

Review

Special Announcement, p. 13

Speed No Longer Kills

BILL HALPERN



A new patch makes Q&A 5.0 run smoothly on the fastest PCs.



UNTIL this summer, speedy computers – Pentium IIs running at 266Mhz or faster – were giving Q&A 5.0 users fits. To run 5.0 on these faster computers, we had to resort to a utility (designed for DOS games!) to retard the processor to the equivalent of a 180Mhz PC in order to avoid the dreaded “Divide by Zero” or “Divide Overflow” errors. This turned some Q&A 5.0 users off, sending them scurrying for a replacement database manager. (Nobody we know of was able to find anything they considered satisfactory.) So, we lived with Moslo.com and a slower Q&A.

But not any more! Q&A 5.0 users can now get back into the fast lane! Thanks to Q&A 5.0’s creator, Andreas Goebel of PFP Software in Germany, we now have a patch for Q&A 5.0 that lets it run on today’s fastest PC’s. The patch, called *Q&A Speedfix 1.0*, is supplied in a zip file that includes a Readme document (your standard software disclaimer) and the patch file itself, *Speedfix.exe*.

Speedfix is a 32-bit program, so you can run it only in Windows 95, 98, or NT. It corrects a timing loop error in QA1.EXE that was introduced with the new code in version 5.0. The patch simply sets the timing routines back to the way they work in Q&A 4.0 by modifying nine bytes in the executable. Its author claims:

It does not touch any other files. It does not affect network users. It does not change the file attribute, etc. Timed routines with delays, such as generating sounds with the @Play command might behave slightly different (the tone will be different than before). Since it affects timing routines and there are no problems with timing on systems running Pentium MMX 233’s or slower, the patch should not be applied here. (If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!)



Figure 1. Speedfix’s starting screen.

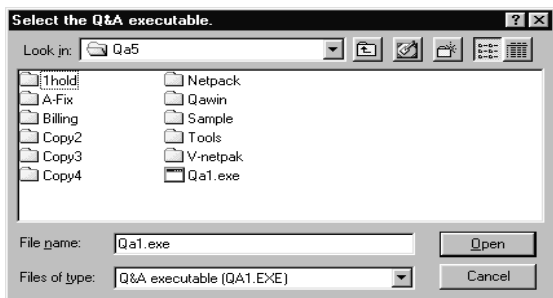


Figure 2. Speedfix prompts for your Q&A 5.0 QA1.EXE file.

When you run *Speedfix.exe*, you’ll see the opening screen shown in Figure 1.

When you click on *Start*, the next screen will prompt you to locate the QA1.EXE file you want to update. (See Figure 2.)

Select the drive and directory where Q&A 5.0 is located, highlight the QA1.EXE file, and click the *Open* button. Speedfix will make a backup of the file, update it, then notify you when the



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job is done. The patch won’t modify a Q&A 4.0 QA1.EXE file because it checks for the offending code before making the correction. Nor will it attempt to patch a previously-fixed copy of QA1.EXE.

So, does it work? All indications to date are that it does. Andreas claims to have performed extensive testing on all the different international versions of Q&A 5.0 with no reported failures. I limited my testing to the U.S. version running on 300 and 400 Mhz PC’s.

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The Big Bug is History

TOM MARCELLUS

AS Bill Halpern points out in this month's lead story, the impressive new features that made Q&A 5.0 such an attractive upgrade for power users have been eclipsed of late by the anguishing fact that it simply refuses to run on the faster Pentium II PC's without the careful application of duct tape and bailing wire.

Thankfully, that major glitch is now behind us. (And good riddance to Moslo.com, even though it saved the day during the interim.) Read all about the new patch that will take you and Q&A 5.0 into the next century, no matter the speed at which that new barnburner PC you're using (or contemplating) runs.

When custom menu capabilities arrived with Q&A 4.0, folks were quick to recognize their potential as powerful user interface tools to make even the most complex applications far easier to work with. They can make managing *multiple* apps easier still. You simply have a macro file for each app, keep all the app's macros and custom menus in it, then switch macro files (and thus menu systems) in order to switch apps.

Until now, though, the logjam was all the keystrokes it took simply to switch to another macro file. Izzy Gindi shows you how you can do it on-the-fly from a convenient picklist, so you can have the selected app's macro file automatically loaded into memory and gain instant access to the new app's custom menu system. No more of that *Shift-F2, Get Macros, enter a path and filename* business. Check it out if you work with multiple applications that have their own custom menu sets. The technique works in Q&A 4.0 and 5.0.

Speaking of interfaces that make Q&A easier to use, Jeff Nitka shows you how to add handy click-on buttons to your database forms. More than that, he explains how to *enable* them with programming. This way, until that invoice is finished and ready for printing, the dimmed *Print* button won't respond to a mouse click.

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Hide Sensitive Reports

Suppose you have a sensitive report you'd like to hide from prying eyes. You can keep it

from appearing on the database's List of Reports screen so users can't print it. Here's how.

