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All the 'Alternate Programs' You Could Want

TOM MARCELLUS

Want faster access to your other programs—and a way to pass data to them? Why not start them from inside Q&A!

THESE days, with more programs available to automate tasks, chances are you're switching between your favorite database manager (Q&A, of course) and those other programs more often, as well as looking for ways to share your Q&A data with them.

Q&A 4.0 for DOS gives you six customizable "Alternate Program" slots on the Main menu that you can use to launch other programs or run Q&A macros. (To access the Alternate Programs screen from the Main menu, select *Utilities / Set Alternate Programs*.)

When you "install" a program on the Main menu, then launch it, Q&A temporarily swaps itself out of memory while you're using the other program. When you quit the other program, you're automatically returned to Q&A.

This can be a real time-saver if you spend much of your time in Q&A but need to use other programs throughout the day. Trouble is, there are only six available alternate program slots on the Main menu. If you use these slots for macros, as many of us do, you'll have none left for your other programs. (Q&A 5.0 doesn't suffer from this same limitation. See the sidebar.)

I decided to find out if there was a way I could launch other programs from Q&A 4.0 while keeping most of my Main menu slots free for macros. I'll show you how I did it in a way that not only lets you start programs from Q&A 4.0 with ease, but also lets you do the following:

- Specify a file to open when the other program starts.

- Cause the other program to run a macro.

- Pass variable text from Q&A to the other program.

I think you'll see just how useful this technique can be as I cover a few examples.

Q&A 5.0 and 'Alternate' Programs

In addition to the six optional Main menu slots for alternate programs or macros, Q&A 5.0 supplies a special customizable *External* Programs menu (*File / Utilities / External Programs*) from which you can launch up to nine other programs. But there's more to 5.0's External Programs feature than this. You can display this menu (Alt-F9) and launch a program on it from virtually anywhere in Q&A and be returned to the same Q&A screen when you quit the other program. Plus, you have the option to pass variable information (such as a field value) to the selected external program. Q&A 5.0 also comes with an @Shell programming command you can use to launch an external program from a database record.

In a nutshell

Briefly, this method works by letting you specify which external program to run from a predefined set of programs and related start-up options stored in the Lookup table of a special database I'll call Programs.dtf.

You use your fifth Main menu "Alternate Program" slot for a macro that opens Programs.dtf and prompts you to specify the program to run. The sixth (last) slot is set up to run the batch file that starts that external program.

Quick Tip

Quick-Print Just the Selected Text

Here's one from the "Lost Know-how" department. It applies to Q&A 4.0 or 5.0 for DOS: If you ever need to print just a few lines of text from a Q&A Write document or macro file, or a few lines of programming from a lengthy program, or a portion of text in a database field, Ctrl-F2 is the easiest way to do it.

In a Write document or expanded database field (this can also be a Spec field, such as in the Program Spec), simply position the cursor at the beginning of the text you want to print and press Ctrl-F2. Highlight (select) the text with your cursor keys or mouse, then press F10. Q&A will print that text to the default printer.

To print to a different printer, first press F2 and select your printer. Press F9 to return to the text, then position your cursor at the beginning of the pertinent text and press Ctrl-F2.

In the case of a Write document, Q&A will print the selected text in the font that has been applied to it, or in the default printer font (usually Courier) if the text isn't enhanced. In the case of an expanded database field, Q&A will print the text in the default printer font.

Use this handy printing technique whenever you need to print some but not all of the text.

Tom Marcellus

XLookup Bug Unearthed in Q&A Win

I found a bug in Q&A for Windows that probably doesn't arise very often, but it sure bit me. I discovered that I could not do an XLookup in Q&A for Windows 4.06, yet had no problem doing the same XLookup with the same databases in Q&A 5.0 for DOS. (Q&A for Windows 4.06 is the version you use with Q&A 5.0 for DOS databases.)

The XLookup did not produce an error, but it did not find the record either. I eventually determined the problem and reproduced it with test databases. Here's what happens.

Database A cannot do an XLookup to database B.

Database A was created in Q&A 5.0 for DOS, then later opened in Q&A Windows.

Database B was created in Q&A 4.0 for DOS, subsequently upgraded to Q&A 5.0, then opened in Q&A for Windows.

The problem is that database B retains the original Q&A 4.0 for DOS collation sequence information in it.

It seems that Q&A for DOS can handle the discrepancy, but Q&A for Windows can't.

If you run across this problem, you'll have to recreate database B as a "native" Q&A 5.0 database. (I presume if you create it in Q&A for Windows 4.06, it would be the same.)

If that would be a lot of work, as it was in my case, I've developed a program that transfers the collation information from database A to database B. So far, after doing a Recover to rebuild the .idx file, it seems to be working. If you run across this problem and are interested in my program, drop me an e-mail.

John Dow
jtd@pgh.net, www.johntdow.com

Alternate Programs… cont'd from page 1

Since the batch file is created on-the-fly, the technique can accommodate any number of external programs.

Here's an example. Suppose you routinely send faxes to people from your PC via a fax document template you designed, say, in Microsoft Word. (This also assumes you have fax software such as WinFax Pro installed.) Using the technique I'll describe, to send a fax, you'll simply click on *Programs*, enter a one-character code that tells Q&A to invoke the Fax option, type (or XLookup) the person's name and fax number, then press a hot-key.

