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Create a Handy Letters Database

TOM MARCELLUS



The Quick Answer

The Do-It-Yourself Guide to Q&A

July 2002

Volume 13 Number 7

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If your work involves routine letter or memo writing, one of the problems you might have is storing these documents on your computer in a way that lets you quickly find them. A problem has cropped up with a supplier. You remember writing a memo to him several months ago on this very issue. Now if you could only find the darned thing you could see exactly what it was you told him in writing. But with the restrictions imposed by the old 8.3 DOS file naming conventions, you're slogging through your directories pulling up document after document, frustrated at not being able to find the one you need.

A database of documents

There might be a better way—composing and storing your brief letters and memos in a database instead of Write documents. This way, you can handily search your database by the recipient's name, by date range (when they might have been written), by subject—even by a word or phrase in the body of the letter. You could have that crucial letter or memo in front of you in a few seconds instead of 15 minutes.

I'll show you a little Q&A 5.0 database (Docubase.dtf) that does this very thing. (It's included in this month's download file.) Docubase lets you address the letter or memo by selecting the recipient from a handy pop-up picklist. All you have to do is type in the subject and compose the body of the letter. With that, you can "font" the letter in a variety of popular typefaces (Courier, Times, Univers) and print it out right from the database screen simply by pressing F2, F10. You can even add "spot" enhancements to your letters, such as bold, italic and underline, and have them print just as pretty as you please.

The Docubase is designed for the brief letters and memos you might frequently write and need to save electronically for easy tracking and fast lookup. It's for use with HP LaserJet or compatible printers (due to the

formatting codes used, as you'll see), though you can probably adapt it for use with an HP DeskJet or compatible printer. (My Docubase letters print fine on my LaserJet 2100 or DeskJet 870CSE without changing a thing.)

How the Docubase works

Figure 1 shows the field layout. When you open Docubase in Add Data mode, an @Msg message prompts you to press Enter for a list of names from your contacts database. (See Figure 2.) If the recipient is not in your database—such as a letter to your credit card company disputing an overcharge—you can always type in the name and address.

Figure 1. Visible fields in the Docubase database.

Continues next page

Most of the fields shown in Figure 1 are easily identifiable. The **Formal?** field (Yes/No) allows you to choose whether or not you want a formal salutation (“Dear Mr. Anderson” or “Dear Gregory”). Clicking on the **Font** field after you’ve composed your letter allows you to choose your font from a pop-up picklist (See Figure 4 on page 3), whereas clicking on the **Unfont** field removes an assigned font.

Presets and preferences

All of the presets for formatting your letters and memos—including the name and fields in the external contacts database to look up your recipients and addresses—are stored in the Lookup Table. (See Figures 6 and 7 on page 5.) Everything in the database form design, programming and Lookup Table are customizable to suit your needs and preferences.

Let’s go through the Docubase programming. You’ll see how it uses the presets stored in the Lookup table to make everything work.

Programming the database

The only Navigation Spec programming is in the **LName** or last name field:

```
< If LName = "" Then @Msg("Type name & address
or press Enter for pick-list.")
```

The **LName** field in the regular Program Spec is programmed this way:

```
> If @Add and LName = "" then {
  XUserselect(@Lu("ExtDb", 1), @Lu("List", 1),
  LName);

  XLookup(@Lu("ExtDb", 1), LName, @Lu("List",
  1),
  @Lu("FName", 1), FName, @Lu("Salut", 1),
  Salut,
  @Lu("Company", 1), Company, @Lu("Address",
  1), Address,
  @Lu("City", 1), City, @Lu("State", 1),
  State,
  @Lu("Zip", 1), Zip, @Lu("LName", 1), LName);
  Goto Subject }
```

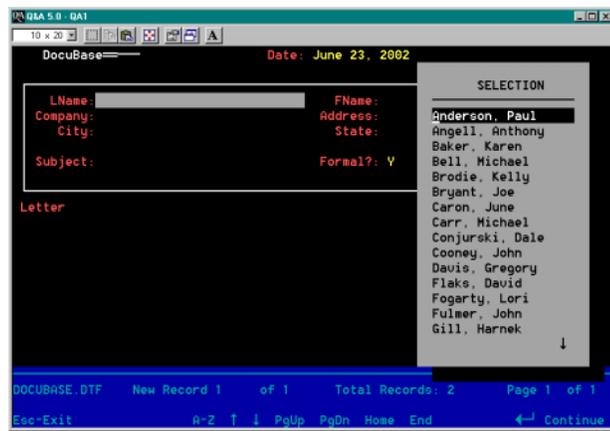


Figure 2. The Docubase can pop-up a list of potential letter recipients.

This program executes in Add Data mode when the **LName** field is blank. (When you’re starting a new letter and not manually typing the name and address.) It pops up an **XUserselect** pick-list from the contacts database which, in this case, is **Contacts.dtf**.

The first **XUserselect** parameter consults the Lookup Table (See Figure 7) to get the name of the external contacts database. The second parameter matches the **List** field value in the Key column of the Lookup Table with the corresponding field in the Contacts database (**ForList**) to generate the pick-list of contacts, returning to the **LName** field (the third parameter) the whole name (“Anderson, Gregory”) of the selected recipient.

With the recipient’s full name now known, an **XLookup** can then retrieve the data from the pertinent fields. The single **XLookup** command performs multiple lookups. Each one is comprised of two parameters—the field name in the external Contacts database, and the matching field name in the current record where the data is to be placed. The program gets each external field name from the Lookup Table. For example, `@Lu("FName", 1)` says:

Find the Lookup Table entry for “FName” in the Key column, then find the entry in its corresponding column 1. Retrieve the data from that matching field in the external database.

The Quick Answer™

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The Quick Answer (ISSN 1052-3820) is published monthly in a downloadable “electronic” (Acrobat PDF) edition by Marble Publications, Inc., 1927A Harbor Blvd., Costa Mesa, CA 92627 USA. A Subscriber ID is required to download each issue.

