

T·H·E Quick Answer

The independent monthly guide to Q&A expertise

Review: Q&A 5.0 for DOS— A Little Late, But Not Too Little

Dubbed the “Phoenix Project,” the Q&A for DOS upgrade’s compelling features will have you looking at your database applications—present and future—in a whole new light. A patch ensures Q&A for Windows compatibility with the new database format.

By Tom Marcellus

THOUGH Symantec announced Q&A 5.0 for DOS in mid-June, the anticipated July release was bumped to August to complete beta testing on the “American” version. So with only the beta to go on, I’ll cover 5.0’s new features as I found them—solid for the most part. I’ll show you how to use the features, including ways to combine them to make Q&A perform fabulous feats. Though the examples I provide might not be right up your application alley, you should be able adapt them easily enough.

The bulk of version 5.0’s enhancements are in the database, with a few key improvements elsewhere. For example, the row limit on crosstabs has been increased from 100 to 500, and report headers and

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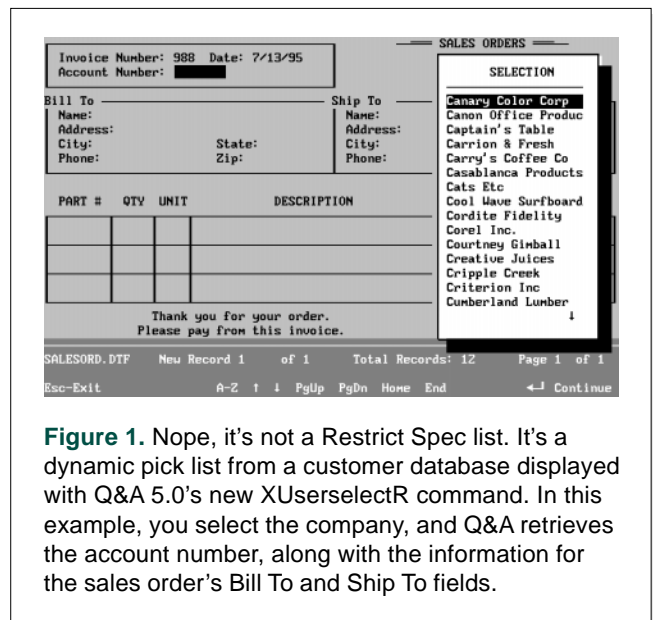


Figure 1. Nope, it’s not a Restrict Spec list. It’s a dynamic pick list from a customer database displayed with Q&A 5.0’s new XUserselectR command. In this example, you select the company, and Q&A retrieves the account number, along with the information for the sales order’s Bill To and Ship To fields.

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README.1ST

While Q&A enthusiasts across the United States pressed Symantec for an upgrade, over in Germany—where the “F&A” user base is equally huge—work had already begun on one. Under a closely held agreement, Symantec supplied a Dusseldorf software developer with the Q&A source code, and the German firm plugged in a host of new features to make Q&A more versatile, more relational, and easier than ever to use. Earlier this year, the German-language 5.0 beta emerged, and pulses quickened.

Those of us who test drove the German beta were treated to a rocket ride. Even in the low light of another language, it was clear that although Q&A’s familiar look and feel were still there, tremendous new potential had been smoothly integrated into the product. There were innovations to substantially enhance any database application and make any Q&A user more productive. It was a new ball game.

In the United States, the grassroots campaign for an upgrade continued. With a promising beta already in hand, Symantec launched a “Phoenix Beta” program of its own with an American edition, and the result is a Q&A for DOS upgrade you can take into the 21st century, whether you run it in Windows or in its native DOS environment.

This month I’ll cover the gamut of Q&A 5.0’s new features. Though space prevents me from doing justice to the full range of application possibilities or showing you the many ways you can combine them to create even more powerful solutions, you’ll read about these solutions right here in the months to come.

See you in September

If you’re free the weekend of September 16, you really ought to jump in your car or hop on a plane and come to Gaithersburg, Maryland, (just outside Washington D.C.) for what promises to be the best-attended National Q&A User Group Bash ever. Better yet, arrive in time to attend *The Quick Answer’s* day-long Q&A 5.0 seminar on Friday, September 15, where you’ll meet and hear *The Quick Answer* regulars Mike Bell, David Dvorin, Bill Halpern, Gordon Meigs, Jeff Nitka, and yours truly. We’ll have the big screen up and our PCs humming, and you’ll see live demos of our coolest time-saving tricks and techniques. Bring your Q&A questions and problems, and return home with solutions. Call 800-780-5474 or 301-424-1658 for more information. Hope to see you there!

Tom Marcellus
Editor

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Q&A 5.0 for DOS

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footers now support programming expressions. Q&A's shell capabilities have been vastly improved, and a product-wide Clipboard has been implemented. In the word processor, you can now include .PCX and .BMP graphic images.

Copy and paste big time

For many, the Clipboard alone will make the upgrade worth its \$79 price tag. When you copy text to it (up to a page and a half) the text is available until you replace it or exit the program. You can transfer programming statements and document paragraphs via the Clipboard and use it to pass database values as global variables. Put a customer ID in the Clipboard with a keystroke, drop it into the Retrieve Spec of another database, and you'll have your linked records in short order. And because you can now launch a macro from a programming statement (and your macro can copy and paste to and from the Clipboard), you can zip back and forth between linked records in different databases as fast as Q&A can change screens.

The F11 and F12 function keys have finally found a home in Q&A as the Clipboard's copy and paste keys. In the database, F11 copies the active field to the Clipboard, and F12 pastes it. To print a form letter or mailing label for the record you're viewing, simply pass its key value to the merge printing Retrieve Spec via the Clipboard. It's that simple.

In Write, press F11 to select the text, then F10 to copy it to the Clipboard. You can then paste it into another document or a database record. Though you can't cut (move) text to the Clipboard like you can in Windows, you can use the F3 delete command without affecting what's in the Clipboard. If you don't have F11 and F12 keys on your keyboard, you can record macros that fool Q&A into thinking you do.

Speaking of macros, Q&A 5.0 comes with its own QAMACRO.ASC file. If you install the upgrade to a directory that already contains QAMACRO.ASC, it will be renamed QAMACRO.400. You might want to save Q&A's macro file to another name or directory before renaming your old macro file QAMACRO.ASC.

Interface extras

A nifty option—the Start menu—displays the names of the document and database you last worked on and loads either one on start-up with a keystroke. Use the *QA -startup* command to start Q&A with the Start menu displayed, or make it a default start-up switch

via the Utilities / Set Global Options screen. Be sure any start-up macros you use take the new menu into account.

The upgrade's built-in calculator isn't much to look at, but you can pop it up in a form or document to quickly crunch your numbers. Shift-F3 displays the Calculator, and F10 pastes the answer into the active field or document.

For the vision-impaired, Q&A 5.0 offers a special start-up mode that makes its screens display a flashing cursor for driving single-line Braille output. Invoke this mode by starting Q&A with the *QA -blind* command.

Have shell. Will travel.

Remember the day you ran out of Main menu slots for your alternate programs? Now you can add your DOS programs and batch files to the External Programs menu and launch them from anywhere in the Q&A (even if you're running Q&A in Windows 3.1). When the external program is finished, Q&A returns you to where you were. What's more, the feature lets you pass data to and retrieve data from another program. And with the ability to include switches, files, and the like, you can have total command over your environment from inside Q&A.