The hot-key macro writes a batch file *on-the-fly* that contains the selected external program's start-up parameters, then saves the variable text (the name and fax number in this case) to a special text file. The macro then invokes the batch file it just created, which starts the external program. In the blink of an eye, your fax document template is on-screen in Word, with the person's name and fax number already "typed in." After you send the fax and quit Word, you're automatically returned to Q&A.
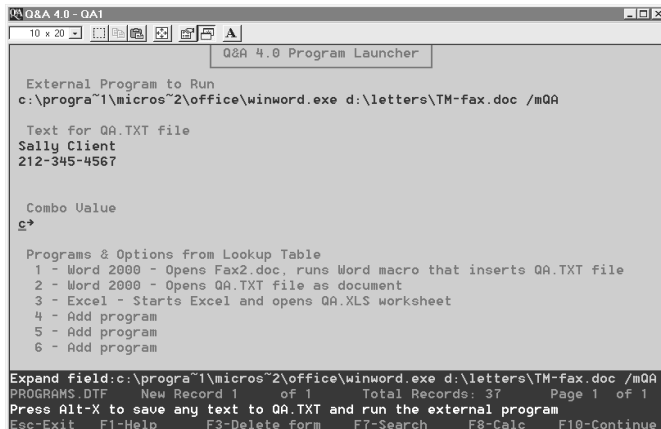
Although I'm going to use a separate database to perform feats like this, you won't actually need it to run your external programs from Q&A 4.0. You can add its features to any existing database. You might need the ability to shell out to Word from your Clients database, or start Excel or Outlook from your Orders database. As you'll see, you can do it.

A database of external programs

Figure 1 shows a sample Programs.dtf record filled out to launch Microsoft Word 2000, auto-load a predesigned Word fax template document, and insert the recipient's name and fax number in it.

If you look at the text in the field below the *External Program to Run* label (the name of the field is *Program*), you'll see this command line (on one line):

```
C:\progra~1\micros~2\office\winword.exe d:\letters\TM-fax.doc /mQA
```

In this case, the actual path to the Word 2000 executable is:

```
c:\program files\microsoft office\office\winword.exe
```

The long Windows folder names have been replaced with their eight-character DOS counterparts.

The path to the Word executable is the first parameter on this command line. After that there's a space, then the second parameter:

```
d:\letters\TM-fax.doc
```

This is the location and filename of the Word fax template document I want Word to open on start-up.

A space follows, then the third and final parameter on the command line:

```
/mQA
```

This tells Word to run the macro named *QA* on startup. In this case, it inserts (in the fax template) the text specified in the second field of the Figure 1 record, which is:

```
Sally Client
212-345-4567
```

How this text is made available to the Word macro, and the macro itself, I'll cover later.

The lengthy command line I just covered wasn't typed—it was looked up. All I did was type a *1* in the *Program* field and press Enter. The program shown below assembled the corresponding command line 1 from the Lookup Table. (See Figure 2.)

```
> If @Len(Program) < 3 Then
  Program = @Lu(Program, 1) + " "
 + @Lu(Program, 2) + " "
 + @Lu(Program, 3);
  If Program = "" or @Len(Program) > 2 Then {
  @Msg("Enter 1, 2, 3, etc. for the program & option you
want to run");
  Goto Program }
```


Figure 1. A record filled out to launch Word, open a Word document, and run a Word macro to fill in text.

Figure 2. The :Lookup Table contains the specifics of each external program.

As you can see, this program accepts a code that matches a Key column entry in the Lookup Table. In this case, the Key codes are 1, 2, 3, and so forth. This way, you tell Q&A which external program to run simply by entering the number 1, 2, 3, and so on in the *Program* field. You don't have to limit yourself to this numbering scheme—you can use any system of codes you like to return the program path, filename and startup options from the Lookup Table. The point is to keep it simple.

The second field, named *Text*, contains this program:

```
< @Msg("Type the text you want to save to QA.TXT. F6
expands field")
```

The variable text you type in this field (or XLookup) is the text you want to pass to the external program via the QA.TXT file (assuming you want to pass *any* text to the other program). It might be a name and address, a canned paragraph (perhaps looked up from an external database via a one-character code), or an entire typed or inserted document. The Text field can be expanded to allow entry of virtually any amount of text.

The third and final Programs.dtf field, named *Combo* (because it stores the values in the *Program* and *Text* fields as a combination value), contains this program:

```
< If Program <> "" Then {
Combo = Program + "
" + Text;
@Msg("Press Alt-X to save any text to
QA.TXT and run the external program")  }
```

This program reads the command line from the *Program* field, appends a carriage return to it (starting a new line), then adds the variable text from the *Text* field. At this point in this example, the Combo field contains a whopping *four* parameters relating to the external program about to be launched:

1. The external program's path and executable file.

2. The path and name of the document (or worksheet or whatever) to open.

3. The name of the external program's macro to run.

4. The variable text to pass to the external program via the QA.TXT file.

Now this doesn't mean that you have to specify all four parameters for any external program you launch. You might want to simply start another program, or start the program and open a default document. I'm only showing you some of the options you have for making this one powerful little program launcher.

In any case, when you reach the Combo field, Q&A displays a message line that reads:

```
Press Alt-X to save any text to QA.TXT and run the
external program
```

The Alt-X macro

Now we get to the Q&A macro referenced in Program.dtf's *Combo* field. In the example I'm discussing, the macro is named Alt-X, though it could be named anything. It assumes Automatic Menu Execution is set to Yes (*Utilties / Set Global Options*) and looks like this:

```
<begdef><altx><name>"<caps,>altx<caps.>"<vidoff><f6><altf5>
<end><f10><home>c:\qa\programs.bat<enter>y<altf5><end><end>
<end><f10><home>c:\qa\qa.txt<enter>y<f6><capsf10><esc>wg<home>
c:\qa\programs.bat<enter><ctrlf8><home>c:\qa\programs.bat
<enter>y<esc>g<home>c:\qa\qa.txt<enter><ctrlf8><home>
c:\qa\qa.txt<enter>y<esc><esc>-<enddef>
```

The macro performs the following steps, first creating a batch file named programs.bat, then creating a text file named qa.txt:

1. Presses F6 to expand the *Combo* field.

2. Presses Alt-F5, the *Move Text to File* command.

3. Selects the first line (the command line parameters from the *Program* field and Lookup Table).

4. Presses F10, types in the path and filename to save the file, and presses Enter and "Y" to overwrite the previous file of the same name. (This programs.bat file is the batch file used to launch the external program. It's being written on-the-fly here.)