Assuming you already have the database password-protected, add a small dummy (do-nothing) field to it using the "<" and ">" field delimiters. Don't give the field a label. If you're using Q&A 5.0, you can make the field invisible by coloring it the same as the database form's color.

Next, redesign the sensitive report and include the dummy field in the Column/Sort Spec—but make it an

invisible column (using the "I" command) so it doesn't appear in the report output.

Then, go to the Field Security Spec for the database, and type an "N" (for

"No Access") in the dummy field. Assign this Spec to all users or groups you want to prevent from running the report.

This way, the sensitive report won't appear as a selection on the List of Reports screen unless the user has been granted access to the protected field.

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J. WALTER

Switch Custom Menu Systems On-the-Fly

IZZY GINDI



If you use Q&A to manage multiple applications with their own custom menu structures, here's how you can toggle effortlessly between them.



In my June 1998 article ("Swap Macro Files the Easy Way"), I presented a technique for quickly switching between multiple macro files. In this article, I'll show you how to extend the technique to switch between custom menu structures within those macro files.

This technique is ideal if you use several macro files each of which contain a custom menu structure. I developed it so I could quickly switch between "modules" in a sophisticated property management application that required 30 custom menus in 10 different macro files. You can use it to switch between applications. It works in both Q&A 4.0 and 5.0 for DOS.

What's menu-switching?

Q&A stores custom menu definitions in macro files. A macro file can contain several custom menus. It's common to have a custom main menu along with several submenus, with the submenus as selections on the main menu.

When I talk about switching menus, I mean switching from a custom main menu in one macro file to a custom main menu in another macro file. You're actually switching applications. To switch between custom menus *within* the same macro file, you simply add the menu names to the other menus in the structure.

Some definitions

Let's start by defining three key elements associated with custom menu switching. The first is the name of the macro file that contains one or more custom menus. For illustration, I'll use three macro files: *Payables.men*, *Payroll.men*, and *Clients.men*. Note that these files all have the same *.men* filename extension.

The second element, *Menu Name*, appears at the top of the Application Menu Options screen (where you create custom menus. See Figure 1.) You can view this screen by pressing Shift-F2, selecting M - Create Menu, then selecting a menu from the list. The *Menu Name* is the "handle" Q&A uses to retrieve (display) the custom menu.

If, for example, you assign *Main* as the menu name, then record a macro that ends by calling *Main*, you can thereafter display the *Main* menu simply by invoking the macro, provided the macro file that contains *Main* is in

memory. This is part of my technique, as you'll see.

The third element is what you enter in the *Menu Title* field at the same Application Menu Options screen. This is the descriptive text that appears at the top of the custom menu when it's displayed, and shouldn't be confused with the menu's *Name*.

For example, the custom main menus for the three macro files I mentioned earlier might be titled *My Payables*, *My Payroll* and *My Clients*.

To summarize these key elements:

- The macro file named *Clients.men* contains a custom menu named *Main* with the title *My Clients*.
- The macro file named *Payroll.men* contains a custom menu named *Main* with the title *My Payroll*.
- The macro file named *Payables.men* contains a custom menu named *Main* with the title *My Payables*.

As you can see, each macro file supports a different module or application. Each application might consist of several databases along with a variety of custom menus and macros. Because each application has its own macro file, you can manage multiple applications without stuffing a confusing profusion of custom menus and macros into a single huge macro file.

How menu-switching works

Assuming we're working with the three custom menus described above, the idea is to be able to easily switch from any of them to either of the other two. In other words, if the *My Payroll* menu is displayed, you want to be able to quickly switch to the *My Payables* menu or the *My Clients* menu that are in different macro files.

Using the Application Menu Options screen, you place an item (menu selection) named *Switch Menus* on each of the three Main menus. Then, when you select *Switch Menus* from any Main menu, the three macro files are displayed in a picklist in alphabetical order, like this

Clients.men
Payables.men
Payroll.men

Suppose you select the *Clients.men* macro file. When you do, *Payroll.men* is swapped out, *Clients.men* is swapped in, and Q&A's own Main menu appears.

On the Alternate Programs menu, you have a selection named *Custom Menu* in the top slot (Alternate Program 1). You select it, and the My Clients menu appears.

This type of menu-switching requires three quick steps, but you don't have to remember filenames or their locations—or type a single character.

Note that the macro file and custom menu name are related. For example, when you choose the Clients.men macro file, it means you want the My Clients menu.

Now, here are the steps in detail.

Step 1 - Rename your macro files

Make a new directory to store your macro files. Let's say this directory is c:\qa\menus.

Rename any macro files containing menus that you intend to include in your menu-swapping system. Give them the same three-letter filename extension. I'll assume you're using the .men extension as in the examples given.