Cost of subscriptions: 12 issues, \$89 anywhere in the world. Single copy price: \$9. All funds must be in U.S. currency. Back issues available upon request for the same price as a single copy. Back issues from 1990 through 2001 available in printed format. Back issues from 1995 onward available in Acrobat PDF files.

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I like this technique because it enables you to set defaults for a database while making them easily modifiable without having to ransack the Program Spec and change your code.

See the sidebar for special considerations on the Contacts database.

The **Formal?** field in Docubase contains this program:

```
>
Rem "Build address block, date & salutation for
FORMAL letter";

If @Add and Formal Then { Letter =
  FName + " " + LName + "
" + Company + "
" + Address + "
" + City + " " + State + " " + Zip
+ @Text(20, " ")
+ @Month$(Date) + " " + @Str(@Dom(Date)) + ", " +
@Str(@Year(Date)) + "

" + "Dear " + Salut + " " + LName + ":" };

Rem "Build address block, date & salutation for
INFORMAL letter";

If @Add and Not Formal Then { Letter =
  FName + " " + LName + "
" + Company + "
" + Address + "
" + City + " " + State + " " + Zip + @Text(20, "
")
+ @Month$(Date) + " " + @Str(@Dom(Date)) + ", " +
@Str(@Year(Date)) + "

" + "Dear " + FName + ":" };

Rem "Close up blank line if Company field empty";

If @Add and Company = "" Then Letter =
@Replfir(Letter, "
", "
");

Goto Letter
```

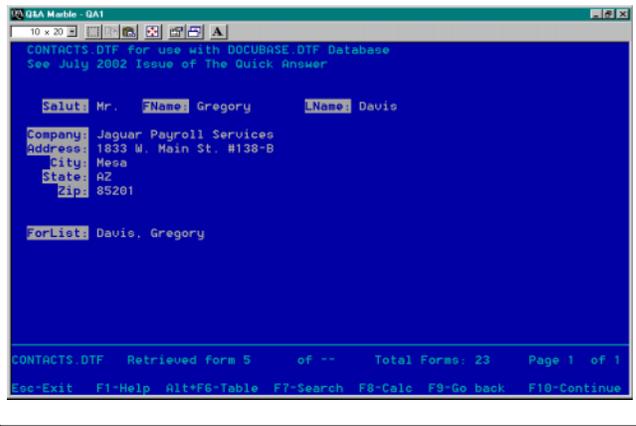
This program generates (in the **Letter** field) the

Contact Database Essentials

The Contacts database (see screen shot below) includes fields that match the recipient's name and address fields in the Docubase. It also contains a program in the **LName** field that combines the person's last and first names in the format ("Smith, Sandy"). That program looks like this:

```
> If FName <> "" and LName <> "" Then
  ForList = LName + ", " + FName
```

The **ForList** field in Contacts must be Speedy so you can use it as the Key value for your Docubase XUserselect and XLookup commands.



recipient's name and address block, the full date with the month spelled out, and the salutation line. (See Figure 3.) If the **Formal?** field contains "Y", the salutation will be in the format "Dear Mr. Anderson:". Otherwise, it will be informal ("Dear Gregory:"). To "program" the blank line between the city, state and ZIP Code line and the "Dear" line, you type an opening double quote, press Enter twice,

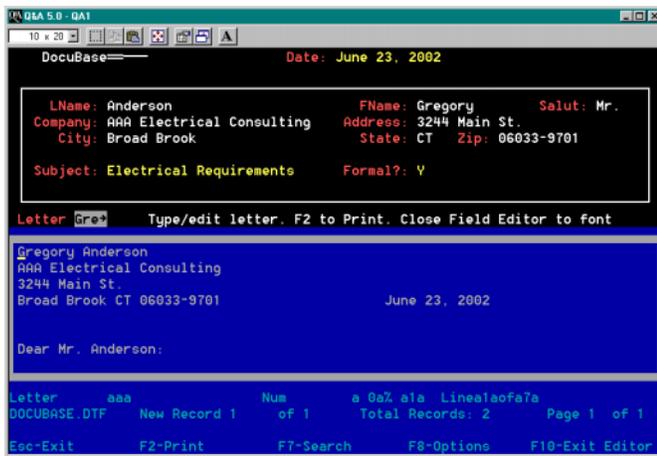


Figure 3. The top of a letter shown in the expanded Letter field.

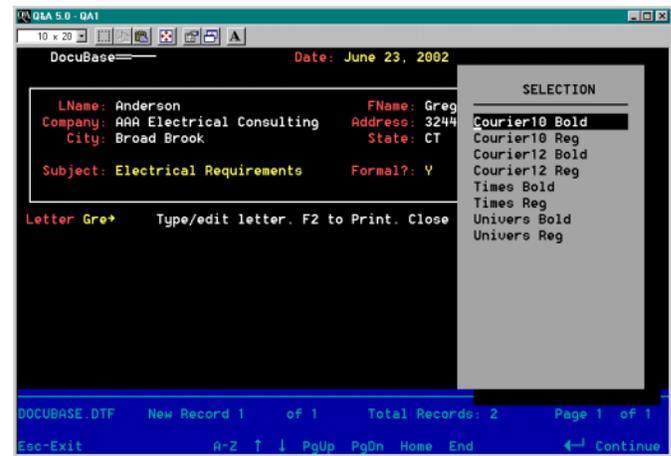


Figure 4. Choosing a font for your document.

then type the closing double quote at the very beginning of the line.

If the **Company** field is blank, the @Replfir (replace first occurrence) command closes up the blank line in the address block.