5. Selects everything after the command line—all that's left at this point is the variable text originating in the *Text* field—and moves it to a file named qa.txt, overwriting the existing qa.txt file.

6. Because a new file generated this way isn't saved as a true ASCII file, the macro exits the record, opens both files and resaves them to ASCII format with Ctrl-F8.

7. The macro then escapes back to the Main menu and presses the dash key which invokes the last Alternate Program selection, running the newly-created programs.bat batch file.

To get a usable programs.bat batch file out of this process, be sure your default document export type is set to ASCII without carriage returns. To do this from the Q&A Main menu, select *Write / Utilities / Set Global Options / Set Editing Options* and, at the Editing Options screen, set the *Default Export Type* line to *ASCII without CR*. If you don't make this simple setting, your batch file might not produce the results you expect, particularly if your command line is lengthy and/or contains multiple parameters.

Also, the external program's command line, including any optional parameters and switches, should fit on the first line in the expanded field (no longer than about 76 characters).

Installing the Alternate Program

Figure 3 shows a sample Q&A Main menu. The last two alternate programs (the slot named *Programs* and the dashed line just below it) are dedicated to this application and work in conjunction with your Programs.dtf database.

Figure 4 shows the Alternate Programs screen (*Utilities / Set Alternate Programs*) where you actually "install" the programs. The Alt-P macro specified in the *Alternate Program 5* slot simply opens Programs.dtf in Add Data mode. Here's what it looks like:

```
<begdef><altp><name>"<caps,>altp<caps.>"<vidoff>fa<capsf4><f10>programs
<enter><enddef>
```

The *Menu Selection* that corresponds to Alternate Program 5 is simply: *Programs*.

Now, you can leave the *Programs* selection off the Main menu altogether. You'll then have to manually press Alt-P to open Programs.dtf, but you'll five free Main menu slots instead of four. If you want, you can record an Alt-P macro that will open Programs.dtf when invoked from anywhere in the File module. (See the June 1993 issue, page 16.)

The batch file specified in the *Alternate Program 6* slot (your path might be different) is simply:
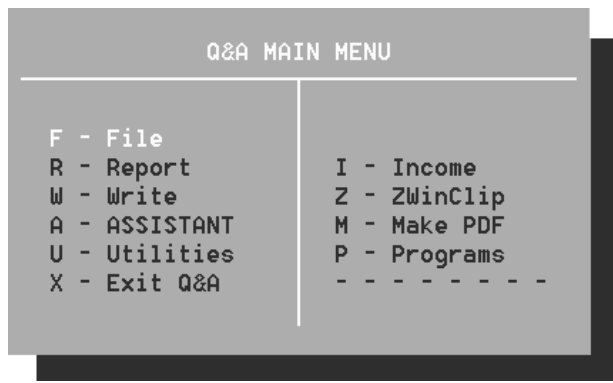
```
c:\qa\programs.bat
```

And the *Menu Selection* for it is six dashes (- - - - - -). Why dashes? Well, because it doesn't look too bad, and you aren't likely to accidentally hit the dash key while at the Main menu. I wanted to avoid using text because it exists only as a way for the Alt-X macro to run the batch file that was written just a second earlier.

The technique in action

Let's recap what's involved in launching an external program:

1. From the Main menu, you press *P* or click on *Programs* (or press Alt-P from anywhere in Q&A if your macro supports this). A new Programs.dtf record displays in Add Data mode.

2. You enter the code for the external program you want to run.

3. You optionally enter or XLookup the variable text you want to pass to the program. (The program must have some facility, such as a macro, for retrieving that text, and your command line must include the switch to invoke that macro.)

4. You press Alt-X which rewrites the programs.bat batch file and qa.txt file on-the-fly and launches the program.

The batch file is actually invoked after the Alt-X macro saves the record, returns to the Main menu, and presses the dash (-) key.

You don't need to have Alt-X actually *save* the new Programs.dtf record, though. You could just abandon it. This way, the database would never contain any records.

Conclusion

There's no practical limit to the number of external programs (or program/start-up-option combinations) that this little program launcher can accommodate. For a larger variety of external programs and options, you could create a second screen page in Programs.dtf to list them all, along with the codes that invoke them. You could even rig the database so that entering, say, a three-character code would tell Q&A (1) the program to run, (2) the document or whatever to auto-load, and (3) the name of external program's macro to run. This would take some careful planning, though, to avoid mismatching any elements relating to a program. (You don't want Microsoft Word trying to open your favorite Excel worksheet!)

Of course, as I mentioned earlier, the Programs.dtf database isn't a requirement at all—you can add its features to virtually any database. If you were to do so, you'd probably limit the procedure to launching just one particular external program.

A note about the Word macro (named *QA*) mentioned earlier. This is a Word 2000 Visual Basic macro that looks like this in Word's VBA editor:

Figure 3. The two Alternate Program slots , *Programs* and the dashed line below it, are the keys to the technique.
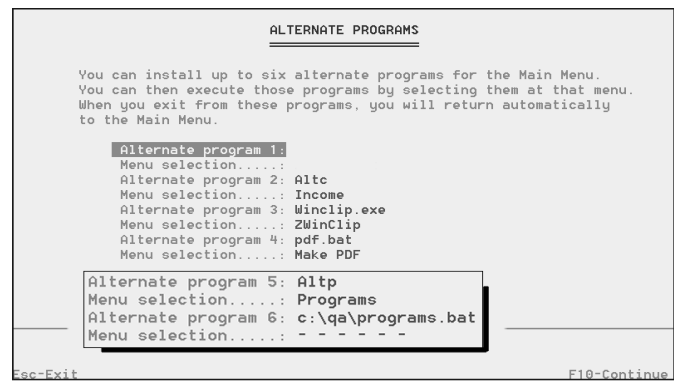
Figure 4. Q&A's Alternate Programs screen. The fifth and sixth slots are reserved for the program launcher.