Step 2 - Adapt your main menus

If any of your macro files contains multiple menus in the same menu structure, organize them in a multilayer structure so one is the main or top menu and the others are submenus. This, of course, makes working with any application a lot easier, whether or not you use this quick menu-swapping technique. Follow these steps:

1. Press Shift-F2 and load the first macro file. Press Shift-F2 again, then choose M - Create Menu. Select the main menu in the macro file and the Application Menu Options screen will appear.
2. Rename the menu *Main*. Leave the *On escape, show menu* field blank. This ensures that the Q&A Main menu will appear when you press Esc from this menu.
3. In the *Item 9* field (or the last one on the menu), type *Switch Menus*, then type <altm> in the *Macro Name* field. For the My Clients menu, your screen should look



Figure 1. The "Switch Menus" selection (somewhat adorned) on the My Clients main menu with its corresponding Alt-M macro. The other "macros" are submenu names.

something like Figure 1.

Repeat these steps with all the main menus in all the macro files.

Step 3 - Create a null DOS batch file

In QA Write, save a blank ASCII document (press Ctrl-F8) to the same directory as the macro files. Name it Swap.bat. The procedure will access this empty batch file to exit then restart Q&A.

Step 4 - Add two Alternate Programs

In the top Alternate Programs slot (Utilities / Alternate Programs), type *Custom Menu* as the Menu selection, and *altz* as its corresponding Alternate Program 1.

In the bottom Alternate Programs slot, type *E****** as the Menu selection, and enter the path to the null batch file (for example c:\qa\menus\swap.bat) in its corresponding Alternate Program 6 slot. (See Figure 2.)

You can use other Alternate Programs slots if these two aren't available.

Step 5 - Record the switching macros

Record an Alt-Z macro (you can optionally name it *Retrieve Main menu*, if you like) that does nothing but retrieve the *Main* menu. (Before saving the macro, type *Main* in the *End with menu* field). The macro should look like this

```
<begdef><altz><name>"Retrieve<sp>Main"<vidoff><menu>"
*Main "<enddef>
```

You have to assign this macro an alphabetical key identifier such as Alt-Z so you can place it on the Q&A Main menu. (You're limited here to Alt-A through Alt-Z.)

Next, record the Alt-M macro and save it to the macro file. Before recording it, be sure you copy your default qamacro.asc file (in the Q&A program files directory) to another directory as it will be overwritten. Also, make sure that *Automatic execution* is set to *Yes* at the Utilities / Set Global Options screen.

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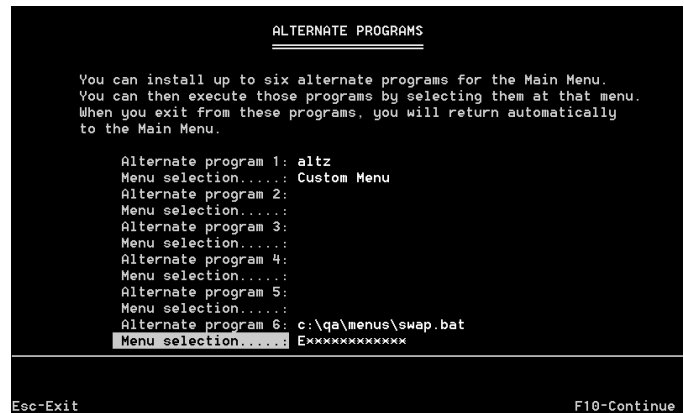


Figure 2. You'll need two Alternate Programs slots. Use the top and bottom slots if available. Your macro key identifier and the path to your Swap.bat file might be different.

Q&A for Windows Add-In Revs Up Multi-Database Apps

ROBERT SCOTT

If you like Q&A for Windows but wish it had more functionality, a new add-in can help soup-up your applications.



LIKE many Q&A developers, I've faced the dilemma of how to keep clients who are happy with my Q&A applications but believe, rightly or not, that they need to migrate to a Windows database. This is what first led me to Q&A for Windows.

But as many of us know—or have been told—Q&A for Windows lacks a number of tools found in its Q&A for DOS counterpart. Now, though, there's DTFWIN, a powerful Q&A for Windows add-in created by John Dow (the author of DTF SPECS and a host of other Q&A utilities) that provides many of these missing features.

How about a custom menu bar with your own menu selections, automatic database switching, pop-up selection lists, and automatic form switching based on a field value. If you're using (or supporting) multi-database applications in Q&A for Windows, DTFWIN is definitely worth a look.

In a custom application

Some of DTFWIN's capabilities come from the basic package, while others are custom-fitted into the add-in by John after conferring with the purchaser. Let me give you an example of how this works with one of my commercial Q&A for Windows applications (HealthTrak) that's used by a nationwide medical laboratory service.

HealthTrak is comprised of a number of databases (I call *modules*) that handle prospecting, patient data, appointment scheduling, billing and reporting for associated labs in many states. The one problem with the application was always ease of use. With no macro or custom menu capabilities, users were constantly having to close and open databases. Moreover, there was no way to display custom picklists that worked like Q&A 5.0's Userselect and XUserselect lists.

To get these capabilities, it seemed the only option was to abandon Q&A and start from scratch with a new database manager. But the client's user community was already familiar and comfortable with HealthTrak. All they really wanted was more automation—particularly, a way to switch between modules and their forms without having to manually close and open databases.