But there's more. With DOS SHARE installed, you can safely launch another Q&A session using the same QA.COM file, perform a task in it, then switch back to your original screen. You can even switch from Add Data to Search/Update in the same database (you may have to set your Sharing Mode to Allow). Each Q&A session can have its own start-up switches, including an autoloader macro file and start-up macro—a practical solution to bloated macro files.

When multiple Q&A sessions are running, the copy number appears on the Main screen, so you'll always know where you are. When you exit Copy 2 through its Main menu, you're back in your original session at the screen where you launched Copy 2. Very fast. Very cool.

Though the Clipboard can't pass text between Q&A sessions, an external program can. Suppose while working in a database, you want to pass the value from the current field to another copy of Q&A. Simply add an external program with a command line that starts Q&A with the %g parameter, like this:

```
D:\QA\QA.COM %g
```

When you invoke the program, Q&A replaces %g with the current field value, launches the second copy of Q&A, and displays the value. If you include an autostart macro on the command line, you can do something with that variable, such as copy it to the Clipboard or save it to a disk file, then use it to perform a task in Copy 2 before returning you to

Copy 1. (For an example of this, see the sidebar, "Creating 'Post-to' Records On-the-Fly.")

Using the %g and %h command line parameters in tandem, you can pass your data (as an ASCII file) to another program where you can modify it, and Q&A will automatically return the modified file to the point where you started. (If you're doing this with a second copy of Q&A, be sure your Write Editing Options specify ASCII as the default import type.) Suppose your external program's command line is C:\QA\QA.COM %g %h, and the cursor is in the unexpanded MyField field. When you invoke the program, Q&A will pass a file containing MyField's text (%g) to Copy 2 and display it. You can modify the file and resave it to ASCII, and when you exit Copy 2, Q&A will drop the modified file (now %h) into the MyField field. (Q&A stores the file in the default temporary files subdirectory under an obscure filename such as AKAKBDA.)

A %f parameter on an external program's command line tells Q&A to pass a start-up switch. It can be a document or database filename, a macro filename, or a start-up macro—any start-up switch acceptable to the external program. When you invoke the external program from a database record, Q&A passes whatever is in the current field as the %f parameter. If you set the current field to CUSTLIST.DOC, Q&A will display the document. By programming your database to conditionally fill a field with a filename or switch, you can pass different start-up parameters to your programs, tailored to the tasks you want to perform.

Figure 2 shows the External Programs installation screen with selections that start another copy of Q&A to perform a special task. Figure 3 shows the resulting

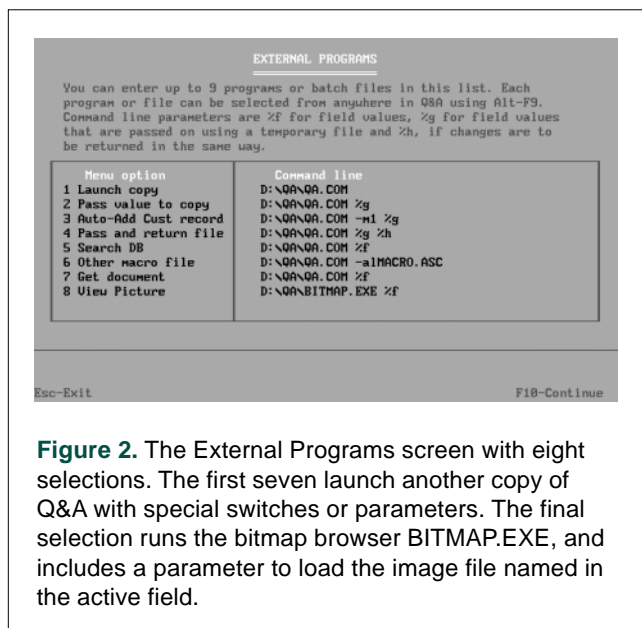


Figure 2. The External Programs screen with eight selections. The first seven launch another copy of Q&A with special switches or parameters. The final selection runs the bitmap browser BITMAP.EXE, and includes a parameter to load the image file named in the active field.

External Programs menu. For another way to shell out to an external program, see the @Shell command later in this review.

Pass the crayons, please

Q&A 5.0 brings a rainbow of colors to the File module. You can choose different colors for a field's text, background, and label, as well as set the overall form color. Paint groups of fields to differentiate logical sections of your form, or set the active field to a contrasting color. Create a gorgeous (or garish) default palette, then use the new @Color command in If/Then statements to draw attention to particular fields during data entry. Programmed color changes affect only the displayed record and can't be saved. Here's the syntax for @Color, followed by two examples:

```
@Color(field ID or field name;
      text color number; background color number)

If @Add and Over Limit > 0 then @Color(Over Limit, 10,
4)
If State <> "" and Zip = "" then @Color(Zip, 4, 10)
```

You can choose dark and light shades of 16 colors for a variety of text/field color combinations. My only beef was that I couldn't color different areas of my form. I had shipping and billing address fields in their own Line Draw boxes, and though I could color the fields and labels, I couldn't paint the background inside just the boxes.

Q&A 5.0 supports image (picture) fields in database records and even includes a picture browsing utility. (You can launch the BITMAP.EXE browser from your External Programs menu.) The upgrade accommodates .PCX and .BMP bitmap files of up to 256 colors. With a VGA monitor, you can view a record's picture by retrieving the record and pressing Shift-F11. When you delete a record, Q&A deletes any pictures associated with it.

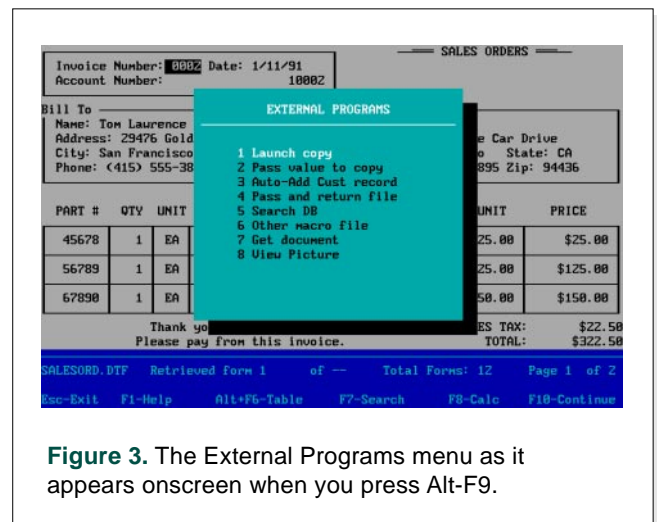


Figure 3. The External Programs menu as it appears onscreen when you press Alt-F9.

A database containing lots of images can be unwieldy, so it's a good idea to limit the size of your bitmaps before adding them to the database. You can convert color images to black and white, crop them, or make them smaller to reduce their file sizes. If you use photos, generate them in resolutions no higher than what your monitor supports.