When you leave the **Formal?** field, you arrive at the **Letter** field—the field that stores the entire letter or memo. It’s programmed this way:

```
< Message = "Type/edit letter. F2 to Print. Close
Field Editor to font"; @Fedit
```

The programming displays a message prompting you to press F2 to print the letter or to close the Field Editor to “font” it. The Field editor simultaneously opens via the @Fedit command. (The message is displayed right on top of the expanded field so you can’t miss it.)

In use, the sequence is:

1. Select or type in the recipient information.
2. Type the text of the letter.
3. Close the Field Editor and “font” the letter.
4. Open the Field Editor and press F2 to print the letter.

Next to the **Letter** field is the **Message** field. Its program reads:

```
< Clear(Message); Goto Subject
```

When you click on the **Font** field (which you can do only when the **Letter** field is not expanded), the following program executes:

```
< If Letter = "" Then {
@Msg("Create letter before fonting"); Goto Formal
};
```

```
If @Instr(Letter, "<-") Then {
@Msg("Letter already fonted. Unfont before re-
fonting");
Goto LName };
```

```
Font = @Userselect("Times Reg,Times Bold,Univers
Reg,Univers Bold,Courier10 Reg,Courier10
Bold,Courier12 Reg,Courier12 Bold");

Rem "Get page setup codes from Lookup Table";

Codes = @Lu("Top Margin", 1) + @Lu("Left Margin",
1);

Rem "Get font, line height & bottom margin codes
from Lookup Table";

Codes = Codes + @Lu(@Left(Font, @Instr(Font, " ") -
1), 1)
+ @Lu(@Left(Font, @Instr(Font, " ") -
1), 2)
+ @Lu(@Left(Font, @Instr(Font, " ") -
1), 3);

Rem "Get bold code from Lookup Table";

Codes = Codes + @Lu(@Mid(Font, @Instr(Font, " ")
+1, 6), 1);

Rem "Translate spot Bold, Ital, Underline to escape
codes";

Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Bold", 3),
@Lu("Bold", 1));
Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Bold", 4),
@Lu("Bold", 2));

Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Italic", 3),
@Lu("Italic", 1));
Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Italic", 4),
@Lu("Italic", 2));

Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Underline", 3),
@Lu("Underline", 1));
Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Underline", 4),
@Lu("Underline", 2));

Rem "Add printer control code string to top of
letter";

Letter = Codes + "
" + Letter; Goto Letter
```

The program in the **Font** field executes based on one of three cases:

Case 1: If there is no text in the **Letter** field, it tells you that there’s nothing to “font” and returns you to the **Formal?** field.

Case 2: If the **Letter** field is already “fonted,” it will contain at least one ASCII 27 character, that little left arrow “Escape” character that’s common to all HP printer control codes. (In Q&A, you can display this character by pressing Alt-F10, then holding down the Alt key while typing 27 on the numeric keypad.) If there’s at least one such character in the **Letter** field, you’ll be prompted to “unfont” the document before assigning a font to it.

Case 3: If the letter field isn’t empty and doesn’t contain an ASCII 27 character, then a picklist of fonts will display. (See Figure 4.) When you select a font, the programming consults the Lookup Table to get the appropriate control codes, builds a string of them in the **Codes** field, places the string at the top of the document, then opens the **Letter** field for printing (Figure 5). The codes disappear as the printer processes them.

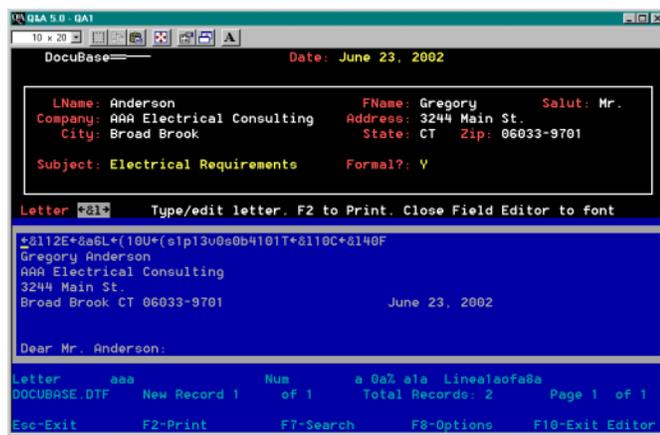


Figure 5. Printer control code string at top of document, ready to print.

The small hidden **Codes** field is just above the fixed text that reads, *Create letter before using these options*. This is where the program “compiles” the printer control code string that sets the top and left page margins, font, font size and so forth. The individual codes for these settings are stored in the Lookup Table.

The **Font** field program also converts any “spot” enhancements (bold, italic, underline) to actual control codes the printer can understand.

If you look at Figure 6 you’ll see, in the *Enhancements* section of the Lookup Table, that **@b+** means *bold on* and **@b-** means *bold off*. You can use these codes, respectively, before and after any word, line, or section of text you want enhanced. When you then assign a font to the document, these “spot” codes are replaced by the more arcane actual printer control codes. There’s an option in the Lookup Table (*Strip Spot Codes*) that enables you to retain these spot codes (“Y”) in the document or have them automatically removed (“N”) when you save the record.

The last field, **UnFont**, contains the following program:

```
< #100:

If Not @Instr(Letter, "<-") Then {
@Msg("No printer codes to strip"); Goto LName };

Rem "Strip printer codes from top of letter";

If Codes <> "" Then Letter = @Replace(Letter,
Codes + "
", "");

Rem "Revert to user spot enhancement codes";

If @Lu("Strip Spot Code", 1) = "Y" Then {

Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Bold", 1), "");
Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Bold", 2), "");

Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Italic", 1), "");
Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Italic", 2), "");

Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Underline", 1),
"");
```

```
Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Underline", 2), "")
};

If @Lu("Strip Spot Code", 1) = "N" Then {

Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Bold", 1),
@Lu("Bold", 3));
Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Bold", 2),
@Lu("Bold", 4));

Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Italic", 1),
@Lu("Italic", 3));
Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Italic", 2),
@Lu("Italic", 4));

Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Underline", 1),
@Lu("Underline", 3));
Letter = @Replace(Letter, @Lu("Underline", 2),
@Lu("Underline", 4)) };

Clear(Font, Codes, Message); Goto Letter
```

When you click on the **UnFont** field, its program removes the printer control code string (plus the carriage return that follows it) from the document. Because the **Codes** field stores this code string, all you’re doing is stripping from the **Letter** field whatever value is in the **Codes** field. If you have “spot” enhancement codes in the document, then these, which have been converted to the actual printer control codes for printing, are converted back to the human-readable codes (**@b+**, **@b-**, and the like) you manually added to the document.

