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The RAMBar Shell!

Program Manager Shell!
Version 4.0
Copyright (c), 1994, 1995 Ron Mc Neill
(Dr. Suess)

So What's New?
About RAMBar!
About RAMShell!
Gettin' Started...
Registration
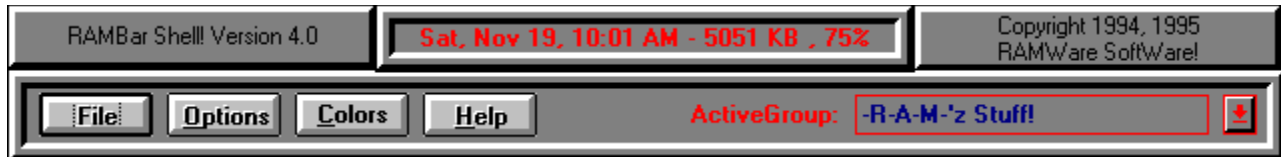Distribution
Disclaimer
What else can I read?

The RAMBar! started out as a simple little icon bar that provided the compatibility of the Program Manager Group files with the simplicity of having all your applications at the touch of a button!. I now know now why most Button Bars and Front End Programs use their own format (usually an INI file or something) for there Icon Groups! Reading the *.GRP files can get tricky. As far as writing to the groups, I believe Microsoft has that covered in there copyrights. Besides, the Program Manager handles that task fine. It just needs a little help from a USER FRIENDLY interface to work from recreating the wheel by trying to make RAMBar! act like a Windows Shell just doesn't seem practical. What I want is the convenience that Program Manager doesn't provide, like a compact Icon Bar, an attractive user interface, and ease of use. I strongly believe a Windows Program should look like a Windows Program, but not your Desktop, it should be as convenient as any Modern Desktop in any office (complete with buttons and everything!). If Microsoft intended a Windows program to simulate a piece of paper, why then does their default desktop look like a Windows program? I haven't seen any real desk that looked like a piece of paper.

RAMWare SoftWare is committed to make your life as a Windows user (or DOS user) easier by providing utilities on a "Try Before You Buy" plan. Normally I make simple programs that are handy to have around (like my collection of batch file utilities, BATUTIL2.ARJ, that can turn a batch file into a powerful Menu program for DOS enabling color without ANSI drivers, getting input from users, etc., etc.). Just as DOS Shell is really a COMMAND.COM Shell, RAMBar! is a Program Manager Shell (COMMAND.COM really handles the "Shell" functions in DOS, DOS Shell simply provides ease of use and "shelter" from the command prompt). So therefore, The RAMBar is not a "Windows Shell", but a "Program Manager Shell" (or enhancer, if you prefer) and a very convenient, user friendly way to access your Program Manager Groups!

The program groups are no longer edited using the Program Manager, version 4.0 comes with GROUPED.EXE that can be accessed from the RAMSHELL Menu. The RAMBar! no longer reads the Group files, "Dynamic Data Exchange" was introduced in version 3.0 that enables RAMBAR Shell! to "talk" to Program Manager (which by the way is in a hidden state) so it no longer needs to waste time reading data that's already in fast memory, it also helps keep the same data from being loaded twice into your memory as RAMBar! needs data, it simply "asks" for it and Program Manager is happy to provide the information and perform all needed tasks as a hidden shell. The same holds true with editing the Groups, RAMBar! simply "tells" Program Manager what it needs to do. If you need to get to Program Manager just click a menu selection and it instantly appears (just as all you need to do is select "Command Prompt" (or Shift + F9) in Dos Shell, BTW: Dos Shell, Windows, and Program Manager are all copyrights of Microsoft, all rights reserved (Sorry, I had to throw that in!)!

