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# The Easy Way to Mail Merge Your Q&A Data in MS Word for Windows

TOM MARCELLUS

Follow this step-by-step guide to make printing your merge letters in Word as easy as printing them in Q&A itself.

DOS

**O**VER the past couple of years we've shown a variety of ways to use Q&A data in Windows programs. (Search *The Quick Answer* Index database at [www.quickanswer.com](http://www.quickanswer.com) to find the tips and articles.) Still, we hear from Q&A users looking for "the easy way" to run their mail merges in Word for Windows. Usually it's because they plan to stick with Q&A for data management, but want a state-of-the-art word processor that can take full advantage of their modern printer and fonts.

You can't argue the point. Once you've been spoiled with the speed and ease of creating professional-looking documents in a graphical word processor like Word for Windows, going back to Q&A Write DOS feels like running a race with your knees locked.

But that isn't the only consideration.

The last Q&A DOS printer drivers are now nearly four years old, and although they usually "do okay" with newer printers for plain-Jane printing tasks, they simply aren't equipped to make today's printers perform *really* well. (Problems seem to be more pronounced with inkjet printers such as the newer HP DeskJets.) If you're using the *correct* older Q&A driver for your new printer and still can't get the output you need for a particular printing task, you simply have to lower your expectations or turn to Windows printing.

I'll guide you through the process of setting up a mail merge in Word for Windows (Word 6.0, 95, or 97). Though there are a variety of ways to pass your Q&A data to Word, I'll focus on the one I've found that gives the cleanest results with the least fuss.

I'll keep it simple, using a basic Q&A DOS customer database with a "Haven't-heard-from-you-lately" merge letter for customers who haven't ordered anything from you in 90 days. Since this is the kind of mail merge task you'd perform on a regular basis (once a month, perhaps), the objective will be to make it as easy as 1-2-3, like this:

1. Run a Q&A macro.
2. Open your merge document in Word.
3. Click the Merge Print button.

I'll also show you a few useful tricks you can perform with Word mail merges that you can't do in Q&A. Once you're familiar with the process, you should be able to adapt what I've shown to whatever kind of Q&A-to-Word mail merge task you need to perform, including letters, envelopes and even mailing labels.

# The Quick Answer

The Do-It-Yourself Guide to Q&A

May 1999

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## Prep your Q&A data for MS Word

The first step is to output (export) your Q&A data in a form that Word for Windows can use. (Like most programs, Word can't read Q&A databases directly.) The simple customer database we'll use as our example has the following fields:

Title:  
First Name:  
Last Name:  
Company:  
City:  
State:  
Zip:  
Last Order Date:

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# Publishing Your Q&A Data (or Database) to a Web Site

TOM MARCELLUS

**T**HE day has arrived when people expect the information they seek to be available on the Internet, and companies the world over are flocking to the World Wide Web as a powerful and instantaneous means of communicating a wide range of information, not just to customers and prospective customers, but to their own people as well.

- A company can publish price updates, product information and stock availability on its Web site so representatives in the field—and customers—always have access to the latest information.
- A travel agency can place up-to-date tour package information on its Web site, where clients can go to conveniently browse the options, make travel plans, and even book travel arrangements online.
- A health care organization can publish up-to-date prescription and medical history data about patients on its Web site so personnel outside the facility can get the vital information they might need in a field medical emergency.

When your Q&A data or database is on a Web site, anyone anywhere in the world with a modem and browser can access it.

Once you have the basic structure in place (a Web site and the “containers” for your data), publishing updated information from your Q&A databases to a Web site can be as easy as running a Q&A macro that automatically outputs your Q&A data to standard HTML Web page files that you then upload to your Web server. Publishing a series of Web updates this way—even several times each day—takes minutes, not hours.

The Q&A data on your Web site can be unsecured (anyone can view it) or password protected so only designated people can view it.

The data can be *static*—updated as often as you like, but designed to be viewed only. Or it can be *interactive*—where visitors to your site can select what data to view, and perhaps even update the data remotely. A Q&A application can even be totally Web

based, where database updates are made exclusively online from your Web site.

## Static Web pages

Static Web pages—often consisting of text and optional graphic images in tables—can be generated in any version of Q&A. (See, for example, John Fulmer’s “Keeping a Web Site Up-to-Date with Q&A” in the March 1999 issue.)

Suppose you wanted to place on a Web site a daily price update table on your company’s products.

First, you design a Q&A report that includes the data from your database in the general form in which you want it to appear.

Next, you “tweak” the report, adding the appropriate codes to produce the HTML “tags” that make the report output publishable as a table on a Web page.

Finally, you upload the updated report (as a file) to your Web site.

Once the groundwork is done, when you need to publish new updates, you simply run your Q&A report(s) and upload the resulting file(s) to your Web server.

With static Web pages, the Q&A database itself isn’t on the Web server, only your preselected output from it.