This is where DTFWIN came into play.

A tailored add-in

When I spoke with John Dow about it, he asked what I was trying to accomplish, then worked with me to design a DTFWIN package that tailored Q&A for Windows for HealthTrak. He was able to do this quickly using a "toolkit" he developed for this purpose.

First, we created a custom menu bar to select different databases and forms. (See Figure 1.) The title bar contains the application name (HealthTrak), and the menu bar includes a group of customized pulldown menus:

- The File menu contains selections for general program operation, such as exiting.
- The PatienTrak menu has four selections, each opening the PatienTrak database and loading a selected form.
- The AppointmentsTrak menu includes options for viewing appointment schedules.
- The DocTrak menu includes options to add a doctor to the Doctors database or run a Search/Update on it.
- The OfficeTrak menu has options to add a new office location or Search/Update an existing one.

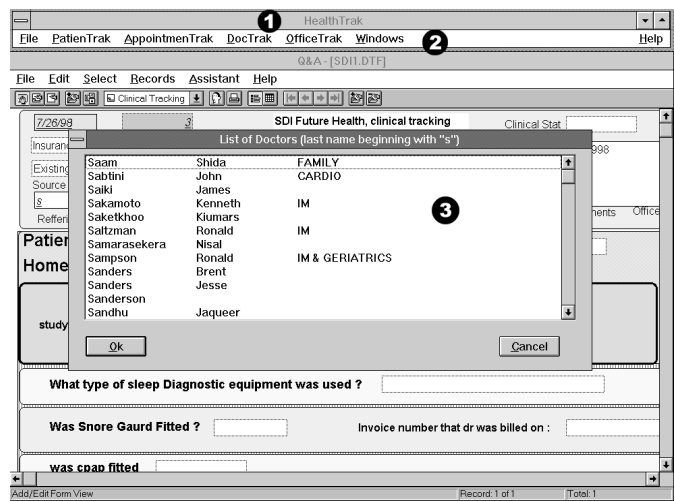


Figure 1. The custom HealthTrak application in Q&A for Windows includes (1) a custom application title bar, (2) a custom menu bar containing six pulldown menus, and (3) a multi-column picklist.

- The Windows menu lets users switch between open database windows similar to Windows' Program Manager. (This can also be done by pressing F11.)

These menus can be accessed either by clicking on them or by pressing the Alt-key in combination with the first letter of the menu—a standard Windows interface feature.

This application-specific custom menu system is driven by Windows-aware macros that can be used to control virtually all of Q&A for Windows' behavior—not just form switching as in the case of Q&A for Windows scripts. John created the macros as part of customizing DTFWIN for the application. They're hard-coded, but John told me that it would be possible to design user-customizable macro facilities into DTFWIN if enough people wanted them.

Picklists

The application needed a multi-column picklist showing doctors' last names, first names, and specialties from an external Doctors database, with the ability to limit the doctors on the list to the letters that matched up to three user-entered characters. (Figure 1 shows a multi-column picklist containing doctors whose last names begin with "S.") When the name is selected, the data is placed into the originating field.

DTFWIN handles this via an initialization (.ini) file that lets you identify specific fields in a form. When the user presses the hot-key from a field, DTFWIN reads the cursor position and identifies the form in use as well as the list to display.

I also wanted a picklist of office locations, with the selected location placed into the current field. DTFWIN lets you create such lists (they work like Q&A 5.0's Userselect lists) using ordinary ASCII text files.

In the HealthTrak application, I wanted F12 to be a kind of general hot-key but with its functionality dependent on the current field. To do this, you simply tell DTFWIN which fields you want to respond to your hot-key and the action you want performed. This way, pressing F12 in a field displays its picklist, while pressing F12 in another field displays a different picklist.

Other features

We also use DTFWIN when scheduling a patient for lab work. By pressing F12 in the pertinent field, DTFWIN displays a calendar-like popup with selections for a specific location previously entered into a "point of service" field along with available doctors or technicians in that area. Once a date is selected, DTFWIN opens another database, loads the appropriate form, enters patient information from the original database, closes that database, returns you to the original database and form, and places the selected date into the field in the original record.

To do this, DTFWIN uses several of its capabilities,

including intercepting keystrokes, auto-switching to another database and form, displaying a multi-column picklist from the same or another database, and displaying a picklist from an ASCII text file.

Another DTFWIN feature (customizable at a low cost) is the ability to launch Windows or DOS programs (like Q&A 5.0's @Shell feature) and display custom help via Windows Help or an HTML browser.

Q&A 5.0 for DOS comparison

Although comparing Q&A for Windows/DTFWIN to Q&A 5.0 for DOS is like comparing apples and oranges, here are some of the Q&A 5.0 features that DTFWIN can match or even exceed in functionality:

@Insert—Inserts a Q&A or ASCII text file into a database field.

@Msgbox—displays a three-line message box.

@Askuser—displays a three-line message and prompts for a Yes/No response.

