Activity Monitor 1.0
Copyright © Louis Desjardins 1994

User's Guide

Introduction: What is the Activity Monitor?

As the name indicates, this program is designed to monitor the activity on your system. Activity Monitor, ACTMON.EXE, will record on an on-going basis all the active applications on your system, and make note of the application with the focus. Every time the focus, or in other words the system's attention, passes from one application to the next, the Activity Monitor will record the change. It will accurately report most Windows applications (we have yet to find an application that it does not report accurately -- please let us know if there is one!), as well as DOS applications running in a window. It will not, however, detect and record DOS applications running in a full screen. The log file that it produces is encrypted for added security. As is the case with simple encryption algorithms, anyone spending enough time on it will crack the code, but this one should be sufficiently complicated to stop the average peeper long enough.

The Activity Monitor, as was just hinted, can have applications as a security or as a reporting tool. For example, if you suspect that someone is using your system without authorization, you can obtain a full account of the illicit activity through the use of the Activity Monitor, since it can be made virtually invisible to the average user. Again, any given individual with a sufficient knowledge of Windows will in relatively little time detect the activity of the program, and possibly disable it, but even moderately advanced users should not be able to detect its presence on your system.

You can use the Activity Monitor as a reporting tool, showing a complete log of active applications and in some cases of the open files to an eventual supervisor.

As you have probably guessed by now, this program can also be used to monitor an employee's activity unbeknownst to him or her. We do not approve of the use of the Activity Monitor in such spying uses without due cause, and ask our customers to use this tool with discernment.

System requirements:

Activity Monitor 1.0 requires Windows 3.1 or later. The installation, using the third option (Visible Mode, Program Manager Icon) may fail if you are using replacement shells such as the Norton Desktop or others, because the installation program uses Program Manager-specific DDE commands. It is recommended to use the Activity Monitor on systems with 4 MB of RAM or more, although it would work well on systems with less memory. On systems with less than 4 MB of memory, the Activity Monitor 1.0 may cause a slight degradation of performance on the system, and this speed reduction could tip off would be peepers that it is installed on the system.

Method of operation:

The Activity Monitor is a little program which is automatically launched along with Windows. This can be acheived in a number of ways, which we will discuss later. The program immediately takes note of the time and date of the launch, and then checks the system every subsequent 30 seconds

approximately. (the program is assigned a low priority. It will not interfere with your more important work.) Each time the Activity Monitor detects that a new application has the focus, it writes it in a log file. The entry contains the date, time, name of the application, actual path and file name of the executable, and in some cases, a mention of the currently open file. The log file can only be read by the Activity Monitor, and only when the Activity Monitor Setup Utility is also running, as an added precautionary measure. We will come back to this later.

Installation and De-Installation:

If you downloaded the Activity Monitor 1.0 from a BBS, then it came as a ZIP file, and you probably expanded it on your hard disk. The installation program will work just fine from there, but if your intent is to confirm illicit activity on your computer, then it is better to remove this and other Activity Monitor related files from your hard disk, keeping only the installed program, INI and LOG files. You may use UTIL.EXE to transfer the files to a diskette. UTIL.EXE will also help you through the preparation of a registration form. Please make sure that you expand the ZIP file in a specific directory, which does not contain any other files, otherwise don't use the option to move the system to a diskette as offered in UTIL.EXE: it could wipe some of these other files away from the disk. There is no risk at all for files outside the sub-directory where you expanded the zip file.

In order to work properly, the Activity Monitor must be installed and initialized. This is done with the companion program, AMSETUP.EXE, which is an installation and de-installation utility designed specifically for the Activity Monitor. AMSETUP will install all the required files, create the appropriate INI file and set operating parameters according to your system configuration, and to the installation option selected. It will also remove all traces of the Activity Monitor when you no longer require it on your system, removing all the files that it installed and erasing the log files created by the Activity Monitor.

If you use the registered version, then when you launch AMSETUP for the first time, you will be prompted to enter your name, and your Company name. The Shareware version lacks this feature, but is otherwise identical. Of course, we can only offer support to our registered customers. You will be required to provide your licence number when you call for service.