Unless you'll need to access the database in Q&A for Windows, you're better off not adding images to your database at all. Instead, add a text field to store the path and name of the bitmap file, then program the field like this to launch the bitmap browser and display the image:

```
<#200: If Not @Shell("BITMAP.EXE " + #200) = #200
Then @Msg("Picture file " + #200 + " not found.
Please check.")
```

An alternative would be to add BITMAP.EXE %f to the External Programs menu, then invoke it from the picture field.

The revamped Utilities menu includes an Install Graphics Card selection to test and set the resolution supported by your display adapter and monitor. If you're not using images, don't bother.

You can add pictures and logos to your Write documents, as long as they're .PCX or .BMP files, and as long as your printer can print graphics. Write's *GRAPH* command now supports the new file formats in addition to the prehistoric .PIC and

The Trouble with Color

Q&A 5.0's new color and image capabilities involved changes to the database engine, so your 4.0 databases must be upgraded for use with 5.0. Upgrading a database resets its color scheme to Q&A's default gray on blue, so plan to invest some time re-creating your non-default palettes. After installing the upgrade, open your databases in Search mode to upgrade them. Then, any existing database-opening macros you run won't bomb.

PFS:Graph files. To have Q&A print a bitmap image, place the *GRAPH* command at the location in the document where you want the image to print. Be sure to include the full path to the bitmap file if it's not in your default documents directory:

```
*GRAPH C:\BITMAPS\MYLOGO.BMP*
```

I was disappointed by the lack of image-sizing support in the *GRAPH* command (to resize an image, you'll need a program such as Paintbrush or Hijaak) and at Page Preview's inability to accurately render images. Also, though black and

white bitmaps came out fine on my LaserJet 4P, color bitmaps printed poorly. I hope we'll see some improvements in the final release.

New programming functions

Screen mail

You can use the new @Msgbox function to conditionally display your custom three-line message. Unlike @Msg, which plants a one-liner at the bottom of the screen, your @Msgbox message won't escape notice, if only because it makes you press Enter to put it away. What's more, you can program @Msgbox to include context-sensitive variable text. Figure 4 shows the kind of custom message you can display if Sally enters Blarney Inc's account number on a new sales order.

Here's the programming technique that displays the message box shown in Figure 4:

```
> If @Add and @XLookup("Customer", Account Number,
"Account Number", "Late Balance") > 0
Then
@MsgBox("But " + @UserID + "-" +
@XLookup("Customer", Account Number,
"Account Number", "Company") + " is a deadbeat!",
"$" + @XLookup("Customer", Account Number,
"Account Number", "Late Balance") +
" in unpaid invoices!",
"Best get the boss's OK on this one.")
```

Programming a bare-bones @Msgbox involves nothing more than plugging in the three lines of text you want to display:

```
@MsgBox("line1", "line2", "line3")
```

Because @Msgbox expects three lines, leave in the double quote marks for any blank lines. A displayed message box suspends programming execution until you press Enter, F10, or Esc to put it away. If you

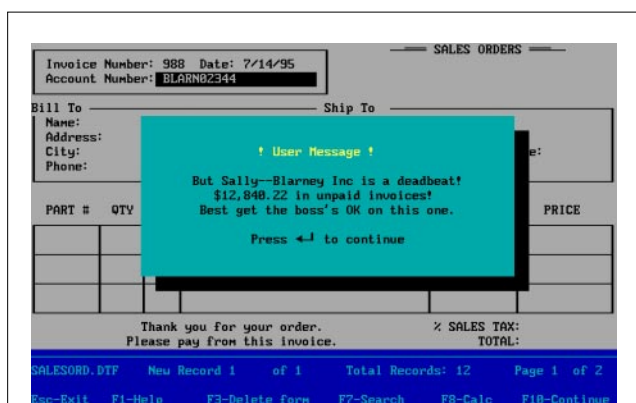


Figure 4. You can conditionally display an @Msgbox message box with your context-sensitive message. Here, the User ID, company name, and dollar amount are variables within the fixed text.

want Q&A to prompt for a decision, see the sidebar, "Yes/No Message Boxes Prompt for a Decision."

Miscellaneous functions

The @Save command speeds data entry by making it unnecessary to press F10 to save the current record and get the next one. For example, you can have your program validate the record, then invoke @Save if everything checks out. @Save is also a cool way to streamline a marathon data entry session.

The @Exit function works the other way. It chucks any changes made to the current record since the last save and exits to the File menu—no questions asked. Use @Exit in conditional statements as another way to tamper-proof your data.

Q&A 5.0's @Modified function tells you if changes have been made to the current record. It doesn't tell you *what* was changed—it simply returns true or false. Use it in an If/Then statement to have Q&A do something if the record onscreen doesn't match the one on disk. To track changes to records, you could use @Modified to conditionally post the date, time, User ID, and record number to an external history record. This way, you'd know whodunit, and when.

If you want the field editor to open automatically, you can use @Fedit in an on-field-entry program and forget about pressing F6. Like most of the new functions, you can place @Fedit in the Navigation or Program Spec. This way, you can have Q&A do something when you enter the field, and something else when you leave it. Because programming statements execute before Navigation commands, you have even more options.

(Speaking of programming, the beta documentation indicates you can now add comments to your code. Simply type REM on an empty line, followed by your comment inside double quote marks. Q&A will ignore any comments when running the program, but they'll be there to help you and future generations find the meatballs in your spaghetti.)

The @Insert function inserts a Q&A or ASCII text file into the field you specify. Be sure to include the complete path to the document if it isn't in your default document directory. Here's a sample @Insert statement:

```
>#20: If @Add and #20 = "" Then
      ListField = @Insert("F:\LISTS\LIST1.DOC")
```

You can program Q&A to pop up a list of document names and feed your selection to @Insert. (I'll cover the new Userselect command later.) You can also include an @Fedit command to expand the field once the document has been inserted.

Name that tune

The new @Play command produces a sound on your

PC's internal speaker. Use it to alert the user to an error, a questionable entry, or the completion of a complex recalculation. @Play("Beep") and @Play("Click") produce a beep and a lower toned beep. You can use @Play conditionally in conjunction with other functions. For example, to alert the user to a failed XLookup, you could create a program like this:

```
If @Error Then
  { @Play("Beep");
  @MsgBox("Well, " + @UserID + ", that ID number
  bombed.",
          "Go ahead and give it another shot","") }
```

You can program @Play to play a ditty. This one plays CHARGE!:

```
< @Play("sound", "196,100"); @Play("sound", "256,100");
  @Play("sound", "329,100"); @Play("sound", "392,200");
  @Play("sound", "329,100"); @Play("sound", "392,300")
```

Yes/No Message Boxes Prompt for a Decision

If you want the user to make a decision during data entry, you can use the new @Askuser function. @Askuser displays a message box like @Msgbox and shares its syntax, but it prompts for a Yes or No response that you can link to an appropriate programmed action. Here's an @Askuser routine that shells to another copy of QA following a "Yes" response, and prints the current record following a "No" response:

```
> If OpenOrders > 0 then If
  @Askuser("Start another copy of Q&A",
  "and run Open Orders report?","")
Then
  { OpenOrders = @Shell("D:\QA\QA.COM -m6");
  Clear(OpenOrders) }
Else { Printed = "x"; @Macro("Print Record") }
```

Here, if the OpenOrders field is greater than 0, the @Askuser message box asks if you want to run the Open Orders Report. If you say "Yes," another copy of Q&A is launched with an Alt-6 start-up macro to run the report. When you return to Copy 1, Q&A clears the OpenOrders field. If you say "No," Q&A places an "x" in the Printed field and runs the macro named *Print Record*.

