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My (New) Life With XP

TOM MARCELLUS



WHEN the motherboard on our primary Marble Publications PC went south a few weeks ago, I went looking for a new top-quality Windows XP Professional machine. I'd put off upgrading the older Windows 98 PC to Windows 2000 or XP for a couple of reasons. First of all, I really didn't want to install 2000 or XP *on top of* Windows 98 because of some of the horror stories I'd heard. If I was going to move up to one of these new O/S's, I wanted a clean O/S install. Secondly, Windows 98 had run so reliably for us that I couldn't see a deciding advantage in scrapping it.

The most important thing about that older Windows 98 machine was that it ran Q&A for DOS like a dream, day in and day out, just as our earlier Win 98 machines had. This PC had at least a dozen copies of Q&A installed on it and a desktop fairly littered with Q&A icons. In addition to the copies of Q&A for testing and servicing clients, we kept all our Marble Publications applications in Q&A, including our *Quick Answer* subscribers database, billings and receivables databases, and so forth. Some of these applications involve big macros, External Programs and other features that help us get our Marble Pubs-related work done efficiently. So I was loath to move it all to another operating system and have to suffer through the usual move-related vagaries.

Because most of the Q&A applications we deal with are in version 5.0 (though we *do* use Q&A for DOS 4.0 and Q&A for Windows), we had to be absolutely certain that any new PC we purchased supported Expanded Memory. We were temporarily operating on a backup Windows 98 PC and couldn't afford any surprises with respect to the Expanded Memory issue. For this reason, we ordered our new PC from Jeff Noreman's company, Nexus Unlimited (www.nexusunlimited.com). Another reason we bought from Jeff is that we knew he would be able to help us get any networking and Internet connection issues (which are vital to us for email and the Web-related work we do) squared away quickly over the phone.

Since the hard drive on the dead PC was fine, I had Jeff transplant it to the new machine as HARDDISK 2. The primary hard disk with the XP operating system on it would be a new 80GB, 7200 RPM Western Digital.

After unpacking the new PC, I connected the monitor (a ViewSonic 19-inch flat panel), the keyboard (an Avant Stellar 116-key, programmable model based on the wonderful old Northgate keyboard with the F Keys on the left where God intended them), the Logitech wheel mouse, and our venerable LaserJet 2100M printer. I crossed my fingers and powered up. The machine booted in an *fraction* of the time of our two-year-old Windows 98 machine. I was already starting to like XP and the faster hard drive. I reckon that the astonishingly faster boot time is a combination of the two.

After installing all of our Windows programs, some of which contain components that load on start-up, the new machine still booted in about a fourth of the time of the old one. But what amazed me even more was that I didn't get one single dialog box about installing drivers for any of my peripherals. XP simply appeared to recognize everything connected to the computer and had the right drivers in stock. (I was probably just lucky.)

I got the PC basically configured. I dumped the painfully garish XP color scheme in favor of "Windows Classic," and made sure that the hard drive(s) wouldn't be "put to sleep" during a lengthy phone call and crash an open copy of Q&A. Then I got Jeff on the phone and we spent 20 minutes

The Quick Answer

The Do-It-Yourself Guide to Q&A

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Volume 14 Number 3

- 1 My (New) Life With XP
Tom Marcellus
- 2 *Tip*—Barcode Scanning in Q&A
- 2 *Tip*—Q&A Win Doesn't Like Some Printers
- 4 Using *Sesame* Tutorial—Part 1
Erika Yoxall
- 6 @Help—*Edited by Bill Halpern*
 - *Tracking Report Printing Dates*
 - *Starting MS Word from Q&A 5.0*
 - *Archiving Database Records*
 - *Recommending Computers*
 - *Disappearing Records*
 - *To Partition or Lesspace*

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configuring my network, firewall and Internet connection.

Q&A in the mix

All of my Q&A installations were now on HARDDISK2. That drive, on the old machine, was partitioned into C: through G: drives, with the CD drive as drive H:. The new XP machine wanted to keep its CD drive as drive D:, so it bumped all the partitions on HARDDISK2 down by two. What was my drive D: on the old machine was now drive F:, what was on the old E: drive was now on G:, and so forth. I decided to live with this (for the most part) and not move all my Q&A installations (scattered about on these

Continues page 3

Quick Tip

Barcode Scanning in Q&A

Our local Society for the Blind asked me if it were possible to check off the returns from their monthly talking book audiobook mailout using a barcode reader. They send out 500 tapes and receive about 490 back. They wanted a way to find out who the miscreants are.

I knew nothing about barcode readers, so I went out and bought one for \$150. This one plugged into the USB port and Windows 98SE recognized it immediately. It's easy to use. You point it at a barcode, press the little button and it goes beep! (Just like at the supermarket.) It dumps a numeric text string into your word processor or Q&A database field—whatever has the focus on your screen—followed by a carriage return.

The carriage return is handy because it causes Q&A to exit the field. This action can execute an @Macro to run a macro with a pause in it. The user can enter some text, press the macro's resume key, and be right where they need to be to scan the next one.

I exported the client's database to dBase format and used the telephone number as a unique identifying code to create a Code 39 barcode in the *Avery Design Pro Lite* label program. (The software is freely available from Avery's Web site at www.avery.com). All the talking book audiotapes are sent out with reversible labels—on one side is the recipient's label with the barcode, and on the reverse is the address of the Society. When the tapes are returned to the Society, the address cards are reversed and the barcodes are scanned into the Q&A database.

The barcode macro I designed starts from a menu and pauses in the telephone field at the Retrieve Spec. On scanning the barcode, the telephone number code is inserted by the reader into the waiting field, followed by a carriage return. Q&A finds the record and proceeds to the next field (the logging field) where programming inserts the system date, updates the record and returns to the menu. I have tried recursing this macro, but Q&A only

allows five readings! To do this, you edit two identical macros and have each one call the other. But things can go wrong; it's best to launch each reading separately.

The barcode reader I purchased is a *Phoenix 80mm CCD USB* unit. It's made in Taiwan, and in the UK is available from Peninsula sales@peninsula-group.com (www.peninsula-group.com) but it must be available in the States as well, though perhaps under a different name.

