

# That time the CEO of a company complained to Congress about Windows file extensions

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Back in the days when it was even more fashionable to hate Microsoft than it is today (but then again, some things never go out of style), I remember that the CEO of a technology company testified in front of Congress to complain about Windows file extensions.

The CEO was complaining about anti-competitive practices, and gave as an example that installing a Windows upgrade caused Windows to reset the file extensions used by their company's product and reassign it to the default Windows handler. This was clear evidence of anti-competitive behavior, intentionally disabling software produced by a competitor and forcing users to use the Microsoft-provided software instead.

The Windows engineering team was asked to investigate this accusation, given only the information provided on C-SPAN. I wasn't part of the investigation, but I recall that the conclusion was that the company's software did not register their file extension handler properly, and the upgrade process left the file extension handler registration system in an inconsistent state, and the conflict resolution algorithm ended up picking the Windows-provided software as the winner.

If their engineers had just picked up the phone and called the shell team, they could have fixed their installer and all of the problems would have been solved, thereby keeping their customers happy. It would also have kept the company happy, except that playing friendly with Microsoft wasn't part of their narrative.

So I guess this is taking the idea of sending your complaint directly to Bill Gates, and going a step further. Instead of going to the CEO, you go an even higher authority: the government.

This is what happens when Windows backward compatibility is not 100%: There's a chance of being dragged into a Congressional investigation.

**Bonus chatter:** The great thing about airing these accusations in front of Congress is that the non-technical media are watching and taking notes. Even if what you say is based on a misunderstanding, it doesn't matter. It has become the truth. (Like, what is Microsoft going

to do? Issue a press release explaining the bug? Would anybody even read it, much less report on it?)

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