If the use of a field seems murky, select it and read the Mini-Help area: It will give you a brief description of what that field does. Here, for those few who like to read the direction *before* trying to break an application, are some hints as to how to use each field:

Event Grid:

This grid contains the name and state of all current available events. Select the event's name to make it the current editable event... this will cause all of the below fields to change and allow you to edit the configuration of this event. You can toggle on/off or delete the event by selecting the second column (note that when you select this field, it toggles between being active and suspended. Also note that when the mouse button is pressed down, the icon changes to a lit match... in this state, drag the mouse over the garbage can and release and, voila, the event will be removed. Note the cute burning of the trash!)

Sound Filename field:

Enter into this field the full path name of the .wav file that you wish to be uttered. Note that you can browse for the file.

Browse... button:

Browse for existing .wav files.

Description field:

Enter any descriptive string. This just to make it easier for you to remember what this event is supposed to do.

Days of the week list:

Highlight only the days on which you want the event is to occur... ie - I don't like the event "Wake up for work" to be active on Saturdays and Sundays.

Note: You must select at least one valid day.

Note: This list uses extended multiple selections. You can use shift-click to extend selections, or ctrl-click to toggle items.

Hours list:

Highlight only the hours of the day during which the event is to occur.

Hint: don't have your computer sing and dance in the middle of the night... it wakes up the baby.

Note: You must select at least one valid hour.

Note: This list uses extended multiple selections. You can use shift-click to extend selections, or

ctrl-click to toggle items.

Minutes list:

Here is where you control how often an event occurs, right down to a resolution of one minute.

Note: You must select at least one valid minute.

Note: This list uses extended multiple selections. You can use shift-click to extend selections, or ctrl-click to toggle items.

Replace button:

Updates the currently selected grid event with the current fields and lists that you have just edited.

Note: changing the Grid is only valid for the duration of the current instance of the application. Restarting the application will revert events to their previous state. To store permanently, see the Save button.

Add As New button:

Adds the fields that you have edited as a brand new event to the Grid.

Note: changing the Grid is only valid for the duration of the current instance of the application. Restarting the application will revert events to their previous state. To store permanently, see the Save button.

Save button:

Stores the current state of the Event Grid to disk. Subsequent reboots or new instances of the application will use the new Event Grid.

Undo Changes button:

The event grid is cleared and reloaded from disk.

Invisible Icon toggle:

Makes the Sound Cron icon invisible.

Conditions switches:

Allows the user to trigger events only if certain system events have occurred, such as when files exist, files are relatively new, applications are running, or applications have ceases to run. See *The Five Basic Events* elsewhere in this document for further information.

Application field:

The name of the form or application which you wish to monitor. Use the application's title.

Note: the application name must match exactly with the window title.

File Name:

The name of the file which you wish to monitor. Depending on the Newer field, the age or

existence of this file will trigger the event.

Newer Than field:

Given that you are monitoring a file, this field lets you choose how new the file must be, before you are interested in an event being triggered. You can enter three types of values here:

1 - another filename: The event will be triggered only if the monitored file is newer than this file.

2 - *x days* or *x hours* or *x minutes* - The event will be triggered only if the monitored file is newer than *x* days, hours or minutes (where *x* is a valid real number). Note that you cannot mix days, hours and minutes: you must specify just one. ie - 2 days is valid, as is 48 hours... but 2 days 4 hours will be interpreted as just 2 days.

3 - valid date - Any valid MS date text. Some examples are: 12:00 Jan 30 1994 or 1:01 AM

Future Releases

The future looks bright for Sound Cron. I have already planned several releases.

First, bug fixes will probably drive at least one release more than I currently have planned.

Second, there are some obvious enhancements:

Help files - The next version will include a complete help file. I have the prototype finished (complete with embedded sound files).

Better error catching - particularly in the fields of *Filename* and *Newer Than*.

Menu bar - I actually removed a menu bar to simplify the design, but many people have rightfully pointed out that a properly designed Windows application should have a menu and a method to use short cut keystrokes... so be it.

Mini Help - The default location of the mini help is along the bottom of the application. If enough people can sway me, I will move this mini-help to the bottom.

A better sound browser - There's gotta be a better way.

Third, I am sure that as I learn the intricacies of all those sound cards out there, I will discover many enhancements worth adding. One example that I have already considered is as follows: My sound card is the NS Tyin 2000. It is not only a sound card but a modem/fax and answering machine. I have a plan to use Sound Cron to dial a number and speak messages according to events. (i.e. - "hello, this is your network monitor. Please be advised that your file server is no longer responding"). Also, I am currently looking to incorporate a text-to-speech synthesizer to allow the machine to speak raw text files.

How can you help?

Remember, this is Shareware: Sound Cron will only evolve if you help. I am looking for ideas and money. If you use Sound Cron, I am looking for donations of \$10.00. Please make cheques payable to John Chase as described below (this will help pay for resources to help me continue). If you find something wrong with Sound Cron or you have better ideas, please forward any constructive criticism to the author. I am particularly interested in how Sound Cron runs with various integrated hardware... please let me know of any successes and failures with specific hardware so that I can build a matrix of supported pieces.

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