Roger Skidmore,
rogerskid@supanet.com

A client of ours has had similar success with a Metrologic Voyager Series hand scanner. They scan barcoded folder labels into a field to keep track of where the folders are. This unit connects to the PC through the keyboard.
—Ed.

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Quick Tip

Q&A Win Doesn't Like Some Printers

Beware if you are planning to buy a new printer. Q&A for Windows is not compatible with the Lexmark E210 printer or the Samsung ML-1210 printer.

By the way, I am convinced that Q&A for Windows

doesn't have any problem with large drives and that repartitioning a large hard drive is not necessary.

John Dow, john@johntdow.com

back partitions.) to the same drives they were originally on. I knew I would have to update any path-related settings—Global Options, font file pointers stored in documents, macros, hard-coded paths in programming and the like—in most of my copies of Q&A. But I figured I could deal with this on an as-needed basis.

That, as it turned out, was a mistake. I didn't realize how XP would react to fonted Q&A reports.

Incidentally, when you create a new XP desktop shortcut for Q&A DOS—this is case with Windows 2000 as well—you have to first point the shortcut to the copy of QA.COM you want. Once you've done that, you can then edit the shortcut and specify your Q&A startup batch file on the Program tab's Command Line.

I use Lesspace with all my copies of Q&A, so my startqa.bat batch file includes a line to load Lesspace, a line to start Q&A (using QA.COM, *not* QA1.EXE!), and finally a line to unload Lesspace when I quit Q&A:

```
Lesspace
QA.COM
Lesspace \u
```

For each copy of Q&A DOS I have installed, I keep its startqa.bat file, along with Lesspace, right in that copy's Q&A program files directory. This way, I don't have to worry about paths in the batch file itself. All I have to make sure of is that each of my Q&A shortcuts points to the correct location of startqa.bat for the copy of Q&A that it runs.

I noticed that the Memory tab in my Q&A shortcuts' properties was pretty much the same as Windows 98—you select 1024 for both Expanded and Extended memory. Despite these settings, I wasn't successful at getting XP to cough up any Extended Memory. But after several weeks of use I haven't seen this cause any problems. The 3K of Extended Memory that Q&A 5.0 is thought to use for its own internal clipboard doesn't appear to affect the clipboard even if Expanded Memory is reported by Q&A's System Information screen (press Ctrl-F3 from the Main menu) as not being available.

I always run Q&A for DOS in window mode (never full screen—*yuck!*). So I was tickled pink to discover that I could simply drop a copy of my 8514OEM.FON font file (that I've been using for years in Win 98) into my XP Windows/Fonts folder and have it show up as a 10 x 20 font in my Q&A shortcut properties Fonts tab. This is by far the nicest looking Q&A DOS-in-a-window font you'll ever lay eyes on. And it makes for what I consider to be an ideal window size. You can download the 8514OEM.FON font file from the Freebies page at www.quickanswer.com.

Unpleasantries

I am constrained to report that—at least in my case—Windows XP does not run Q&A for DOS as smoothly as my Windows 98 machines always have. You may notice

the same quirks—some minor, some downright annoying.

For example, I don't get copy, cut and paste icons at the top of any Q&A for DOS window as I did in Windows 98. I have to click on the little icon in the upper left corner of the window to get a drop-down menu and then select *Edit* followed by the operation (copy, cut or paste) I want to perform. So if I need to copy a block of text from one area of Q&A 4.0 to paste into another Q&A screen, I have got through this process twice. Windows 98 spoiled me.

Something else I noticed straight off with Q&A for DOS—there's a slight but maddening lag from the instant you hit a key to when the character appears on screen. I've tried a couple of different keyboards so far—even disabled all my startup programs—and can't get rid of it.

It's worse when typing more than just a word or two—the display is always running behind. And it's jerky. It looks like the keystrokes are being processed in *batches* instead of one at a time. When rapidly arrowing down a pick-list, it's easy to blow right on past the item I want. If I tab through a form really fast, the cursor jerks around in fits and starts and looks like it's skipping fields. To find out if it really was skipping fields, I made a little 51-field test database, naming the fields 1 through 50 and **String**. In all the numbered fields I placed this program:

```
< String = String + 1
```

If I moved through this form as fast as I could press the Tab or Enter key (or simply held down one of these keys), the **String** field should, at the end, contain 50 if the programming in every field were executed. And indeed that turned out to be the case. (*Phew!*) It was only a *perception* that fields were being skipped. But still it's something I *never* saw in Q&A for DOS running on a Windows 98 machine. I get the same keyboard lag at the command line, but not in any true Windows program.

To be fair, a client of mine who runs Q&A 5.0 on a year-old Windows 2000 machine gets the same kind of keyboard lag, though it doesn't seem to bother her.

Another quirk. I have a billings database with an SE (Speedy/Existing) field. Whenever I add new record to it, I get a pop-up XUserselct list of the previous entries for this field. It saves me having to type in the client's name. Never had a problem with this database in Windows 98—the pick-list would just be there. The same database running in XP, though—even after a Recover—sometimes hangs for 10 seconds or longer before the pick-list comes up. Q&A says it's "Working..." What's it working on? The database contains only 1,300 six-field records. At other times, the list just pops-up immediately as it always did in Windows 98. With a state-of-the-art operating system, a processor so powerful that it requires its own personal cooling fan, and with more RAM than my PC of a few years ago had hard disk space, you'd think you'd get better and more consistence performance from anything that XP permitted to run in it.

Continues page 9

Using *Sesame* Tutorial Part 1—Create an Application



ERIKA YOXALL

Recently, Erika Yoxall, a member of the *Sesame* development team, prepared a “Quick Start” tutorial guide designed to introduce beta testers to the first general *Sesame* beta release. (Until now, beta testing has been limited to a small select group of individuals close to Lantica Software.) Erika’s tutorials, which also include *Design a New Application*, *Translate a Q&A Database*, and *Fixing Common Q&A Translation Issues*, will be featured here in *The Quick Answer* over the next few issues. We think you will find them of interest if you’re planning on (or just thinking about) migrating to *Sesame*.

