

Q&A Conference Packs House. 150 Attend from 11 Countries

Users and Developers from Around the World Gather To Learn Vital Q&A Survival Techniques and Preview Coming Q&A Successor Product

BY Wednesday, January 10—two days before the big event—organizers of **The International Q&A Users Conference 2001** were beginning to worry. A powerful Pacific storm—the worst in years—had just smashed into southern California, pummeling the state with gale force winds and record rainfall. Widespread flooding, power outages and even rare West Coast tornado watches were making national headlines. Airport traffic delays were increasing. Freeways were turning into underwater parking lots. And the National Weather Service was forecasting that the storm would continue into the weekend.

But by Friday, January 12 the tempest subsided, and what poured into Southern California instead were more than 150 Q&A devotees from as far away as Europe, South Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand—the largest gathering of Q&A users and developers ever. And as it turned out, not one of them was the least regretful that they made the long journey.

Topic One—Surviving with Q&A

The theme of the conference was *Q&A and the Future....Expanding the Functionality of Q&A Now and Migrating to Lantica Database Products in the Future*. Conference host, *Quick Answer* publisher Tom Marcellus, opened the event Saturday morning by welcoming everyone in the packed hall. Laughter could be heard downstairs in the hotel lobby as Tom treated attendees to excerpts from several “Q&A Support Calls From Hell” that his company had received in recent months.

Bill Halpern

Professional Computer Technology Associates (PCTA) co-owner and *Quick Answer* @Help column editor **Bill Halpern** gave the first presentation. In his 90-minute wide-screen presentation on surviving with Q&A in light of



Not an empty seat in the place. Conference attendees watch demonstrations on the big screen. You can too as all presentations were professionally videotaped.

The Quick Answer

BONUS 16-page
Q&A Conference Issue!
VIDEOS—page 12

Do-It-Yourself Guide to Q&A

February 2001

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today’s new operating systems and PCs, Bill covered a wide range of vital issues that are increasingly affecting all Q&A users: How to set up Q&A to run optimally in Windows 98, 2000, NT and ME. Important system settings you’d better not ignore. The correct way to configure your Q&A desktop Shortcut and properties. How to coax essential Expanded Memory from a computer that refuses to provide it. Which new computers to avoid purchasing. The options you have for solving the “too

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Naw, We Ain't Goin' Anywhere Soon

AT the conference last month, several subscribers expressed concern that with the new Q&A-compatible database manager on the way, *The Quick Answer* might be preparing to saddle up and ride off into the sunset.

Actually, we hadn't given much thought to the publication going anywhere except in the same direction that, with your support, it has been going for more than 10 years now.

Of course if the vast majority of our subscribers were to migrate all their Q&A apps to the new product the moment it appeared (scheduled for the Fall of this year), that would certainly prompt a business decision here. We believe that most of our subscribers *will* make the transition, and it will be *after* most of you do so that *The Quick Answer's* fate will be decided. Not before.

There might come a time, though, when we no longer *mail* the newsletter but offer it exclusively online. By that time a *new* newsletter devoted to the new product will already be available. (We plan to launch it.)

In the meantime, beginning next month we plan to have a regular *Quick Answer* column that will keep you posted on the new product as it progresses in development. We'll tell you about programming and relational capabilities, application design features, navigation options and the like—and provide tips to help simplify the transition for you when *your* time is right.

Fair enough, partner?

—TOM MARCELLUS

Quick Tip

Use 'TL' Format Code for Email Addresses

Q&A users typically take advantage of only a fraction of Q&A's features. For example, at the Format Spec (File / Design / Customize / Format values), you can choose between **T** (for Text), **TU** (Text UPPER CASE), **TI** (Text Initial Caps) and **TL** (text, lower case) for a text field—the last option being one that I've always thought, "who would possibly want to use *that*

one?" Well, now there *is* a good reason to use it—*email address fields*. These are conventionally all lower case, such as *alec@keywordtraining.com*.

Alec Mulvey
Keyword Training

Quick Tip

How Many Thousands?

Everybody knows that @Round will round a number to a specified number of decimal places [$@Round(1.234, 2) = 1.23$]. But what happens when you round to a *negative* number of places?

Rounding to a negative number of places cuts off the decimal portion of a number and rounds the number by increasing or decreasing the number to the nearest value ending in the number of zeroes specified by the negative

number of places.

Whew! That's a mouthful. To translate by example, $@Round(12345.12, -3) = 12000$ while $@Round(12995.12, -3) = 13000$.

So, to round the value in a field (Amount) to the nearest thousand, try $@Round(Amount, -3)$. $@Round(Amount, -2)$ will round Amount to the nearest hundred. @Round will accept values from -15 to 15.

The Quick Answer™

Editor / Publisher
Tom Marcellus

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Q&A Conference... cont'd from page 1



Bill Halpern fields a question from a member of the audience.

large hard drive partition" problem and why you put your data at risk by neglecting this issue. Bill then spoke on resolving database corruption problems with Q&A 5.0, and offered several much-welcomed suggestions on resolving common printing problems when using Q&A for DOS with troublesome inkjet printers.

Tom Marcellus

After the break, **Tom Marcellus** returned to the podium for a 75-minute presentation entitled "Five Ways to Get Your Q&A Data on a Web Site." With the explosion of Internet access in recent years, the Web has become *the* preferred low-cost medium for wide-area data dissemination in companies looking for a competitive edge in sales and service. Attendees eyes were glued to the projection screen as Tom worked with actual Q&A databases, demonstrating easy, practical ways to output Q&A data to "Web-ready"-formatted files that can be immediately uploaded to a Web server at any interval for instantaneous access by anyone anywhere. Tom showed that Q&A has the tools to do it—you just have to know where they are and how to use them. Several of Tom's demo databases, along with the Web files he used during his presentation, were on the CD attendees received.



Quick Answer Publisher Tom Marcellus shows attendees five ways to publish and access their Q&A data on the Web.

Erika Yoxall

Many people with departmental or company-wide responsibilities rely on their venerable workhorse Q&A databases to help them store, retrieve and manipulate their vital



Erika Yoxall describes how to link your Q&A data to Access to produce "pretty" reports.

information. But when it comes time to summarize and commit that information to paper, Q&A's Report module too often just doesn't have the capabilities to produce the kind of output format—or *look*—needed to communicate the data in the clearest, most effective way. And Q&A for DOS' inability to take advantage of the advanced

BE THERE! Videotapes of all conference presentations are available. See page 12.

capabilities of today's printers only compounds the problem. An attractive

solution, expertly demonstrated by **Erika Yoxall** of Hammer Data Systems during her presentation, involves designing the report in Microsoft Access' powerful graphical report writer, then clicking on a button to flow in the data from the Q&A database. Q&A data. Access container. Who would have thought? But the result?—gorgeous, professional-looking report output enhanced with pictures, colors, lines, boxes and shading. Erika's demo files on the conference CD that attendees took home are designed to help simplify setup.

Jeff Noreman

"Houston, We Have a Problem—It's the Network Again."