The **UnFont** field is also the *On-Record-Exit* field, so in addition to its program executing when you click on it, it executes when you save or resave the record.

That’s it for the programming.

Options and suggestions

The Docubase in its present incarnation is not intended for lengthy documents. It’s for people who type a lot of brief letters or memos—typically “one-pagers”—where they need a quickly searchable electronic record of every one they wrote. It’s ideal for memo-happy managers who are constantly being challenged by employees about what was actually in some memo or other.

Concludes on page 12

KEY	1	2	3	4
Top Margin	+@112E	12 lines		
Left Margin	+@a6L	1 inch (approx)		
Font	On Code	Line Height	Bottom Margin	Remarks
Courier10	+(10U*(e0p10h1+)	+@110C	+@140F	10 pitch mono
Courier12	+(10U*(e0p12.0+)	+@118C	+@146F	12 pitch mono
Times	+(10U*(e1p13u0+)	+@110C	+@140F	13 point prop
Univers	+(10U*(e1p12u0+)	+@110c	+@140F	13 point prop
Enhancements	On	Off	Spot code On	Spot code Off
Bold	+(e3B	+(e0B	@b+	@b-
Italic	+(e1S	+(e0S	@i+	@i-
Underline	+@d0D	+@dB	@u+	@u-
Strip Spot code	Y			PgDn... More

Figure 6. Page 1 of the Docubase Lookup Table. All your editable settings are stored here.

KEY	1	2	3	4
Program keys	External DB &			
Don't Change	Field Names			
ExtDb	CONTACTS.DTF			
List	FarList			
LName	LName			
FName	FName			
Salut	Salut			
Company	Company			
Address	Address			
City	City			
State	State			
Zip	Zip			

Figure 7. Page 2 of the Docubase Lookup Table contains information on the external contacts database where recipient information is looked up.



Network Users Lost on New Computer

We purchased the Q&A networking option way back in 1995 or so, and it worked. But somehow in the course of re-installing Q&A onto newer servers, the little networking add-on hasn't worked properly and we've had to go to one-user-at-a-time mode for certain multi-user situations. Do you have any tips for making file sharing work properly for now, and will it be built into the new Q&A replacement product being developed?

Tom

Q&A Network Packs install new users by modifying the qa1.exe file and adding a network user count utility. Once used, the Netpack marks itself as used and cannot be reinstalled. If you reinstalled Q&A from scratch on your new computers, you have lost the network-modified .exe file and the Netpack you have will no longer work. If you can get to your old computer and copy the Q&A directory in total from it, you will be able to get your network count back to where it was.

As far as *Sesame* goes, networking will be based on the number of copies of the program that you own. Each separate copy will be accepted by the server as a valid user. *Sesame* is a true Client-Server application.

Calculation Statement Order

I know that Q&A calculates a record by reading statements in fields from left-to-right, top-to-bottom of the form. My question is how does Q&A read a database record that has pg1, pg1a, pg2, pg2a, and so forth. I had to convert an existing database I designed in this style because I ran out of pages going down with pg1, pg2, pg3 and the like. Does Q&A read pg1 complete then pg1a or does it read from top left of pg1 to top right of pg1a then on down? Also, How can I print just pg1 or just pg1a.

Jeff

As to the way Q&A calculates programming statements, it works this way:

- If there is an on-field-entry (<) or on-field-exit statement (>), Q&A calculates the programming in that field *only* when the appropriate navigation through the field is performed by the user.
- If there are no field entry/exit conditions, Q&A will only allow programming in a field that is identified by a programming field number (#10, #20, #30 or the like.)

The calculation order is then determined by the field *numbers*, in ascending order, or the on-entry/on-exit conditions, *not* left-to-right, top-to-bottom. This applies whether you use F8 to calculate manually or have Calc Mode set to automatic execution. So, your page order means nothing, whereas your field numbering means everything.

I assume from your description that you are using Q&A for Windows (p1a, p2a, and so on). The easiest way to print any page or part of a page is to use Q&A for Windows' ability to have different form views of the same database. Just create a new form which duplicates only P1a or P2a. When you want to print that page, just click on the form you need from the Forms window then click on Print.

Q&A, Windows 2000/XP and Novell Networks

I have just added a new Windows XP Professional computer to my Novell network and I can't get Q&A to access my databases from it. I get the message that it "cannot open the idx file." All of the other computers on the network (Windows 95 and 98) work fine. If I move my files to the local hard drive on the new PC, Q&A accesses them just fine.

Phil

I added a new Windows 2000 computer to my Novell network and can no longer run Q&A from it. All the rest of my Windows 98 workstations work great. When I try to run Q&A on the new 2000 machine, I get a message that it cannot access the qaovr19.ovl file and it won't load. Help!

Dave



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.

Both of these correspondents are running into a problem caused by using Novell's new NT client for their network rather than the Microsoft client that ships with Windows. It only affects systems running Novell 4.83. It is usually a good idea to get the manufacturer's latest drivers whenever you upgrade your system, but this was not the case for Novell. The driver they supplied would not grant read-write access to Q&A files. Thus, the inability to read Phil's .idx files (and not open a database) and the inability to write to the network count file for Dave (and not start Q&A). The immediate fix was to uninstall the Novell supplied network client and to use those supplied by Microsoft as part of the Windows packages. Q&A was then immediately operational on both Windows 2000 and XP PCs.