You program @Askuser for a "Yes" response and include an Else clause to have Q&A act on the "No" response.

With a hierarchy of @Askuser message boxes, you can guide the user through a multistep decision-making process and have Q&A do something with the decision at each step.

The first number sets the frequency, or tone, and the second, its duration in milliseconds. Use @Play with @Color and @MsgBox to wake the dead.

Don't leave home without it

For many, @Macro will prove to be among the most useful of the new features. Once you've defined your macros, you can include them in @Macro commands and run them conditionally. You can have Q&A run macro 1 (by name or key identifier) when condition A is present, macro 2 when condition B is present, and so forth. The macros must be available in the macro file currently in memory.

Here's a program that executes the macro named *View Payment History* when the invoice date is more than 30 days old:

```
If Invoice Date < @Date-30 Then @Macro("View Payment History")
```

If the macro was recorded with an Alt-1 key identifier, you'd invoke it with @Macro("Alt1").

Suppose you print your invoices in a Write merge document (INVOICE.DOC), and you'd like the option

of printing a completed invoice with the press of a key. Start by adding a field named Printed to the end of your invoice form, and program it along these lines:

```
< If @Askuser("OK to merge-print this invoice now?","","")
Then {
Printed = Invoice No;
@Macro("Print Invoice")}

```

Next, record your Print Invoice macro with the following commands:

```
<begdef><nokey><name>"print<sp>invoice"<vidoff><f11>
<capsf4>√<capsf10><esc>wg<home>d:\qa\docs\invoice.doc
<enter><f2><f10><f12><f10><enter><esc><esc>fainvoice
<enter><enddef>

```

When the cursor enters the Printed field, Q&A asks if you want to print the invoice now. If you press "Y," the program copies the invoice number to the Printed field then calls the Print Invoice macro. The macro copies the invoice number to the Clipboard, places a "√" (check mark) in the Printed field, then saves the invoice and exits. The macro continues, loading INVOICE.DOC, pasting the invoice number

How the New @Shell Command Works

Q&A 5.0's powerful @Shell function runs an internal DOS command (TYPE, DIR, MEM, and so forth), a batch file, or another DOS program (including another copy of Q&A). When the external operation or program is finished, Q&A returns you to the same record. For example, if you wanted to conditionally shell out to Norton Utilities, you could use a command like this:

```
> If @Modified then #15 = @Shell("C:\NU\NORTON.EXE")
```

@Shell works with Q&A 5.0 running in Windows 3.1, but don't expect to "shell out" to an actual Windows application.

When you use @Shell to launch another copy of Q&A, then exit that copy, you return to the screen where you invoked the command. Any pending programming statements are then executed.

Suppose you wanted the option to display open purchase orders while working in a vendor database. Ordinarily, you'd have to abandon what you were doing, exit VENDORS.DTF, and open PO.DTF. @Shell takes the pain out.

First, define a new macro with an Alt-*number* key identifier (from Alt-1 through Alt-9). Record the keystrokes that take you from the Main menu to PO.DTF's Retrieve Spec. Save this macro to your macro file or to a new macro file—MACRO.ASC, for example.

Next, add the @Shell command to your VENDOR database's Program Spec. Here's a sample program:

```
> If SearchPO = "Y" Then
{SearchPO = @Shell("QA -alMACRO.ASC -m1");
Clear(SearchPO)}
```

With this program, you simply type a "Y" in the SearchPO field and press Enter. Q&A starts another copy of Q&A, loads the MACRO.ASC file, and runs its Alt-1 macro (taking you to PO.DTF's Retrieve Spec). When you exit Copy 2, Q&A returns you to the vendor record you were in, then clears the SearchPO field.

For even more flexibility, you could add a series of Alt-*number* macros (Alt-1, Alt-2, and so forth) to a macro file, and create an @Userselect menu (more on this function later) to display descriptions for them. By embedding @Userselect in @Shell, as shown in the following example, your program can display the menu, pass the first character of your selection to the -m start-up macro parameter, shell to a second copy of Q&A, and run the macro that takes you to the pertinent screen:

```
> If Search = "Y" Then
{Search = @Shell("QA -alMACROS.ASC -m" +
@Userselect("1 - View POs,2 - View Stock items,
3 - View Customers,4 - View Vendors"));
Clear(Search)}
```

into the Invoice No field at the Retrieve Spec, then returning you to Add Data for a new invoice as the previous invoice prints out.

You can turn your Alt-F7 list of restricted values into an “un”-Alt-F7 list simply by defining a no-key macro named Alt-F7 (include the dash). With the recorder running, press Alt-F7, then end recording and save the macro. To display your list of Restrict Spec state abbreviations as you enter the State field, program the field like this:

```
< If @Add then @Macro("Alt-F7")
else Cnext
```

If you use a mouse, you could add a group of push button-like “task” fields along the bottom of the form. By programming each one with an on-field-entry @Macro command, you could simply click on the appropriate “button” to make Q&A perform the task. You can also use @Macro to pop up a custom menu containing various macros to run or optional menus to display.

By teaming up @Askuser and @Macro, you could prompt for permission to run a sensitive procedure. With different macros connected to the “Yes” and “No” responses, you could branch to the macro appropriate to the response, display another

Tailor Make Your Report Titles

Q&A 4.0's 100-row ceiling on crosstab reports has been increased to 500. Q&A 5.0 also supports programming expressions in report headers and footers, giving you the flexibility to really customize your report titles. To add a programming expression to a report header or footer, use the same format you use in Write. For example, to print the database's path and filename, type the following on one of the header or footer lines at the report's Define Page screen:

```
Report compiled from *PG {@Filename}*
```

Any programming expression that works in a Write document or mailing label, including @XLookup, should work in your report header or footer.

@Askuser message box, or whatever. If you needed this feature outside the database, you could create a small “switch yard” database containing fields and programming to accommodate your @Askuser and @Macro commands and have your macros go there to obtain their marching orders.

More ways to get at your data

Q&A's Lookup family now includes list display commands that bring powerful point-and-shoot simplicity to data entry. The versatility of these new commands is remarkable—they have possibilities far beyond what the documentation suggests.

Point 'n' shoot data entry

The Userselect command displays a sorted pick list of items and places your selection in the target field. Think of it as a kind of Lookup Table that displays all the entries instead of just one. Functionally, it's similar to the Alt-F7 list of restricted values, except that Q&A displays the list automatically, and the selections don't have to be restrictions. Here's Userselect's syntax along with an example:

```
Userselect("item1,item2,item3,...item30",
          target field)
```

Retrieve Spec Window Opens Wide

If you've cursed the 240-character limit on Retrieve Spec search values, moaned as they disappeared from the “expand field” line at the bottom of the screen, or lamented that you couldn't pass your search values to the Retrieve Spec from another source, curse, moan, and lament no more. Now you can press F6 at the Retrieve Spec and get a real field editor. All your search values remain within easy view as you add more to the list, and the 240-character limit has disappeared.