Whether you're sharing your databases over a network now or plan to in the future, this is one "high-tech" bog most of us would rather not step into. So we call in a network expert like **Jeff Noreman** of Nexus Unlimited. As Jeff pointed out to a round of hearty laughter—where computer networks are concerned: *if it ain't broke, it will be!* And it was laughter and learning for the next 90 minutes. Where *do* you begin when you want to network two or more PCs? What do you need to do in and with Q&A to safely and efficiently share your files? Peer-to-peer vs. standalone server—which is best for you? Should you use Windows built-in networking or buy a networking software package? How do you setup network resource sharing for printers, Internet connections and the like? Home and home/office networks—how are these different? How do you choose a



Jeff Noreman, "The Network Guy," came with a host of tips and insights on network-related issues.

reliable network interface card? What about cabling vs. telephone and electrical line networks? Jeff covered all the essentials, including productive networking tips as well as traps to avoid. Conference attendees were treated to a real clinic on practical networking by the guy the Q&A experts call when *"It's the Network Again."*

John Dow

Nobody knows what *really* lives inside a Q&A database better than the next speaker to address the conference, **John Dow**. That's because during the past few years John has developed a small army of powerful utility programs that do everything from analyzing and repairing Q&A database corruption, to extracting data, changing multiple passwords in a single pass, and copying report designs from one database to another. During his presentation, John demoed a number of his most popular utility programs for Q&A, showing their valuable diagnostic and time-saving capabilities. Judging by the periodic flurry of note-taking, for many attendees the solutions to their recurring Q&A problems were right there on the screen in one or more of John's demos. And they went home with the same demo files on their conference CDs



John Dow demoed his popular "DTF" utility programs for Q&A.

Alec Mulvey

Saturday's final speaker, regular *Quick Answer* contributor **Alec Mulvey** of Keyword Training in the UK, proved, as in past Q&A Bashes, an exceptional treat for attendees. Alec's unflappable British wit, coupled with his wide-ranging expertise as a long-time Q&A developer, trainer, and computer applications consultant, had the audience in stitches as he gave a very well received big-screen demo on integrating Q&A data with Microsoft Word. A barrier for Q&A for DOS users who need enhanced output has long been the lack of a truly WYSIWYG word processor in which to design and print graphically-enhanced merge letters, mailing labels, forms and the like. Added to that is the lack of Q&A printer driver support for the advanced capabilities found in today's printers. Though most attendees had Microsoft Word on their computers, many didn't know how (or even if) they could merge their Q&A data with it. Alec's detailed, step-by-step demonstration proved how easy it actually is.



Alec Mulvey during his presentation on merging Q&A data with Microsoft Word.

The crowd goes boating

Saturday night, attendees were treated to a Newport Harbor dinner cruise aboard the elegant M.S. *Phoenix*, a 109-foot motor side-wheeler originally owned by the Wrigley family of chewing gum fame. We all piled into two huge school buses for the trip down to the docks. What a din! Everyone was engaged in so much spirited conversation that the bus trip was an event all by itself! Aboard the *Phoenix*, attendees enjoyed drinks, a sumptuous catered dinner, a live DJ, and a jovial skipper who playfully informed his passengers that if we should start sinking, we could simply move to the upper deck where we'd all remain safely above water!

Super-Sunday—The Unveiling!

For several months, *Quick Answer* readers have known that a group of Q&A developers, consultants and power users had formed a company to undertake development of a new 21st century Q&A-compatible database manager. But not much beyond that has been publicly announced. Rumors, of course, abounded. Who exactly are these people? What is this new product going to look like? What will it do for me that the Q&A I'm now using *can't* do? How *really* Q&A-compatible will it be?

During the Friday night get-acquainted party and all day Saturday, the speakers were privately approached by attendees with all sorts of questions about the new product. Lips, however, were sealed. "You'll just have to wait until Sunday," they were told. For many, the extended Sunday presentation was what had brought them across the country or halfway around the world to discover. And discover they did!

Tom Marcellus opened the Sunday session by describing the chain of events beginning in 1998 that led to the decision to develop an all new Q&A successor database manager. He told attendees how negotiations with Symantec for the purchase of Q&A had broken down, and how it had stopped selling and supporting Q&A, leaving Q&A users with nowhere to turn at a time when near-future operating systems and computers would no longer run legacy DOS programs like Q&A.

Bill Halpern then took the podium to tell the audience all about the new company, Lantica Software, LLC, which has been working on the new product for 18 months. Bill, President and CEO of the company, described its objectives for the product—code-named "*Sesame*"—saying that its first and foremost mission will be to provide a solid, sensible upgrade path—a 32-bit solution—for Q&A users running virtually any operating system now and to come—Windows 95/98, NT, ME, 2000—even Linux/Unix!

Bill then introduced Lantica's other founding members and principals—Alec Mulvey, Tom Marcellus, Cliff Sobin, Erika Yoxall, Andreas Goebel (the creator of Q&A 5.0 for DOS), John Dow and Mark Lasersohn.

Bill went on to describe the product's state-of-the-art client-server architecture, making it fast, efficient, and natively networkable on a peer-to-peer, server-based or

multiple server-based system, whether the server is down the hall, on the same computer as the client (single user), or on a remote Web server!

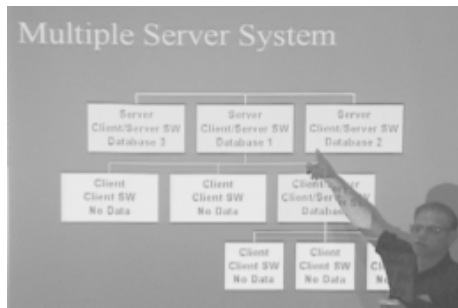
"Faster than Q&A," was how Bill answered an attendee's question about speed.

Bill then showed a typical Q&A programming statement on the screen and followed it with the statement in the new product to perform the same task. The syntax of the two programs was identical! That's right!—programming in a Q&A database will convert in the new product right along with the form design, reports, field formatting and other specs.

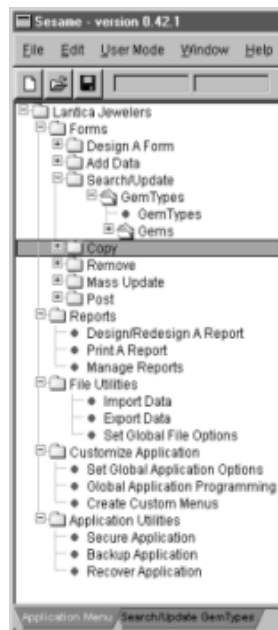
Though the full programming language has not yet been fully implemented, it will be possible in Sesame to have on-field-entry *and* on-field-exit statements in the same field (something you can't do in Q&A). What's more, the new product will feature a host of powerful *new* programming capabilities, such as true variables that don't require "temporary" fields to store interim calculations, sortable multi-dimensional arrays in memory, and loops that don't need separate fields with Q&A-like Gsub/Return statements in them.

A member of the audience piped up: *"How much will it cost?"* About the same as Q&A has been traditionally priced, replied Bill.

Sesame development team leaders Erika Yoxall and Mark Lasersohn then continued the demo. Using two networked computers—one set up as a server, the other as a client—they took attendees on an extended live tour of the Alpha version of "Sesame." They saw how easy it was to switch the PCs between client and server mode or run both modes on the same PC. They saw, up close, its familiar Q&A-like menu system and form-based interface.



Bill Halpern shows how the product's advanced multiple server capabilities allow as many different levels of security as required in a department or company.



Sesame's Application Menu puts the various database commands right at your fingertips. Look familiar?

Sample databases with records being added and updated were shown, including a form with an embedded subform that demonstrated the product's relational capabilities. Applause at every turn. During the final part of the demo, Alec Mulvey stepped up and searched a "Sesame" database exactly the same way you'd search a Q&A database. Same retrieval parameters; same syntax; same results. Nothing new to learn. The audience loved it!