The offending Novell driver affected many more programs than Q&A and finally caught the attention of the company. They released a fix for the problem on June 3, 2002, which is available from their Web site at:

<http://support.novell.com/cgi-bin/search/searchtid.cgi?/2962669.htm>

It is a replacement version of NWFS.SYS for the Novell Client 4.83 for Windows NT/2000/XP. You download and run the file *nt483pt2.exe*. Then right-click on the resulting NWFS.INF and then click on INSTALL. The file will then be automatically referenced in the *DependingFileNameRequest* key in the Windows Registry. The installation will prompt you to reboot the machine, and during the reboot the new NWFS.SYS will be installed. Until the machine is rebooted, the new file will *not* be effective. Another method to install is to manually copy and replace the existing NWFS.SYS with the resulting file extracted from the download, in the directory...

```
%SystemRoot%\System32\NetWare
```

...and reboot your computer.

Q&A lives on.

Q&A and Large Hard Drives Clarified (Again)

I understand from your materials at the qaug.com Web site that Q&A does not run (or may run but can corrupt data) on hard drive partitions larger than 1.88G. My question is this: If the Q&A program resides on a server with a drive size of 1.8G or less, and the Q&A data also resides on this drive, will Q&A work okay connecting from a client machine? Does it matter if Q&A is run locally on the client, but the data is on the server? The reason I ask is that Q&A runs faster if installed on the local client PC. Thanks for any input you may have on this matter and also for the article that got me to where I am today.

Harald

I assume that you are asking about Q&A for DOS. If this is the case, the answer is *Yes*—you can keep the data on a partitioned server drive with the proviso that you also keep all your Q&A temporary files on that partitioned drive. The best way around having to partition the drive at all is to simply use LESSPACE.COM in conjunction with Q&A for DOS. This solves all the problems. You do not have to worry about drive size or the location of *any* Q&A files and Q&A will run fine. Start Q&A for DOS with a batch file containing these lines:

```
@echo off
Lesspace
qa.com
lesspace /U
Exit
```

With Q&A for Windows, as long as the data is on a partitioned drive of less than 1.88G, all will be fine.

Printers, Windows, and Q&A

We've published many tips and articles on printing problems with Q&A for DOS (4.0 and 5.0) but I feel that it bears some repeating here since we receive many calls every week about various printing-related issues. It seems as though everyone out there is getting a new printer for their new computer.

To start, Q&A does *not* support printing to a local printer connected via a USB port. USB ports are not recognized as valid printer connections by DOS programs. However, if the USB printer is a network printer *and* it is one that will support the printer codes that Q&A generates during print jobs, you can *capture* the printer to a local LPT port and Q&A will work with it.

If you are using a *Windows only* printer (not designed to work at all with DOS programs), Q&A for DOS will not work with it. The printer will *not* understand the printer control codes being sent by Q&A.

So what to do? Make sure that you have a printer that meets the following criteria. (Check with the manufacturer or supplier before purchasing it).

- It comes with a standard printer port (LPT) Centronics type connection capability. (Q&A can also print to a COM or serial port printer, but I've never used one.)
- It is *not* a "Windows-only" printer.
- It can *emulate* one of the printers on Q&A's standard printers list (HP LaserJet series, HP DeskJet 500 or 550c, Epson FX, LQ, or Stylus, Okidata OL and dot matrix series, Panasonic KX-P series, and so forth.)

One more tip: Stay away from those all-in-one office printer/fax/scanner systems if you plan to use them with Q&A for DOS. They are nothing but trouble.

Concludes on page 12

Some Handy New Sesame Features

ALEC MULVEY



THIS month I'd like to show you some important new *Sesame* features. They're new in the sense that they give you greater ease of use, more power and/or more options than are available in Q&A.

No mistaking the Retrieve Spec

In the early days of *Sesame*'s development, we asked a lot of Q&A users what they liked or disliked about Q&A. A common gripe with Q&A for DOS was that all the screens looked the same. The worst effect of this is when users mistakenly overtype previously entered data (or add a new record comprised of search criteria) because they think they are in the Retrieve Spec. This results in that familiar phenomenon of a batch of records that are blank except for company names like "New Jersey.." or "...software".

Well, with *Sesame*, you'll have no excuse for these faux-pas any more, because *Sesame* will tell you which mode you are in! It's brilliant yet simple.

Sesame's Mode Indicator panel on the toolbar changes colour and legend. Initially, with no application or form open, the panel is grey and says "Application." Open a form to the Retrieve Spec and the indicator turns blue and says "Search." (See Figure 1.)

When you run the search and your form is showing data, the Mode Indicator turns green and it reads "Update." (See Figure 2.)

When you're in Add Data mode, the indicator colour is deep red and says "Add Data." (See Figure 3.)

As I said, brilliantly simple.

Sesame's dynamic sorting

Sesame incorporates all of Q&A's sorting facilities—and much more. In Q&A you cannot perform a *dynamic* sort. That is, to re-sort a set of sorted records, you must return to the Retrieve Spec, press F8 and re-specify your sorting criteria, then run the Retrieve again. In *Sesame* you can perform a dynamic sort in one of two ways.

1. You can click on the Sort button in the column heading of *Table View*. (We'll be taking an in-depth look at *Sesame*'s Table View in a forthcoming issue.)
2. Or you can retrieve some records (a *result set*), display the Sort Spec window, specify the new sort, and apply it.

Here's how you would do that.