@*Help*

EDITED BY GORDON MEIGS AND WILLIAM HALPERN

Y2K Glitch In Reverse (1999 Shows as 2099)

I run Q&A for Windows in Windows 95 on a Pentium PC. My database contains about 2,500 records with 110 date fields. To have dates with the full four-digit year, I made sure that the date format in the Windows' Control Panel Regional Settings was correct. (Both the long and short format were set to dd/mm/yyyy.) I then changed the database's Global Date Format in Q&A (*Select / Database Structure / Database / Global Format Options*) to dd/mm/yyyy.

This has worked correctly with about 90% of the records—that is, it has changed /95, /96, and /97 to /1995, /1996, and /1997. A few that had already been entered with *00* for the year it changed to *1900,* but these I can remedy manually. The problem is the other 10% of the records where the date has been changed to *2095, 2096,* and the like. This is in the same field that was correctly updated in other records. For example, the **Commencement Date** field in one record now shows 1/12/1999 and in a different record shows 1/12/2099 when these should be the same date. Thank you in advance for any help you can provide.

Ken Farrow via email

The issue here is not with Q&A but with your Windows date format settings. Q&A for Windows uses the Windows Global Date format. Go to your Windows *Control Panel* and select *Regional Settings*. Under the *Date* tab you will see the conditions and rules for converting dates with two-digit years. Q&A for Windows follows these rules. All of your dates had two-digit years before converting. You have to make sure that even the short date format is displayed as *mm/dd/yyyy* and that the rules for date calculation are set between 1930 and 2029 (available only in Windows 98). Without the second part of the settings, what will happen is that entry of two-digit years like *99,* even though you meant *1999,* will be interpreted as being entered in the current century and stored as *2099.* From now until the end of time, get in the habit of *always* entering dates by typing the full four-digit years. Remember, Q&A doesn't know what you mean when you type two digits for the year.

Now that you have the problem (the reverse of the usual Y2K problem where dates wind up 100 years *behind* the times) you can correct the bad records with the following Mass Update spec:

```
#10: If #10 > "1/1/2044" Then
#10 = @TD(@Str(@Left(#10,4)-100) + "/"
+ @Str(@Mid(#10,6,2))
+ @Str(@Right(#10,3)))
```

This subtracts 100 years from dates after 1/1/2044. If you have the Regional settings correct in Windows, everything should be fine from then on.

Bringing a Balance Forward

I recall reading in a past issue of *The Quick Answer* an article on how to add a number from a previous record to a new record. I have a **Dollar** field and a **Total** field. Suppose in Record 1 the Dollar field is $100.00 and the Total field is $100.00. If Record 2 has $50.00 in the Dollar field, then I want the Total field in Record 2 to equal the $100.00 from Total field in Record 1 plus the $50.00 from the Dollar field in Record 2, for a total of $150.00. Can you tell me issue and page number that explains how to do this?

William Kernodle via email

Various *application-specific* techniques for performing such feats have been covered in a past issues. (See, for example, "Home Finances Made Easy" in the February and March 1993 issues, "How to Track Multiple Accounts" in the September 1993 issue, and "Automate Your Check Writing and Printing" in the January 1995 issue.) But rather than wade through these, let's just consider what your database needs.

First, in each record, you must have a Speedy field containing a unique number that defines both the record order number and the page number (the line of the order that you want forwarded to the next page, or record, of the spcific order) and is less than 16 characters in length. You will also need what I'll refer to as a **Cost Forward** field. Suppose in Record 1 the order number is 100058 and the form number is 01 (set by your programming to always be two characters in length). Your programming then sets the special lookup Speedy field to @*Str(Order*

number) + @Str(Page number) or *10005801*. The Cost Forward field is 0 at this point, and the Total Cost = Cost Forward + Dollar field

In Record 2, the Order number is still 100058, but the Page number is 02. The programming then sets the special lookup Speedy field to = @Str(Order number) + @Str(Page number) or 10005802. The Cost Forward field is filled from the last record so that the Total = Cost Forward + Dollar amount.

This is accomplished by programming in the Cost Forward field similar to what follows. (For the purposes of this example, the Order number field is #10, Form number is #20, Cost Forward is #30, Special Lookup is #40, and Total is #50. Remember, field #40 must be set by the programming *before* the cursor enters field #30):

```
< #30: If #20 > 1 then
#30 = @XLookup(@Fn, #40-1, "X#40", "X#50")
```

This statement will only work on forms greater than the first one in a given order (*If #20 > 1*) and will check the previous page for the order and bring the total forward to the Cost Forward field. We will leave it up to you as to how you set up your order numbers and page numbers for each record and how you do the calculations once you have the numbers you need.

No Color, No Print-Screen, and Shrunken Screen

I recently installed QA 4.0 for DOS on my Toshiba 4015CDT notebook. (I used Partition Magic to create a smaller partition for Q&A, then installed it to that partition.) I notice three flaws when running Q&A. (1) The screen is black and white, even though my other programs run in color; (2) Q&A does not fill the whole screen and, (3) the Print Screen key doesn't print the screen. Any suggestions?

