

Alternate Ways to Run Q&A

IZZY GINDI

If you're running Q&A in Windows 95, you have lots of options for starting and running different Q&A configurations.



TODAY, more and more people are running Q&A for DOS in Windows 95. It makes sense. Not only have computer vendors been preinstalling Windows 95 on new PC's for several years now, Q&A runs extremely well under it.

Running under Windows 95, Q&A 4.0 or 5.0, in most cases, has access to all the memory it needs. As we've seen in recent issues of *The Quick Answer*, Q&A 5.0 has a remarkable ability to integrate with Windows applications such as Microsoft Word and Excel via External Programs and @Shell. And there are other advantages, as David Dvorin points out in his "Q&A and Windows 95" articles in the October and November 1997 issues.

Another advantage of running Q&A for DOS in Windows 95 is that you can have multiple Q&A shortcuts on your desktop for fast access to different Q&A configurations. You can have a shortcut that starts Q&A with its normal default menu structure, another that starts Q&A customized for a particular business, and yet a third that starts Q&A customized for a different business. Even if some days all you want from Q&A is an accounts receivable aging analysis, you could create a Q&A shortcut to take care of it. You could have the shortcut run Q&A in the background (minimized), launch a Mass Update to age your open invoices against the current date, print the report, then exit, so you can continue playing Solitaire or designing your sales brochure. You can even have a shortcut that starts Q&A in full screen mode, and another that starts it in a window.

There's no practical limit to the number of Q&A shortcuts you can create, and you don't need multiple Q&A installations to reap these benefits.

I'll show you how to create three Q&A shortcuts, each with their own startup parameters, and organize them in a Q&A folder for easy access. Although I'll be referring mostly to Q&A 5.0, everything applies to Q&A 4.0 as well.

Autoload macro files

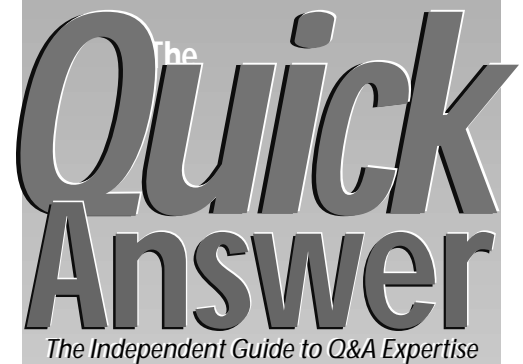
By default, Q&A automatically loads the macro file named QAMACRO.ASC on startup. But you can tell Q&A to load a different startup macro file. For example, if your macro files are stored in the QA5\Macros\ subdirectory (called a *folder* in Windows 95) you could autoload a *Macs.asc* macro file by starting Q&A this way:

```
QA -al\Macros\Macs.asc
```

The *-al* stands for *autoload*. If you wanted Q&A to always load *Macs.asc* on startup, you can use the *-ad* autoload default switch instead.

Autostart macros

Q&A allows you to automatically execute any of ten different macros on startup. These are called *autostart* macros, and they must be assigned key identifiers Alt-0 through Alt-9. When you specify an Alt-number startup macro, Q&A runs it as soon as it loads. So, the command to start Q&A,



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load the *Macs.asc* macro file and run its Alt-3 macro would be this:

```
QA -al\Macros\Macs.asc -m3
```

PIFs and properties

Windows 95 uses Program Information Files (PIFs) to help make DOS programs such as Q&A run smoothly in the Windows environment. When you create a Q&A shortcut, Windows 95 creates a default PIF for it. Windows then consults that PIF to find out how to run Q&A.

The PIF contains customizable configuration and startup

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The Future of Q&A

TOM MARCELLUS

LIKE so many others, I started with Q&A because it promised to let me find things using plain English. "Show me the invoices where Past Due is greater than 30 days." To a clueless database novice in 1985, it sounded like the computing equivalent of The Rapture.

After a few weeks of playing around with Q&A (and unhooking the Intelligent Assistant in favor of faster options) I showed the boss what I could do. "Fine," he said. "Let's put the company on it." That's how I learned Q&A. And that company is still running its operations—from order entry, purchasing, and inventory control, to billing and direct mail—using databases, documents, and macros initially designed more than 10 years ago.

Why haven't they "modernized"—moved "up" to one of the latest and greatest Windows databases? You already know the answer—What they've been using gets the job done. And so well, in fact, that I haven't been called back to that company since I left it years ago, except to plug in some new little gizmo now and then.

So it amuses me when people ask, "What's going to happen to Q&A?"

My reply is always the same—"It's up to you."

It's only natural to be disappointed when the maker of a program you've worked with long and successfully doesn't upgrade it. You can't help feeling a bit betrayed, like when the automaker discontinues that favorite model you bought just last year and a few years before that.

"But how's the one you have now running?"

"Well, fine, actually."

"So what's the problem, then?"

I don't avoid advances in computer and software technology. I actually like having the latest and greatest *when it delivers what I need*.

For example, these days I run everything in Windows 95.

But where do I enter, store and manipulate my data?

Q&A for DOS.

I like modern Windows word processors because of their powerful document formatting, WYSIWYG editing and graphics-handling features.

But where does my mail-merge data come from?

You guessed it—Q&A.

If a client needs some jazzed-up output, like invoices with a logo, shading, and fancy fonts, I just design the container in whatever Windows program they have, then add a macro "button" to their Q&A form that ports the data to it for printing. No big deal.