@Save—saves the current record and displays the next one.

@Exit—saves changes in the current record and exits data entry.

@Fedit—opens the field editor.

@Shell—starts an external program or runs an internal DOS command.

@Macro—runs a macro.

@Userselect/Userselect—displays a selection list and places the selection into a field.

@Xuserselect/Xuserselect—displays a selection list of the contents of a field in an external database and places the selected entry in a field.

@XuserselectR—displays a selection list of the contents of a field in an external database, allowing a specified value range, and places the selected value in a field.

It's important to understand that DTFWIN has a similar and, in some cases, better way of implementing these features. For example, Q&A 5.0 can display a three-line @Msgbox message, while DTFWIN can display umpteen pages in a scrolling window if desired.

On the other hand, some of these Q&A 5.0-like features aren't built in—they cost extra to add.

John made DTFWIN a breeze to install and configure. All I needed to do was place DTFWIN and a .dll file in my Q&A for Windows directory, then modify the add-in's customizable features to suit my needs.

For additional information, an online tour of DTFWIN's capabilities, and a demo copy of the program, visit John's Web site at <http://www.johntdow.com>. You'll find a price list for the standard DTFWIN package as well as available custom options.

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EDITED BY GORDON MEIGS
AND WILLIAM HALPERN



Imported Dates Not Valid

I imported an ASCII file with date values in a 980822 format (for August 22, 1998), but the date field in my Q&A database doesn't reformat them. Is there a Mass Update I can perform to get these dates into a format that Q&A will recognize as valid?

Ron Mead, Ft. Worth, Texas

Q&A can do almost anything with data import and date conversions. You'll need an extra text field in your database in addition to the one for the reformatted date. (Use a full date format such as 03-19-1995.) Import the date value into the text field, then run a Mass Update using the following Update Spec, where field #1 is the text field and field #2 is the date field:

```
#1: #2 = @Str(@Lt(#1, 2)) + "/" + @Str(@Mid(#1, 3, 2)) +
"/" + @Str(@Rt(#1, 2))
```

After running the Mass Update, dates imported as 980822, 980101, 971222, and 960404 will appear in the date field as 08-22-1998, 01-01-1998, 12-22-1997 and 04-04-1996, respectively, and they'll behave like valid Q&A date fields. You can delete the extra text field if you like.

Find the Same Person in Another Database

I maintain a large mailing list database and several smaller special interest mailing list databases. I'd like to add Yes/No fields to the large database, then, when there's a name match in one of the external special interest files, have Q&A place a "Y" in the field to indicate the other file the person is also in. How do I do this?

Jim Eckersley via the Internet

The simple answer is to run a Mass Update that tests the field with a last name/first name combination against the external databases for a match and, if found, places a "Y" in the appropriate Yes/No field. However, there are some issues you should consider. First of all, XLookups use only the first 16 characters to determine a match, so this could present a problem with longish names. But you're flirting with disaster if you're using only names. If there's more

than one person in a special interest database named John Jones, for example, Q&A will report a match on the first one it finds, which might not be the same person.

Names are among the least reliable database key fields. They're simply not unique enough. Finding a *Bill Smith* in two databases in no way guarantees they're the same person. Moreover, names for the same person might be spelled differently in different records. You'll be much better off if you can come up with some sort of *unique* Customer ID (such as a phone number's digits, Social Security Number, or the like.). Using an Update Spec along the following lines, you can run a Mass Update on your master database to search for the same ID in the other databases, then have Q&A mark your master database record if a match is found:

```
Customer ID: #10:
If @XLu("SpecInt1.dtf", #10, "ID", "ID") = #10
Then Spec1 = "Y" Else Spec1 = "";
If @XLu("SpecInt2.dtf", #10, "ID", "ID") = #10
Then Spec2 = "Y" Else Spec2 = "";
If @XLu("SpecInt3.dtf", #10, "ID", "ID") = #10
Then Spec3 = "Y" Else Spec3 = "";
```

This might not be the most elegant solution, but it's workable and can be used as a starting point.

Banking System Y2K Disaster—Not Here!

I've been an active user of Q&A since 1990 and an avid *Quick Answer* reader. I supervise the Executive Support Group of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce in Toronto, Ontario, Canada and run Q&A 4.0 for DOS in Windows 3.11 to support all the database, communication, and word processing requirements for the 260 executives of CIBC worldwide.

I tried Q&A 5.0 for DOS, but found the printers it supports incompatible with the multitude of existing Write documents and Reports we use, so I've remained with the old faithful Q&A 4.0 for DOS. I have the following questions:

- I store all dates in Q&A's Global Date Format "1" (Mar 19, 1968). Am I Y2K ready? Will I experience *any* Y2K problems?



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.

- I will be upgrading from Windows 3.11 to Windows 98 this September. Can I continue to use Q&A 4.0 for DOS?

I appreciate your support. A "Yes" answer to my two questions would mean the world to me!

Robert Hill via the Internet

The last person with a similar question said the solution would be worth a "million dollars." Since you work for the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce...