Editor / Publisher  
Tom Marcellus

The Quick Answer (ISSN 1052-3820) is published monthly (12 times per year) by Marble Publications, Inc., 1927A Harbor Blvd., Costa Mesa, CA 92627 USA

Cost of domestic subscriptions: 12 issues, \$89; Outside the U.S., \$109; Online edition, \$59. Single copy price: \$11; outside the U.S., \$12.50. All funds must be in U.S. currency. Back issues are available upon request, for the same price as a single copy.

Postage paid at Costa Mesa, CA. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Quick Answer, 1927A Harbor Blvd., Costa Mesa, CA 92627.**

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## Word Mail Merge. . .continued from page 1

Last Order Date is a date field. The Title field is for Mr., Ms., Miss, or Mrs. (To follow along, you might want to create this little database and add a few dummy records to it.)

You want to select the customers who haven't ordered in 90 days and add their names and addresses to a file Word can use as its own "database" for the merge document. Q&A handily exports data *and* field names to dBase format. Word likes dBase files. Here are the steps:

1. From Q&A's Main menu, select *File / Utilities / Export / dBase IV*.
2. Enter the name of the customer database, followed by the name of the dBase export file you're about to create. For this exercise, name the file *Export90.dbf*.
3. At the Retrieve Spec, type `{@Date - Last Order Date >= 90}` in the **Last Order Date** field. This will select records where Last Order Date is 90 or more days earlier than the current date.
4. Press Shift-F8 and save this Retrieve Spec to the name *Last Order 90 Export*. (You can optionally press F8 here for the Sort Spec and specify the order in which you want the selected records added to the export file—perhaps in ZIP Code order.)
5. Press F10, for the Merge Spec and fill in the fields with the following numbers:

```
Title: 1
First Name: 2
Last Name: 3
Company: 4
Street: 5
City: 6
State: 7
Zip: 8
```

6. Press Shift-F8 and save this Merge Spec to the same name: *Last Order 90 Export*.
7. Press F10 and Q&A will create the dBase IV export file.

If you want Q&A to run this procedure automatically (since you'll be performing this mail merge periodically), see the sidebar, "Automate Your Export to Word."

That's it for the Q&A end. Now you need to create your merge document in Word.

### Creating the MS Word merge letter

Like Q&A, a Word mail merge requires a document, envelope, or label template and a *data source* or database for the merge fields. You created the data source in the previous section (the dBase file). Now, you'll create a simple document with merge fields. Later on you can

## Automate Your Export to Word with a Q&A Macro

Nothing beats a Q&A macro for turning complex tasks into no-brainers. Follow these steps to create a macro that will automatically generate an updated dBase export file for Word whenever you need it:

1. From the Main menu, press Shift-F2, Define Macro.
2. Don't assign a key combination to this macro—press Enter.
3. With the macro recorder running, select *File / Utilities / Export / dBase IV*.
4. Press Shift-F4 to clear the database prompt, then press F10. Q&A will display the list of files in your default database directory.
5. Type the name of the database and press Enter.
6. Type the name of the export file (Export90.dbf), press Enter, then press "Y" to have Q&A overwrite the earlier file of the same name.
7. At the Retrieve Spec, press Alt-F8, carefully type *Last Order 90 Export*, and press Enter.
8. Press F10 for the Merge Spec. Press Alt-F8, carefully type *Last Order 90 Export*, and press Enter.
9. Press F10 to run the export.
10. Press Esc until you're back at the Main menu.
11. Press Shift-F2 to end macro recording.
12. In the Macro Options box, type *Last Order 90 Export* on the Macro Name line, set Show Screen to *No*, then press F10 to save the macro to your macro file.

Whenever you need to run this macro, go to the Q&A Main menu, press Alt-F2 to display your macro list, highlight *Last Order 90 Export*, and press Enter. The macro will create a dBase IV export file of customers who haven't placed an order in 90 or more days from the current date.

compose the text of the letter, add graphic elements if you like, such as your letterhead, and you'll be ready to print:

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# Averaging Summary Values in Report Columns

MARK MYERS

Take care when calculating averages in reports. What you get might not be what you're really after

ONE challenge when working with Q&A's columnar report generator is that it doesn't give you an easy way to perform calculations on column totals.

Here's an example. The marketing department at my company buys various kinds of outside advertising. They want to know how well the ads are generating responses, so they need reports that show the cost per incoming call on a per advertisement basis. For an individual ad, this is easy to calculate in a derived column. You simply divide the cost of the ad by the number of calls it generated.

But if you wanted to get the total cost per call from an ad *campaign* or by the *media* used (newspaper, television, billboard, and so on), there's no obvious way to get it. Q&A's @Avg function only averages the entries for the row it's in. What you really need is a weighted average over an entire block of rows.

## The workaround

Fortunately, there's a relatively easy trick you can employ to get it. It involves a calculated column that performs its calculation on every row in the report in a way that gets you the average of the column totals.