The F8 Options menu is available as well, so you can insert a list of search values, such as a file containing names, cities, products, or whatever, exported from your database or from another source.

Optionally, you can pass a list (or just a value) to the pertinent field via the Clipboard. If the list isn't properly formatted with a semicolon between each value, you can use the F7 Search-and-Replace feature to put it in shape without leaving the Retrieve Spec.

I exported 100 company names (1000-plus characters) from a database to a semicolon-delimited Standard ASCII file, and when I inserted the file in the Retrieve Spec (without reformatting it), Q&A found the records without a hitch. Strangely, though, when I used the same method with account ID numbers (strictly digits), Q&A ignored them and returned all the records in the database. But when I formatted the Account ID field for numbers then reran the procedure, it worked!


```
< Userselect("Jaguar,Ferrari,Corvette,Porsche,Matador",
            Exotic Car)
```

In this case, Exotic Car is the *target field*—the field that receives the selection.

Add as many items as you need, in any order, and separate each with a comma. (Don't leave a space between the comma and the beginning of an item.) With the list displayed, you can scroll it or press the first character or two to move to the item you want. (Your options for moving to and selecting an item are the same for all the new list display commands. Press Ctrl-End to move to the end of the list, Ctrl-Home to move to the top, and PgDn and PgUp to display the next or previous 15 entries.)

With Userselect you can choose an appropriate message to include in records you'll print and mail (invoices, for example):

```
Thanks for your order! Call us anytime!
Reminder—this is a PRO-FORMA invoice.
Call Randi at ext. 432 if there's a problem.
Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!
30% off on all widgets through August 31st!
We will be closed over Labor Day weekend.
```

If you need to return the selected item as a variable, use the @Userselect function without the *target field* parameter. This way, you can do something with the item. In the following example, if you select

bread from the list, *day-old bread* will be placed in field #10.

```
#10 = "day-old " + @Userselect("donuts,wheat bread,pound
cake")
```

You can employ multiple Userselect commands to narrow choices for a field. In the following program, a list containing UPS Air and UPS Ground appears when you move to the Ship Via field. If you select Ground, the Ship Via field gets Ground, and the cursor moves to the next field. If you select UPS Air, however, another list appears with Next Day, Second Day, and Letter, and your choice is placed in the Ship Via field before the cursor moves on:

```
< If @Userselect("UPS Ground,UPS Air") = "UPS Air"
Then
Userselect("Next Day,Second Day,Letter", Ship Via)
Else
Ship Via = "Ground";
Cnext
```

The technique makes for fast and consistent data entry because you're selecting, not typing.

A window to other databases

When you need information from another database, you can use Q&A 5.0's mighty XUserselect command to display a pick list of customers, employees,

XUserselectR—Speed Demon or Sunday Driver?

Interested in finding out how XUserselectR would perform on my standalone 486-DX2 PC with 8M RAM, I tested it with Q&A running in DOS, then in a full screen in Windows. Q&A performed slightly better when running in DOS. I'll mention only those results.

To ensure my lookup databases were at their best, I ran Recover on them first.

Out of curiosity, I wanted to see how XUserselectR handled a 16,600-record lookup database when I specified an A to Z range. For the command's external field parameter, I used Last Name, a Speedy field (one of four in the database) containing 30 percent duplicate values. XUserselectR took 100 seconds to filter out the duplicates (nearly one out of three), report that not enough memory was available to display all the names, and ask if I wanted to display 3,275 of them. I answered Yes, and the list (with names A through most of F) appeared. I'd expected Q&A to display the first group of names fairly quickly—like it does in Table View—but it didn't work that way. Nor did Q&A offer to display the rest of the records. Rerunning the test using XUserselect didn't improve performance.

Clearly, the command isn't designed to handle huge lists. When I set the range parameters to display just the names beginning with "F," the 625 names appeared in 12 seconds. I asked for the "S" names (1,792), and got them in 40 seconds.

The same tests on a 10,500-record database with a single Speedy field and *no* duplicate key field values improved performance dramatically. The A to Z lookup took 20 seconds (Q&A still offered to display just the first 3,275 names), and the "S"-names lookup (1,107 records) took 12 seconds.

With a 5,000-record database, Q&A displayed the "S"-names (315 records) in about a second. With a 3,000-record database, Q&A displayed all the records in five seconds, and any range I specified instantaneously.

The rules for using XUserselectR commands with a large lookup database are pretty obvious: Don't use a range that could result in Q&A finding more records than it can display (available memory is a factor), and always use the smallest range that will display the information you need.

A third rule: Make it easy to set and revise the range.

vendors, part numbers, descriptions, open invoices—whatever you need (see Figure 1). XUserselect's syntax is straightforward:

```
XUserselect("database", "external key field", target field)
< XUserselect("CUSTOMER", "Company", Sold To)
```

The example displays a list of companies in CUSTOMER.DTF and places your selection in the Sold To field of the current record.

Database is the database you want to access. *External key field*, which must be Speedy, contains the values for the pick list. The item you choose is placed in the record's *target field*.

Because XUserselect's external key field is also the lookup field, your target field is limited to key values. For more flexibility—and when the external database contains thousands of records—you'll need XUserselectR (more on this later).

XUserselect (using an external database) is preferable to Userselect in applications where the list is lengthy and subject to frequent change.

An XUserselect list displays only *unduplicated* values, which might be a problem if you perform an XLookup on your selection. Suppose your external key field is Last Name and your customer database contains several Smiths, the resulting list will contain only one Smith, and your XLookup might retrieve

information from the wrong Smith record. For this reason, the XUserselect family of commands, like XLookup, is best used when the external key field entries are unique, at least through the 16th character.

(If your database doesn't contain a unique field, you can create one. You can combine the last name and the ZIP code (SMITH30433), for example—whatever is likely to result in a unique value that helps you (and Q&A) tell one Smith from another. During data entry, once you've selected the correct Smith, your XLookup can overwrite the combination key value with the actual last name.)

Fine tune your XUserselect list

XUserselect's subset includes XUserselectR, @XUserselect, and @XUserselectR. Use the @XUserselect command when you want to do something with the selected item besides place it in a field (though you can still assign it to a field). For example, you might want to perform an XLookup on the selected item, have Q&A compare it to another value, or use it to conditionally invoke an @Macro command.

If your lookup database contains a vast number of records, you'll need to control which ones Q&A displays to avoid lengthy lookup delays. The XUserselectR and @XUserselectR commands are just the ticket. They not only let you specify a *range* of records for your pick list, they give you the option of

Turn Those Lists Into Custom Menus

You can use Q&A 5.0's list display commands—Userselect, XUserselect, and their variations—to create custom menus that perform all sorts of useful tricks. As an earlier example showed, you can pass the selection on an @Userselect list as a parameter to @Shell. But you can do much more.

Because an @Userselect list displays only the items' first 19 characters, you can add spaces after the final character and tack on a special parameter—a macro to run, a document name to retrieve—starting at the 20th character position. When you display the list, your special parameters won't show, but you can pass them to other functions to perform the actual task.