Kidding aside, let's first address your statement concerning printer drivers. Q&A 5.0 added some printer drivers not supplied with 4.0, but if you don't like them, you can safely use a 4.0 printer driver with 5.0. All you have to do is to copy the old qaprint.cfg file to the new Q&A 5.0 directory.

As for upgrading from Windows 3.11 to Windows 98—*don't* perform a direct upgrade! Though advertised to work, you'll have no end of problems and crashes. A Windows 98 upgrade from Windows 95B will go smoothly, but not so from Windows 3.x. To avoid this problem, install the complete Windows 98 package into a new directory on your PC's.

Now, what about Q&A 4.0 running in Windows 98? Here at PCTA, we have it running (three copies, network pack, and so forth) on a Windows 98 computer and network. We use it on a daily basis and haven't had a single problem. Contrary to rumor, even the FAT32 presents no problems. If, as part of your conversion, you're upgrading to faster computers with large hard drives, don't forget the processor speed issue (see the August 1997 and June and August 1998 issues) and hard disk partition issues (see the March and August 1998 issues). The "Q&A Tips" page at The Quick Answer's web site (www.quickanswer.com) has the information you need to successfully setup and run Q&A 4.0 or 5.0 in Windows 95. The same procedures apply to Windows 98.

As for Y2K issues and Q&A—basically, you're covered. Q&A is Y2K-compliant because it stores dates with the four-digit year, though users and programmers aren't always up to the task. As long as your people enter 21st century dates with the four-digit year, you're golden. (Q&A will interpret 01/01/2001, for example, as January 1, 2001, but 01/01/01 as January 1, 1901.) Make sure you don't have any date-related programming that will give you problems. See the March and April 1998 issues for some tips on 21st century date issues, or visit *The Quick Answer's* Web site for information on the availability of a complete Y2K package.

So, the answers to both your questions are Yes!

Databases Inexplicably Locked

Can you *please* tell me how to setup QA 4.0 for DOS on a LAN. Our databases become fully locked after access by the first user.

Tony Dovale via the Internet

The key to setting up Q&A on any network is to make sure that the file- and record-locking features are properly configured. For a client-server LAN with a dedicated file server, you don't have to do anything. Q&A will automatically set the databases to share and provide record-locking. However, on a peer-to-peer network where the databases reside on workstation drives, you must specifically tell Q&A to allow file sharing. To do this, make sure nobody is using the database. From the Q&A Main menu, select File / Design / Secure a file, enter the database name, and choose Declare Sharing Mode. Set the sharing mode to "Allow" (it will be on "Automatic" by default). Return to the Main menu, and repeat this step for every database you'll share on the network. Once you've done this you should be all set.

Play it Again Sam. . . But Slower

It would be helpful to find out what occurs when using Speedfix on 166-200Mhz PC's. I tried it and it seemed to slow down one application—a telephone number auto-dialing program. For consistency, we planned to use Speedfix on all our PC's. Attached is the program we're using for auto-dialing. Thanks for any help you can provide.

Andrew Aronson via the Internet

Looking at the program you sent, you appear to be using @Shell, some @Play commands, and Gosub programming. The @Play looks like it's designed for user notification. After reviewing your programming and running it on a Speedfix'd 300Mhz PentiumII and a non-Speedfix'd 233 Mhz Pentium MMX, we have the following comments:

- Speedfix lets you run Q&A 5.0 on the fastest PC's. So who cares if the @Play sounds are slightly different?
- After checking the timing and sounds on both our test PC's, we noticed no difference.
- If you're concerned about speed, why use @Play at all? It's of no benefit to your auto-dialing and, besides, @Play commands execute *not* in the order they appear in the program, but *first*—even *before* you can see the cursor move. In other words, your entire program is put on hold until the sounds are played. If you want fast dialing program execution *and* user notification, why not use a message box or message line instead?

See the review of Speedfix elsewhere in this issue.

[Speedfix's creator recommends installing the Speedfix patch only on PC's where Q&A 5.0 has trouble running. —Ed.]

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Adding GUI-Like Features to Q&A

JEFF NITKA



Programs with graphical user interfaces (GUIs) make performing tasks easier and more intuitive. Here's how you can get some of this functionality in your Q&A 5.0 databases.



OVER the years we've seen comments in *The Quick Answer* about Windows-based database programs. For nuts-and-bolts data management, though, it's actually a lot simpler and far less time-consuming to design an application in Q&A than in Microsoft Access. Nevertheless, there are things about GUI programs I do like, and I've successfully incorporated them into Q&A for DOS databases. One of these is a form button you can click on to perform a task—a button you can *enable* or *disable* depending on the conditions you, the database designer, specify.

One feature of GUI programs is that you can disable click-on buttons when they aren't needed or appropriate. The method is simple: You write code that reads data in one or more fields, and if the data passes certain tests, the button is activated. Otherwise, it changes color (dims) and won't respond to a mouse click.