Rudy Abud via email

1. You copied Q&A to your new notebook computer from another computer and must start Q&A at least once with an appropriate *monitor start-up switch*. (This is covered in your *Getting Started* Guide.) Try starting Q&A with one of the following switches until the color returns. Q&A will then remember the correct setting.

```
qa.com -SCC
qa.com -SMC
```

2. The space at the top and bottom of your screen is the result of your notebook's display resolution, not Q&A.

3. Print Screen doesn't work the same in Windows as it does on older PCs. Again, this is a Windows issue, not a Q&A issue. Try pressing *Shift-Print Screen* or *Ctrl-Print Screen*. (You might have to first put Q&A in a window by pressing Alt-Enter.) Even if one of these key combinations sends the screen text to the printer, you might still have to press the page feed button on your printer one or more times to feed the page.

Can't Print to USB Port

Q&A 4.0 for DOS will not print on my new computer. I'm running Windows 98 Second Edition, and my printer is an HP 882c USB. Any advice?

Gary Fields via email

There is no way we know of to make Q&A for DOS print to a local USB printer (one attached to a USB port) because that type of port isn't available at Q&A's Install Printer screen. (All versions of Q&A were developed long before the USB idea was so much as a gleam in its father's eye.) Q&A for Windows could provide a solution since it will print to any installed Windows printer. You could run Q&A DOS and Q&A Windows at the same time and even use the same database simultaneously in both if you set the database Sharing Mode to Allow.) It bears repeating: If you're shopping for a new printer and it's important that it work with Q&A for DOS, purchase it only with an unconditional money-back or exchange guarantee.

Q&A for Windows Messing Up Word

I installed Q&A for Windows on my PC so that I could help someone else in our office learn it. Now I can't open up my Word documents and email attachments. What gives?

Charles via email

When you installed Q&A for Windows, you answered "Yes" to the question: "*Do you want Q&A to automatically open all files that end in .doc or .txt?*" Doing so changed your file association for Word documents (ending in .doc) so that Windows opens them in Q&A Write instead of Word. To remedy the situation, do the following:

1. In Windows Explorer, find a file with a .doc extension.

2. Click on it *once* to highlight it.

3. Hold down the Shift key and Click on it again with your *right* mouse button.

4. You will see a menu with an *Open With...* selection on it. Left-click on this choice.

5. In the *Open with* window, scroll down to *Winword* and click on it. (Make sure that the checkbox that says *Always use this program to open this type of file* is checked).

Repeat the same procedure on a file with a .txt extension, but substitute Notepad for Winword. With your file associations now reset, everything should work fine.

Network Pack and Database Access Problems

I recently purchased a Q&A Net Pack for my small biz and am having trouble getting it to work properly on the computer in the back room. Last we spoke, you thought the

Q&A Basics

Installing and Configuring Q&A

ALEC MULVEY   DOS

In this regular column (monthly, I hope!), my aim will be to address the needs of those to whom bubble sorts, indirection and macro file switching are as familiar as the far side of the moon. Each month, these *Q&A Basics* articles will build the foundations of working with Q&A and give you the confidence to eventually use more of Q&A's features. Here, in the first article in this series, I'll start at the very beginning.

Installing Q&A 4.0 or 5.0 for DOS

Installing Q&A is easy. Q&A 5.0's installation is different from Q&A 4.0's, but they both have you up and running in just a few minutes. What you might like to do is get your install disks or CD out and install the program all over again. It will use just a few megabytes of your hard disk, and can be easily uninstalled again later. One point I would stress, though, is that you must *be sure to install Q&A into a new directory*. Make a note of your current Q&A program directory and use a different drive or directory name for the new install. Otherwise you risk losing printer setups, macro files, mailing label definitions, and the like. Alternatively, you may prefer to rename your existing Q&A program directory. One way of finding out what your existing Q&A program directory is to press Ctrl-F3 at Q&A's menu to display your System Information screen.

Running the Q&A 4.0 install program

Run the install program. The program scans for existing copies of Q&A, lists them, and you can choose to overwrite or create a new directory using the name you specify. It's best to keep it short and sweet: C:\QA4 is ideal. Perform a Full install—it only takes a few megabytes of hard disk space.

After the program is installed you're prompted to install font files (printer drivers), tutorial files, and the ready-to-use and utility files. Don't install these files to your main program files directory. Instead, specify subdirectories for them named FONTS, TUTOR, SAMPLE, and UTILS.

Running the Q&A 5.0 install program

Installing Q&A 5.0 is quite different than installing QA 4.0. During the installation process the program restarts Windows for you. You're asked if you want a full installation. This is okay, but it will install 118 font files totalling some 4M—over half the total amount of space required by installation. You'll probably want to delete

most of these later, and perhaps move the remaining ones to a separate FONTS directory.

The default directory installation proposes is C:\QADOS50. I would reduce that to simply QA5 for manageability. A word of warning if you install into your current Q&A directory: the Q&A 5.0 install program installs a macro file, QAMACRO.ASC, which will overwrite any existing macro file of that name. So, you might want to take steps to protect yours. The one that comes with Q&A is of little use and can be safely deleted.

There are a number of issues concerning installing and running Q&A on modern PCs, and some bug-fixes for Q&A v5.0. First of all—hard disk size.

Large hard disks

Like many older programs, Q&A will not run reliably if the files it works with are on a hard disk partition that's larger than 2G. You will either need to create a partition for Q&A that's under 2G, or run a special TSR utility with Q&A. You can partition the disk so that at least one partition is smaller than 2G. The easiest way to do this is to use Partition Magic from PowerQuest (http://www.powerquest.com). It's available from computer dealers and software vendors. The other solution is to use a TSR utility called *Lesspace*. When Q&A asks the system how much free disk space there is, LESSPACE reports a much smaller figure, enabling Q&A to run smoothly. An evaluation version of Lesspace is available from the Free Downloads page at www.quickanswer.com. I have Lesspace in use at many clients and like it because it solves both the server and client side 2G problem.