Here's a sample routine that executes when the cursor enters the Help field. The program displays an @Userselect list (abbreviated @US) containing descriptions of three documents, inserts the selected document in the Help field, then opens the Field Editor so the document can be perused:

```
< Help = @Insert(@Mid(@US("Looking up names? HELP1.DOC,
Choosing tax rates?HELP2.DOC,Shipping options?
HELP3.DOC"),
20, 12)); @Fedit
```

You can also create easy-to-maintain databases that store information you can display as menu selections on @XUserselectR lists. Such a database might include a description field containing document descriptions, and a lookup field to store the corresponding filenames. This way, you could use @XUserselectR to display your document descriptions and feed the filename to @Insert. This setup could also pass a document name to an @Shell command that launches another copy of Q&A (where the document could be displayed full screen).

You can use databases to store macro names (as parameters to pass to an @Macro command), macro filenames, Alt-*number* start-up macros, alternate DOS programs, internal DOS commands, and the like. @XUserselectR displays them as menu selections, and passes the data field as a parameter to other functions, including @Shell. It's like having custom menus with dozens (even hundreds) of available selections, instead of just nine.

filling the target field with a value other than the external key field—that is, other than the values displayed on the list. Here's the syntax for XUserselectR:

```
XUserselectR("database", "external field", "data field",
"range starting value", "range ending value",
target field)
```

By placing @XUserselectR inside XLookup, you can make your program more efficient and take advantage of XLookup's ability to retrieve multiple field values from the external database:

```
< If @Add then
  XLookup("CUSTOMER",@XUserselectR("CUSTOMER",
"Company",
  "Acct No", "A","Z"),
"Acct No", "Acct No", Acct No,
"Company", Ship To,
"Address1", ShipAddress1,
"Address2", ShipAddress2)
```

In this example, a pick list of all (A to Z) customers appears when you move to the Acct No field. When you select a customer, the account number is returned to the XLookup command, which retrieves the customer information—in this case, the company name and shipping address.

Creating "Post-to" Records On the Fly

Version 5.0 can't *create* a record to post to, even though an option to add a record on the fly then post to it would be useful in many applications. You can, however, use the External Programs feature to achieve the same objective.

Suppose you're processing orders and you've got one from a new customer. You'd like to add this customer to the CUSTOMER file right away so you can XPost the order information to it.

Assuming you can assign a unique account number or customer ID to this new customer from the ORDERS database, the following technique automatically passes that account number to a second copy of Q&A, uses it to create the customer's record, then returns you to the order you were working on so you can wrap it up and post it.

Start by adding another copy of Q&A to the External Programs menu. In the Menu Option field, type something like *1-Make CUSTOMER record*. Then, in the Command Line field, type *C:\QA\QA.COM -m1 %g* (substitute your actual path). The *-m1 switch* tells Q&A to make Alt-1 the start-up macro, and the *%g* parameter is the account number variable.

Next, record the macro that will create the record when you launch the second copy of Q&A. Because it will be an autostart macro, assign it an Alt-*number* key identifier such as Alt-1; and because it exits Q&A, you'll have to edit it in Write to add the final "x." The following Alt-1 macro copies, to the Clipboard, the new account number passed to Q&A Copy 2. It then opens CUSTOMER.DTF in Add Data mode, pastes the account number into the first field (the account number field, in this case), saves the new record, then exits Copy 2.

```
<begdef><alt1><name>"<caps,>alt1<caps.>"<vidoff>
<f11><end><f10><esc><esc>facustomer<enter><f12>
<capsf10><esc>x<enddef>
```

To run the procedure from your ORDERS record, simply type in the new account number (or use programming to assign one), press Alt-F9 to display the External Programs menu, and select *1-Make CUSTOMER record*. Q&A will pass the account number to Q&A Copy 2, run the Alt-1 macro, then return you to the order. Because CUSTOMER's Acct No field is Speedy and Unique, the macro will bomb if the account number already exists.

The following program prevents you from proceeding if the Acct No field is left blank. It verifies that any account number entered exists in the CUSTOMER database, and prompts you to run the external program if the account number is new:

```
> If Acct No = "" Then {@Msg
("Please enter a New or Existing account number");
Goto Acct No};

If @Add and @XLookup("CUSTOMER", Acct No, "Acct No",
"Acct No") = Acct No Then @Msg
("Account number "+ Acct No +" FOUND in CUSTOMER.DTF.");

If @Add and @XLookup("CUSTOMER", Acct No, "Acct No",
"Acct No") <> Acct No Then {@MsgBox
("Account number "+ Acct No + " NOT in
CUSTOMER.DTF.", "Press
ESC then Alt-F9 to add new customer", "with account
number "
+ Acct No); Goto Acct No}
```

You can follow the second condition with an XLookup to retrieve the pertinent customer information. If you just added the customer record via the external program, this XLookup will fail (@Error will be True), and you can then display an @Msg or message box as a prompt to fill in the name and address fields. Once the customer's name, address, and so forth have been entered on the order, you can post them to the new customer record you added earlier.

You can satisfy XUserselectR's range parameters with values in the current record. In the following example, if FieldX contains "AE," the list will include all the companies from AAA Plumbing to EZ Pest Control and place the selection's account number in the Acct No field:

```
XUserselectR("Customer", "Company", "Acct No",
             @Left(FieldX,1), @Right(FieldX,1), Acct No)
```

The rule regarding double quote marks applies: If the reference is to an external field, use them.

You can optionally use @Fn (current filename) as the database parameter. This way, you can get a list of the companies (or whatever) from the database you're already working in.

For most data entry needs, you'll probably use a field in the current record to supply both the starting and ending range. Suppose while entering sales orders you need the customer's account number to XLookup the shipping and billing information. If you have an Acct No field in your SALESORD database, and the external CUSTOMER file has a matching Acct No field, you can program SALESORD's Acct No field along these lines:

```
> If @Add Then
  XUserselectR("CUSTOMER", "Company", "Acct No",
              Acct No, Acct No, Acct No)
```

Here's how it works. In the Acct No field, you enter the first character or two of the company name. The more characters you enter, the more you narrow down the range and the faster Q&A will display the list. If you're looking for Burkhardt Supply, you enter "B," and Q&A will display all the companies that begin with "B." If you enter "BUR," you'll get all the companies beginning with "BUR" at near-XLookup speed, and you'll probably hit the bulls eye. You can then press Enter to retrieve Burkhardt's account number into the Acct No field (overwriting your range parameter).

In this example, if you leave the Acct No field blank, Q&A will assume an A to Z range. If CUSTOMER.DTF contains thousands of records, you might as well do your nails.

You can make the range and company both selectable by displaying a Userselect list of the alphabet and by feeding the selected character to XUserselectR. Here's an example:

```
< If @Add and Acct No = "" then
  Userselect("A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J,K,L,M,N,O,P,Q,R,S,
            T,U,V,W,X,Y,Z", Acct No);

  If Acct No <> "" then
    XUserselectR("CUSTOMER", "Company", "Acct No", Acct No,
                Acct No, Acct No)

  Else {@MsgBox("Thou Shalt Select Thy Range!", "", "");
        Goto Acct No}
```

With this routine (it works in the Program or Navigation Spec), Q&A displays the letters of the alphabet when you enter the Acct No field, and your selection becomes the starting and ending range for XUserselectR. If you press Esc from the initial list (leaving the Acct No field blank), a message displays and the list reappears.