You can reproduce much of this functionality in Q&A. Although Q&A doesn't supply buttons, you can use a field to act like one. (Tom Marcellus has written extensively on this topic. See, for example, "Streamline Tasks with Custom Windows-like Gadgets" in the January 1996 issue, and "More Windows-Like Gadgets" in the August 1996 issue.) With some basic Q&A programming, you can mimic button behavior commonly seen in GUI interfaces.

What do you want your button to do?

You start by deciding what you want your button to do and how it should look and behave. Suppose you have an invoice database (call it Invoice.dtf). The database form includes a *Print* button which, when clicked, prints an invoice from the current record.

You know what the button should do, now you have to decide how it should behave. In GUI design, buttons usually have a fixed background color and black text when they're enabled (that is, when a user can click it to perform a task). When the button is disabled, the text changes to a color just slightly darker than the button's

background. As an example (and for the purposes of this article), let's agree that the button should look (and be) enabled when certain fields contain valid data, and look (and be) disabled when some data is determined to be invalid.

Although Q&A can't precisely mimic this functionality, it can come close.

Back to the invoice database

You want to create a Print button in your invoice form. It doesn't really matter where you put it, but you'll need an invisible field on either side of it. These invisible fields force the user to click the button, preventing the user from entering the button field either by tabbing or pressing Enter.

In the Design spec, the button field (call it **Print**) and surrounding fields (all are center-justified read-only text fields) look like this:

```
<Fld1> <Print   > <Fld2>
```

In order to provide a label for the Print button, go to the Initial Values Spec (from the Q&A Main Menu, select File-Design File-Customize a File-Set Initial Values), type *Print* in the Print field, and press F10 to save it.

To force the user to click the Print field in order to run its program, place the following navigation statement in fields Fld1 and Fld2:

```
< Goto OtherField;
REM "OtherField is arbitrary; it can be any field
    the user is allowed to place the cursor."
```

In the Program Spec, place the following code in Fld2:

```
#1: If   Type <> "Credit" then
      if     @Sum(Amt1..Amt4) <= 0
      then @Color(Print,12,4)
      else @Color(Print,14,6)
```

Finally, place this code in the Print field:

```
< If   Type <> "Credit" then
      if     @Sum(Amt1..Amt4) > 0
      then @Macro("Print Invoice")
      else Goto OtherField
```

Continues on page 11



Gargantuan Hard Disks

It came to our attention recently that hard drives larger than 8G are formatted with FAT32x—a specification that differs from FAT32

with its 8G limit. Drives larger than 8G “don’t follow the rules,” according to PowerQuest, maker of Partition Magic, a non-destructive hard disk partitioning utility. Partition Magic won’t touch a partition formatted with FAT32x.

We recently installed a new 400Mhz PC with an 8G drive formatted with FAT32x. The good news is that Lesspace.com—a utility that fools the operating system into thinking the partition is much smaller—seems to allow Q&A to run okay on this very large drive. However, our client found the slow speed with which Lesspace loaded on his new PC unacceptable. So we needed to partition the hard drive. (For more on Lesspace.com and drive partitioning, see last month’s @Help column, and also December 1996, p. 8 and March 1998, p. 8.)

Many new PC’s that come with installed applications include a utility that “restores the hard drive to it’s original configuration.” What this does, of course, is wipe out anything you’ve installed, putting the PC back to its out-of-the-box configuration.

To partition the 8G drive, we booted from a Windows 98

startup diskette, then used FDISK to create 6G and 2G partitions. After rebooting with Dell’s Windows 98 startup diskette, we used their “restore” utility. The first Dell tech support rep we spoke to thought the PC might not run properly after sensing that the newly partitioned C: drive was no longer 8G. But another rep thought it should. It did. That is, it restored all the original Dell-supplied software to the new 6G partition, including all of Windows 98. When we rebooted the machine, it was just like new, except that we now had a 2G D: drive on which to install Q&A without having to use Lesspace.com.

(We also installed the new *Speedfix* patch so Q&A 5.0 would run on this very fast Pentium.)

Dell told us that when ordering a new PC you can specify FAT16 instead of FAT32. With FAT16, we knew we could use Partition Magic to resize the partitions and convert them to FAT32 at the same time. Accordingly, when we ordered two new 300Mhz PC’s recently, we requested FAT16. But no one was listening because we got FAT32! Fortunately, the drives were 6G and formatted with FAT32, which Partition Magic handles easily.

If you purchase a new PC with an 8G or larger hard drive, make sure you order it pre-partitioned, preferably with at least one partition less than 2G. Let the vendor know that you’ll return the PC if it comes with FAT32x.

GORDON MEIGS, PCTA

Getting Your Q&A Data into 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 nifty Q&A add-on from *The Quick Answer*—lets you *instantly* copy any database field to the Windows 95/98 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 4.0 or 5.0** running in full screen or window mode in Windows 95/98. It works in any database as-is, requiring no extra fields, modifications, or programming.
- **WinClip is not a TSR**—it takes no memory 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.
- **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

See the April and May 1998 issues of *The Quick Answer* for a review of WinClip and application ideas

Custom Menus...continued from page 4

Follow these steps to record the macro. (I'll assume your Q&A program files are located in a C:\QA directory. If not, modify the procedure accordingly.)