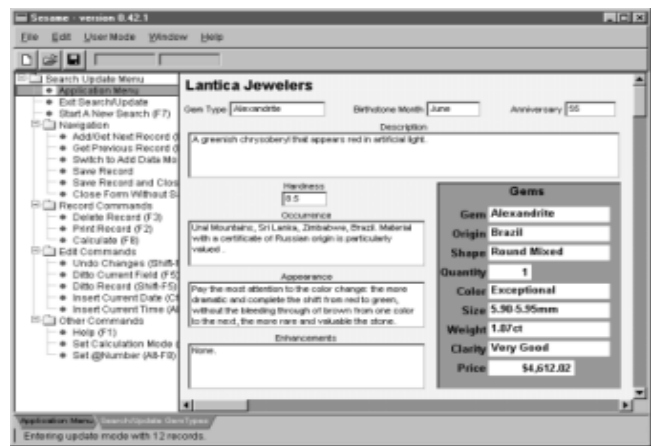
A huge round of applause followed the three-hour presentation. The atmosphere remained palpably electric for more than half an hour as attendees talked excitedly to Lantica team members and among themselves before finally heading downstairs for lunch. Here was a *real* future for their Q&A applications. Here was a product they could use!

Sunday afternoon, round tables were set up so that attendees could sit down with the speaker of their choice and get their nagging Q&A and Lantica/Sesame questions answered in a workshop setting. The investor relations table was among the busiest!

All in all, it was a very successful conference and received rave reviews from those who made the investment to attend. Post-conference survey forms told the story: On a scale from 1 (low) to 5 as to how much they enjoyed the event, the responses averaged a stellar 4.8! Here are a few typical remarks from those surveys on the new product demo session:

"Great product" • "Very exciting" • "It looks to be the answer to all our Q&A problems" • "Great. Sensible attitudes toward product development" • "Extremely impressive" • "Very excited, huge potential" • "Wow!" • "It's a fantastic dream" • "I've never had such a nice team of people working so hard for me" • "Home Run!" • "Winner" • "Outstanding. Can't wait" • "Fantastic" • "Wonderful"

In the months to come, *The Quick Answer* will be bringing you regular updates on the progress of the new Q&A-compatible database manager. We'll be talking about conversion from Q&A, powerful additions to the programming language, using the new relational capabilities, and much, much more. So stay tuned!



A Sesame database record containing an embedded subform. Familiar Q&A-like record options are conveniently located on an expandable menu tree in the left-hand pane.



EDITED BY WILLIAM HALPERN



Printing Extended ASCII Characters

How do you get the lower ASCII graphics characters to print in Q&A? I can get characters 129 and above to display in Write and print, but pressing Alt-5 does not display the little heart character.

Ken

There are a few ASCII characters that don't print, such as the bell character (Alt-7) and the carriage return (Alt-13). Some others can be printed, but to display them in Q&A involves a two-step process. Generally, if you're trying to display characters lower than 33 on the ASCII table, you have to press Alt-F10 first, then hold down the Alt key while typing the ASCII character number on the numeric keypad. For the heart character, press Alt-F10, then hold down the Alt key while pressing 3 on the numeric keypad. Alt-F10, Alt-5 will display the club character.

Convert Money Values to Longhand Text

Is there a way in our database to get a money value to automatically print its written equivalent? For example, \$452.35 in a Money field would return Four Hundred Fifty Two dollars and Thirty Five Cents to a text field.

Ken

Q&A can't do this out of the box, but you can program your database to do it. You'll need a Lookup Table in the database with 1="one", 2="two", 3="three," and so forth through 19, and all ten values (10="ten", 20="twenty", and so on) through 100. Then, depending on how large a number you need to convert, you will need fields to split and then concatenate the numbers. That is, if you're only going into the thousands, you'll need one field or programming statement each for thousands, hundreds, tens, ones, and decimals. When leaving your number field, your program will have to split the values, look up their equivalent text value in the Lookup Table, then concatenate the entire set of fields into a text string with the proper syntax, such as "One Thousand Two Hundred Ninety Seven Dollars and Twenty Two Cents." Don't despair, on the "Free Downloads" page at

www.quickanswer.com there's a downloadable database (Checks.dtf) with all this programming and the Lookup table already in it. Just transplant the needed fields and Lookup table to your own database. If you're using Q&A 5.0, you might instead want to download and try moneytxt.exe, a utility program you can use in conjunction with the @Shell command to convert money values to their longhand equivalents. (See "Converting money values to Text Equivalents" in the January 1998 issue for information on using the utility. See also "Automate Your Check Writing and Printing" in the January 1995 issue.)

Using Q&A Databases on CDs

I copy my large Q&A databases to a CD-R so I can then access them from my notebook computer. When I use the CD writer to retrieve the data all is well. But, when I use a regular CD drive, Q&A won't let me use the database. Q&A thinks I'm trying to search and update the data and update can't be done on a read only CD drive. Is there any way within Q&A to tell it to read only so that I can use Q&A (purely to retrieve data) with a regular CD drive?

Lee

The answer is No. Q&A needs to write to the disk to record the date and time the file was accessed. Since a regular CD is read-only, this won't work. Q&A *must* be able to access a database with full read/write permission. Remember, even if you copy the data files to your hard drive from the CD, they will be read-only. You will have to select the files in Windows Explorer, right click on them and uncheck the Read-Only attribute, then click Apply. You have to do this for both the .dtf (database) and .idx (index) files.

QA1.EXE vs. QA.COM

I keep seeing where you insist that the command line on the Q&A shortcut should read QA.COM. I have always used QA1.EXE and the program seems to run fine. Which is correct?

Harry



Stumped?

Send your Q&A questions to @Help, The Quick Answer, Marble Publications, Inc., 1927A Harbor Blvd, Costa Mesa, CA 92627 or email to mailbox@quickanswer.com. Include your name, address, phone, and your Q&A version number (and whether DOS or Windows) and a detailed description of the problem. We'll publish those questions we feel are of general reader interest; individual responses aren't possible.

QA.COM is the correct command to start Q&A. It sets up Q&A to run properly and then it runs QA1.EXE. If you start Q&A with the .exe file, you will not be able to use any of the startup switches such as those that set your personal path or load a non-default macro file. You should always start a program with the command line it was designed to start with, no matter what you think you can get away with otherwise.

Q&A and Windows Me

I have Q&A 4.0 for DOS, and I've read that the new Microsoft Windows ME won't run DOS programs. If this is true, should I start looking into converting my databases to some Windows program?

David

The statement, no matter where you saw it, is a *falsehood*! All current Windows operating systems, including ME and 2000 run DOS programs perfectly well. Full reviews and installation setup information are available at www.pcta-usa.com.

Expanded Memory Going Extinct

I've been following your discussions on Q&A for DOS and Expanded Memory. I know the issue is getting more complex with the new PCs. There also seems to be an issue with Windows Me on some PCs. Could you expand further?

