

The overlay icons in Windows 7 | 8 explained

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You may have noticed several icons in your Windows operating system which have an overlay icon on it. This could be the most common overlay arrow icon, which indicates that the icon is a shortcut icon; or it could be a padlock icon, which would indicate that you have a private item in a non-private directory.

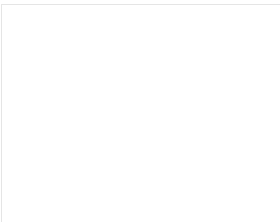


Overlay icons in Windows

Here is a list of overlay icons that come with Windows 7 | 8

- **Small arrow:** This is the shortcut overlay.
- **Lock icon:** This means that you have a private item in a non-private directory. This indicates that it is a file or folder with special permissions & that the user is restricted from performing some operations on that file or folder.
- **Downward pointing blue arrow:** This is the "to be written to CD" overlay.
- **Pair of green swirly arrows:** This means that the item is available offline.
- **Gray X:** This means that the file has been archived to tape and will take a very long time to access.
- **Shield:** This means that the program requires elevation to run and that a UAC prompt may appear.

No longer present as an overlay is the **sharing hand**. The sharing hand has been removed in favor of the private overlay. The reason? Given the changes in how people use computers, sharing information is becoming more and more of the default state. Most people have some sort of home network, and when you set up a HomeGroup, pretty much everything is going to be shared. To remove the visual clutter, the information was moved to the Details pane. What's more, a single overlay cannot express the different ways an item can be shared, so in order to figure out what the deal is, you have to go to the Details pane anyway.



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A similar thing happened to the **offline files swirly arrows**. They used to be placed on every item that was available offline, but feedback from customers highlighted that this was unnecessarily noisy because it trumped other, more informative, overlays. Instead, the swirly arrows are shown only on the root of the folder that is pinned and not on everything contained within it.

Overlays are not a good way of presenting information because there can be only one overlay per icon, and there is a limit of 15 overlays per ImageList (<http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/bb775227.aspx>). If there are two or more overlays which apply to an item, then one will win and the others will lose, at which point the value of the overlay as a way of determining what properties apply to an item diminishes since the only way to be sure that a property is missing is when you see no overlay at all.

The following registry key will show you all currently installed overlay handlers, on your Windows computer.

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Have you come across anymore overlay icons or have any additional information on them? Please do share!

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Anand Khase aka HappyAndyK is an end-user Windows enthusiast, a Microsoft MVP in Windows, since 2006, and the Admin of TheWindowsClub.com. Please create a System Restore Point before trying out any software & be careful about any third-party offers while installing freeware.

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