How well does XUserselectR perform with large lookup databases? See the sidebar, "XUserselectR—Speed Demon or Sunday Driver?" to find out.

Post haste

Batch posting a la Q&A 4.0 is a powerful tool, but it has its drawbacks. You need Posting and Retrieve Specs, and you might have to run a Mass Update to ensure the same records aren't reposted. On top of this, you have to exit data entry to run the post.

Version 5.0 changes all that. Though you can still batch post, you can also post in real-time, during data entry. The XPost command—a kind of XLookup in reverse—lets you instantly update a linked external database record. What's more, you can specify that the posted value be added to, subtracted from, or multiplied or divided by the value in the record's target field. This way, you can deduct sold items from inventory as you save a new sales order, or credit a late payment to the customer's account before Farnsworth over in Collections unleashes the dogs.

Here's XPost's syntax:

```
XPost("database", key field,
      "external key field",
      post from field,
      "external target field",
      "operation")
```

Database is the file you're posting to. *Key field* is the field in the current record that matches *external key field* in the other database. (The external key field must be unique or you risk posting to the wrong record.) The *post from field* contains the value you want to post to the external target field. If numbers are involved, the *operation* can be *add*, *sub*, *mul*, or *div*. If the operation parameter is omitted, Q&A replaces the target field value. If the *post from field* is blank, XPost blanks the external target field, so you might want to post your data conditionally, like this:

```
If Name <> "" Then XPost("CUSTOMER, ID, "ID", Name,
"Name")
```

XPost makes address changes and the like a snap because you can edit the information returned by an XLookup, then post the changes right back to the record the data came from.

Following is a sample XPost routine that posts invoice information to the corresponding customer record. Three conditions are required for the post: Q&A must be in Add Data mode; the Post? field must

contain "Y"; and the read-only Posted field must be blank. If these conditions aren't satisfied, a message box appears. Once the post has been executed, an "X" is placed in the Posted field, and the Post? field is cleared. In this program, the Invoice Amount is added to the Dollars to Date field; otherwise, the posts replace the target field values:

```
> If @Add and #"Post?" = "Y" and Posted = "" Then {
XPost("CUSTOMER", Acct No, "Acct No", BillTo,
      "Company");
XPost("CUSTOMER", Acct No, "Acct No", BillAdd1,
      "Addr1");
XPost("CUSTOMER", Acct No, "Acct No", BillAdd2,
      "Addr2");
XPost("CUSTOMER", Acct No, "Acct No", Invoice No,
      "Last Inv No");
XPost("CUSTOMER", Acct No, "Acct No", Invoice Amount,
      "Dollars to Date", "Add");
Posted = "X"; Clear(#"Post?")
Else
{ @MsgBox("Hey, Bub, ", "this stuff has already been
posted!",
"Bye now."); @Exit }
```

Unlike Batch Posting, XPost offers no option to execute programming statements on the target record. Nor can you effect multiple posts in the same way you can retrieve data from multiple fields with a single XLookup command.

If your typical record contains several items to post, consider placing your posting commands in one field and setting that field's program to execute on-record-exit. This can help reduce interruption in the flow of data entry, especially on a busy network where the databases reside on a remote PC and a post might take a moment.

However you use XPost, be sure to protect against unwanted and duplicate posts.

XPostR is the range variation of XPost. If XPostR can't find a matching external key field value, it will post to the record it deems closest. Careful with this one: if the target record was inadvertently deleted or its key value changed, XPostR turns into a "smart" bomb with an arbitrary target, and you'll have loads of fun picking through the wreckage at month end.

If you're interested in creating new target database records on the fly—records you can then post to—see the sidebar, "Creating 'Post-to' Records On-the-Fly."

I'm sold on you

As you dig into Q&A 5.0, you'll find its whole far greater than the sum of its parts. The new features are impressive, but 5.0's real potential lies in combining them for even more powerful solutions. The product actually is revolutionary for a flat-file database, and you'll find it more fun than ever to use.

As you've seen, the upgrade gives you lots of new ways to get more done in less time. Q&A's reputation was built on letting regular folks do just that. And now regular folks can do a lot more, especially with *The Quick Answer* to guide them along. In the months to come, we'll explore 5.0's features in greater depth, and you're bound to discover ways to manage, access, and manipulate your data like never before. So do stay with us. If you want to get up to speed on Q&A 5.0 fast, register to attend *The Quick Answer's* September 15 day-long seminar in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

How to Obtain the Upgrade

You can obtain the upgrade by calling Symantec customer service at 800-441-7234 or 503-334-6054. The price is \$79.95 plus shipping and applicable tax.

The upgrade includes files that update Q&A for Windows to accommodate the new version 5.0 database format. The installation procedure creates a QAWIN subdirectory under the main Q&A 5.0 directory and copies the Q&A for Windows-related update files there. (See the README.WIN text file for instructions on installing the Q&A for Windows update.) The patch doesn't otherwise upgrade Q&A for Windows, though, so don't expect it to accommodate the new programming commands.

After installing the upgrade, check for any README files that may have come with it. These files often contain useful information not included in the printed matter.

Tom Marcellus is editor of *The Quick Answer* and author of *PC World Q&A Bible*, published by IDG Books.

Organize Your Report and Macro Lists

Make your lists of reports, specs, and macros easier to work with by forcing Q&A to put them in the order you want.

By Peter Venuto



YOU design your databases and forms to make them functional and easy to use. The same rationale should be applied to report and macro lists as well. Take reports. Regardless of the information they include or the order in which you create them, Q&A places them on the List of Reports in alphabetical order by name. You might want your reports listed or grouped by some other criteria. Though you can't change the way Q&A lists your reports, you can follow a report naming convention that forces Q&A to arrange and maintain the list to accommodate your needs, regardless of how many new reports you might add. See Table 1.

The first "report" on the list—00) *Don't Change Report Order*—reminds the user not to rename the reports. This can be important if you use macros to print selected reports.

Report names are prefaced by numbers to force Q&A to list them in the order you want them to appear.

You can design reports without any parameters, strictly to separate one group of reports from another. For example, the "reports" prefaced by a number followed by dashes do nothing but segregate groups of reports.

To create a do-nothing report, from the Report menu choose Design/Redesign a report, type in a name for it, and press F10 five times. You can then rename the "report," or copy it to create additional do-nothing reports.

Applying these conventions give users—and you—a stable and easily readable report menu.

LIST OF REPORTS IN DATABASE	
00) Don't Change Report Order	14) Payables - Written & Held
01) Allocations - Math Review	15) Payables - Release Dates
02) Allocations - Locate Errors	16) Payables - Grouped
03)-----	17) Payables - Itemized
04) Check Register	18)-----
05) Status Report	19) Non Income Dep - Received
06)-----	20) Non Income Dep - Refunded
07) Receivables - Daily Deposit	21) Non Income Dep - Recapped
08) Receivables - Grouped	22)-----
09) Receivables - Itemized	23) Capital Equipment
10) Receivables - Bad Checks	24) Leasehold Improvements
11) Receivables - Ticket Sales	25)-----
12)-----	26) Available
13) Payables - To Be Written	27) Available

Table 1.

Ordering macro lists

You can set up your List of Macros in a similar fashion. See Figure 2 for an example of a structured macro list I use.