I've worked with more "advanced databases," but I've never had to

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Quick Tip

Use Your Mouse to Enhance Text Faster



The usual way to enhance Q&A document text (apply bold, italics, a different font, etc.) is to move the cursor to the first character you want to enhance, press Shift-F6 for the Text Enhancements and Fonts Menu, choose the enhancement you want, highlight the text with

your cursor keys, then press F10 to apply the enhancement. If you use a mouse with Q&A, you can simplify the task. Just drag your mouse over the text, then press Shift-F6 and select your enhancement. Not only does this alternate method save steps, you'll find it's very easy to get used to.

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parameters called *properties*. (David Dvorin covered these in detail, and showed how to create a shortcut.) Thus, by creating multiple shortcuts for Q&A, and customizing each one's properties, you can start Q&A in any of several configurations.

Create multiple shortcuts

Once you've created a Q&A shortcut and fine-tuned its properties, you don't have to repeat the process to create another Q&A shortcut. You simply make a copy of the original one, and modify the copy. Windows will save the copy to a different .pif filename

Suppose you named your original shortcut *Update Accounts*. To make a copy of it, click on it with the *right* mouse button, drag it to an empty spot on your desktop, release the mouse button, then select *Copy Here* from the pop-up menu. To rename the copy, click on it with your right mouse button, and select *Rename* from the pop-up menu. You can then type in a new name, such as *Retrieve Daily Schedule*. You can repeat the copy process to create a third shortcut with a name such as *Print New Clients*. You now have three shortcuts you can use to start Q&A and run your Alt-1, Alt-2, and Alt-3 macros, respectively. Specifying these Alt-number macros in the shortcuts' properties is the next step.

Editing a shortcut's properties

Suppose you want your first Q&A shortcut to run the Alt-1 (*Update Accounts*) macro. Just follow these steps:

1. Click on the *Update Accounts* shortcut with the right mouse button, and choose *Properties* from the pop-up menu.
2. Click on the *Program* tab in the Properties dialog box. (See Figure 1.)

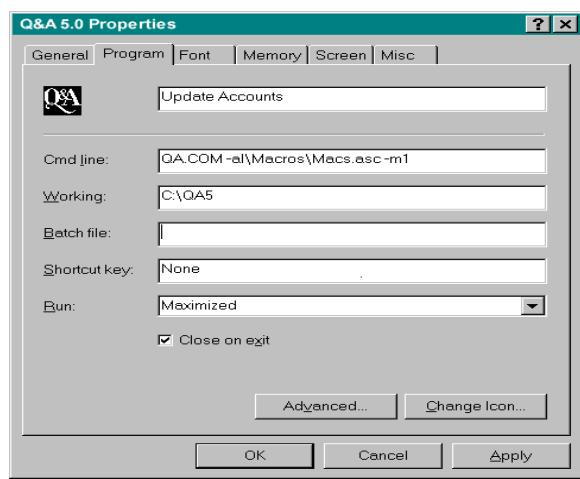


Figure 1. The Program tab of Q&A Properties, filled out for a Q&A shortcut that starts Q&A, loads the Macs.asc macro file in the C:\QA5\Macros\ folder, and autoruns its Alt-1 macro.

3. Edit the Command line field to read *QA.COM -AL\MACROS\MACS.ASC -M1*. (If you're using *QAMACRO.ASC* in the main Q&A program files folder, the command line can simply be *QA.COM -M1*. Don't forget that one or more of your Alt-number macros can invoke the first menu in a custom menu structure.)
4. Change the Working field to read *C:\QA5* (the name of your main Q&A directory or folder.)
5. Select *Maximized* in the Run field. (If you want Windows to run the Q&A procedure in the background, you can select *Minimized*.)
6. Put a checkmark in the *Close on exit* field by clicking on it.
7. If you want your shortcut to display the stylized icon that comes with Q&A, click the *Change Icon* button, click *Browse*, and navigate to the Q&A /Tools/ folder, and select the *QA.ICO* file. (If you're using Q&A 4.0, you'll probably find *QA.ICO* in your main Q&A program files folder.) Click *Open*, then click *OK*.
8. Click *OK* to finish the process.

Simply repeat these steps for your other Q&A shortcuts. For this example, you'd specify *m2* for the second shortcut, and *m3* for the third one.

Recording the macros

If you haven't already recorded your Alt-1, Alt-2, and Alt-3 macros in Q&A, now is the time to do so. Be sure they all start from Q&A's Main menu. If you want any of the macros to exit Q&A when finished (returning you to your Windows 95 desktop), be sure they finish at the Q&A Main menu, then edit them in Write, inserting *x<enter>* immediately in front of the *<enddef>* command.

With your Q&A shortcuts and Alt-number macros in place, you're all set. Simply double-click on the shortcut for the Q&A configuration or macro you want to run.

Creating a Q&A shortcuts folder

Too many Q&A shortcuts might make your desktop look cluttered. If so, you can create a new Q&A folder and move all your Q&A shortcuts to it. Here's how:

1. Click the right mouse button on an empty spot on your desktop. Choose *New* from the pop-up menu, then choose *Folder*. A folder icon with the title *New folder* will appear.
2. Right click on the new folder, and choose *Rename* from the pop-up menu.
3. Edit the folder name to read *Q&A Startup Options*, or whatever you like.

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New Utility Brings Q&A and Your Windows Programs Closer Together



ERIKA YOXALL

If you run Q&A for DOS under Windows 95, a new add-in makes it a snap to copy your Q&A data to the Windows Clipboard to paste into other programs



I just had a wonderful experience! I was putting together an article for *The Quick Answer* in Microsoft Word for Windows, and I wanted to copy a lengthy programming statement from my Q&A database and paste it into my Word document. I opened my Program Spec, went to the field I needed, pressed Ctrl-C without expanding it, returned to my Word document, and pressed Ctrl-V.