Jeff

Yes, there are more and more PCs appearing where the manufacturers are using the memory between 640K and 1M to load drivers and improve the performance of the chip sets. The bottom line is that if you have less than 64K available in this range of memory, you *cannot* set the system up to provide Expanded Memory. You *must* have at least this amount to allow paging in Expanded Memory. Another issue is that some manufacturers are "hiding" the starting address of this available paging, so simply adding the *Device=C:\Windows\Emm386.exe RAM* to your config.sys file might not allow the system to access it. However, you can add one more statement to the line and take one last shot. Change the line to read:

```
Device=C:\Windows\Emm386.Exe RAM Frame=D000
```

If this works and the computer boots properly, you will have Expanded Memory and be off to the races once more. One note: If you have to employ the *Frame=* parameter, you will probably see a boot-up warning that *RAM or ROM is being loaded into paging area*. It will advise you to press any key to continue. You can ignore both the warning and the keypress message. It will go away in a few seconds and the computer will continue to boot.

In Windows Me, there is no config.sys file to work with, so make sure that the *system.ini* file does not include a line that starts with *EmmExclude ...* in the 386Enh section. If it does, just Rem it out by putting a semicolon

(;) in front of the line and re-saving the file.

To the best of our knowledge, computers running Pentium III or earlier processors at speeds of less than 800 MHz—and all Athlon based processors—are okay.

Bottom line: Check with the computer manufacturer *before* making your purchase.

[Jeff Noreman's company, Nexus Unlimited, Inc. (516-753-2125) sells top-quality PCs with Expanded Memory. Jeff spoke at last month's Q&A User Conference. See p. 3. —Ed.]

HP DeskJet Printers and Q&A DOS

I have an HP DeskJet printer that the HP people tell me can print from DOS programs, but they cannot tell me which printer driver to use in Q&A 5.0 for DOS. Any suggestions?

Don

It's surprising that HP didn't give you the info they have on their own Web site. They suggest to try the following printer drivers for DOS programs in the order shown below, trying each one in turn to see if it works with your printer. One word of advice, before playing around with printer selections, make sure to go to your printer manufacturer's Web site and download the latest drivers for your printer and operating system.

1. DeskJet 550C
2. DeskJet 540
3. DeskJet 500C
4. DeskJet 500
5. DeskJet PLUS
6. DeskJet
7. LaserJet II/III D/P

Date Programming Problems

I just found your Web site and it's great! I'm dealing with a simple problem in programming and I'm beginning to feel really stupid. I think that anyone who knows what they're doing can solve this in an instant. I hope you can help.

Fields used:

```
#2 (Date)
#30 (Taxable?)
#31 (Subtotal)
#32 (Tax) (We're trying to get the correct tax)
```

The state tax changes on 1/1/2001 from 7.75% to 7.50%. There are also some sales which are non-taxable (field #30 is Y/N). If the subtotal (#31) is taxable (#30) and the invoice date is *before* 12/31/2000, then the tax (#32) is 7.75% of the subtotal (#31). If the subtotal (#31) is taxable (#30) and the invoice date is *after* 1/1/2001, then the tax (#32) is 7.50% of the subtotal (#31). If the subtotal is not taxable (#30), then the tax (#32) is 0.00.

Here's what I've come up with thus far:

Concludes on page 16

How to Get Dynamic Picklists in Q&A 4.0

JOHN T. DOW



FOR many, one of the most useful features in Q&A 5.0 for DOS is its @Shell

command. An @Shell program in a database lets you run an external DOS command or batch file or launch another program without having to exit the record you're viewing. And when the external program is finished, the Q&A database record you were on is still there on screen.

When used in conjunction with DTFDATA and DTFTALK, you can create an @Shell program to display a prompt for information in another database. When you answer the prompt, DTFDATA extracts the matching records from the external database and DTFTALK displays them on a convenient selection list. You can then select the item you want and insert the data into a field or fields in the record you're viewing. (For more on using DTFDATA and DTFTALK with Q&A 5.0, see "When XUserselect Lists Aren't Enough" in the October 1998 issue and "Simplify Data Entry with Wide DTFTALK Pick-Lists" in the October 2000 issue.)

This is not to be confused with Q&A 5.0's XUserselect command which limits you to a 19 character-wide selection list and suppresses duplicate values. (If you have several "Smiths," only the first one will appear on the list.) A DTFTALK selection list can be screenwide, shows all duplicate values by default, and has other advantages not offered by XUserselect or XUserselectR.

Q&A for Windows doesn't support an @Shell command, although with the addition of DTFWIN you can easily run external programs and add similar picklist selection features to your database. (See "Q&A for Windows Add-On Revs Up Multi-Database Apps" in the September 1998 issue.)

Q&A 4.0 for DOS doesn't support an @Shell

command. And because it's a DOS program, DTFWIN won't work with it. Like Q&A for Windows, some other program has to help it out.

Such a program now exists. It's called DTFDEMON.

A typical user interface

Suppose, as a Q&A 4.0 for DOS user, you're adding a new invoice to the Invoice database and want to check the Customer database for a Mr. Smith in order to obtain his Customer ID. (The Customer ID, in this case, is assumed to be needed to XLookup Mr. Smith's full name, address, and any other particulars for the invoice.)

With this new technique, you merely go to the Customer ID field in an Invoice record and invoke a macro. (I'll use Alt-P for "Popup," but the key combination could be anything you want.) At this point, a new window appears on top of the invoice, prompting you to enter several characters of the customer's last name. (See Figure 1.) When you do, you then get a sorted selection list containing the records that match your criteria. (See Figure 2.) You can now select the customer you want, and auto-fill the appropriate fields in the new record. (See Figure 3.)

How it works

The scenario I've just described requires Q&A for DOS to be running under Windows. (Q&A must be running in a window and not in full screen mode). It also requires DTFDEMON to be running *before* you run the Q&A macro. DTFDEMON is a Windows program that runs in the background, so you can forget it's there. (*Demon* is a standardized term for a program that just waits around to do things for other programs.) Just start it from your AUTOEXEC.BAT file or Windows Start-Up Folder.

Figure 1. You type "S" to search for "Smith" and a selection list appears with one or more customers whose names start with "S." (See Figure 2.)

Name	Age	DOB	Sex	ID	Hobbies
ADD NEW CUSTOMER					
Saxon	27	05/08/69	F	1077	
Scott	49	07/24/47	M	1031	
Shah	35	02/08/61	M	1098	
Shiner	61	03/11/35	M	1047	
Signorini	33	04/04/63	M	1066	
Slater	32	05/02/64	M	1037	
Smith	28	12/23/68	M	1013	
Spector	67	12/15/29	M	1046	
Stickie	81	02/28/15	F	1027	

Figure 2. You select "Smith," the selection list disappears, and the invoice record is now fully visible again. The selected Customer ID number has been placed into the current field. The field exit programming is triggered, performing one or more XLookups to bring over information about Mr. Smith from his record in the Customer database. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3. You now have the correct Customer ID for the Customer, which you can use to XLookup other information about the customer.

When it's time for the demon program to do something, you run your Q&A macro. (A sample macro is shown below.) The macro prints the contents of a field to a file. What's in the field at the time it's printed would be determined by programming in that field. (A sample program is shown below.) That programming is triggered by the macro before it prints the field contents. The demon program is constantly checking for the file to appear and the moment it does the demon reads the file to see what it's supposed to do on behalf of the database. (The demon also removes the file.)

In the example above, DTFTALK is invoked during the process to prompt for part of the customer's name. Then, DTFDATA is invoked to look into the CUSTOMER database for appropriate entries. DTFTALK is then run once more to display the selection list. Finally, the Customer ID number is extracted from the entry you select and pasted back into the field in the current invoice record. It all happens in the blink of an eye.