As with reports, I preface macro names with numbers to force Q&A to position them on the list in the order I want them to appear. You can create macros without any parameters and assign names to them to separate the types of macros on the list.

Because I rely heavily on macros to automate tasks, I use different macros files for different database operations. For example, my accounts receivable macro file is named AR.MAC, my accounts payable macro file is named AP.MAC, and so forth. In each macro file, I designate the same macro identifier, Alt-L, for temporary macros. This way, no matter which macro file I'm using, I always know that Alt-L is available as the key identifier for a temporary macro.

Whether your saved items are reports, macros, Retrieve, or Update Specs, arranging them in a sensible fashion by assigning numbers and special names to them makes them easier to find and use, particularly when your lists include many items and others use your applications.

Peter A. Venuto is an administrative assistant with Rainbow Montessori Day Care Centers, Inc. in Santa Clara, California. 408-727-4776.

MACRO NAMES	
00) -----Print Statements	<alta>
01) Single	<altb>
02) Double	<altc>
03) Selected	<altd>
04) New Enrollment	<alte>
05) Itemized	<altf>
06) Signature	<altg>
07) Mail	<alth>
08) -----Print Other	<alti>
09) Deposit Slip	<altj>
10) Daily Activity Report	<altk>
11) -----Copy Data	<altm>
12) Ar7.dtf To Dep.dtf	<altn>
13) Ar7.dtf To Wd.dtf	<alto>
14) Ar7.dtf To Checks.dtf	<altp>
15) ARYTD94.dtf To Tax94.dtf	<altq>
16) -----Other	<altr>
17) Setup New Month	<alts>
18) Post Ar7.dtf To New-Ar.dtf	<altt>
19) Calculate Forms	<altu>
<altl>	

Table 2.



Edited by Dave Reid

Mark Modified Records

The April 1994 issue contains a tip that describes how to mark records with the user's name. I need this update to occur only if the record has been modified. If someone looks at a record but doesn't change it, I don't want it marked.

Gary Shanower, Mentor, Ohio

To have Q&A automatically mark a record with the user's name, the database must be password protected. (Q&A can tell which user is currently logged in.) Even if the database isn't password protected, Q&A can still return the date and time the record was modified. The following sample stamps the record with the updated date and User ID:

Last Updated On: #98 = @Date
Last Updated By: #99 = @UserID

After saving the Program Spec, display any record in the database, and press Shift-F8 to set Calculation Options. (In Q&A for Windows, pull down the Edit menu, and select Calculation Options.) Change the Calculation Mode to Automatic, then press F10 (in Q&A for Windows, click OK). This way, when a record is modified, the calculation programming will execute, and the fields will be updated with the date and User ID. Calculation programming is any programming that isn't preceded by a "<" (on-field-entry) or ">" (on-field-exit) command.

[Q&A 5.0 includes a new @Modified command, which you can use in a conditional (If-Then) programming statement to mark fields when a record has been changed. See the Q&A 5.0 review in this issue.—Ed.]

Network Printing Problems

We use Q&A 4.0 for DOS on a network and a laser printer to print letters, labels, and so on. The printer is also on the network. The printer occasionally prints the last line of a page over and over. If I turn the printer off and back on again, it corrects the problem but only for a while. There doesn't seem to be any pattern to the problem. It happens to everyone. Sometimes it happens when printing a letter, sometimes with mailing labels. Any clues?

Laurie Dunnavant, Escondido, California

This doesn't sound like a Q&A-related problem, but there are a number of things you can do to rule out what's causing it. First, take the printer off the network and connect it to a local PC. This is an inconvenience, but if the problem doesn't recur, it tells you it's not Q&A but probably something to do with the network. If the problem persists with the local connection, check and possibly reinstall your Q&A printer driver from the master disks. If the problem disappears with the local connection, check your network software, and possibly reinstall the

printer on the network. You're probably using some kind of printer queuing software. Check to see that it's properly configured, and reconfigure, replace, or reinstall it if necessary.

Use the Same Database in DOS and Windows

I use Q&A for DOS and Q&A for Windows. I like the attractive screen layouts in Q&A for Windows, but I prefer Q&A for DOS's speed when I need to perform data-intensive tasks. I'd like to run both versions of Q&A concurrently and have the same database open. Every time I try this, however, I receive an error message saying the file is already in use. Is there anything I can do?

Chuck Magnesio, Massachusetts

By meeting a few requirements, you can have the same database open in the two versions. First, the DOS SHARE program must be running before you start Windows. You can load SHARE from your AUTOEXEC.BAT file. Second, you'll need to change the database's Sharing Mode. To do this, start Q&A for DOS, select File / Design File / Secure a File, and enter the name of the database. From the Security menu, choose Declare Sharing Mode. Set the Sharing Mode to Allow, and press F10 to save the setting. The database is now configured for sharing, and you should be able to open and use it in both versions of Q&A. Perform the same steps with any other databases you want to share.

Save Merge Specs

I love Q&A for DOS, but I have a problem. I import information from a fixed ASCII file into my database almost daily. The import file is always in the same

format, and I find myself having to fill out the Merge Spec over and over again. I tried recording the procedure in a macro, but when I added some fields, the macro got messed up. Is there another solution?

Phyllis Fuller, Galion, Ohio

Just like many other type of specs in Q&A for DOS, you can save the Merge Spec. With the Merge Spec displayed, fill it in, then press Shift-F8, and Enter a description for the Spec (up to 31 characters). The

next time you import a file with the same structure, press Alt-F8 from the Merge Spec, select your saved spec, and press Enter to load it. You can then proceed with the import. This same process can be used to save commonly used Retrieve, Mass Update, Posting, and other Specs.

Dave Reid is a Symantec senior support analyst providing second-level assistance to the technical support representatives. He's also the coauthor of *The Q&A 4.0 Wiley Command Reference*, published by John Wiley and Sons, and works as an independent Q&A consultant. PO Box 12083, Eugene, OR 97440.

QUICKTIP

Creeping Envelope Solutions

DOS

Printer creep—when the address block prints successively lower or higher on each envelope—can be due to the lack of text following the address block in the merge document. It can also stem from an inaccurate envelope definition in the printer driver. To fix the first cause, simply add some text below the address block. To check the envelope definition, you'll have to reinstall the envelope driver.

When you reinstall the driver, Q&A displays a message box containing special notes about the selected driver, and advises you to *Press F8 to set up any special printer options*. Press F8 to display the

Special Printer Options screen, then press F10 to display the More Special Printer Options screen. The envelope height is on the last line of this screen. In most cases, a standard business envelope's height should be 24, not 18. Change it to 24, then reprint your envelopes with the Print Options Line Spacing set to Envelope and Page Preview set to Yes. In Preview mode, press Ctrl-PgDn to move between envelopes—the addresses should be properly centered. If they're still creeping, reinstall the driver, and adjust the height a line or two.

Updated printer drivers have been issued since Q&A 4.0 was released. (Press Ctrl-F3 from the Main menu to check the date of your QAPRINT.CFG file.) You can download the most recent drivers from the Symantec BBS or the Symantec Library on CompuServe (Go Symantec).

Gordon Meigs, Professional Computer Technology Associates

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