I have however limited the "Icon Bars" to a maximum of 30 Items, as opposed to

Program Manager's 50, this was done because most Windows Documentation on Resource Management recommends that program groups stay around 15 items or less (this saves the resources it takes to display all those icons!). I have however increased that to 30 though because some people like big groups but 15 items will fit in one button bar and that keeps a nice streamlined look in your Windows (NOTE: over 15 items   will result in two rows of icons which makes things look a little bulkier). You can load bigger groups, RAMBar! will just ignore what is past the maximum, and will display an error letting you know that all items weren't displayed.

| RAMBar Shell! Version 4.0 | Sat, Nov 19, 10:01 AM - 5051 KB , 75% | Copyright 1994, 1995 RAMWare SoftWare! |

| File | Options | Colors | Help | ActiveGroup: -R-A-M-'z Stuff! |

   The most popular change to RAMBar! has been the addition of RAMShell! It consists simply of a "Menu Bar" leaving all your attractive wallpaper for everyone to see. If you don't have Wallpaper (or just like to conserve resources, then select a nice pattern, and change your color scheme to make things a bit more pleasing to the eye. Not to mention, your Desktop is less cluttered! Want to "Tile", or "Cascade" your windows, Double click on your Desktop to activate the Task Manager.

   The RAMShell slightly resembles PCTools Desktop (Copyright Central Point SoftWare, All rights reserved). I like the Desktop's user interface, with a few exceptions. The main reason being it just flat uses too much memory for a desktop program. The Dynamic Data Exchange features of RAMShell make it a very powerful program, capable of doing almost anything with less memory being used (at least in this instance). More and more Windows applications are starting to include DDE capabilities (Microsoft Word, Microsoft Access, and Microsoft Excel are some I can think of off hand).

 The title bar displays the Date, Time, the amount of free memory in kilobytes, and the percentage of TOTAL free resources for monitoring your memory while you work.

   The Menu Bar specifies which group is currently active four buttons that Drop the menus and dialog boxes to configure RAMShell and run various features. The Menu Bar now features an Active Group Combo Box to allow easy selections of your Program Manager Groups. A "Colors" button has been added at your request to allow you to customize the RAMShell colors to taste. The four main control buttons are as follows:

File
Options
Colors
Help

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This software is available for an introductory price of $25.00, this price is for a limited time and may change as new versions and/or updates are released.

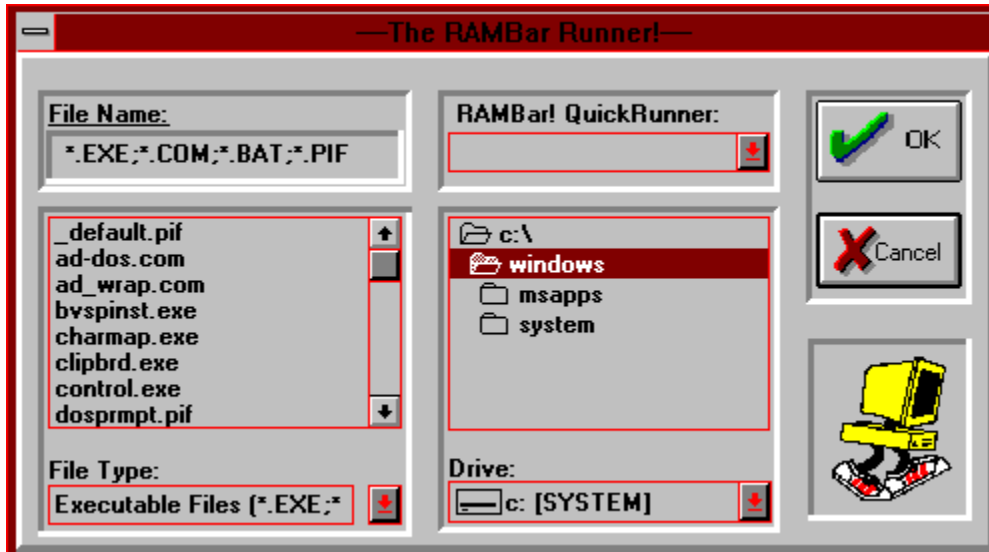Please Specify the format of floppy you prefer (1.44, 720, 1.2, 360).