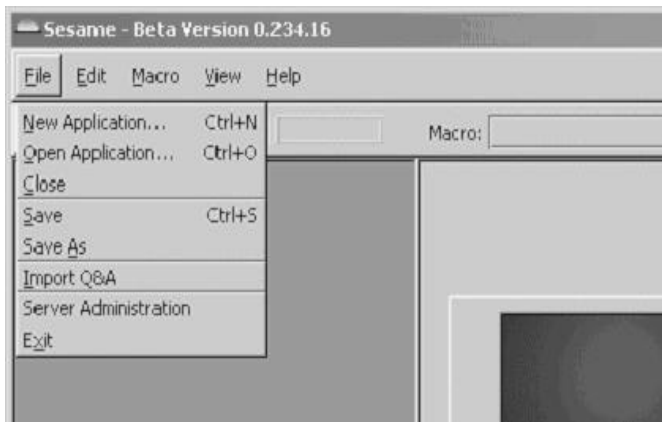
Note:—Due to the number of screen shots and relatively small amount of text (the pictures tell the story), we have departed from our usual format and kept all the screen shots in line with the tutorial text. Keep in mind that the screen shots have been scaled to fit within the confines of our two-column format.

In this tutorial, we will build a very basic *Sesame* Application, using *Sesame* Designer. We won’t be going into much detail at this point, but you will have a working *Sesame* application in no time flat!

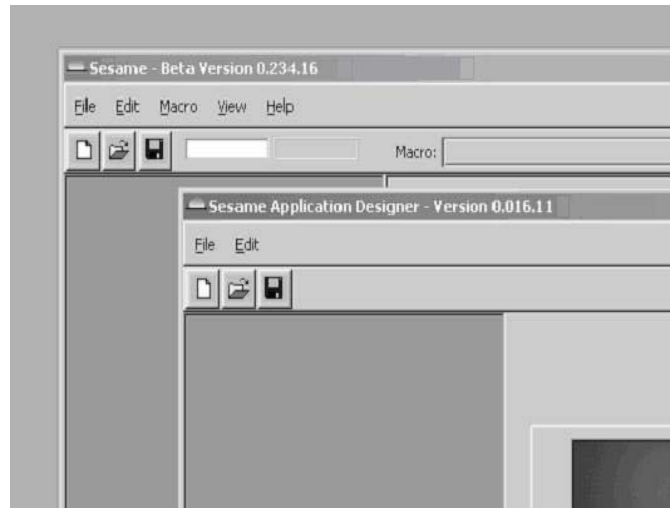
Step 1 – Starting *Sesame* Designer

Start *Sesame* by clicking on the *Sesame* icon on your desktop.

On the **File** menu, click **New Application**.

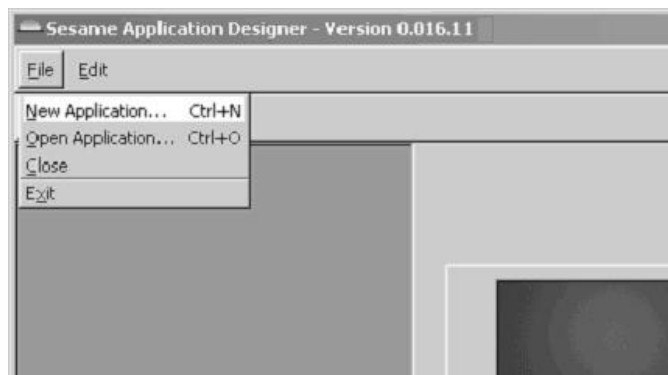


Sesame Designer will open in a new window.

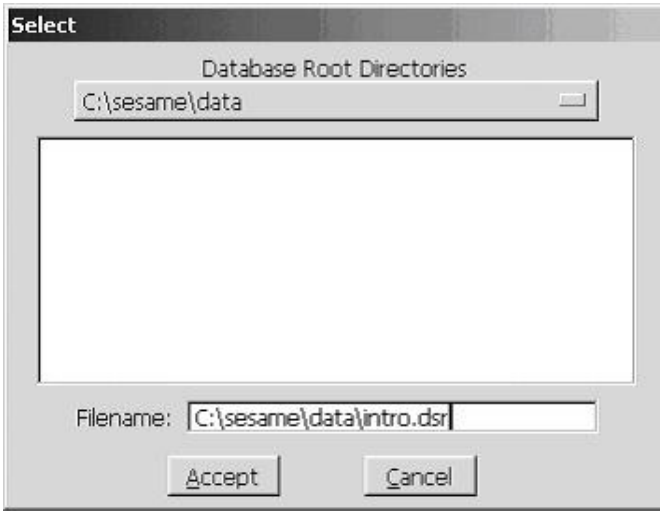


Step 2 – Creating A New Application

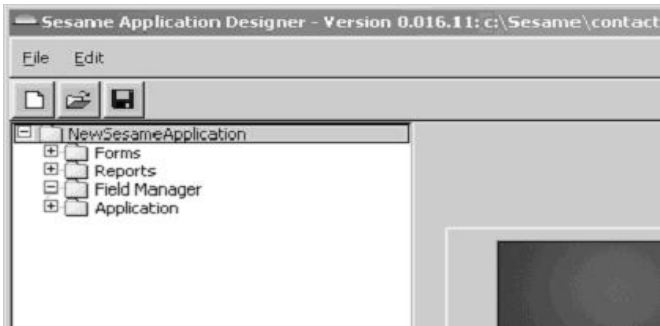
On the **File** menu in the *Sesame* Designer window, click **New Application**.



You are asked to select a filename for your new application. Type `c:\sesame\data\intro.dsr` in the Filename box. (See next page.) Click **Accept**.

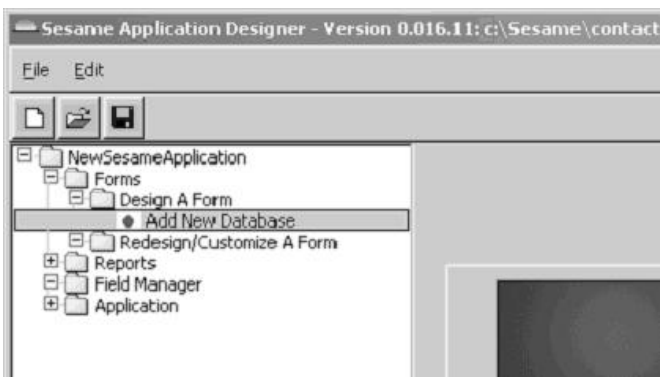


Sesame Designer creates the structure of a new application. By default, the application is named *NewSesameApplication*.

