

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

Volume 12, Number 2

- 1 Report on the Q&A Users Conference
- 2 *Tip*—Use the 'TL' Formatting Code
- 2 *Tip*—How Many Thousands?
- 6 @Help—*Edited by Bill Halpern*
 - *Printing Extended ASCII Characters*
 - *Converting Money to Longhand Text*
 - *Using Q&A Databases on CDs*
 - *QA1.EXE vs. QA.COM*
 - *Q&A and Windows ME*
 - *Expanded Memory Going Extinct*
 - *HP DeskJets and Q&A for DOS*
 - *Date Programming Problems*
- 8 Dynamic Pick-Lists in Q&A 4.0
John Dow
- 10 *Tip*—Get a 'Clean' Export File
- 11 Have Q&A 'Press the Keys' for You
Alec Mulvey
- 12 Q&A Conference Videos Available
- 16 New ZipCode Database Available

MARBLE
PUBLICATIONS

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

Continues on page 3

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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

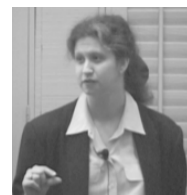


ways to output Q&A data to "Web-ready"-formatted files that can be immediately uploaded to a Web server at any interval for instantaneous access by anyone anywhere. Tom shows that Q&A has the tools to do it. You just have to know where they are and how to use them. Several of Tom's demo databases along 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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(Continues next page...)

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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, overwrite 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.

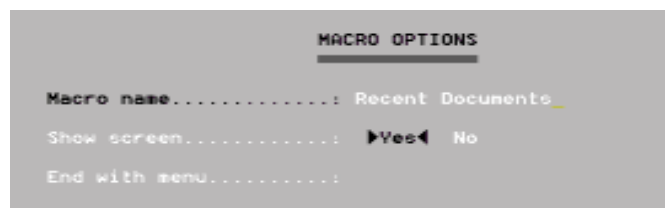


Figure 3. Naming the macro

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.

Alec Mulvey is a founding member and official of Lantica Software, LLC and owns Keyword Training & Consultancy in Ascot, near London, England. Alec has been building Q&A applications and training clients for 11 years. Keyword Training is the UK distributor for the International English edition of Q&A and John Dow's Utilities. Fax +44-1344-884-111, alec@keywordtraining.com, www.keywordtraining.com.

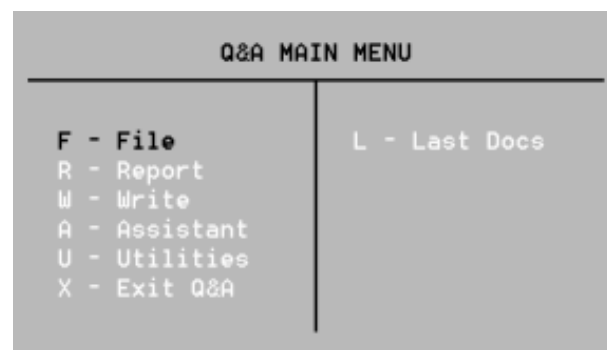


Figure 4. The Q&A Main menu with one Alternate Program

@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.

Bill Halpern is co-owner of Professional Computer Technology Associates (PCTA) in Newtown, Pennsylvania. He is also the President and CEO of Lantica Software, LLC. 215-598-8440, www.pcta-usa.com, email pcta@comcat.com.

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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First Class