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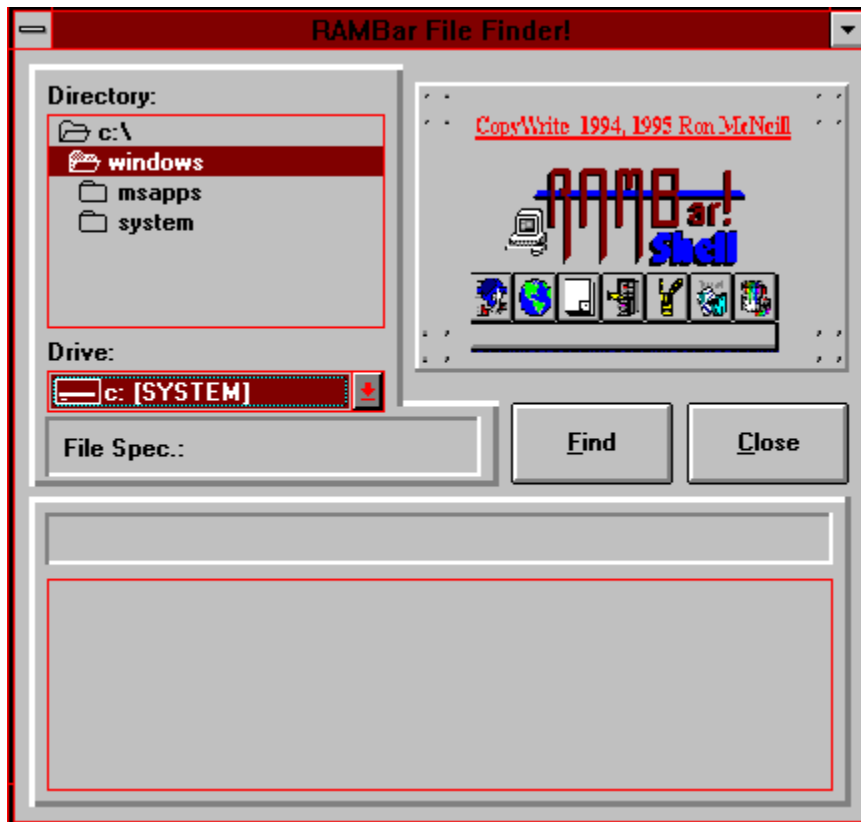
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FILE: The "File" menu containes various options:

1. RAMBar Runner! : This handy little classic has proven to hold it's weight among some of the most popular "Runner" utilities. It's certainly more versatile than the default stuff Windows comes with. In RAMBar Shell 3.0, I integrated it into the program, and made a few changes (but not many). The Runner! is once again an external utility. This allows you to create an icon in the button bar to access it   (if that's what you prefer). It's undergone some very nice modifications for RAMBar Shell! 4.0. Among them is a new (much needed) "facelift" and a "QuickRun" combo box that allows you to re-run the last ten programs you last ran by just clicking your selection!

2. RAMBar File Finder: One of the newest additions to the RAMBar Shell! Simply select the Drive and Directory, type in the filename to look for, and PRESTO! it'll tell you where your file is! This handy utility is something I've wanted to do for awhile. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do!