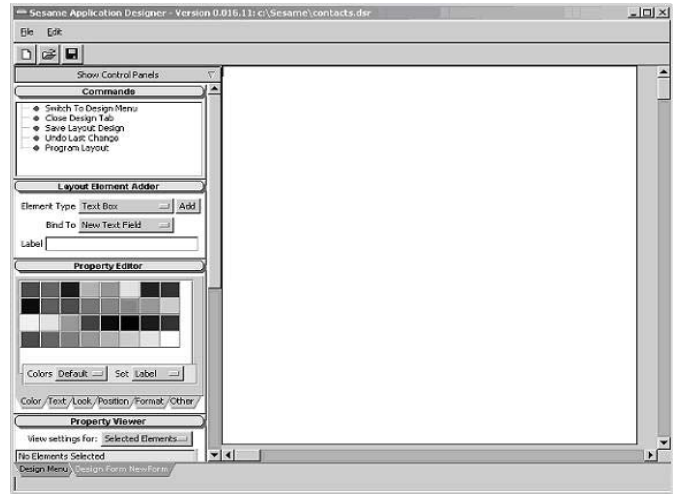


Step 3 – Creating A New Database

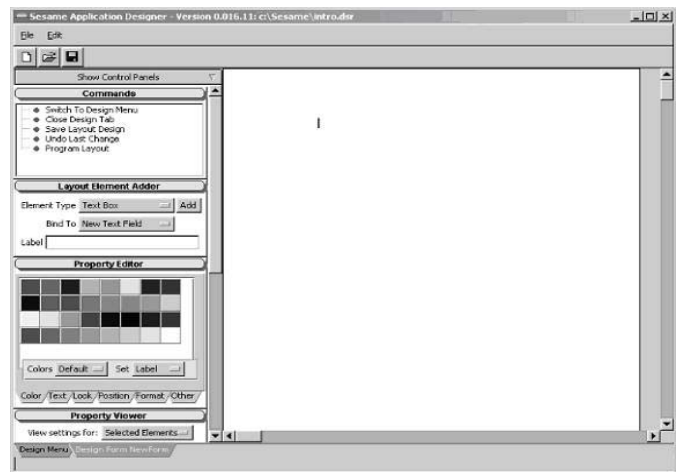
Creating a new database is as simple as adding a form. On the Design Menu Tree, click **Forms** to expand the Forms menu. Click **Design A Form** to expand the menu. Click **Add New Database**.



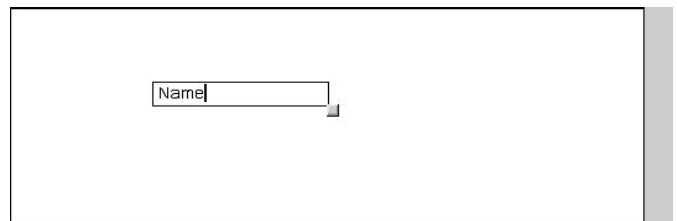
Sesame Designer opens a new Design Tab with a blank Form.



Let's add some fields to the database. Those of you who have used Q&A will recognize this technique right away. The white area on the right side of your screen is your form. Click on the form. Leave some space from the top and the left. A black cursor will appear on the form.



Type **Name**. You will see the text appear on the Form.



Now, to make a field, simply type a colon (:). You will immediately see a text box labeled "Name" appear on the Form where you were typing.

Continues on page 8



Keeping Track of Report Printing Dates

I have a question that might seem a little overboard. I use Q&A 5.0. There is something I need to do that would prevent problems and ensure the integrity of what I have to periodically report to our parent company. Our parent company has constantly changing requirements for special database printouts and reports. The format and basic content of the reports and the printouts are always the same, but the date ranges of the data they require always change. To make matters worse, they always want the reports to span the time from the date the last one was submitted through yesterday. I have resorted to keeping a paper calendar to remind me when I last printed the reports, and then redoing the Retrieve Spec for the new printing. Is there any way that Q&A can remember the last time I ran a particular report and then automatically run the next report starting from that date? A simple mistake on my paper calendar or a mistake in filling out the Retrieve Spec would give me incorrect data which could adversely impact our parent company's decision making process.

Perry

This question offered a real challenge. Last month I wrote about some issues involved with date retrieves and inserting text files containing date values. Here we have a different issue. First, you would have to be able to create and save a record of the date you are running the required reports. Second, you'd have to be able to use that date to run the same process the next time the reports are required. And, lastly, you'd need a way to change that date at the end of any run so it would be correct for the start of the next run. One other little twist is that you want to run the process starting from the day before it was run last time until the day before it is run this time (in order to get a full day's information at the start and end of the reports). Knowing today's date is easy. But yesterday?

Let's start with a new but very simple one-field database named Now.dtf:

```
Date Database
** Not for Data Entry **
** For System Use Only **
```

```
Yesterday< >
```

The programming in the **Yesterday** field would be:

```
< If @Add then Yesterday = @Date - 1
```

This is a database that, when adding a new record, will auto-fill its sole field with Yesterday's date.

This gives you a reliable way for an automated procedure to find and capture yesterday's date. With Q&A 5.0's built-in clipboard (F11 Copy / F12 Paste), Q&A can always be told to go get that date and use (paste) it wherever you specify. (In another database's Retrieve Spec, for example.) Another feature of Q&A that you can put to use here is the ability to print via saved Print Specs or Reports either by printing with *temporary* changes, or by redesigning the Spec and then printing with *permanent* changes. Are you getting the picture yet? The first step is to redesign your reports so that they have an initial (first time run) date Retrieve Spec. You would create and save these designs without printing anything.

All you'd need then is a way to automate the periodic report printing routine. And for this, macros are the way to go.

The actual recording of the macros—along with the structure of your databases and reports—is up to you. But here are the general steps and sequences that need to be included when recording the macro:

1. Print your reports by selecting *Report / Print a Report* with *no temporary changes*, and then escape back to the Q&A Main menu.
2. Add a record to Now.dtf and copy the new date into the clipboard by having the macro press F11 from the **Yesterday** field. After this, have the macro press Esc and do *not* save the record.