Yes, you read that correctly. I used Ctrl-C and Ctrl-V with Q&A for DOS just like I was copying from one Windows program to another. No having to mark the text, no six lines at a time, no weird ASCII characters. Just a simple copy and paste. And all without having to leave my database.

It was my first use of a new utility called *WinClip* from Marble Publications, *The Quick Answer's* publisher.

All WinClip requires to work is that three files be copied into your Q&A program files directory and a macro added to your macro file. It took me less than five minutes to get the whole thing installed and running. WinClip works on any Q&A database without any modifications.

I can now go into any database field or Spec field, and copy the contents of the field to the Windows Clipboard simply by pressing Ctrl-C. Ctrl-V will paste it into any Windows program. Or, I can insert the text file WinClip creates into another Q&A field or Write document. WinClip even includes a batch file that I can modify to automatically launch the Windows program or document I want to paste my Q&A data into!

WinClip won't let you copy just a portion of a field, and it has trouble with the extended ASCII graphics characters (non-keyboard characters), but for straight text cut-and-paste, it's a nice shortcut.

Erika Yoxall owns Hammer Data Systems in Garrettsville, Ohio, specializing in Q&A and Microsoft Access. Phone/Fax 330-527-4018, hammer@apk.net

Using Your Q&A Data in Windows Programs Just Got a Whole Lot Easier



WinClip makes working between Q&A and Windows programs incredibly easy!

\$49 postpaid — Specify for Q&A 5.0 or Q&A 4.0
WinClip for Q&A 5.0 uses one External Programs slot
WinClip for Q&A 4.0 uses one Alternate Programs slot

If you use—or plan to use—Windows programs along with Q&A, you need a way to copy data from your Q&A database to the Windows program you're using.

Now you can do it with a single keystroke!

WinClip—a new Q&A add-on from *The Quick Answer*—lets you *instantly* copy any database field to Windows 95's Clipboard! You simply press *Ctrl-C* (or the hotkey of your choice) and **BINGO!**—the field's contents are in the Windows Clipboard, ready to paste wherever you need!

You can even have **WinClip** start your Windows program so you can immediately paste the data into it (*Ctrl-V*) and finish the task. When you quit the external program, you're back in Q&A!

- **WinClip** works with **Q&A DOS** running in full screen or window mode in Windows 95. It works in any database as-is, requiring no extra fields, modifications, or programming.
- **WinClip** is not a TSR—it takes no memory away from Q&A.
- **WinClip** handles more data than Q&A 5.0's own clipboard, and lets you *effortly* pass it to any Windows program or windowed DOS program—including Q&A itself!
- **WinClip** retains the *formatting* of your Q&A data. What you copy is what you paste. (WYCIWYP)
- **WinClip** comes with a *demonstration database* you can use to try out various WinClip options.
- **WinClip** is a *snap* to install. The documentation includes a variety of configuration and usage examples.

Order WinClip for \$49 from Marble Publications

The Dating Game

ALEC MULVEY

Here's a potpourri of tips and tricks that can help you make short work of date-related calculations and tasks



SOME time ago I designed a Q&A booking system for an independent Girls' School that runs a summer school. One feature they wanted was a way to highlight any girl whose birthday occurred during her stay at the school. This way, the staff could arrange a birthday party and cake for her. To do this, I added a *This year's birthday* field to the database, and programmed it as follows (DOB represents the date of birth field):

```
This Yr Bday: #100 = @Replace(DOB, @Left(DOB, 4), @Left(@Date, 4))
```

As you probably know, Q&A stores dates in a YYYY/MM/DD format (for example, 1998/04/28). What this program does is fill field #100 with the contents of the DOB field, replacing the first four characters (the year) with the first four characters of the current year (@Date) using the computer's system clock. This makes it easy to compare the birthday date with the start and finish dates of the girl's residence at the school, and quickly spot whether she's a birthday girl.

I've always favored this technique for age calculations as well. In some applications it's necessary to know a person's age in years. The *365.25 days-per-year* method is all very well, but it's an approximation at best. One day before someone's 40th birthday, they're still 39. After midnight, they're 40. That's the level of accuracy usually required. The following program applies the same technique to age calculations:

```
Age: #150 = @Year(@Date) - @Year(This Yr Bday) - @Date < This Yr Bday
```

Here's how the program works. You take the year of birth from the current year. If the birthday hasn't yet occurred, subtract one. The logical statement *@Date < This Yr Bday* yields True or False, which equates to 1 or 0 (zero). If true, then today's date is less than this year's

birthday, and 1 is subtracted from the age. If false, zero is subtracted. This, of course, assumes you have that extra field showing this year's birthday. If all you want is the current age, there's no reason to incur the burden of the extra field; simply calculate the age as needed, like this:

```
Age: #150 = @Year(@Date) - @Year(@Replace(DOB,@Left(DOB,4),@Left(@Date,4))) - @Date < @Replace(DOB,@Left(DOB,4),@Left(@Date,4))
```

This, as you've probably gathered, is just an amalgamation of the two earlier programs.