3. Quit RAMBar!: Selecting this will redisplay Program Manager, if it's hidden, and shut down RAMBar!

4. Exit Windows: This selection allows you to Exit Windows. This "Exit Door" doesn't insult your intelligence tell you that it'll "End Your Windows Session" in a confirmation dialog box . So if your not positive you want to Exit Windows,   hold off on selecting this or you'll find yourself at the command prompt. All Windows programs should ask if you want to save your work before such a hasty exit, but I make no guarantees! As a good rule of thumb, EXIT all applications before exiting Windows.
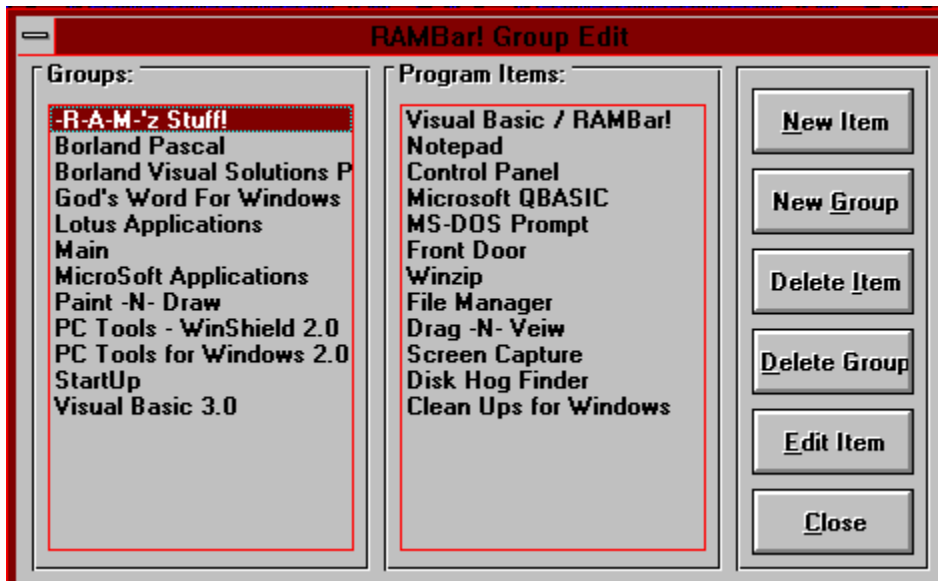
5. Restart Windows: From time to time you'll find your self needing to Restart Windows. This is a handy option when that need arises. Sometimes this is the only way to recover resources from a "naughty" or crashed application. You may edit your WIN.INI or SYSTEM.INI, you'll need to restart Windows for the changes to take effect.

6. Re-Boot your machine: This one does just that. You Exit Windows, then go through a warm boot (no memory test). If you edit your AUTOEXEC.BAT or CONFIG.SYS you'll need to reboot. This is the safe way to do it without dropping to the command prompt first.

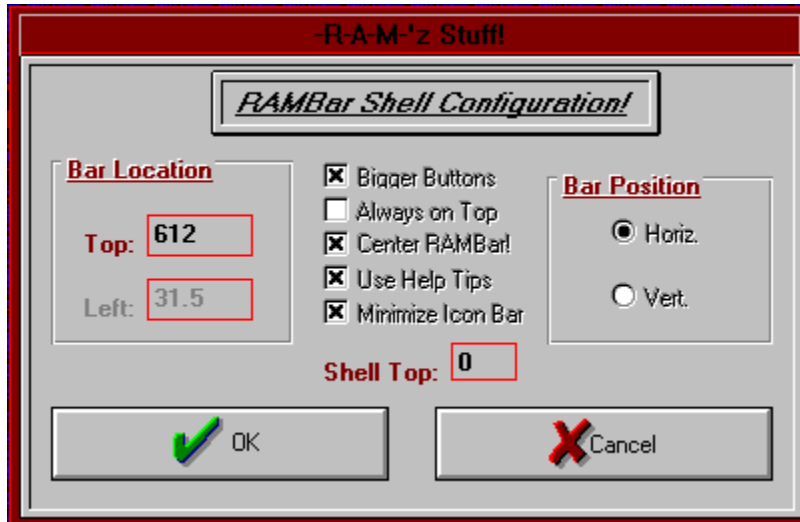OPTIONS: The Options menu has the following selections available:

1. Hide Program Manager: Some Setup programs make Program Manager visible before creating groups. This option will rehide it again. Notice the CheckMark by the selection. This informs you that RAMBar Shell! is set to Hide Program Manager at startup. Clicking Show Program Manager will not only make Program Manager re-appear, but it will also change the startup routine.