All but the last of these steps are performed by a DOS batch file. The last step, extracting the Customer ID and pasting it back into the field in the invoice record, is triggered by the batch file but is actually done by the demon.

A more detailed explanation

The Q&A macro (Alt-P, in this case) looks like this:

```
<begdef><altp><name>"DTFDemon Popup"<vidon><f6>
<capsf4>DTFDEMON<f6><enter><f6><f2><dn><dn><dn>
<dn><1ft><f10><f10><capsf4>
F:\QADATA\DTFDEMON.TXT
<enter><capsf4><f6>
<enddef>
```

Notice that the fourth line has a path and file name. This assumes your databases are in the F:\QADATA subdirectory. If they are elsewhere, change the macro accordingly.

When you press Alt-P in the Customer ID field in the invoice record, the macro opens the field with F6, clears it, enters the text "DTFDEMON," closes it with F6, and then "presses" Enter. At this point the programming in the database is triggered.

The programming, on seeing "DTFDEMON" in the field, replaces it with "CUSTOMER.BAT." Basically, the macro is saying to the program, "Tell me what you want to do," and the program is responding by saying, "Run CUSTOMER.BAT for me."

Following the programming in the Customer ID field in the Invoice database:

```
>#10:

If #10 = "DTFDEMON" Then {
    #10 = "CUSTOMER.BAT";
    Goto #10;
};

If #10 <> "" Then {
    <<put your XLookups here>>
};
```

When the programming performs the *Goto #10* after changing the field value, the macro continues where it left off. It prints the contents of the field to the file that's in the macro, namely F:\QADATA\DTFDEMON.TXT. (You can change the location but not the name of this file—it must be DTFDEMON.TXT.)

Now, because this string has been printed to the DTFDEMON.TXT file, the demon program picks it up and runs the selected batch file, which might look something like this:

```
@echo off
DTFTALK GETNAME.DLG 1 0 RESULT=DIALOG.TMP
IF "%RESULT%" == "ESC" GOTO END
IF EXIST DTFTALK.ERR GOTO ERROR1
DTFDATA /NRF CUSTOMER CUSTOMER.QAX DTFDATA.TMP
@DIALOG.TMP
IF EXIST DTFDATA.ERR GOTO ERROR2
DTFTALK DTFDATA.TMP 1 4 RESULT=SELECT.TMP
IF "%RESULT%" == "ESC" GOTO END
ECHO PASTE SELECT.TMP 34 4 > DTFDEMON.TXT
GOTO END

:ERROR1
CLS
ECHO DTFTALK ERROR:
TYPE DTFTALK.ERR
PAUSE
GOTO END

:ERROR2
CLS
ECHO DTFDATA ERROR:
TYPE DTFDATA.ERR
PAUSE
GOTO END

:END
EXIT
```

This batch file does standard stuff like running the programs and testing for errors. Finally, after you've made your selection and the results are in the SELECT.TMP file, the Customer ID has to be extracted from the proper columns of the file and pasted into the right field in the invoice record. This final step is performed again by the demon program. (A batch file by itself can't do these things. DTFDEMON not only helps Q&A, it also helps the DOS command interpreter.)

Here's the statement in the batch file tells it what to do:

```
ECHO PASTE SELECT.TMP 34 4 > DTFDEMON.TXT
```

The ECHO statement is a batch file command that writes "PASTE SELECT.TMP 34 4" into the DTFDEMON.TXT file. As before, the demon program notices immediately that this file has appeared and promptly does as asked. Namely, it extracts four characters from the SELECT.TMP file beginning at the 34th position and pastes them into the invoice record, followed by Enter.

Voila! You're done. @Shell from Q&A 4.0 for DOS!

Additional technical details

Note that if you wanted to, in the programming you could pass information to the batch file merely by appending it

to the value that's set in field #10. For example, if you wanted to pass the contents of some field, say #90, you could do this:

```
#10 = "CUSTOMER.BAT " + #90;
```

You could of course run any program you want, not just a batch file and not just the CUSTOMER.BAT file. If you do run a batch file, be sure to right click on it and set any properties that are needed. In particular, make sure it is set to close on exit. You might also want to adjust the idle sensitivity setting.

If you're familiar with DTFDATA, the last parameter, @DIALOG.TMP, will be new to you. It's a new feature. The "@" before the file name means that DTFDATA is to get its parameters (%1, %2, etc.) not from the command line but from the file whose name appears there. This new feature is necessary because a batch file can't read the file and put the contents on the command line. The file it's reading was created just a moment before by DTFTALK.

Similarly, DTFTALK needs to be able to pass information back to the batch file. In particular, the batch file needs to know if the user pressed the Esc key to cancel the process. DTFTALK returns this information using the syntax *RESULT=SELECT.TMP*, where *RESULT* is an environment variable that's set and can be tested in the batch file to see if it's "Esc."

In other words, to do what this particular example does, you'd need the latest versions of DTFDATA (2.10)

and DTFTALK (1.05). (See the sidebar below.)

Notice that the same macro can be used for all fields where you want to invoke the demon. The reason is that the macro just puts DTFDEMON into the field and it's the programming in the field that supplies the particular program or batch file to run. Thus, with a standard macro and DTFDEMON program, with programming in the database and by creating some matching batch files, you can do anything you want, including running word processors and image viewers and so forth.

Of course, having the process dependent a Q&A macro is not ideal. If the user runs it in the wrong field, it would clear the field and enter DTFDEMON into the field. I suggest putting some mark next to the fields where the macro can be run, perhaps "(P)."

John Dow is the creator of a host of valuable utilities for all editions of Q&A, including DTFDATA and DTFTALK. He is also a founding member of Lantica Software, LLC. jtd@pgh.net, www.johntdow.com, 412-973-9473.

Download the Demo

The DTFDEMON program, along with the featured sample databases, macro file and batch file, are available in a demo program you can download from www.johntdow.com. You can order DTFDATA while at the Web site. (DTFDATA comes with DTFTALK.) Previous purchasers of DTFDATA can get the updated version free of charge.



Get a 'Clean' Export File Every Time

At the conference last month we watched presentations on

exporting data from Q&A databases to use in Windows programs such as Microsoft Access for sophisticated reports and Microsoft Word for mail merge.

If you use Q&A to export the data, you may have some work to do before the file will be 100% ready for other programs. For example, Q&A puts a funny character at the end of export files. It also exports empty fields as " " (quote-space-quote) which can generate blank lines if you're doing a mail merge and that's the only field on a line. Because of these minor annoyances, you have to edit the export file to clean it up before using it.

DTFDATA doesn't do these things, so its output can go directly into another database, word processor or spreadsheet program. But there are still two shortcomings with DTFDATA. Actually, I should say, there *were* two.

First, it doesn't (didn't) export the field names as the first record, something programs like Access and Word like to see. That's been fixed. To export all the data from the customer database, with field names, just use this command:

```
DTFDATA /NAMES CUSTOMER FORMAT=C CUSTOMER.DAT
```

If you have wild and crazy Q&A field names so that your destination program will balk at them, then do this to get cleaned up names (spaces and other offending characters removed):

```
DTFDATA /CLEANNAMES CUSTOMER FORMAT=C CUSTOMER.DAT
```

If you don't want to export all the fields, you need to provide DTFDATA with a QAX file. In this file you need to list the field names. Another new option makes this very easy. You use the /MAKEQAX option when you run DTFDATA. But it's even easier than that. Suppose your database is CUSTOMER. To create a QAX file and export the data to CUSTOMER.DAT, just type EXPORT CUSTOMER on the command line and follow the instructions. It will create a QAX file and direct you to edit it to remove the fields you don't want to export. Then it will go ahead with the export.