Installing Q&A 4.0

The 2GB limit poses a particular problem to users wishing to install (or re-install) Q&A 4.0. The Q&A 4.0 install program will not work if the hard disk is larger than 2 G, and Lesspace does not help in this case. Short of partitioning, your best bet is to install Q&A on another PC and copy the files over to the new one via removable disk or the network.

Q&A 5.0 bugs

Problems will be experienced ("Divide by zero" errors) if you run Q&A 5.0 on a Pentium processor at over 200MHz. A patch has been developed by PFP Software that corrects this problem. After installing Q&A 5.0, run the SPEEDFIX patch which is available for download from the Freebies page at www.quickanswer.com.

Three of the Global Date formats do not appear as they should in QA 5.0. The dates themselves are not wrong, just the formatting. Bob Buckland has developed a

patch that corrects this which is also available from the Quick Answer's Web site.

Lastly, both QA 4.0 and 5.0 have a very minor Y2K date display bug. It's just a cosmetic bug—the year isn't displayed correctly when you highlight a file in Q&A's file manager window (list of databases) and view the file date near bottom of the screen. PFP Software has a patch for this too. It's called Y2KFIX and it is available free—you guessed it—from the Quick Answer's Web site.

Configuring Q&A

Now that you have Q&A installed, it's ready to run. But how do you start it? The most convenient way (assuming you're going to run it in Windows) is to have a Q&A icon (shortcut) right on your desktop. The following instructions apply to Windows 95, 98 and NT Client.

Creating a Shortcut

There are a couple of ways of creating a desktop shortcut for Q&A. If you're happy using Windows Explorer or My Computer, then you can browse until you can see the QA.COM file in your Q&A program files folder. (Make sure it's is the *correct* folder if you have more than one, and make sure the window is not maximized— that is, you can see some of your desktop behind it.) Simply drag the file onto your desktop. It becomes an icon representing a shortcut that will start Q&A.

If you are not confident using one of these file-management applications supplied with Windows, then try the following:

1. Click on a blank part of your Windows Desktop using the *right* mouse button (this is called *a right-click*).

2. On the menu that appears, select *New / Shortcut*. A dialog box appears as shown in Figure 1.

3. Follow the instructions shown. Either browse to find the Q&A start-up file, or type it's full pathname and filename, for example, C:\QA4\QA.COM.

4. Click Next

5. Type a name for the shortcut; *Q&A 4* is fine. You can use spaces, upper and lower case letters and brackets, but most other punctuation marks are not permitted.

6. Click Finish.

Customizing your QA shortcut.

Now you need to customize your shortcut. It will show a generic DOS-program icon and will probably be labelled "Q&A Report Writer." You'll want to change that.

Right-Click on the new icon on your desktop. From the shortcut menu select Properties. The properties window is displayed with several tabs along the top that access different categories of settings for the program.

The Program tab

The **General** tab shows some information that might be of interest, but there is nothing to change here. The **Program** tab shows, first of all, the name of the program. Whatever is typed here is what will appear on the title bar (at the top) of the Q&A window when you run Q&A in other than full-screen mode, and on the button on the windows taskbar, normally at the bottom of your screen, when Q&A (when running in a window) is minimized. This is not the same as the shortcut's name, which you assigned when you first created the shortcut.

(Incidentally, if you want to change the name of the shortcut on your desktop, you can click on it once, pause, then click again to highlight the whole name. You can then overtype the old name with the new one, or click a third time to edit the text.)

The next field on the **Program** tab is labelled **Cmd line**, for Command Line. This is the path and name of the program, and should read, initially, something like C:\QA4\QA.COM. It is not case-sensitive. It is important that QA.COM is specified, not QA1.EXE. Although the latter file is the main Q&A executable, and although Q&A will run if this is specified, QA.COM is the correct one to use—it is the start-up file that establishes the Q&A environment before calling the main program file.

Incidentally, if you find that the Ctrl-F3 System Information key doesn't work at Q&A's Main menu, the odds are that you incorrectly started Q&A with QA1.EXE instead of QA.COM.

This Command Line is one of the most important properties of the shortcut. It behaves just like a batch file (for those of you whose experience goes back to the "good old" DOS days). Here's where you can add start-up switches, such as *-g* to disable the red mouse pointer, a switch to specify a start-up macro file other than QAMACRO.ASC, an auto-start macro, or the like.

The **Working Directory** should be the Q&A program directory (everything up to *QA.COM*). **Shortcut Key** is seldom used, but if you were to set one, such as Ctrl+Q, then this key combination would start Q&A or switch to it if it were already running.
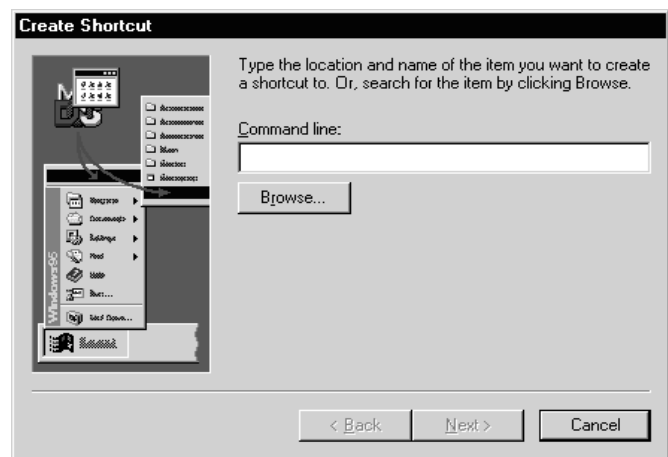

Figure 1. The Create Shortcut dialog box.

The **Run** setting allows you to specify the kind of window in which to run Q&A by default. Leave it set to "Normal Window."