Fixing the Year 2000 "bug"

Q&A is pretty well prepared for the new millennium. Without going into detail about year 2000 issues covered in past issues of *The Quick Answer*, you should use a four-digit-year date format, and specify the full century when entering dates after 1999. (This is to some extent hardware-related, so your PC might not behave exactly as described.) If after 1999 you enter a date omitting the year, Q&A will add the correct year. If, on the other hand, you enter a date with a two-digit year (*23 Jun 01*, for example), then Q&A will *incorrectly* assume the year is 1901. The workaround for this is simple—add the following on-field-exit program to your Date field:

```
> If @Year(Date) < 1950 Then #1 = @Replace(Date, @Left(Date,4), @Left(Date,4) + 100)
```

Here, if the year assumed by Q&A is earlier than 1950, then 100 years are added to it. You can, of course, vary the 1950 cut-off point to suit your needs.

Keep in mind, though, that the above year-2000 workaround will *not* work if you enter a date of February 29. Although such a date might be valid after 2000, Q&A will consider it a 1900's date. (2000 is a leap year, but 1900 was not.) So, such dates need to be entered either with the year omitted, (if it's the current year), or by entering the year in full.



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All back issues are available at \$11 each. Contact us using one of the methods on page 2.

Entering dates around the turn of the year

Have you ever entered transactions in an accounting type of database? If you have, then you've probably found it annoying when, in January, you're entering sales or purchases for December, only to find that Q&A has entered the date as December of the *new* year, rather than December of the previous year. This is because we're all used to omitting the year. Fortunately, there's an easy workaround:

```
Date:
>#1: If @Add and Date > @Date + 30 Then Date =
@Replace(Date, @Left(Date,4), @Left(Date,4) -1)
```

Here, if the date assumed by Q&A for the transaction is more than 30 days in the future (for example, a December 98 date entered in January 98), then one year is subtracted.

Searching dates

Q&A stores dates as text in the format YYYY/MM/DD. By using the "]" (right square bracket) character, you can perform a literal search on the contents of a date field, and include wildcards. For example:

```
Dates in March 1998      ]1998/03/??
First of any month in 1997 ]1997/??/01
All dates in 1997        ]1997/././
                          ]1997/??/??
```

Manipulating dates as numbers

Although Q&A stores dates as text values, you can treat them as numbers and manipulate them accordingly. Think of a date field as containing a number—an integer—with 1 representing January 1, 0000. Thus, the serial number for January 1, 1998 is 729,390. This is how you can perform date math with dates and get answers as the number of days since "Day 1." Simply add 7 to any date and you'll get the date one week later.

Special Note: Although Q&A dates are numbered from the year 0000, Q&A does have a more limited date range. Q&A can only work with dates after January 1, 1600 (which rather hamstring the Shakespearean scholars among you), and up to December 31, 4083 (by which time Bill Gates' heirs will have us using *Microsoft Access 4000* in the form of brain implants).

A Now() function for Q&A

Suppose you have a database with date and time fields to capture the date and time the record was added, when the sale was made, or whatever. And suppose you want to find the most recent record. If you type *Max* in the Retrieve Spec Date field, Q&A will hand you the record with the latest date. If you type *Max* in the time field, you'll get the record with the latest time, regardless of the date. How, using these two fields, can you find the most recent record? You can't type *Max* in both the Date and Time fields—it won't work.

Microsoft Excel includes a Now() function that evaluates the date *and* the time (*April 17, 1998 11:00*, for example). Although Q&A doesn't include a similar built-in function, you can create one. For the following programming example, you'll have to add an extra field to the database. If all you need is to simulate Excel's Now() function in a report, you can do it in a derived column without the extra field.

Assuming you have the following two fields:

```
Date: Formatted D for dates
Time: Formatted H for hours
```

Add this field to the database:

```
Now : Formatted N for numbers
```

Then add this simple program:

```
Now: #79 = Date + (Time / 1440)
```

Just as Q&A dates can be treated as serial numbers based on the year 0000, time fields in Q&A store a serial number—the number of minutes since midnight. By dividing this number by 1,440 (the number of minutes in a day), you get a decimal fraction of a day, with 0 (zero) as midnight, noon as 0.5, 6:00 p.m. as 0.75, and so forth. When this fraction is added to the date integer, you'll get a number that yields the precise date and time, and it can prove a useful field to sort on. Now you can type *Max* in the Now field, and Q&A will find the most recent record in the database.

You can perform arithmetic on a time field if you bear in mind that you're working with minutes. To add an hour, you add 60 (minutes). If the value of a time field exceeds 1440 (24 hours), Q&A automatically adjusts it to show the correct time.

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Letters

Just wanted to thank Alec Mulvey for his great article in the last issue on how to check for open databases. When he said "... without having to trek around the building to visually check all the pcs." I knew that was what I needed. (We do Mass Updating and Batch Posting on a network.) As soon as I finished reading about the OK.DTF database that performs the check, I followed his directions and it worked perfectly the first time because the instructions were so easy to follow and precise.

I also enjoyed Alec's talk on "searching" at the last National Q&A User Group's Bash. We all had fun listening to him. Thanks again. —Mike Tamarkin



EDITED BY GORDON MEIGS
AND WILLIAM HALPERN



Separating Parts of Names



I hope you have a solution to what seems like it should be a simple problem. I'm working with someone who ported all their data from a program called PCPlus to Q&A.

Approximately 1600 records were transferred. In the PCPlus program, there's one field for the customer's name, in this format: *Name: Doe,Jane*. The Q&A database has LastName and FirstName fields. When the data was imported into Q&A, the whole name field (for example, *Doe,Jane*) wound up in the FirstName field. What's the best way to have Q&A separate the names and place them in their respective fields? In other words, the comma needs to be removed from *Doe,Jane*, Doe should go into the LastName field, and Jane should go into the FirstName field. I've tried programming and Mass Updating to no avail.