The version of DTFDATA that does this is the new version 2.10. If you have an earlier 2.x version, the upgrade is free.

John Dow, jtd@pgh.net

Have Q&A 'Press the Keys' for You

ALEC MULVEY



ERIKAYoxall, in her excellent three-part series on macros ("Macros—the Missing Link," July-September 1997) pointed out that "Q&A just isn't Q&A without the automation that macros provide." This is very true. Macros offer a wonderful way of taking the load off users and making the computer and software work harder. That's the way it should be. In this article, I'm not going to cover macros comprehensively—far from it. Instead, I'm going to show you how to get started with them in a very limited way. Macros are easy, as you'll see.

In Q&A, when you press Alt-F2 or click the *right* mouse button, one of two things will happen: You'll either get a message at the bottom of the screen saying, "No Macros have been defined" or a list of macros will display. (See Figure 1.)

The "No macros..." message is self-explanatory. Otherwise, you'll see a list of macros that have already been created by you or someone else. If you're using Q&A 5.0 and have not created any macros, there's a chance you will see a couple of unfamiliar macros named Ctrl-U and F11 (Ctrl-A). These are of little value and can be ignored. Notice on the Figure 1 macro list that all the macros have names, and that some of them have *key identifiers* as well. These key identifiers are shortcut keys that offer an alternate way of running the macro. Some are *Alt* plus a letter; some are *Ctrl* plus a letter, and others are just another key by itself. In addition to these, some of the macros have no key identifiers at all. You'll learn why later.

I'm going to have you create a new macro file and record some macros. But first, a couple of preliminary tips. These have nothing to do with macros *per se*, but will

make life a lot easier for you:

- Set Q&A's *Automatic Execution* mode to *Yes*. The default setting is *No*, which means

that you have to press Enter each each time you make a menu selection. You can change this setting at the *File / Utilities / Set Global Options* screen. There is no reason to leave this set to No—it just forces you to press more keys to get anything done and it's a throwback to earlier versions of Q&A. All macros you record from this point onward will depend on this setting staying fixed, so the time to switch to Automatic Execution is now—*before* you start recording macros.

- Always store all your databases in just *one* directory (folder) and make this Q&A's default data directory (*File / Utilities / Set Global Options* again). If you want to create a separate folder for say, backup, obsolete, or archive databases, then make it a subdirectory of your default directory. Avoid "long" (more than eight-character) directory names and very long pathnames. Q&A can't open a database with a name such as

C:\DOCUME~1\ADMINI~1\Q&A50DOS\DATA\CUSTOMER.DTF

because the maximum path length (including the ".dtf" filename extension) is 45 characters.

Recording a macro

So, I'll assume now that after you've exited and restarted Q&A, selected *File / Search Update*, and pressed Enter, you'll see a list of all your databases. Right? Good! Now we can continue.

First, let's create a brand new macro file, so there's no danger of losing any existing macros you might have.

Press Shift F2 for the Macro Menu. (See Figure 2.)

Next, select *C - Clear Macros*. This will remove all

macros from memory. When you finish recording a macro, you'll save it into the macro file currently loaded in memory and Q&A will then prompt you to

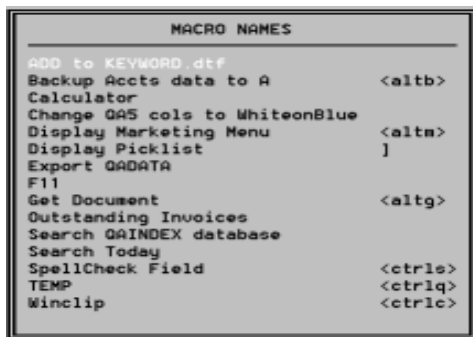


Figure 1. Q&A's Run Macro menu.

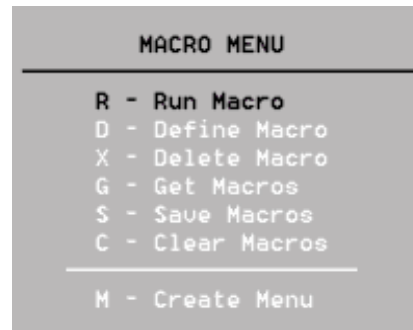


Figure 2. Q&A's Macro Menu

Continues on p. 14

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Bill Halpern *Q&A in All O/S's*

Everything you need to know about getting Q&A to run perfectly on any PC. Professional Computer Technology Associates (PCTA) co-owner and *Quick Answer @Help* column editor **Bill Halpern** gives an expert 90-minute wide-screen presentation on surviving with Q&A in in today's new operating systems and PCs. He covers a wide range of vital issues that are increasingly affecting all Q&A users: How to set

up Q&A to run optimally in Windows 98, 2000, NT and ME. System settings you'd better not ignore. The correct way to configure your Q&A Shortcut and properties. How to coax essential Expanded Memory from computers that don't come with it. Which new computers to avoid purchasing. Options for resolving the "too large hard drive partition" problem and why you put your data at risk by neglecting this issue. Bill covers all these issues and more in graphic detail. He then talks on resolving database corruption problems with Q&A 5.0, and offers some much-welcomed suggestions on how to handle common printing problems when using Q&A for DOS with troublesome printers.

Tom Marcellus *Q&A Data on the Web*

The Quick Answer publisher **Tom Marcellus** gives a 75-minute presentation on "Five Ways to Get Your Q&A Data on a Web Site." With the explosion of Internet access in recent years, the Web has become *the* low-cost medium for wide-area data dissemination in companies looking for a competitive edge in sales and service. Watch as Tom works with actual Q&A databases, demonstrating easy, practical

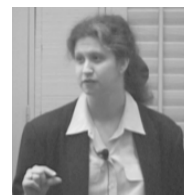


ways to output Q&A data to "Web-ready"-formatted files that can be immediately uploaded to a Web server at any interval for instantaneous access by anyone anywhere. Tom shows that Q&A has the tools to do it. You just have to know where they are and how to use them. Several of Tom's demo databases along with the Web files he uses during his presentation are on the Conference CD.

Erika Yoxall *Sophisticated Reports*

Many Q&A users with departmental or company-wide responsibilities rely on their workhorse Q&A databases to help them store, retrieve and manipulate their vital information. But when it comes to summarizing and committing that information to paper, Q&A's Report module too often just can't produce the kind of output—or *look*—needed to communicate the data in the clearest, most effective way. Q&A for DOS' inability to take advantage of the advanced features found in today's printers only compounds the problem. An attractive solution expertly

demonstrated by **Erika Yoxall** of Hammer Data Systems involves designing the report in Microsoft Access' powerful graphical report writer, then clicking on a button to flow in the data from the Q&A database. Q&A data. Access container. The result?—gorgeous, professional-looking report output enhanced with pictures, colors, lines, boxes and shading. Erika's demo files on the Conference CD help simplify setup.