2. Show Program Manager: If (for some reason) you miss seeing Program   Manager, you can make it visible with this selection. It also instructs RAMBar Shell not to hide Program Manager at startup.

3. RAMBar! Group Edit: This feature is like the "New" & "Properties" selections from Program Manager's "File" Menu all bundled up in one. It also looks a lot nicer! The functioning is a lot like it's default counterpart (the stuff that comes with Windows) so I'm not going to explain a bunch of stuff you already know. I will note that you should use great care when using the "Delete" buttons. This program instructs Program Manager to delete the listing AND the file! Program Manager is quite eager to obey the Group Editor (I found this out the hard way when creating this, thank God for backups!). This is an external utility and can be run like any Windows Program from an Icon, or the Runner!

(if you prefer).

4. Change Default Group: Should you decide to use a different group as your default group,   simply select a new one from the "Default Group Dialog Box". NOTE: This will also change the active group.

5. Configure RAMBar!: This is the RAMBar configuration. Users of older RAMBar! versions will be pleased at the new options available now!

1. Minimize Icon Bar: When unchecked, the Button Bar will not reduce to an icon when you   run a program. This was added by request.

2. Always on Top: Selecting this will keep the Button Bar portion of RAMBar! the topmost window.

3. Bigger Buttons: If the buttons are too small, you can increase the size of them by checking this.

4. Center RAMBar!: This feature will center the button bar horizontally in your screen.
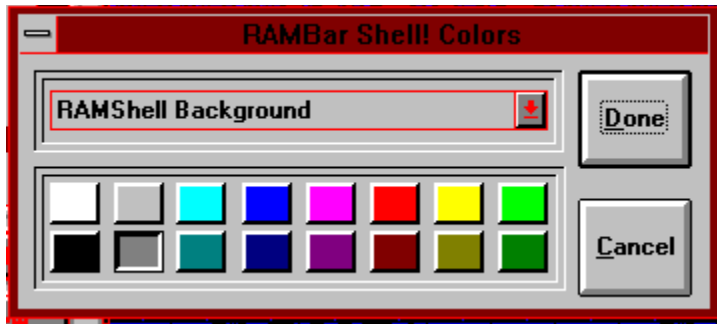
5. Use Help Tips: This pertaines to the "help tip" that pops up when the mouse passes over a button. The colors of the Help Tip can now be configured from the "Colors Dialog Box"

6. Vertical Bar/Horizontal Bar: These two selections allow you to select a vertical button bar   (up and down) or the default Horizontal Bar.

7. Top: This is a number in inches specifing the distance between the top of the screen, and the top of RAMBar! I'm trying inches in this version to try to be more user friendly. If everyone prefers pixels, as was the last version, I'll change it back. I just remember how important the term "pixel" was to me when I was new to computers (not very). I'm trying to keep RAMBar! as friendly as possible.

8. Shell Top: Just incase you want the RAMShell somwhere else, you can move it with this.

9. Left: This is a number in inches specifing the distance between the left of the screen and the left of RAMBar! NOTE: This option is (of course) unavailable when RAMBar! is centered.

This is where you set the colors of the RAMShell and the Help Tip. Simply select the colors you want to change, and then click the new color! Nifty huh? This works a lot like the System Colors in the Control Panel so you shouldn't have to much problem playing around with them until the RAMShell looks "just right".

   Should you decide you didn't really want to change anything, simply click Cancel. Done will write the new colors to the RAMBAR.INI file and will remain in effect until you change them again.

HELP: As self explanatory as this is, I will note that the operations in the RAMBar Shell 4.0 are a lot more efficient. You can perform a search for Program Manager Help, and RAMBar! Help. The Windows Tutor is also available from here (if you chose to install it on your system). The About Dialog has been replaced by the RAMBar About box.