Isabela via The Internet

Yes, there's a fairly simple solution. First, to guard against any errors, make a backup copy of the database. Then, using the two fields in question, LastName, and FirstName, perform a Mass Update. For the Retrieve Spec, include all the records. At the Update Spec, in the FirstName field (which you say contains the combined name—for example *Doe,Jane*), type the following program:

```
#1: If @Instr(#1, ",") > 0 then {
LastName = @Left(#1, @Instr(#1, ",") - 1);
FirstName = @Mid(#1, @Instr(#1, ",") + 1, 20) }
```

This first line checks to see if there's a comma in the field separating the last and first name. The @Instr(x,y) function, returns the position of the first occurrence of "y" in "x." If there's a comma, this position will be greater than zero. Assuming there is, then the LastName field is filled with everything up to one character *less than* the comma's position (@Instr(#1, ",") - 1), and the FirstName field gets everything starting with one character *after* the comma. In this example, we've assumed that no first name exceeds 20 characters. If you want to play it safe, you can increase the 20 to 30 or 50.

Special Record Retrieval Codes



I recently had to Mass Update a database of more than 10,000 records. The update included a mathematical calculation and copying of some numeric fields. In some of the records, the data in the primary calculation field was

missing, and the resultant records were filled with number fields that contain "ERR." How can I retrieve all these records in order to remove the "ERR" and correct them?

R. Carroll, Southampton, PA

"ERR" is Q&A's way of telling you that you performed an illegal mathematical calculation, such as dividing by zero or a blank. But you probably already know that. Since ERR isn't a number, Q&A won't let you enter it as a Retrieve Spec parameter in a number field. The equals sign ("=") won't find the records, because the field isn't blank. But there's a solution. The right square bracket ("]") character followed by any character(s) will retrieve the records containing those literal character(s) in the field, even if they don't match the field's format (type of data). Thus *JERR* will find all your bad records. In addition, Q&A will let you find improperly formatted values by typing a slash followed by two periods (/..). So you can also find all of your ERR records this way. The last way to find the results of the improper calculations is to sort the database in ascending order on the result field. All of the ERR records will sort to the beginning of the stack.



@Number Skipping Numbers

A client of mine used to run Q&A 4.0 for DOS on a standalone Windows 95 PC. Situations arose where they would begin to enter a new record with an invoice number, change their mind, and press Esc to cancel. In such cases, the invoice number wouldn't increase, but be saved for the next new record. Recently, I moved this client to an NT Server with the data on the server. Now, if they cancel a new invoice by pressing Esc, the invoice number increments anyway (skipping one). There seems to be no way to retrieve the skipped invoice number. Any suggestions on how to correct this little glitch?

Tim Jenkins, Via the Internet

Q&A has automatic file- and record-locking features built-in, and knows when it's accessing databases on a shared (non-local) drive. Once file- and record-locking are in place, the @Number function (which is what's assigning your client's invoice numbers) works differently. Q&A has no way of knowing whether one or several users will be accessing or adding records to the database, so once it returns the next @Number in sequence (whether or not the record is saved), that's it—

Q&A considers it *used*. The next call to @Number (by the same user or another), will get the next number in sequence. This isn't a "glitch," but an important feature for keeping shared data consistent and uncorrupted.

One way to keep the @Number from incrementing when your client escapes from a new invoice—and the safest and surest—is to place the database on a local drive if only one user will be working with it. Another way is to set the database's Sharing Mode to *Disallow* so only one user can access it at a time.

Or, instead of using the @Number command in the Initial Values Spec, you could use an on-record-exit program to conditionally return @Number when the record is saved and the invoice number field is blank.

Power Glitches Locking Databases



We run an involved job tracking system in Q&A 5.0 on a Novell 3.12 network. Most of the time, we have 10 to 15 users on the network, and everything runs fine. However, if we experience any power fluctuations, or a workstation locks up, we often wind up locked out of the database with the Q&A message at the bottom of the screen, "*File in Use by Another DOS User ...Please Wait.*" The message never clears, and we can't even Recover the database. We always have to resort to a backup copy of the database and invariably lose any work done since the last backup. Is there anything we can do to resolve this dilemma?

Bart Ecksel, Southampton, PA

The problem you're experiencing has to do with the way Q&A 5.0 and Novell Netware 3.12 interface on file- and record-locking. We don't know exactly why, but that particular version of Netware in combination with Q&A is extremely sensitive to low power fluctuations, and will set a network flag indicating that the file open at the time has not been closed. As long as the database is on a network drive, Q&A will maintain the lock just as the network has told it to do, even though the file is probably structurally sound and all records are intact.

But don't despair, there's an easy way to fix and free up any database locked this way. From a DOS prompt, copy it from the network drive to a local drive, such as C:\ (both the .DTF and the .IDX files). There, you'll find it's no longer locked. Open the file in Q&A by retrieving a record. (This is best done with a Sort Spec that forces Q&A to scan all the records). For safety's sake, you should Recover the database. Then, using Q&A or a DOS command, delete the network copy of the database, and copy the local version back to its original location on the

network drive. You should be back up and running in a few minutes without any lost work. To prevent power fluctuations from reaching your system, you should install a good quality uninterruptable power supply (UPS) on the server as well as on each workstation.

Problem Printing Online Edition

I hope you have a quick answer to my problem. I subscribe to the Online Edition of *The Quick Answer*, and I just downloaded the March 1998 issue from your Web site. The newsletter looks great in Acrobat Reader, but only the upper right table of contents prints on page 1, even though all the other pages print just fine. Any ideas about printing page 1? I've had no problem printing any other Acrobat Reader documents—just page 1 of the March issue. I'm using Windows 95, a 300Mhz Pentium II, Acrobat Reader 3.0, and an HPDeskjet 870Cse printer.