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Jeff Noreman *Network Essentials*



"Houston, We Have a Problem—It's the Network Again." Whether you're sharing your databases over a network now or plan to in the future, this is one "high-tech" morass most of us would rather not have to confront. So we call in "The Network Guy"—a guy like **Jeff Noreman** of Nexus Unlimited. As Jeff points out early to a round of hearty laughter—where computer

networks are concerned: *if it ain't broke, it will be!* And it's laughter and learning for the next 90 minutes. Where *do* you begin when you want to network two or more PCs? What do you need to do in and with Q&A to

safely and efficiently share your files? Peer-to-peer vs. standalone server—which is best for you? Should you use Windows built-in networking or buy a networking software package? How do you setup network resource sharing for printers, Internet connections and the like? Home and home/office networks—how are these different? How do you choose a reliable network interface card? Cabling vs. telephone and electrical line networks—what are the advantages and disadvantages of these? Jeff covers all the essentials, including networking traps to avoid, interspersed with a host of troubleshooting tips. You'll be treated to a clinic on practical networking by the guy the Q&A experts call when "*It's the Network Again!*"

John Dow *Third-Party Q&A Utilities*

Nobody knows what *really* lives inside a Q&A database better than **John Dow**. That's because during the past few years John has developed a small army of powerful utility programs that do everything from analyzing and repairing Q&A database corruption, to extracting data, changing multiple passwords in a single pass, and copying report designs from one database to another. In his presentation,



John demos a number of his most popular utility programs for Q&A, showing their valuable diagnostic and time-saving capabilities. Judging by the periodic flurry of note-taking, for many attendees the solutions to their recurring Q&A problems were right there on the screen in one or more of John's demos. And they went home with the same demo files on their conference CDs.

Alec Mulvey *Merging Q&A Data with MS Word*

Regular *Quick Answer* contributor, **Alec Mulvey** of Keyword Training in the UK, proves, as in past Q&A Bashes, an exceptional treat. Alec's unflappable British wit, coupled with his wide-ranging expertise as a long-time Q&A developer, trainer, and computer applications consultant, has the audience in stitches as he gives a very well received big-screen demonstration on integrating Q&A data with Microsoft Word. A barrier for many Q&A for DOS users has long been the lack of a truly WYSIWYG word processor in which to design and print graphically-enhanced

merge letters, mailing labels, forms and the like. And then there's the problem of long-outdated Q&A printer driver support. Most people today have Microsoft Word on their computers, but many don't know how (or even if) they can merge their Q&A data with Word documents. Alec's detailed, step-by-step demonstration proves how easy it really is.



Q&A-Successor Product Unveiled—*See It in Action!*

You've known for some months that a group of Q&A developers, consultants and power users formed a company to develop a new 21st century Q&A-compatible database manager as a successor to Q&A. But who are the people doing it? What is this new product going to look like? What will it do for me that the Q&A I'm now using can't do? How *really* "Q&A-compatible" will it be? **Now you can find out!**

Tom Marcellus opens the presentation by describing the chain of events beginning in 1998 that led to the decision to develop an all new Q&A-compatible successor product.

Bill Halpern then takes the podium to tell you all about the new company, **Lantica Software, LLC**, which has been working on the new product for 18 months. Bill describes the company's objectives with the product—code-named "*Sesame*"—explaining that its first and foremost mission is to provide a solid and **sensible upgrade path**—a powerful 32-bit solution—for Q&A users running virtually any operating system now and to come—Windows 95/98, NT, ME, 2000, and even Linux/Unix! He then introduces the founding members and principals of the new company.

Bill goes on to describe and show the product's state-of-the-art **client-server** architecture, making it fast, efficient, and natively networkable, whether the server is down the hall, on the same computer

as the client (for standalone use), or 5,000 miles away on a Web server! "*Faster than Q&A*," is how Bill answers a question about speed.

Bill shows how the new product accommodates the **same programming syntax** as Q&A and describes how your Q&A database programming will convert in the new product right along with the form design, reports, field formatting and other specs.

What's more, the new product will feature a host of **powerful new programming capabilities**, such as true variables that don't require "temporary" fields to store interim calculations and loops that don't need separate fields with Q&A-like GOSUB/RETURN statements in them.

Sesame development team leaders Erika Yoxall and Mark Lasersohn then continue the demonstration. They take you on an extended hands-on tour of the Alpha version of "Sesame." You'll see up close its familiar **Q&A-like menu system** and form-based interface. You'll see databases with records being added and updated, including a form with an embedded subform that demonstrates the product's **relational capabilities**. You'll also discover how you can search a "Sesame" database exactly the same way you'd search a Q&A database. Same retrieval parameters; same syntax; same results. **Nothing new to learn!** This video will have you cheering right along with the audience!



Macros. . . cont'd from page 11

save that macro file to disk so that the macro file on disk is the same as the one in memory.

If you now press Alt-F2 or click the right mouse button or select “Run Macro” from the Macro Menu, you should get the message, “No macros have been defined.”

The next step is to create a new macro file to contain the macros you’re going to record. You can create a file within Q&A before you start recording macros:

1. Press Shift-F2 again for the macro menu.
2. Select S - Save Macros

The pathname Q&A proposes is the Q&A program files directory. Type the filename TEST.MAC and press Enter. (See the sidebar.) The dialog will close and that’s it.

Press Alt-F2 again. “No macros have been defined” again. That’s correct. We’ve got a macro file, but an empty one with no macros yet. Time for our first macro.

If you use Q&A’s Write word processor at all, then you will find that a macro to display the recently-used file list will come in handy. What’s that? You didn’t know Q&A Write has a recently-used file list? Shame on you!

Escape back to the main menu, then follow these steps:

1. Press Shift-F2 to display the Macro Menu.
2. Select D - Define Macro. Q&A prompts you to “Type the macro identifier, or press Enter for none.” For example: Alt-A, Alt-B, and so forth. We’ll use Alt-G.
3. Hold down the Alt key and press G. You will now see a small rectangle flashing alternately Red and Yellow in the extreme bottom-right corner of the Q&A screen. If you are running Q&A in a Window, you will see just a solid yellow rectangle that does not flash. You can switch Q&A between full-screen and window mode by pressing Alt-Enter at any time, even in the middle of recording a macro—Q&A doesn’t care. From here on out, Q&A will record *all* your keystrokes—even your typos and subsequent backspaces to erase the mistake. Even the Escape key. The *only* way to end recording a macro is to press Shift-F2 again.
4. Press W to select Write from the Main menu.
5. Press T to select Type/Edit from the Write menu. You should be at a blank document screen.
6. Press F8 for the Options Menu.
7. Press D for Documents from the Options menu.

Voilà: your most recently-used documents!

Naming Macro Files

Don’t use QAMACRO.ASC as a macro file name. Use anything else. The way that macros in Q&A work is that when Q&A starts up it looks for a macro file. If you don’t specify a particular one (you’ll learn how to do this shortly), then it looks for one named QAMACRO.ASC in the Q&A program files directory. If it doesn’t find this file either, then you’ll have no macros you can run. But—here’s the catch—if you then start recording macros, Q&A will create a *new* QAMACRO.ASC file and store them there. This is why I say use anything *but* QAMACRO.ASC as a macro filename. It’s so easy to get a proliferation of such files, all with the same name, and be confused about which is the right one, particularly on a network. Generally, you want one *unique* macro file, so it’s better to name it explicitly.

Q&A accepts anything as a macro filename and doesn’t care what the file extension is. You could even use “AUTOEXEC.BAT” as your macro file name—but *don’t!!!* I use the file extension “.MAC” for all macro files, so my working macro file is named KEYWORD.MAC.

It’s here you want to stop the macro, with the recently-used file list on screen, so you can select which document to open.