The **Close on Exit** checkbox should be checked. You do not want to change anything from the **Advanced** button, but you will want to click on the **Change Icon** button. When you do so, you are likely to be presented with an array of colourful, irrelevant icons, with a file name such as C:\WINDOWS\SYSTEM\PIFMGR.DLL. You should delete this, and type the location of your Q&A program directory, or browse to it and pick up a proper Q&A icon. There is one supplied with Q&A, but others are available in the \WINDOWS\MORICONS.DLL file.

There is no need to change anything on the **Fonts** tab. At the **Memory** tab, enter the settings shown in Figure 2. The one difference between Q&A 4.0 and 5.0 is that you should set Extended Memory (XMS) to None for Q&A 4.0.

You might find that you cannot specify EMS (Expanded Memory): you might be told by Windows that your computer is not set up to use it. In this case do the following if you feel confident enough. Otherwise, have someone more familiar with computers do it for you.

1. Run the program SYSEDIT (*Start / Run / Sysedit*)

2. Click on the window titled CONFIG.SYS, and add these lines ahead of any others:

```
REM THESE LINES ADDED TO PROVIDE EMS FOR Q&A
DEVICE=C:\WINDOWS\HIMEM.SYS
DEVICE=C:\WINDOWS\EMM386.EXE RAM
DOS=HIGH,UMB
```

3. Save the settings and exit.

After rebooting, you will find that you can now go to the shortcut properties and specify EMS. EMS reduces the conventional memory a little, but it more than makes up for it in allowing Q&A to page out data. In fact, it is positively necessary for Q&A 5.0. Without it, you might not be able to run mail merges or print mailing labels without receiving "Out of Memory" messages.

The Screen tab

The **Screen** tab isn't all that important. You can specify whether Q&A initially runs in a window or full-screen. Full-screen is often confused with m*aximized*. Full-screen means that Q&A occupies the entire screen; there is no window border, no toolbar, no maximize/minimize buttons—the program looks exactly as it would running under DOS. The opposite of this is for Q&A to run in a window. The window can be any size, including maximized. This is not "full-screen" — there is still a title bar, minimize button, and so forth (evidence of Windows).

When running Q&A in a window, even if only temporarily from time to time, Here's an important keystroke to remember: **Alt-Enter** switches Q&A (or any DOS program) between full-screen and windowed mode.

Whatever screen mode you are in when you exit

Q&A, that is how it will next start the next time, regardless of your properties settings. The other settings on the **Screen** tab can be left at their defaults.

The Miscellaneous tab

The **Misc** tab requires some attention. Considering the first six areas of this tab (ignoring the Windows Shortcut keys section), you should clear all checkboxes except for *Termination: **Warn if still active***. This means, in particular, unchecking **Fast Pasting** and **Allow Screen Saver**. Idle Sensitivity can remain at medium. You should leave checked all the Windows Shortcut Keys.

That completes the optimization of the shortcut. Now let's get to work on customizing Q&A itself.

Setting Global Options

When starting Q&A for the first time, the first thing to do is to go to *Utilities / Set Global Options*. You'll find that *Automatic Execution* is set to Off. This should be reversed. There is no reason you should have to press Enter after pressing "F" for File. The exception to this is if you have macros recorded with Automatic Execution set to off, in which case you have to decide whether to persist with this laborious setting, or re-record all your macros (there's no quick way to update them.)

The next thing to do in Global Options is to set your **File Locations**. Type the pathname of your default location for Write documents, for database files, and for your temporary files. All these directories must exist if you are using Q&A 4.0. If you are using Q&A 5.0, Q&A will create these directories for you when you press F10. You can type your name or some identification for your PC on the **Network ID** line. This will only be used if you are using Q&A on a network.
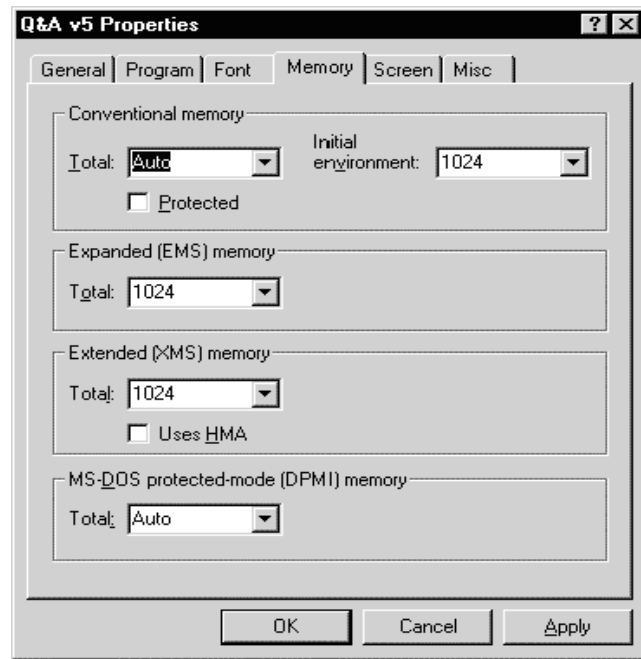

Figure 2. Memory settings for Q&A 5.0.

Installing printers

It's surprising how often I find that printer setup has been done incorrectly. *Utilities / Install Printer* displays a screen where you can install up to five printers, (PtrA through PtrE) with settings for the Port and "Model & Mode." A "printer" in Q&A is a combination of make and model, its port, and other information such as paper size and orientation. So, to install an HP LaserJet 4 (or later), you might select, for Printer A, **HP LaserJet 4 (Port, Letter, 600dpi) on LPT1**. This specifies not only the printer, but that it's printing to the LPT1 port in Portrait mode, at 600 dpi, to Letter size paper. To print in Landscape, you need to set up another Q&A printer, say PtrB, which would be: **HP LaserJet 4 (Land, Letter, 600dpi) on LPT1.** European users will want to select a printer with "A4" in the name to specify European A4 paper which is 8.27" x 11.69". Misleadingly, the five printers are set up, by default, to LPT1, LPT2, LPT3, COM1 and COM2, respectively. There is nothing wrong with assigning two or more printers to the same port. Actually, that's usually the way it's done.