Bob Hansen via The Internet

It so happens that I had the same problem using the same printer—incomplete printing of just page 1 of the newsletter. I downloaded and installed the latest DeskJet 870Cse printer driver from Hewlett Packard's Web site at www.hp.com and the problem disappeared. (Bob subsequently reported that the updated DeskJet printer driver did the trick for him as well.) —Tom Marcellus

Letters

Symantec sales and tech support are giving false information about Q&A for DOS to callers. They are answering queries about the product with the response that it will not run in Windows 95/NT and telling people that their data is at risk when Q&A is run in the Windows environment.

Such statements are blatant untruths! Q&A runs exceptionally well in Windows 95/NT. We have three years experience at this with Q&A installations at more than 50 sites! In all this time, not one Q&A record has been lost!

Yet during just one recent week I received panic calls from five people who heard these statements from Symantec representatives who told them to contact me or one of three other Q&A gurus for more information.

We need to let Symantec know what we think about Q&A, and remind them that there's still a huge base of Q&A users out there that needs their good will and support!

—Bill Halpern

Bill Halpern and Gordon Meigs own Professional Computer Technology Associates in Newtown, Pennsylvania, specializing in data management and supporting services. 215-598-8440, 71023.356@compuserve.com.



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.

Designing a Custom Report Interface, Part 3



JEFF NITKA

If your ad hoc reports—particularly crosstabs—are taking too much time and effort to create, here's how you can really simplify the process.



In the February 1998 issue, I introduced you to the concept of designing and using a custom interface database to help make creating and printing ad hoc crosstab reports faster and easier. Last month, I showed you sample programming for the interface database that helps the user select the various report elements. The code prompts the user to specify the row, column, and summary fields, as well as the output device. After these are selected, the user is prompted to specify the record selection criteria. When the user finally runs the report, programming is executed to perform two tasks. First, the code generates a "list" that includes all the specified criteria; it then launches a macro that uses the list to run the report.

Designing the reports

Since the report's design is temporarily altered by the macro, it serves us well to keep it simple. Here's the procedure (from the Q&A Main Menu) for saving a designed report for this application:

1. Choose Reports, then choose Design/Redesign a Report.
2. Enter the name of the database that contains the data. (This isn't the interface database, but rather the database upon which the interface database is modeled).
3. Type the report name (*Cross Tab to Screen*, in this case) then press Enter.
4. Choose Cross Tab Report.
5. Leave the Retrieve Spec blank, and press F10.
6. Type ROW in the field of your choice.
7. Type COL in the field of your choice.
8. Type SUM in any numeric or money field.

9. Press F10, then choose *Screen* as the output device.

10. Save the report.

Repeat the above procedure for the printed version. You will need to change two things: the name of the report, which must be *Cross Tab to Print*, and the output device, which can be any printer you want.

What we have so far

Before discussing the macro, let's take an inventory of our application up to this point. You should have the following:

- The database that contains the data you want to summarize. (Let's call it *Invoices.dtf*. See Figure 1 on page 10.)
- The interface database. (Let's call it *Reports.dtf*. See Figure 2 on page 10.)
- The two reports in *Invoices.dtf*: *Cross Tab to Print*, and *Cross Tab to Screen*.

When the user runs the report from the *Reports.dtf*, a list containing the Retrieve Spec and Crosstab Spec criteria is copied to Q&A 5.0's clipboard.

The macro

The macro needs to take the list information (stored in the clipboard) and put it in the proper fields of the report's Retrieve Spec and Crosstab Spec. This is done by pasting the entire list into a field, then deleting only those parts of the list that don't belong.

Here's an example. Let's say the list starts with the following parameters:

```
>6  
B..
```

The first line (>6) is the search criteria for the Month field. The second line (it's blank in this example) is the search criteria for the Year field. The third line (B..) is the search criteria for the Customer Name field. These parameters would select the July through December

invoices for any year for all customers that begin with the letter B.

When the macro opens the Retrieve Spec of the report in Invoices.dtf, it clears the Spec. It then opens the field editor for the Month field and pastes the list. Only the ">6" belongs, so the macro moves to the right of >6 and deletes the rest of the list. With only >6 left in the Month field, the macro closes the editor and moves to the Year field.

The field editor is opened for the Year field, and the list is pasted once again. The second line of the list contains the year criteria we're after, so the macro deletes the first line (by pressing Ctrl-Y), moves to the end of the second line, and deletes the remaining list in the same way described for the Month field.

This process repeats for every field that can be searched for record selection.

Once the Retrieve Spec has been reproduced this way, the macro no longer needs the data in the clipboard. The macro then deletes the Retrieve Spec data from the list, and resaves the remaining data (the Crosstab Spec) to the clipboard.

Finally, the Crosstab Spec is filled out in the same way the Retrieve Spec was filled out, after which the macro prints the report to the appropriate output device.

Our macro

As I mentioned earlier (and as you can probably now see), the macro steps are dependent on the fields that can be searched, and which fields can be Row, Column, and Summary fields. Therefore, the following macro (which assumes automatic execution) is specific to this application. Any design changes to Invoices.dtf that involve the location of fields would require this macro to be revised. This macro is shown so that you can step through it, and hopefully see how the list's components are placed in the appropriate fields to produce the desired output.