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.

3. Return to your reports in the *Design/Redesign* mode, and navigate to the date field. In the starting date field, have the macro paste in yesterday's date (F12) and insert ">=" in front of that date (the ending date is always @Date - 1). Have the macro save the design but *do not* print the result. If the start and end dates are in the same field you can have your macro construct a Retrieve Spec like this:

```
>={"F12 here"}..<{@Date}
```

This way, the reports you print will be current through yesterday. When they are done printing, have the macro set the date in Now.dtf to yesterday to be ready for the next automated printing (from today on).

Starting MS Word From Q&A 5.0

I've set up a fairly sophisticated application that makes use of the External Programs feature in Q&A 5.0. I use it to pass variables using the %F and %G parameters to start Microsoft Word and run a particular Word macro. This worked perfectly for me in Windows 98. Now that I've moved to Windows XP, my External Programs aren't working anymore. Any suggestions?

Cliff

One issue here is that Windows XP will not accept external commands from a 16-bit command line (Q&A). You will get the dreaded NTVDM (NT Virtual DOS Machine) error. However, you can trick XP by starting the external program with a batch file rather than a straight command line running from the External Programs menu. There are some restrictions for the batch file run from this location. For example, you cannot use *@echo off* in the batch file, and you cannot enclose long command lines in quotes. Your batch file commands have to be structured along the following lines for a copy of Q&A running from the C:\ drive:

```
CD\PROGRA~1
CD MICROS~2
CD OFFICE
Winword /M%1
CD\QA5
EXIT
```

A standard installation of Word will place the main Word executable (winword.exe) in the "Office" folder at the end of the following path.

```
C:\Program Files
    |__ Microsoft Office
        |__ Office
```

In your case, there was another "Microsoft" folder just above the "Microsoft Office" folder; thus the "MICROS~2" abbreviation is required for the batch file to refer to the *second* folder beginning with "Microsoft."

Your Q&A External Programs menu selection would be something like *MSWORD*, and the command line might look like this:

```
WORDSTRT.BAT %F
```

Note that the batch file name is within the eight-character (8.3) limitation for DOS programs. The multiple lines in the batch file for specifying the directory for Word have to do with the fact that XP, in a shell, seems to handle the command line differently from what you might be used to. The %1 in the batch file reads in, as an environmental variable, what you've passed to it as %F (a field value) from Q&A. In this case, that variable specifies the Word macro to run once Word has been started. Note that you also have to tell XP how to return to the Q&A directory after you've quit Word.

You're back in business.

Archiving Database Records

I'm trying to archive all records from 2002 and earlier in our database. What is the best way to do this? If you can point me to a URL, I sure would appreciate it.

Andy

Terminology can be frightening because it can cause misunderstandings, which can then lead to data loss. By *archive* do you mean that you want to *remove* certain records from your main database and put them in an archive or historical database? Also, are you using Q&A 4.0 or 5.0 for DOS? Lastly, do you already *have* a history database designed?

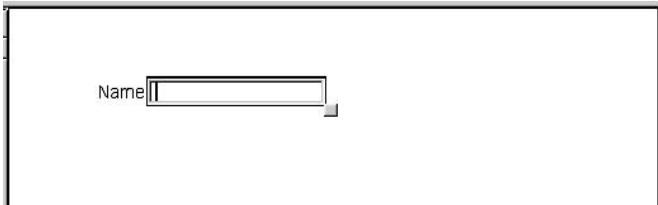
(Andy replied *Yes* to the above questions and said he was using Q&A 5.0.)

This being the case, the safe way to perform the archiving is to follow these steps. (Before you start, BACKUP your main or active database!):

1. Create a Retrieve Spec in your main database that retrieves all the records from 2002 and earlier by typing the following in the applicable date field: < 01/01/2003
2. Check to make sure that the records Q&A retrieves are in fact the ones you want to archive.
3. Press F7 to return to the Retrieve Spec and make sure that the retrieve parameter from step 1 above is still there.
4. Press Shift-F8 to save the Spec. Call it "Move to History."
5. From the Q&A Main menu, select *File / Utility / Export /*

Continues on page 11

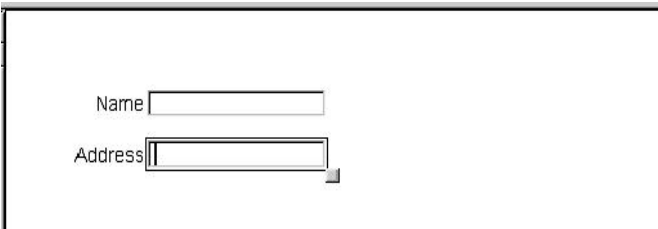
Note: You may need to click twice. The screen will flash briefly when it saves.



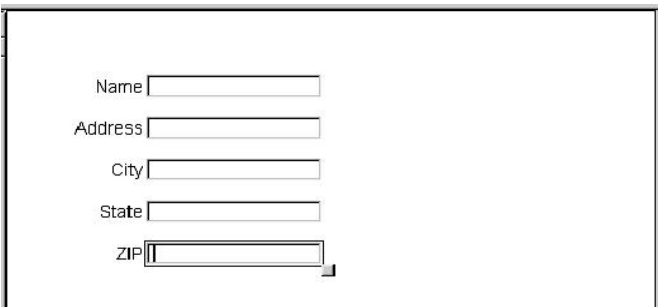
Press **Enter**. The cursor moves to the line beneath the Name field.



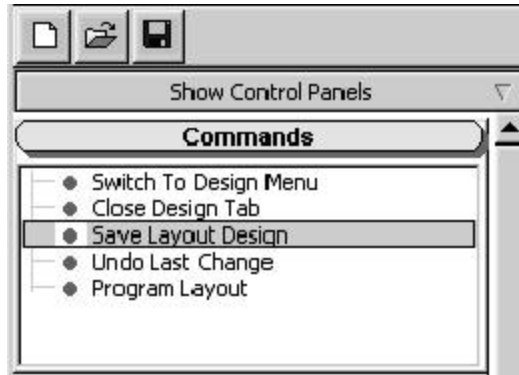
Type **Address**:. You should now have two fields lined up with each other.