Many Q&A users don't understand what some of these printer description elements mean—for example, that "port" means printing only in portrait (normal letter) mode, or that "A4" and "Letter" define the page size. This is understandable when you consider that you can set the page length and width for any Q&A document or report.

Word processor settings

At this point, you should be able to use Q&A comfortably and print documents and reports. The next thing you should do is set some sensible defaults for word processing (*Write / Utilities / Set Global Options*).

Edit Options—Change **Use Real Tab Characters** to *Yes*. This will only affect new documents. It is only by using Real Tabs that you can set up columns that print aligned (evenly) with a proportionally-spaced font such as Times or Univers. Personally, I like to **Show Tabs on Screen**, so I can see whether existing space is a tab or just some keyboard spaces.

Page Defaults—The factory settings for Write documents, reports and Print Specs specify page width and margins in the old-fashioned "row and column" method. This works fine for the monospace Courier font, but will produce unpredictable results with proportionally-spaced fonts such as Times Roman. You will do better by seting up your defaults as follows:

US Letter size paper:	European A4 size paper:
Page Width: 8.0"	Page Width: 7.77"
Left/Right Margin: 0.75"	Left/Right Margin: 0.75"
Page Length: 60	Page Length: 64
Top/Btm Margin: 3	Top/Btm Margin: 3

Now do the same thing for reports: *Report / Global Options / Columnar Global Options / Set Page Options*.

Despite the fact that you need to specify a database, these page dimensions apply to *all* new reports in *all* databases. You might also like to specify a header (perhaps your company name), along with a footer such as this to auto-print the date and page number on each page:

```
Printed @date!Page #
```

Finally, you should set a default font for your Write documents—*but only if you're using Q&A 4.0*. (If you set a default font for documents in Q&A 5.0, a bug can cause mail merges to crash..) To set a default font:

1. Select Write / Type/Edit.

2. Press Ctrl-F9 to display the Font Assignments screen.

3. Select the correct font file for your printer—for example, HPLASER4.FNT for an HP LaserJet printer.

4. Select a Regular font from among those listed.

5. Press F8 (Make Default) to make this your default regular font for new documents.

Unfortunately, there are no Q&A printer drivers for the newer printers such as the current crop of HP DeskJets, Canon BubbleJets and Epson Stylus printers. For more detailed information about printers, fonts and documents, see my article with that title in the September 1997 issue. The Quick Answer's Web site also contains some useful information and tips on Q&A printer drivers and newer printers. Look under "Technical" on the Home page.

Q&A 5.0 Drivers Work in 4.0

Even if you are still using Q&A 4.0, you can install and use the Q&A 5.0 printer drivers and font files. You can obtain these files from the "Freebies page" at www.quickanswer.com, copy them into your Q&A program directory, and reinstall all your printers. A word of caution though: If you have existing documents, reports and Print Specs, then you might get different pagination when printing. The problem can be exacerbated if you've specified fonts in your documents and reports, as the font names were often changed between font file updates. You will see the error message: "Not found, no font used" alongside any such renamed fonts at the Font Assignments screen (Ctrl F9).

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Alternate Programs...

```
Sub QA()
`
` QA Macro
` Macro recorded 1/17/00 by Tom Marcellus
`
Selection.InsertFile FileName:="c:\qa\qa.txt", Range:="",_
ConfirmConversions:=False, Link:=False, Attachment:=False
End Sub
```

I recorded this macro interactively in Word by selecting *Tools / Macro / Record New Macro*, then performing the actual steps (*Insert / File*, locating the file,

and so forth) that insert the qa.txt file at the cursor position. This isn't the place for a primer on recording and running macros in other programs—you can consult your documentation for that. Just keep in mind that by taking advantage of various options such as specifying an auto-open document (or worksheet) and auto-start macro, and passing text from Q&A to the other program via simple text files, you can really simplify otherwise very labor-intensive tasks and save yourself a slew of keystrokes and mouse clicks.

Tom Marcellus is editor of *The Quick Answer* and Webmaster at www.quickanswer.com

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@Helps...

problem might be in the macros. I need your expertise on this as my guy who did the programming is no longer available. I have attached some of the macros if you want to look at them and offer some solutions.

```
<begdef><alt2><name>"new-ord"<vidoff><esc><esc><esc><esc>
f<enter>a<home>c:\qa4\auto\work-ord.dtf<enter><enddef>
*
<begdef><alt3><name>"ch-ord"<vidoff><esc><esc><esc><esc>f
<enter>s<home>c:\qa4\auto\work-ord.dtf<enter><enddef>
```

Mark O'Brien via email

Every one of your macros includes a *C:\QA4\AUTO* path to the database. This was fine as long as you were using a standalone computer with all the data on its local C: drive. Now you're running Q&A on a network and the data resides on the *server's* C: drive, so the path in your macros is incorrect for your networked PCs. My suggestion is to remove the *C:\QA4\AUTO* from every

macro (work on a copy of the macro file) and then make sure that each copy of Q&A has its default directory settings at the Global Options screen pointing to the correct network drive and *\QA4\AUTO* directory. This allows your macros to work, but will *not* correct any programming statements in your databases that perform XLookups and the like. Statements such as this one:

```
XLookup("c:\qa4\auto\invntory",#10,"match","part",part)
```

will have to be modified to remove the path, like this:

```
XLookup("Invntory", #10, "match", "part", part)
```

It is *never* a good idea to include full paths in Q&A programming statements or Macros unless you are very careful to ensure that *all* systems on the network have *all* the exact same drive letter mappings.

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