The lower left area of the *Sesame* screen contains the multi-purpose Spec Window. (See Figure 4 on next page.) This area of the *Sesame* screen can show any of several different specs and is context-

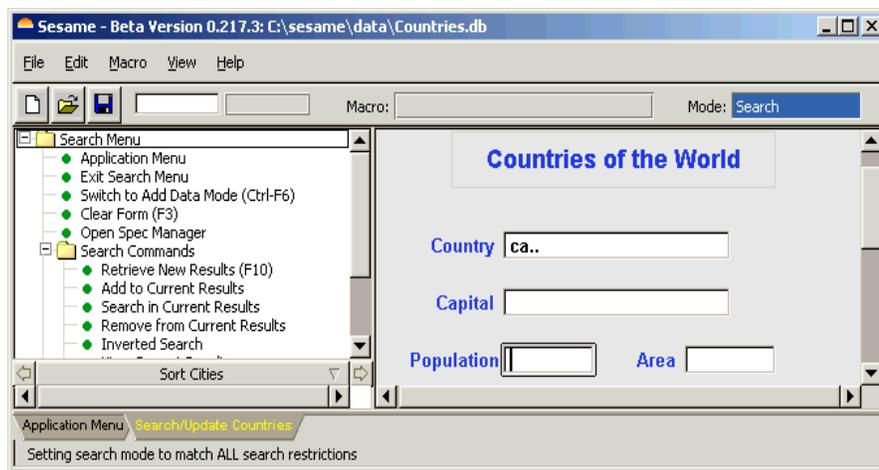


Figure 1. The Mode Indicator (top right of screen) showing "Search" mode.



Figure 2. Data being viewed. The Mode Indicator shows "Update."



Figure 3. Add Data mode. The Mode Indicator says it all.

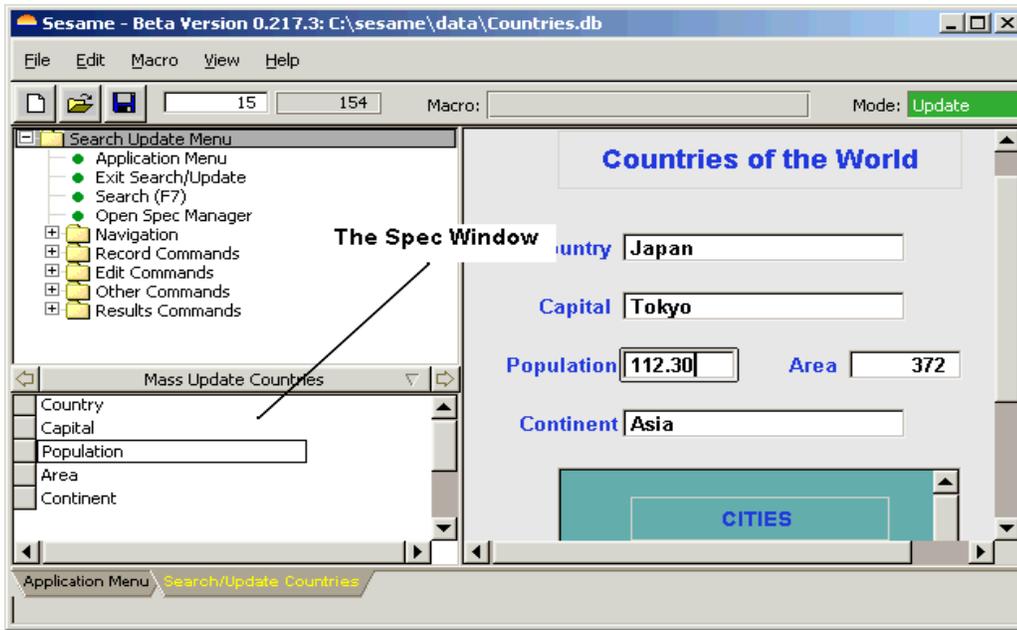


Figure 4. Sesame's multi-purpose Spec Window. Here, showing the Mass Update Spec.

sensitive. You switch specs by clicking on the spec selector buttons (← →) at either end of the header bar (currently showing “Mass Update Countries” in Figure 4). This will take you, for example, from the Mass Update Spec to the Export Spec, to the Sort Spec, and so forth.

You can establish a sort order either at the Retrieve Spec—just as in Q&A for DOS—or *after* you have retrieved your records.

To sort by a field, you click on the row selector to the left of the field name in the Sort window. (See Figure 5.) That field jumps to the top of the list and its selector acquires an “S” to show it is a sorted field. Alongside it is an “A” to show *ascending* sort. If you click on this “A” it



Figure 5. The Sort Spec. Sorting countries by continent, most populous first.

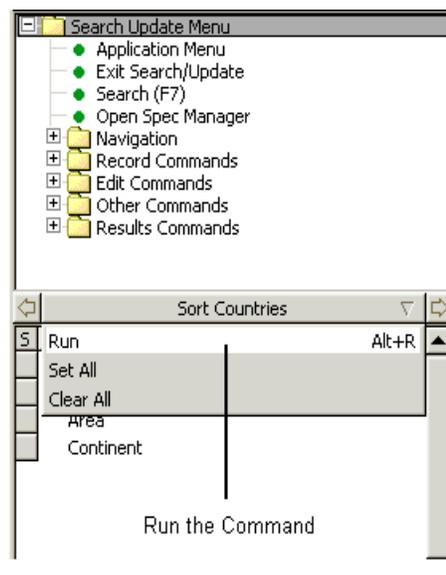


Figure 6. The dropdown menu from the Sort Spec header. You can run the sort, Set All, or Clear All.

changes to a “D” for *descending* sort.

You can add other fields to the sort list for second and third sort levels. You click on the “S” to cancel a sort on a given field. You can also drag fields up and down to change the sort order.

Notice that the header bar in the Sort window includes a small down-arrow icon (▽). Clicking on it opens a drop down menu that includes *Run the command*—in this case, meaning *Sort the records*. The same dropdown also includes options for *selecting* and *deselecting* all fields.

When you click on *Run...*, the data is sorted as you specified. In the example shown in Figure 6, the countries are sorted first on the Continent field (ascending, A-Z), then by the population field (descending, 9-0). So, the records for Africa will be shown before the records for America. And within each continent, the countries with the largest populations will come first.