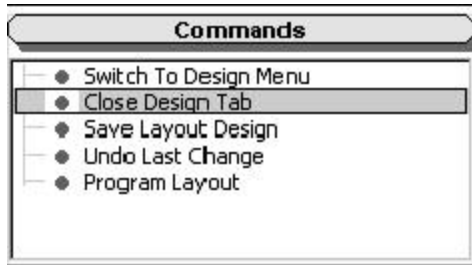
Add a few more fields using the same method. Press **Enter**. Type **City**:. Press **Enter**. Type **State**:. Press **Enter**. Type **ZIP**:. Press **Enter**.



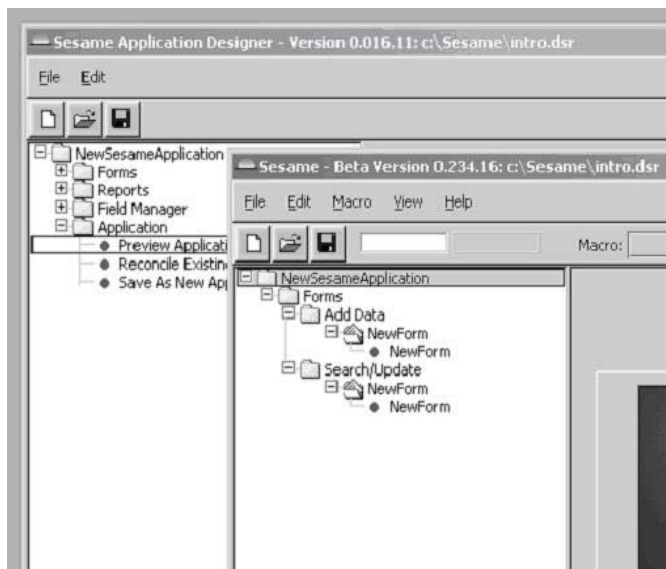
Save your design. The top Control Panel on the left side of your screen is called Commands. In the Commands Control Panel, click on **Save Layout Design**.



Close the Design Tab by clicking **Close Design Tab** in the Commands Control Panel. This should return you to the Design Menu Tab.



You've just created a *Sesame* application! Let's take a look at it. On the Design Menu, click **Application** to expand the Application menu. Click **Preview Application**. A Preview window will open showing your new application.



Concludes on page 12

Could I be having device, setup or configuration issues? Perhaps. It *could* be that all of these quirks are remediable. It could be that my XP machine is the only one in the world that exhibits this behavior. I'm pretty handy with Q&A and a handful of other programs. But I'm no hardware or O/S whiz. So if you know something I don't about any of this, I'd be obliged to hear from you—and I will pass along anything constructive to readers.

Notice that I'm not complaining about the speed at which Q&A runs *in general* in XP—Mass Updates, reports, big sorts and the like. I can't say that I've done any stopwatch testing, but so far I've found nothing to rag about. On the other hand, I haven't found anything to rave about, either. And that two-year-old Windows 98 PC was only half the machine this new one is.

A Big Hairy Unpleasantry

The only real showstoppers I encountered during the few weeks that I've been running Q&A in XP had to do with Q&A for Windows and a Q&A 5.0 report.

We use Q&A for Windows here for a number of things, including merge-printing fancy documents with PostScript and TrueType fonts and graphics files. If you've seen one of our *Quick Answer* renewal notices, these are merge-printed in Q&A Win using the data we manage in our Q&A 5.0 subscribers database.

I fully expected to get a Windows *Illegal Operation* error message when I started Q&A for Windows on the new XP machine—and I wasn't disappointed. But a quick email to John Dow for his NTFIX patch solved that problem. Q&A for Windows now runs just fine.

But there was a more serious matter.

You've seen it repeated in these pages many times—when you copy or move a Q&A installation to a new location (a different drive or folder), it's not just your Global Options, macros, and programming you have to review and update as necessary. Any area of Q&A where you can assign fonts must also be suspect. At a minimum, this includes any documents and labels you use regularly. If a *merge database* is connected to any such documents (in other words, it's a *merge* document) or labels, you additionally have to check the bottom line of the Print Options screens of those documents and labels and update the paths to the merge files as necessary.

If you use macros to automate mail merges, it's even *more* critical that you investigate and update any aspects of those macros in terms of the files they deal with—any files that could cause a macro to bomb if the file is no longer where the macro expects it to be. I don't need to dwell on the irreversible damage a rampaging macro can cause. For any macro that accesses a file and does something with it, you should print that macro out on a sheet of paper, and step through it manually (pressing the keys that the macro presses). This is the only way to know

if a macro is safely runnable after you've moved or copied your Q&A files to a new location.

Back to fonts. A simple macro that prints a fonted merge document can bomb after you've moved a Q&A installation to a new location. And not necessarily because of the location of the document itself. For a document to contain fonts (I'm not talking about regular text enhancements such as bold and underline), there will have to be a font file name specified in the Font Assignments screen in that document. (You access the Font Assignments screen with Ctrl-F9.) The *Font File Name* at this screen will probably include a path to the font file, even if the font file resides in your main Q&A program files directory. When you move your copy of Q&A (along with your files) to a new drive and/or folder, those font file paths do not get automatically updated.

Suppose you have a fonted document where the *Font File Name* at the Font Assignments Screen points to C:\QA\HPLASER4.FNT. You've purchased a new computer and had its hard drive partitioned to create a 2GB E:\ drive where you plan to transplant all the Q&A files from your old PC. So you create a new E:\QA folder and copy (or install) all your Q&A program and font files there. You then create E:\QA\DATA and E:\QA\DOCS folders and copy all your databases and documents, respectively, to those new folders.