1. Start the macro recorder with the custom menu displayed, and choose Alt-M as the key identifier. Press Esc to display the Q&A Main menu. Select Utilities / DOS File Facilities / Copy a file. Clear the path by pressing Shift-F4, type C:\qa\menus*.men, then press Enter. The names of the three macro files will appear.
2. Pause the macro (press Alt-F2), select a macro file, end the pause (press Alt-F2 again), and press Enter. You'll be back at the DOS File Facilities menu.
3. Clear the path, type c:\qa\qamacro.asc and press Enter. Answer *yes* to the overwrite warning. (Be sure you have a backup of qamacro.asc.) Press Esc twice to return to the Main menu, then end the macro by pressing Shift-F2. You can optionally name the macro *Switch Menus*.
4. Edit the macro to exit Q&A and run swap.bat by adding the letter *E* before the <enddef>. Your finished Alt-M macro should look like this:

```
<begdef><altm><name>"Switch<sp>Menus"<vidoff><esc>  
<esc><esc>udc<capsf4>c:\qa\menus\*.men<enter><wait>  
<enter><enter><capsf4>c:\qa\qamacro.asc<enter><left>  
<enter><esc><esc>E<enddef>
```

5. Copy the Alt-Z and Alt-M to each macro file containing

a custom main menu you want to swap. Be sure these files contain no other Alt-Z or Alt-M macros.

You're now all set to switch between your application macro files. Not only that, you can also quickly toggle between the Q&A Main menu and the custom main menus of all your macro files.

Selecting *Switch Menus* from a custom main menu invokes the Alt-M macro that displays the macro filenames in alphabetical order. You make your selection, and that macro file is copied to qamacro.asc.

The Alt-M macro then runs the null batch file (swap.bat). Q&A exits and restarts, loading the default qamacro.asc macro file that is now a copy of the macro file you selected containing the custom menu system you want to use.

Now, when you select *Custom Menu* from Q&A's Main menu, the Alt-Z macro retrieves the *Main* or top menu in that macro file's custom menu structure.

By combining the techniques in this and my previous article, loading macro files and displaying their custom menus will be a breeze. You'll no longer have to remember macro key identifiers or filenames, and you won't have to "go looking" all over your hard drive for your macro files.

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Program Spec...continued from page 9

Save the Program Spec by pressing F10, and add a new record to Invoice.dtf. Set the calculation mode to automatic by pressing Shift-F8, selecting Automatic, then pressing F10.

The field colors I'm using in the @Color commands assume Q&A's default blue form color. If your form is a different color, choose button colors (the numbers in the @Color command) that will make the button visible and readable when enabled.

What happens?

Because the calculation mode is set to automatic, the code in Fld2 will execute every time the user enters data and moves to another field. Thus, it will continually check the total value of the invoice and its type (ignoring credits). If the total is zero or less (and the invoice is not a credit), Print's color appears with its text shaded. Otherwise,

Print's color appears with its text darkened, telling the user that the button is active and can be clicked on.

The calculation code simply effects the color of the Print button. The actual activation code exists in Print's on-field entry program. If the user clicks on Print, the same check is performed to verify its activation status. If the criteria is satisfied, then the Print Invoice macro is invoked, printing the invoice. Otherwise, the cursor is moved to another field.

Jeff Nitka develops Access and Q&A applications for Epoch Software (JNitka@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 available from Marble Publications.

Speedfix...continued from page 1

(Out of curiosity, I also installed the patch on a Network Pack copy of Q&A 5.0 running on a 233MHz Pentium MMX – one of the PC's you ain't supposed to fix.) I performed database redesigns, searches, mass updates, posts, various kinds of external lookups, programmed calculations, database recovery, and more on these PC's and experienced no problems at all. Nor did I find any noticeable speed degradation. (Even on the 233Mhz PC, the comparative speed tests were dead even.)

Note that Speedfix does *not* change the way you install Q&A for DOS in Windows 95/98. You must still *boot* your machine to the DOS command prompt to

satisfactorily install the program from the floppy disks. Nor does Speedfix solve the large (greater than 1.89G) hard disk partition problem. For this, you'll need Partition Magic, FDISK, or LESSPACE.COM.

But for that new blazingly fast PC on your desk or in your future, Speedfix will keep Q&A 5.0 running at top speed on it well into the new millenium.

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Q&A Speedfix is available from the *Free Downloads* page at www.quickanswer.com. It's also available on disk from Marble Publications for \$10 postage and handling.

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Pity You'll Miss Out on a Whole Lot of Useful Information

(Or *will* you?)

Depending on available space, last minute registrations will be accepted for The Quick Answer's **Q&A Masters Seminar** and the National Q&A User Group's **BASH '98** in Washington, D.C. September 25-27—**but you must act now!**

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Details at www.quickanswer.com

Where?

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