SETUP:

   First Run SETUP.EXE from the Windows File|Run Menu. It will ask you a few questions, and install all needed files in the proper directories. If you receive an error saying that you are using a *.DLL or *.VBX file, try clicking "Ignore" this simply informs you that you already have the file and it's in use. You most likely don't need to overwrite the existing file.

   The RAMBar! will still run like it always has (kinda) by specifying the file name of the group you want to run at start-up as a command line parameter (or through an association in the File Manager) but because reading the *.GRP files takes time it's not recommended to use this method. It was provided for compatibility purposes with earlier versions. It's best to just execute it at Windows Startup (either via the RUN= line in WIN.INI, or your "Startup Group"). RAMBar will start and display it's "logo" screen, then as the RAMShell! loads, Program Manager is tucked away to perform it's functions in the background.

   The Load Group Dialog Box has been replaced by the "Default Group" dialog box. Notice that the Groups are selected by GROUP NAME now instead of by the FILENAME! Ahhh the wonders of DDE, RAMBar! simply "asks" for a list of groups from Program Manager and you can now forget what the filename is for that group (for those of you new to RAMBar! the Groups used to be loaded by selecting the file name in versions before 3.0). When a valid selection is made, it saves the default group name in the INI file so it can use   that group the next time you startup (hence, the meaning of "Default Group"). After requesting a few bits of info, you soon have an Icon Bar of the applications in the group you selected. All Applications are available at the "Touch of a Button". In case you forgot what all those darn pictures (icons) mean, pass the cursor over an item and a "help tip" window pops up to display the name of your application. It will remain for about 20 seconds and unload itself. Notice that The Active Group is now selected via a Drop Down Combo Box. I feel this makes the interface more attractive, and more user friendly. Also, upon execution of an application, the button bar will minimize itself to free up the desktop from additional clutter. If this is a problem, you can change this in the configuration. The RAMBar! itself simply executes programs, all other functions are handled by RAMShell!, and Program Manager. Truly "Hand in

Hand" at last!

   If you specify a Group File as a program item in the Program Manager, and execute it from RAMBar!, the Button Bar will simply redraw with the new items in it. This gives the illusion of "Groups within Groups". Something Program Manager is not capable of!

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ABSOLUTELY NO GUARANTEES WHATSOEVER!
But I will say it works fine for me.

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   Version 4.0 IS a totally new program! I know I said that about 3.0, but a Hard Drive crash, and corrupt backups sent all my work down the tubes! Well, it's better off that way, 4.0 is much more solid and full of all kids of new features! Version 3.0 took off so strongly with it's Nation wide distribution that I received some very good comments about RAMBar Shell! I must say I never expected anything like this. As the very few users of versions before 3.0 already know, the main reason for RAMBar! was to create a simple Icon bar that could read the Program Manager's group files. I have yet to find a worthwhile Icon Bar, Windows Front End, or so called "Shell Replacement" that will read the group files I have already spent a lot of time setting up, let alone handle Windows internals as well as Program Manager.

   Even commercial products fall short of providing total support for ALL messages sent to Program Manager. I know I'm going to get it from the PCTools & Norton Desktop fans, but I already paid $100.00 to "try out" PCTools' Desktop for Windows version 2.0, and really don't care to pay another $100.00 to try out Norton Desktop. That's just to much money to pay for a desktop when the RAMBar Shell is only $25.00.

   Version 4.0 contains some features you (the user) has suggested. Along with some things I wanted in it. Like the RAMBar File Finder!, the new "Colors" configuration, the RAMBar! Group Edit to edit groups without "Showing" Program Manager, and an improved Runner!

   Since I originally wanted it for my use, I'm constantly improving and "tweaking" it to eventually become the "ultimate desktop". It's not there yet, but is up in the ranks with the "big boys" and still VERY modestly priced! The best thing is, if you have an idea or suggestion that I didn't think of, I'll seriously consider putting it in. Try getting a major COMMERCIAL software company to do that for $25.00!