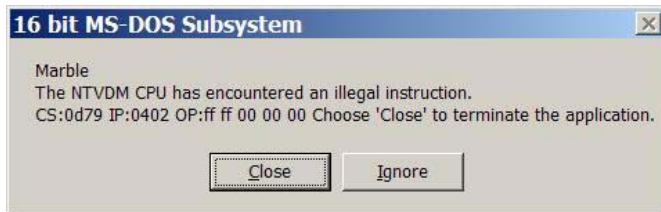
What will happen when you try to open that old fonted document in the new copy of Q&A? You're likely to get a "*Disk drive door open...*" or similar error message. (Yes, it's a bug.) If you keep trying, you should eventually be able to open the document and correct the problem. What happened here is that the document tried to connect to a C:\QA\HPLASER4.FNT file that isn't there. Q&A hands you the goofy error message. To correct the problem, you keep trying to blow past the Q&A error screen until the document opens. If and when it does—and I have never had this *not* succeed on a Windows 98 machine—you thank your lucky stars and make a beeline for the Font Assignments screen, where you update the path to the font file and then resave the document.

But the Font Assignments screen is available in other areas of Q&A as well. You can assign fonts in mailing labels, Reports and Print Specs, which brings me to this section's subtitle.

We have a Marble Publications *Deposit Ticket* report we've been using for years. When we receive checks for subscription renewals and the like, the transactions are entered into our TRANS.DTF database. Here we record the date, check number, amount, payer, and the item(s) purchased. When it's time to make a bank deposit, we gather up the checks and run the *Deposit Ticket* report. It prints out a nice-looking (fonted) deposit ticket we hand to the teller along with the checks (so we don't have to manually fill out a bank-supplied deposit ticket).

About a week after we got the new XP machine, I had some checks to deposit and needed to run the report. Our Marble Publications copy of Q&A—along with all its

related files—was now on a different drive. I'd updated everything I could think of, but it slipped my mind that the report in question contained assigned fonts. When I went to the *List of Reports* screen for the TRANS database and selected the report, I got the Q&A "Drive door open..." error message. Repeatedly pressing the *Enter to continue* option accomplished nothing, but after hitting Esc a few times in an attempt to get the report open (as I was able to do with my fonted *documents*), I got a really nasty "NTVDM (NT Virtual DOS Machine)" error message with *Close* and *Ignore* options. Here's one XP error message you never want to see:



When I chose *Ignore*, XP blew Q&A clean out of the water. Shut it right down. Not so much as a fare-thee-well. (The *Close* option did nothing.) And I was able to duplicate this crude behavior on another fonted report.

Fortunately, it didn't appear to damage the TRANS database containing the report, but it did motivate me to check all my other important reports on the safer backup computer. I never saw a similar situation on a Windows 98 machine elicit such a savage reaction.

The problem now was that I couldn't use the Deposit Ticket report because I couldn't get into it to change the Font Assignments screen Font File path. What I *did* have to do was no cake walk:

1. On the backup computer, make a copy of its TRANS database (naming it TRANSCOPY).
2. Open TRANSCOPY's Deposit Ticket report and make a note of the font file and fonts on the Font Assignments screen.
3. Delete the Font File path and resave the report.
4. Get the TRANSCOPY database over to the new XP machine.
5. Open the TRANSCOPY Deposit Ticket report on the new PC, add the Font File path, reselect the fonts for *Regular*, *Font 1*, *Font 2* and so forth and then resave the report without printing.
6. Remove all the records from TRANSCOPY.
7. Copy all the records from the existing XP machine's TRANS database into TRANSCOPY.

8. Verify that the records were copied correctly.

9. Delete TRANS.

10. Rename TRANSCOPY to TRANS.

I didn't make it to the bank on time.

But what if I'd had, say, 20 such fonted reports in different databases?

Worse yet. What if I hadn't had a usable backup?

I should mention that I didn't have to *re-font* those sections of the report that were already fonted. All I had to do was fill out the Font Assignments screen. The fonted elements remained fonted (in the original fonts) even when no font file was attached to the report.

My mistake was in not taking all of this into account in advance of moving to the new PC. But in Windows 98 I could have probably easily gotten into this report and updated the Font File path. Windows XP, in contrast, simply wouldn't permit it.

Parting shots

There is much to like about Windows XP Pro. And if it's zippier and breaks less and is better supported and runs today's bloated programs faster and more reliably than 98, I'm all for it.

But personally I don't like it *all* that much more than 98. I definitely don't like the way Q&A for DOS behaves in it, compared to Q&A's smooth and reliable operation in Windows 98.

XP offers a "Compatibility" tab in its shortcut properties. I tried all those options and they didn't make a whit of difference.

So far, I've managed to cause only one fatal XP crash (where I had no choice but to push the Reset button) and one near-fatal crash (where XP dangerously slowed to a crawl). Otherwise, I haven't had to reboot the machine because of a system glitch. Over the same period of time on the old Windows 98 machine, I might have had to reboot for similar reasons perhaps three or four times a week. But interestingly enough, I don't recall a Windows PC ever crashing while working *in* Q&A for DOS.

After just a few weeks working with Q&A in XP, my advice can only be this: If you use Q&A for DOS heavily, particularly on healthy Windows 98 machines that are running well, you might be disappointed at how Q&A behaves in XP.

If you *are* using Windows 95 or 98, do not upgrade those machines by installing XP *on top of* 95 or 98. If you simply must upgrade your existing machines to XP, and they have the guts to support it, I'd start from scratch if I were you. I'd backup everything that I wouldn't be reinstalling from the original program CD's, verify that my backups were restorable, then reformat the hard drive and do a clean XP install.

Tom Marcellus is editor of *The Quick Answer*.

Standard ASCII. Select or type in the name of your main database, and then supply an ASCII filename like "archive.txt" for the output file.

6. At the Retrieve Spec, press Alt-F8, select "Move to History," and press F10 twice.
7. At the blank Merge Spec, press F10.
8. At the ASCII options screen, leave the default settings as they are and press F10. The selected records will be exported. Note that the records are not being removed from the main database at this time, only exported.
9. If your history database is *exactly* the same design as the main database, import the archive.txt file into the history database using *File / Utilities / Import / Standard ASCII*.
10. Check the history database to make sure that the records are there and that they imported properly with the data in the right fields. If so, then continue with the following steps.
11. Back at the Q&A Main menu, select *File / Remove / Selected Records* from your main database.
12. At the Retrieve Spec, press Alt-F8 and select "Move to History." Press F10 twice and then answer *YES*.
13. After the records have been removed from your main database, recover it to reclaim any excess space in the data file.