The result—whether in Table View or in Form View—is that you can see your data presented in any order you choose, without having to return to the Retrieve Spec.

Copying records between databases

If you've ever used Q&A for DOS to copy records between two databases (*File / Copy / Selected Records*), you may know what a major irritation (or recipe for disaster) it can be if the two databases are even slightly different. One might have an extra field or two, or worse—a field that was moved to a different position on the form.

This can result in a type of *data shift*—that is, data being copied from the source database to the wrong field(s) in the target database.

Having determined that such a problem exists following a copying operation, you need to determine the nature of the mismatch. You then have two choices—to make the same change to the other database so its data is “in sync” or, after somehow

“reversing out” the bad records in the other database, redo the copy operation, this time filling out a “Merge Spec.” This is the screen where you say that you want field “A” copied to the 22nd field in the other database, field “B” copied to the 23rd field in the other database, and so forth. If there is just one field that’s different between the two databases, then you need to use the Merge Spec to specify the position of every field. It’s aggravating, to say the least.

In Q&A for Windows things are much easier. You can map fields between the two databases by field names. *Sesame* follows this model and allows you to match fields by name rather than by position on the form.

When you open *Sesame*’s Copy Spec you see a list of fields in each of the databases.

You can drag a field from “Source Fields” to “Destination Fields” and

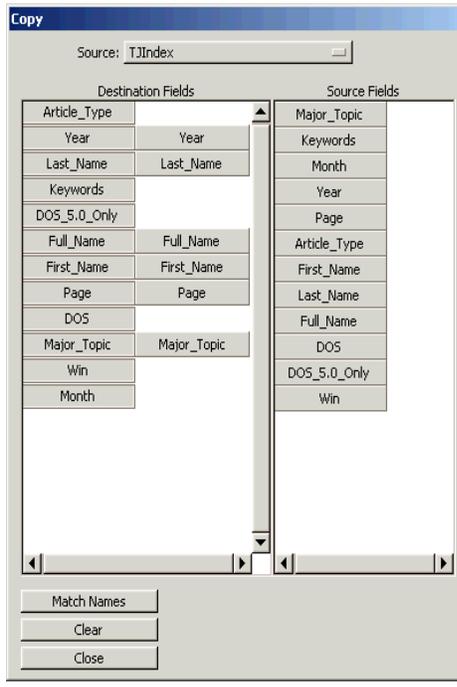


Figure 7. The Copy Spec. *Sesame* uses the more intelligent Q&A for Windows model to let you

position them together. This is useful if the two databases are not similar and the field names differ. But there’s also a “Match Names” button that automatically pairs up fields with the same field name. You can then make manual adjustments if you wish. It will save you time and frustration when copying data between similar, but not identical, databases.

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Quick Tip

Email Address Verification and Data Entry Validation

These days, contact information databases usually include an email address field along with the usual mailing address, telephone number and fax number fields. There are a couple of simple tricks you can use to reduce data entry errors on email addresses and to locate invalid email addresses in your databases. The most common errors are leaving out the “@” sign and/or the “.” that all valid email addresses must contain. For example, the following Retrieve Spec in an email address field would turn up any addresses without an “@” sign:

```
/.@..
```

It would find records with addresses like these:

```
erika@aol.com
erika.aol.com
```

The following Retrieve Spec finds addresses without a “.”:

```
/..\...
```

It would find addresses such as these:

```
erika@aol
erika@aolcom
```

Data entry validation with programming

To catch data entry errors, you can use the @Instr function to check an email address to determine if it contains the necessary characters. Here’s a simple Q&A 5.0 program that does the trick (for earlier versions you can use @Msg instead of @MsgBox):

```
> EmailAddress:
If ((@Instr(EmailAddress, "@") = 0) Or
(@Instr(EmailAddress, ".") = 0)) Then
{
@MsgBox("Bad", "Email", "Address!");
GoTo EmailAddress
}
```

If you like, you can write a more sophisticated program to check if the last “.” occurs after the “@” sign, if there are multiple occurrences of the “@” sign, and so forth

Using field restrictions

The following restriction placed in the Restrict Spec (in the email address field) wants the value entered to have both an @ sign and a “.”—in that order:

```
..@..\...
```

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Quick Tip

Optimize Your Q&A for DOS Screen Font in Windows 2000 / XP

The Quick Answer has long advocated the use of the 8514OEM font when running Q&A for DOS in a window. (See the July 1999 issue.) These days, however, you might find that your new computer won't run Q&A in full screen mode *at all* (see the July 2001 issue) and you are *forced* to run it in a window. So it's even more important that Q&A looks good when running in a window.

To make it look its best in window mode, you need to use the "10 x 20" font—the 8514OEM.FON font file called "Terminal Font for the IBM 8514" (whatever that is or was!). You can download this font from the *Free Downloads* page at www.quickanswer.com. Note that the filename is "8514" followed by the letter "O" as in "OEM"—not a zero.

Although this font comes with Windows 2000 and XP, you'll probably have trouble activating it. If you go to *Control Panel / Fonts* you'll find no mention of it, either as "8514OEM" or as "Terminal Font...." It's there, however, because you can do a search (*Start / Search / Files or folders*), and type "8514OEM.FON" into the file name box and see it listed under C:\WINNT\Fonts in Windows 2000 or C:\WINDOWS\Fonts in Windows XP. (In Windows XP, you will need to *Search Advanced Options* and check "Search hidden files and folders.")

In the search results window, click once on the filename, then press Ctrl-C to copy it to the Windows Clipboard.

Next, go to the window listing all your fonts (that you

opened from Control Panel), click in it, and press Ctrl-V to paste the font. You will see the 8514OEM.FON font file being installed and it can now be selected for use.