Press Shift-F2 again to stop recording. The *Macro Options* dialog is displayed. (See Figure 3.) Here is where you can give the macro a proper name. *Always* name your macros—it’s a zero-cost option.

The name Q&A proposes will be <altg>. *Never* just accept this! Rather, overtype it with a descriptive name for the macro. The macro name can be up to 31 characters and can include spaces, mixed capitalisation, and some (but not all) non-alphanumeric characters, which it’s wise to avoid anyway. Name your macro “Recent Documents,” and press F10.

Q&A now invites you to save the macro file. At this point, the macro file in memory has one more macro than its counterpart file that’s stored on disk. In our example, we’re using TEST.MAC. Press Enter or F10 to save the macro file with your new macro.

You now have one macro that you can run from the Q&A Main menu by pressing Alt-G. Try it.

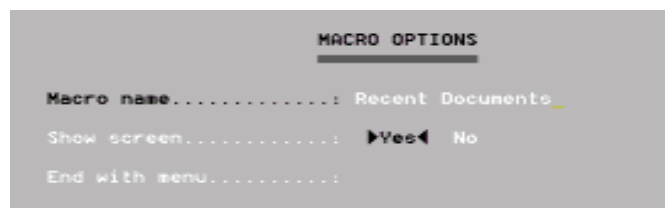


Figure 3. Naming the macro

Adding macros to the Main menu

Now, there's a possible snag. Suppose you're *not* at the Main menu? Open the File menu first, then press Alt-G. The macro doesn't work; it tries to *Post* from a file named "D". That's the problem with Q&A macros—they're dumb. It's vital to bear in mind the context of macros, and any conditions which must be met when they are run.

For example, you don't want to record a macro that Mass Updates a database on a network and then goes on to perform other actions, without considering what the consequences might be if another user is in that database, locking it and preventing the macro from continuing. Very often macros can be made "safe" by building in an "N" for "No" here, or an Esc there, to cover these circumstances. Always rehearse macros first (so that the file you're creating already exists and you get the "do you want to overwrite..." message), and test them under all expected conditions.

As for context, the safest thing by far is to control how macros are started. I avoid keystroke assignments wherever possible, limiting their use to safe macros that are unlikely to do damage, or to where you are forced to use them such as Alternate Menu items. Speaking of which: seeing we only want our Alt-G macro to start from the Main menu, let's add it to Q&A's Main menu. To do this, from the Main menu, select *Utilities / Set Alternate Programs*.

For Alternate Program 1 use type *Alt G* (with or without a space, capitalisation is irrelevant) and for the Menu selection type *Recent Docs*. It isn't possible to type "Recent Documents" due to the rather restrictive 13-character limit. Press F10.

Now your Q&A Main menu should have two columns. But there's another snag. Pressing "R" now runs the alternate program, and this conflicts with "R—Report." (You'll need to use the arrow keys to select Report.) Q&A always uses the first letter of the "Menu Selection" text as a keystroke shortcut for the menu item—without checking for conflicts. To resolve this, return to the Alternate Programs menu and change the menu selection to "Get Document" or "Last Docs" or any other text where the first letter does not conflict with a Q&A Main menu item.

Any macro run from the Alternate Programs menu must have an Alt-something key identifier. The Alt letter does not need to be the same as the first letter of the menu selection, so "L - Last Docs" can run the "Alt G" macro. (See Figure 4.)

Activating a Macro File

The next time you start Q&A, the default macro file, QAMACRO.ASC, will be loaded. You can load a different macro file into memory by pressing Shift-F2, selecting *G - Get Macros*, and specifying an alternative macro file. To load a specific macro file every time Q&A starts, you need to add a start-up switch to the Q&A command line. To do this, right-click on the shortcut icon that you use to start

Warning!

You should be more than hesitant about using the F3 (Delete) key in *any* macro unless you are very sure it will be safe under all conditions. Also be very cautious about using numbers in macros. You might not know this, but you can select Q&A menu items by typing the menu item number. So, for example, on the Main menu "1" is File, "2" is Report, "3" is Write, and so forth. If a macro can't do what it is intended to do, it will bash away at menus. Letters or numbers that do nothing will be ignored and any that do something will be invoked. It is alarming to consider that the sequence "16 F10 F10 1" will remove all records from the last database used! Please—if you want to try this—do so on a *copy* of a database!

Q&A, select *Properties / Program / Cmd Line*, and after QA.COM add a space then type *-AL[macro filename]*. For example:

```
C:\QA5\QA.COM -ALTEST.MAC
```

If your local hard disk or server partition is greater than 2G, then you should be using Lesspace and starting Q&A with a batch file. In this case, you'd have to modify the batch file. Just add the same start-up switch to the batch file's QA.COM line.

To continue, why don't you create some more macros to open your favourite database(s) in Search/Update mode and Add Data mode? These can likewise be put on the Main menu. You're limited to six additional Alternate Programs, but next month I'll show you how to easily create your own custom menus, so you can add limitless macros. I'll also show you how to how to create a "Pop-up" custom menu.

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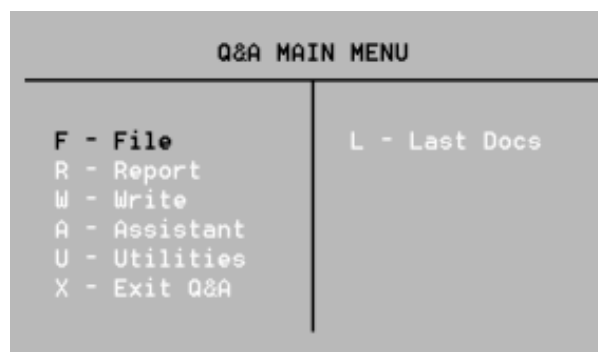


Figure 4. The Q&A Main menu with one Alternate Program

@Help... cont'd from page 7

```
<#32:
If ((#30 = "Y") and (#2<12/31/2000)) Then #32 =
(#31*.0775);
If (#30 = "Y") and (#2>1/1/2001) Then #32 = (#31*.0750);
If #30 = "N" Then #32 = 0.00
```

I can plug *any* percentage into the *first* statement and it works. But the conditions don't seem to work.

Marc

Close, but no cigar. Your program is inconsistent in some of the parentheses and missing some critical quote marks. Try this and it should work:

```
<#32:
If #30="Y" and #2<="12/31/2000" Then #32=(#31*.0775);
If #30="Y" and #2>"12/31/2000" Then #32=(#31*.0750);
If #30="N" Then #32=0
```

Dates specified in programming must be surrounded by quotes to prevent Q&A from interpreting them arithmetically.

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Updated Q&A ZipCode Database Now Available

After failing to find an up-to-date downloadable ZipCode file on the USPS's Web site, we wrote to them to complain. Back came the database we were looking for in Microsoft Access (yuck!) format. So we dumped the data out of it (42,713 records) and into a nice little Q&A 4.0 database that you can now download from the "Freebies" page at www.quickanswer.com and use in any version of Q&A.

The database contains a Speedy ZipCode field, along with fields for the City and State, so if you rig it up right as a lookup file, you'll be able to type in the Zip in an address record and have Q&A auto-fill the City and State fields. A program to do this might look like this one in the Zip field:

```
>XLookup("ZIPCODES", Zip, "Zip", "City", City,
"State", State)
```

Here, Zip, City and State are field names in both databases and the XLookup executes on leaving the Zip field (after the ZipCode has been entered).

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