This is the long way to go, but it's the safest.

Recommending Computers Revisited

When I spoke to you two weeks ago you said you were having no problems running Q&A 5.0 on Dell machines, specifically the 4500, and 4550's. I'm looking at their 2350 which is perfect for me. Does anyone have any input for me?

Fred

I have Q&A 5.0. It works just fine on my Windows 98 machine. However, I recently purchased a Compaq Presario 900 notebook with Windows XP Home Edition. When I try to load / install Q&A, I get a notice that there is insufficient memory and to close down one or more programs. There are no programs running. I have a 20G hard drive. Can you offer any help, or are there fixes available?

Bill

Normally, I won't make specific recommendations regarding brand name machines, but since Fred and Bill asked about specific models, here is my take on them.

Fred: I would have to say *No*; the Dell 2350 is *not* a good machine for you. It's Dell's entry level budget PC for home use. It has shared memory and an on-board video display card. This means that (1) you will sacrifice display quality and (2) you will not get the Expanded Memory Q&A 5.0 requires to run—the computer's hardware will be using it. This model also has a built-in (on-board) network card. Our experience with these kinds of machines has not been encouraging. On the other hand, the Dell Dimension 4000 series systems, which do *not* have on board video cards or shared memory, are excellent machines and run Q&A just fine. Remember, though, that manufacturers sometimes change the hardware and/or firmware configurations they use in their PCs in the middle of production runs. So two PCs with the same model number that appear identical in all respects could have different innards. Therefore, you must always carefully check the equipment specifications of *the PC you are about to purchase* before putting your money down.

Bill: If you bought the Compaq Presario 906, it has, according to Compaq: "ATI Radeon IGP Integrated Graphics with 16MB shared video memory." If this is the case, you will probably *not* be able to get the Expanded Memory that Q&A 5.0 needs to run properly. We have always cautioned people that before buying a new computer they should make sure that it does not have shared memory and that it is physically capable of providing Expanded Memory. That being said, you can try installing Q&A by running "install/d" from your floppies. You will also then have to go to our Web site and download and install the *Datepatch*, *Speedfix*, and *Lesspace* utilities before you will be able to try to run Q&A on the new machine. But do keep in mind that if your hardware cannot deliver Expanded Memory to Q&A, you will have problems with merge documents, labels, and printing in general. It will also affect the ability of Q&A to perform searches on large databases.

Disappearing Records

Recently, we upgraded to computers using Windows XP Professional. We purchased *The Q&A/New PC Setup Guide* from Marble Publications and configured the machines accordingly. The only problem I am having is when I finish a record and go to "Print" and try to retrieve the record I just completed, Q&A gives me a "No Records Were Found..." message. Using Search/Update, on the other hand, finds the record. The only way I can retrieve the record in "Print" is by exiting Q&A and restarting it. Q&A can then find the record or any other record in the database the first time, but then

fails to find it on subsequent consecutive tries. I have records in other databases that Q&A finds and prints without a problem.

Phil

These symptoms indicate that you may have damage in that particular database. (All the others work fine.) You are using the *File / Print Retrieve Spec* to find these records. Here's what I recommend you do:

1. Make a copy (backup) of the database in question.
2. Use the *File / Design / Customize / Speed Up Searches Spec* to remove any speedy (index) fields in the database. Make a note of the Speedy fields and the codes (*S, SU, SE*) they contain.
3. Mass Update (*File / Mass Update*) all the records in the database by pressing F10 at the blank Retrieve Spec and F10 again at the blank Update Spec.
4. Copy the design of the database to a new name. (*File / Copy / Copy Design Only.*)
5. Copy all the records from your active database to the new database. (*File / Copy / Copy Selected Records.*)
6. Replace the Speedy field codes at the Speed-Up Spec.

I bet that the database will now function properly. If

not, the damage is probably more serious. Let me know and we'll take it from there.

To Partition or Lesspace

I received the new Q&A installation CD today. Thanks. I got an unexpected phone call from another computer consultant. One of my former employees had contacted him for support last fall. I told him I was going to use Lesspace with Q&A and he didn't think it was a good idea. He recommended partitioning the hard drive instead. I still have Partition Magic 8.0 and have no problem installing it on the computers if that's the better way to go. Would I be better off partitioning or using Lesspace?

Tom

We (and all our clients) run Q&A for DOS with Lesspace. It's actually better protection than small (less than 2G) partitions because a user can always point Q&A to a file located on a non-partitioned drive. IT consultants and I always have this argument. Some of them are ultra-conservative and always favor a hardware solution over a software solution. The answer is: either way is fine. You will not create problems with either option. Lesspace is easier and less intrusive than partitioning, and affords better overall protection against problems that could arise from users pointing Q&A to files on different drives (including database, document, temporary and configuration files)—and even upgrades to servers and workstations. It's the option I would recommend.

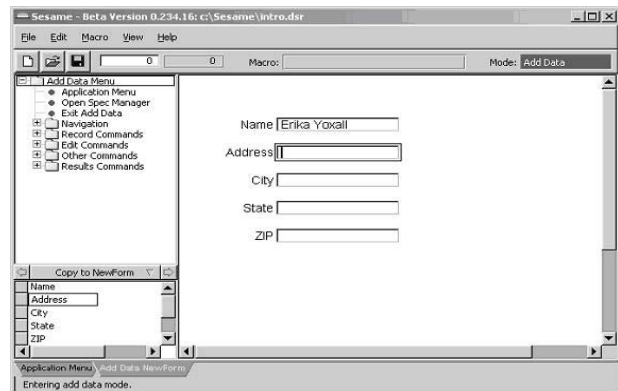
Bill Halpern is co-owner of Professional Computer Technology Associates (PCTA) in Newtown, Pennsylvania and is President and CEO of Lantica Software, LLC. 215-598-8440. bill@pcta-usa.com, www.pcta-usa.com.

Sesame Tutorial cont'd from page 8

The Application, Database and Form have all been given default names. Click on the **NewForm** with the green dot next to it under **Add Data**. There is your form, ready to add records!

That's all it takes to create a new *Sesame* application!

Erika Yoxall is the technical coordinator for Lantica Software, LLC.



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