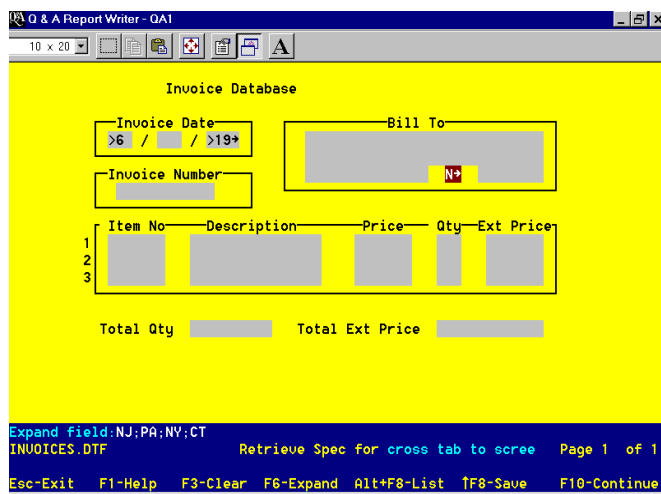


Figure 1. A sample invoice database.

```
<begdef><nokey><name>"Cross<sp>Tab<sp>To<sp>Screen"<vidon>
<f11><esc>y<esc>rp<capsf4>invoices<enter>cross<sp>tab<sp>to
<sp>screen<enter>y<f3><f6><f12><end><f3><ctrlend><f10><f6>
<enter><f6><f12><ctrlly><end><f3><ctrlend><f10><f6><enter><f6>
<f12><ctrlly><ctrlly><end><f3><ctrlend><f10><f6><enter><f6><f12>
<ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><end><f3><ctrlend><f10><f6><enter><f6>
<f12><ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><end><f3><ctrlend><f10><f6>
<enter><f6><f12><ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><end><f3><ctrlend>
<f10><f6><enter><f6><f12><ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><end><f3><ctrlend>
<f10><f6><enter><dn><dn><dn><dn><f6><f12><ctrlly><ctrlly>
<ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><end><f3><ctrlend><f10><f6><enter>
<f6><f12><ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><dn>
<f11><ctrlend><f10><ctrlhom><end><f3><ctrlend><f10><f6><f10><f3>
<f6><f12><end><f3><ctrlend><f10><f6><enter><enter><f6><f12><ctrlly>
<end><f3><ctrlend><f10><f6><enter><f6><f12><ctrlly><ctrlly><end><f3>
<ctrlend><f10><f6><enter><enter><f6><f12><ctrlly><ctrlly><end><f3>
<ctrlend><f10><f6><enter><enter><f6><f12><ctrlly><ctrlly><end><f3>
<ctrlend><f10><f6><enter><enter><dn><dn><dn><dn><f6><f12><ctrlly><ctrlly>
<end><f3><ctrlend><f10><f6><enter><f6><f12><ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly>
<ctrlly><ctrlly><ctrlly><f6><f10><f10><enddef>
```

Another version of this macro would be needed for the printed version. The only thing that would change would be the name of the report. (*Cross tab to Print* would replace *Cross tab to Screen*).

Is it really worth it?

My biggest client employs many people who depend on information to develop sales strategies. These Q&A users want to run reports quickly and easily, and a custom report design interface like the one I've shown was deemed an absolute necessity.

There are many other features I implemented in the interface database. Help screens, error trapping messages, and selection lists were all employed to make criteria specification as simple as possible. Although it took some doing to set up, the way it simplifies running crosstabs, particularly for novice users, made it well worth the effort.

Jeff Nitka develops Q&A and Microsoft Access for Epoch Software (E-Mail: 105020.2215@compuserve.com). Jeff is the author of the Program Evaluator (a Q&A program debugging utility), SurfDrive (a Q&A disk drive reader), and FaxMan (a Q&A faxing database), all of which are available from Marble Publications.

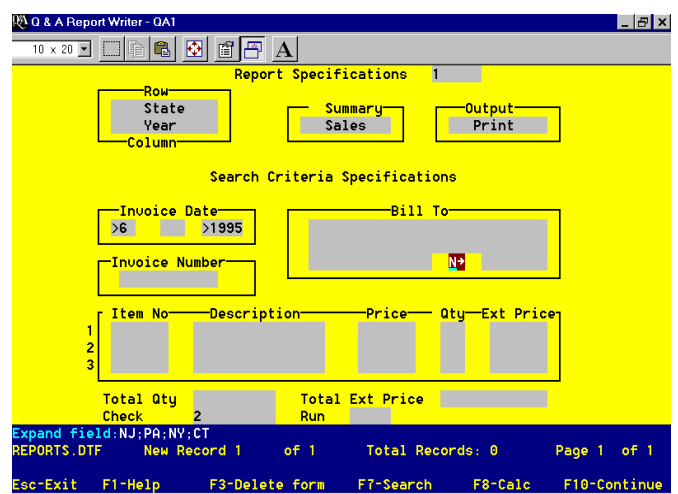
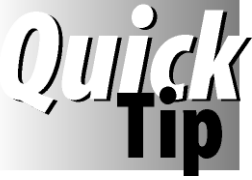


Figure 2. The report interface database that's based on the Figure 1 invoice database.



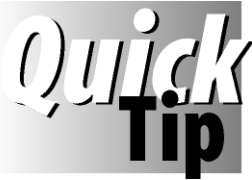
To Get the Labels You Need, You Might Have to Lie to Q&A



Telling Q&A "a little white lie" can sometimes get you the results you need. Take, for example, a situation where you want to print three (3) page-wide labels, each exactly a third of a standard 8.5 x 11-inch sheet of paper (3.67-inches) in height. These might be subscription or warranty renewal notices you're printing on a laser or inkjet printer that you plan to cut to fit into a window envelope with the recipient's name and address showing through for mailing.