However, you may *still* find that you can't activate it by modifying the properties of the shortcut you use to start Q&A. If so, start Q&A and put it in a window. (Press Alt-Enter if it's in full screen.) Then, right-click on the control menu icon (the one with the black C:\ at the extreme top left corner of the window, just to the left of the window's title bar). From this menu select *Defaults* (not *Properties*). Click on the *Options* tab and select *Display Options / Window*. Then, click on the *Font* tab, select size 10 x 20 (see Figure 1) and click OK.

You should now find that Q&A will display in a maximised window in the presentable, easy-to-read 10 x 20 font. It will look best on 17-inch or larger monitors with a resolution of 800 x 600 or 1024 x 768. You might find that the combination of a small monitor (14- or 15-inch) running at 800 x 600 resolution is a little too large for this font and you may want to select a smaller one.

You will still have to go to the properties of the shortcut itself to set the display mode (windowed rather than full-screen, maximised window, close on exit, and so forth).

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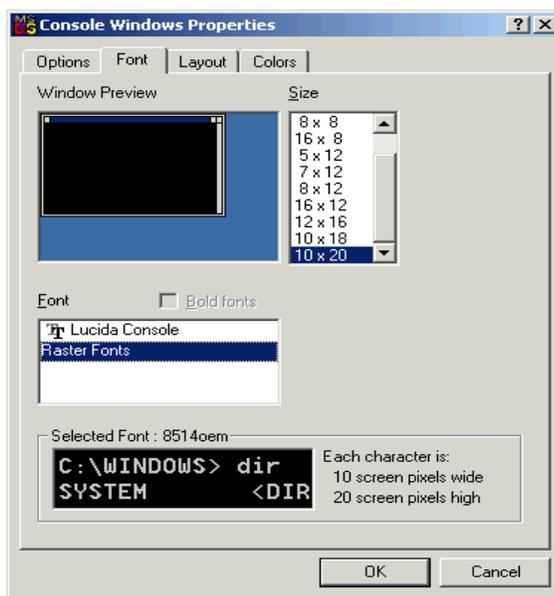


Figure 1. Selecting the 10 x 20 font.

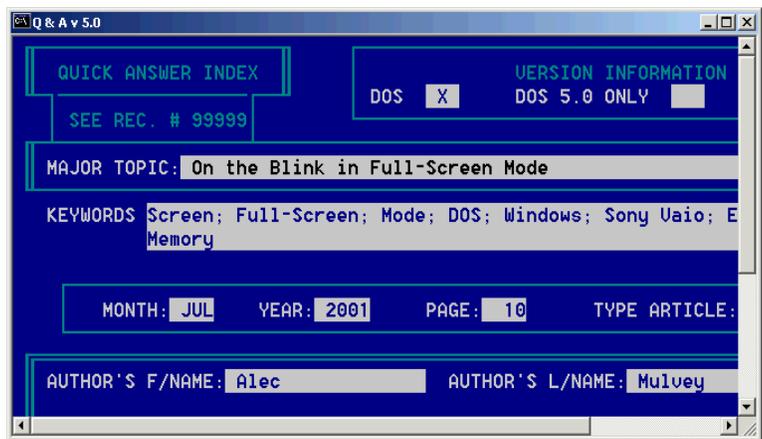


Figure 2. The 10 x 20 font offers excellent readability on most monitors.

Q&A Emailing and Faxing

I'd like to be able to send customers in my Q&A for DOS databases an email or fax outlining my new services. I can't seem to find a way to do this. Any suggestions?

Jerry

While Q&A for DOS doesn't support emailing or faxing directly from the database, it can export your data in a format that you can then import it into a faxing program such as WinFax or an email program like Outlook. You do this by using the Q&A's export facilities on the menu path: *File / Utilities / Export / Standard ASCII*. You will export the fields from your database that you will need in each program and save them as files named *Email.txt* for your email export and *Fax.txt* for your fax export. Make sure to export the correct fields needed for each program. For example, for faxing, you might want to export:

Company Name
First Name
Last Name
Fax Number

For emailing, you might want to export:

First name

Last Name
Company Name
Phone Number
Email Address

Make sure that your phone/fax numbers are correctly formatted and that they include the "1" so that they will import correctly ("1 212-555-0987").

Once you've generated your export files in Q&A, you can open your email or fax program and select *Import* from the File menu and follow the steps dictated by the program, making sure that you indicate that the imported file (*Email.txt* or *Fax.txt*) is a *text* file from another program, that the field separators are commas, and that the record delimiters are carriage returns. As you step through the import process, you will see that you have a chance to "map" the fields to pre-defined fields in the target program. (You will map *First Name* to *First Name*, and so forth.) When you are finished, you will have all of your Q&A customer information in your contact lists for faxing and/or emailing. You can even then use them to set up groups for mass emails and faxes.

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Docubase... cont'd from page 5

When you print something from an Expanded Field by pressing F2 for the Field Print Options screen, Q&A unfortunately breaks the lines in the output at the point where they wrap in the Expanded Field. This isn't a problem when printing with 10- or 12-pitch Courier or a proportional font that's larger than 12 points. But at smaller point sizes, you'll get too large a right margin on the printed page. Keep this in mind if you like to print your letters and memos in flyspeck type that nobody can comfortably read.

As I mentioned earlier, the database—including its Lookup Table where all the presets are stored—is fully

customizable. By default, the database prints a one-inch left margin and a 12-line top margin. This large top margin assumes that you'll be printing to pre-printed letterhead paper. If you want a smaller top margin, change the 12 to 6 or thereabouts in the Top Margin printer code setting in the Lookup Table.

I can't get into a discussion on printer control codes here. If you would like a table of all the basic page formatting HP printer control codes, drop me a line at mailbox@quickanswer.com and I'll be happy send you a copy of my PCL_codes.txt file I keep handy for use with my Q&A applications.

Tom Marcellus is editor of *The Quick Answer*.



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