The Activity Monitor can be operated in two ways, and installed in four different ways.

The first operation mode is called Stealth. Under this mode, the program is virtually undetectable. It is not visible, does not respond to keyboard or mouse events, does not produce any icon at the bottom of the screen and does not appear on the Task Manager's list of active programs.

The second mode of operation is the Visible mode, under which the program runs as an icon that can be restored. There is not much point in restoring it, however, because the program must receive a special parameter from AMSETUP in order for it to be able to read and manipulate the log file. This mode is mostly designed to be a deterrent for eventual peepers.

The first installation option specifies the launch of the program through the RUN line in your WIN.INI. This line is seldom used by modern programs; its functionality was replaced and enhanced by that of the Start-Up group under Windows 3.1. Using the RUN line is the preferred method of installation under the Stealth mode, since very few users ever dare to venture in the WIN.INI file, and also because since it is little known, few people will think of looking there.

The second installation option specifies the launch through the use of a hidden WIN.BAT file in your root directory. In this case, your AUTOEXEC.BAT file is saved under a new name (for the subsequent de-installation), edited to change any reference to WIN.COM, and the WIN.BAT file is

then created. It accepts up to 5 command line parameters in addition to the ACTMON.EXE reference. All the command line parameters in your AUTOEXEC.BAT are preserved. AMSETUP will not however edit any other shell, such as the DOSSHELL or any other menuing system. This option is far less secure than the first one, since many common programs such as the DOSSHELL and the File Manager can display hidden files. The Activity Monitor is therefore far easier to detect if this option is selected. You may increase your chances by disabling the "Show Hidden/System Files" option in both the DOSSHELL and the File Manager.

The Visible Mode has two additional options available to it. First, AMSETUP can add the Activity Monitor to your Start-Up group, regardless of whether its name. AMSETUP will probe your PROGMAN.INI to detect any special name you may have given to your Start-Up Group. If you deleted the Start-Up group from the program Manager, then AMSETUP will create it back. As you are probably aware, the Start-Up Group contains all the applications to be automatically launched with every start of Windows. You can add and remove applications freely in this group, unless you restricted the editing rights of the user to the Program Manager. It is a good idea to reset all such options prior to installing the Activity Monitor 1.0. Once installed, you may return to the restricted setup. AMSETUP will not handle editing restrictions automatically.

Finally, the program can be launched from the WIN.INI LOAD line, which works much like the RUN line, except that the loaded applications run minimized until restored.

Should an unexpected error occur during installation, AMSETUP will clean-up all the successful steps so far, and leave your system the way it was.

When you remove ACTMON.EXE, the options you select have no bearing on the de-installation process. The parameters used by the de-installation routine are all internal, and the routine does not read the parameters set by the user at the time of de-installation. Instead, it reads the parameters recorded at the time of the installation in the file ACTMON.INI. It is important not to delete, move or rename this file, or the de-installation process will fail.

Reading the log file:

The only way to read the log file, short of writing an other program to decrypt it, is to send an access code to the Activity Monitor, using AMSETUP. Launch AMSETUP, and click on the "Log File" command button. This will cause AMSETUP to send the access code to ACTMON, and the content of the log file will be displayed. You will be able to read, print or purge the log file. **Please notice that you must purge the log file regularly, because if it becomes larger than about 30KB, ACTMON.EXE will crash reading it.**

The final word:

This program is very easy to use, or at least we think it is. This is the first release of the program, and you may want to see new features added to it. Please report any improvements that you would want, and any problem that you may encounter using the Activity Monitor 1.0.

Version 1.1 is at the planning stages. It will include new features that we trust be useful for the business users and to the home users alike. We will also add to the improvements any suggestions from users that we feel are of general interest. We can also make versions of this program that are specific to the needs of one customer. Prices for such custom releases need to be negociated on a case by case basis. Customers who wish to purchase upwards of 100 licences, please contact us for company wide licensing agreements and prices.

Louis Desjardins, 1994 04 01 CIS #: 72202,3662