When you try to print three such

labels on an 8.5 x 11-inch page, Q&A will inevitably "bump" the third label onto the next page even if your top and bottom page and label margins are set to their absolute minimums. How do you get around it? Simply use the legal size (8.5 x 14-inch) portrait printer driver for your printer, and tell Q&A (with your fingers crossed, of course) that you're printing to 8.5 x 14-inch sheets. This way, when you print the labels on 8.5 x 11-inch sheets, Q&A will think it has room to spare and will print right to the very last line of each sheet if need be.



Create an Email Address Book



More and more people these days are communicating with friends and associates via email. If you have email addresses in a Q&A database, and you use the popular Eudora Pro email program, it's easy to create a Eudora address book you can use to quickly send email to your contacts.

Create a Q&A report named *Email addresses*. At the Retrieve Spec, select the records that contain an email address. At the Column/Sort Spec, type *1,AS,I* in the full name field, and *2,I* in the email address field. Press F8 and add this derived column :

```
Heading: \
Formula: "Alias " +@Chr(34)+ #1 +@Chr(34)+ " <" + #2 + ">"
Col Spec: 3, HS(\ )
```

Print the report to a disk file named *C:\Eudora\Nickname\QAemail.txt*. (Your path to Eudora might be different.) Start Eudora, open your main address book, and at the end of it you should see a *QAemail* address book. (Eudora treats an ASCII file with a *.txt* filename extension in its Nickname subdirectory as an address book.) Double-click on the *QAemail* address book, and your list of Q&A email contacts should appear. Now, you can send them email as you would any other Eudora address book recipient. To update the address book, simply run your report periodically, and overwrite the existing *QAemail.txt* file.

If you're using another email program, find out the file format it uses for its address books. Chances are you can create a *QAemail* address book for it in a similar manner.

Alternate Ways... *continued from page 3*

4. Using the left mouse button, drag the first Q&A shortcut to the folder. Drag your other Q&A shortcuts to the new folder the same way.

Now, when you double-click on the folder, a window will open showing your three shortcuts. Simply double-click on the one you want to use.

Adding the shortcuts folder to the Start menu

By adding your Q&A shortcuts folder to the Windows 95 Start menu, you'll have another, perhaps more convenient way to start Q&A. Here's how to do it:

1. Start Windows 95 Explorer. If necessary, resize the window so you can see your Q&A folder on the desktop. (You can click the second icon from the right in the top right-hand corner of the Explorer window.)
2. In the left-hand Explorer window pane Click on the plus ("+") sign in front of the *Windows* folder, then

double-click on the *Start Menu* folder. Its contents will appear in the right-hand window pane.

3. Using your right mouse button, drag your Q&A shortcuts folder from the desktop to an empty space in the right-hand Explorer window pane. Choose *Copy Here* from the pop-up menu, and the folder will be copied to the Start menu.

Now, when you click your Start button, you'll see your Q&A shortcuts folder at the top. Move your mouse pointer over it (you don't have to click on it) and a submenu will appear containing your Q&A shortcuts. Simply click on the one you want to use.

If you no longer want the Q&A folder on your desktop, you can delete it by clicking on it with the right mouse button, and choosing *Delete* from the pop-up menu.

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The Future of Q&A *Continued from page 2*

move a Q&A client to one of them.

Oh, these programs are well-endowed all right. But you look at the time and know-how it takes to design even a modestly sophisticated application in them, and compare it with what it takes to create the same functionality—the functionality you *actually* need—in Q&A 5.0, then tell me what's really more advanced.

There are more powerful databases to be sure. But to satisfy the vast majority of small-to-medium-sized business automation needs, they're just wild overkill.

And man, can they cost you. People have no idea of the pain until they're smack in the middle of a database migration. Lengthy development time (rule of thumb: *triple what you were quoted*). Major money (same rule of thumb). Serious debugging. Delays. A new learning curve. ("Say, Gracie, could you call that programmer. I need a list of who owes what.") Plus, the not-so-simple matter of porting your live data to the new product.

There are the day-to-day productivity issues, too. You've got lots of important data there. You have to enter it, validate it, secure it, be able to get at it quickly, run reports on it, update it, manipulate it, merge it, and so forth. So how's that "more powerful" database gonna simplify it all?

Never lose sight of the fact that you're working with *data*—numbers and letters of the alphabet. Entering it in 12-point Times Flagellant Bold doesn't transform it into

something else. It's still just data.

So you'd like to spruce it up for the output side.

Fine—just pass it to a prettier output container.

Beware the know-it-alls trying to sell you a bill of goods about modern Windows programs being so well integrated—the pie-in-the-sky being that you'll spend less time setting up and performing your tasks. Do a little experimenting. Find out what it takes to create a working database and merge a few selected records with a mailing label. You might not be so impressed. You'll compare it with how easy it is in Q&A.

So the future of Q&A isn't in the hands of the people who make it.

It's in yours.

Q&A will help you manage your data in the next century as well as it does today. It runs like the dickens in Windows 95, and rumor has it that it'll run as well if not better in Windows 98.

By all means, trade "up" to "the latest and greatest" if you just can't stand being "behind the times." Get your ZIP Codes and purchase order numbers in those fancy fonts. Spend weeks or months overhauling the works. It's your time. And money.

Just don't worry yourself sick over "the future of Q&A." It's still being sold and installed around the world. It's still being used by tens (if not hundreds) of thousands to *very* productively manage vital data.

And take my word for it, it'll be around for years to come, running smartly on lowly DOS machines and the latest Windows PCs alike.

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