To demonstrate, consider the following report on newspaper ad costs and responses:

Tracking #	Cost	Calls	Cost/Call
Times 2323	\$600	15	\$40
Herald 4523	\$1000	10	\$100
Gazette 1234	\$490	7	\$70
=====	=====	=====	=====
Total	\$2090	32	X

If you want the "X" summary value to reflect the average cost per call for individual ad runs, you can simply use the @Avg report function. In this case, that value would be \$70— $(\$40 + \$100 + \$70) / 3$ . But if you wanted the summary value to reflect the average cost per call for *all* ad runs ( $\$2090 / 32$ ), there's no immediate way to get it.

To get around the problem, you can include another derived column which, as I mentioned earlier, contains the desired column total manipulation in every row. Continuing with the above example, the change shows the accurate cost per call over the three ad runs—\$65.31 instead of \$70:

Tracking #	Cost	Calls	Cost/Call	Total
Times 2323	\$600	15	\$40	\$65.31
Herald 4523	\$1000	10	\$100	\$65.31
Gazette 1234	\$490	7	\$70	\$65.31
=====	=====	=====	=====	=====
Total	\$2090	32		\$65.31
Average				\$65.31

The derived column Spec for the new column, where the Cost column is #3 and Calls is #4, looks like this:

Formula: @Total(#3) / @Total(#4)  
Column/Sort Spec: 6,A

You could, of course, use sub-summary functions to obtain these values based on logical breaks in selected columns. Following the form shown above with sub-summary functions is simply a matter of plugging in the column number you want to break the values on.

You can use more complex calculations in your derived columns (even the if-then technique I demonstrated in my January 1999 article) to get the desired report output format. Because the overall average appears in every row, the technique I've shown above is probably best for totals-only reports. But it can be used in any Q&A report. It gives you the ability to show almost any overall calculated value in a report's summary line.

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## —What's new at— [www.quickanswer.com](http://www.quickanswer.com)?

- **Quick Answer Online Index Database.** Search T.J. Shufflin's actual Q&A database of *Quick Answer* topics by keywords, partial title, date ranges and author names. *Access from the Home page.*
- **Area Codes Database.** Enter the area code to find the state or province and time zone. (Or enter the state abbreviation to find its area codes.) Use as a lookup file. Current as of March 1999. *Free Downloads page.*
- **Gender Database.** Why type "Mr." or "Ms." in that Salutation field when a Lookup to GENDER.DTF can do it for you? 4,000+ first names with salutations. *Free Downloads page.*
- **Y2K Patch** fixes imminent problem with Q&A DOS file dates later than December 31, 1999. *Free Downloads page.*
- **The Q&A Year-2000 Pack** now includes two utility diskettes. *Home page Y2K link.*

# Q&A on the Web. . .continued from page 2

## Interactive Web Pages

In contrast with *static* Web pages, *interactive* Web pages give visitors to your Web site tools to *retrieve* only the information they want. You let them *interact* with your application similar to the way you interact with Q&A on your desktop computer.

For these applications, you put your Q&A database on the Web server, and use John Dow's DTFDATA or DTFPOST along with a Web program to extract and display information from the database in real-time.

This is the interactive method we use to make T.J. Shuflin's *Quick Answer* Index database searchable at [www.quickanswer.com](http://www.quickanswer.com).

You query this actual Q&A for DOS database (try it!) using a Web form that looks suspiciously like a Q&A Retrieve Spec. (See Figure 1.) You enter your retrieval criteria (hidden validation rules check them just like in Q&A), then click the "Run Search" button. This passes your criteria to the Web server where a custom Perl CGI program passes them to DTFPOST to extract the records, then displays them in an attractive table-like format for easy viewing. (See Figure 2.)

With the information displayed, an application like this can provide options on what to do next, such as perform another search, order a product online, display more detail on a selected product or service, or send an email message requesting more information or personal assistance.

Each month, after the new issue of *The Quick Answer* has been mailed to subscribers, T.J.'s updated index database is simply uploaded to our Web site, replacing the now out-of-date database.

Figure 3 shows what another interactively-generated Web table might reveal when a remote salesperson using your Web site requests current price and availability on widgets.

Figure 1. A Web query form that mimics a Q&A Retrieve Spec.

Note that there's a place for the **In Stock** quantity to show what's current right up to the minute.

In this case, not only is the Q&A inventory database online, a sales order database is on the Web server as well. The application is designed so that a salesperson can post a new sales order from the Web site for 30 Heavy Duty Widgets, and within seconds the In Stock quantity (in the inventory database) is reduced from 34 to 4 so the next salesperson will know exactly how many she can deliver immediately to her customer.

Web applications like this that let remote users actually update (change information in) a Q&A database can take any of several forms. Here are two examples:

- *The Q&A database is on the Web server.* Remote users with permission (passwords) can view and edit selected records at the site (as above) in real-time. Any updates they make are immediately applied, so the next user sees the new information. In this case the user doesn't actually work *in* the Q&A database; he or she specifies changes to a record using a Web form, and the changes are posted to the record via Web programming.

- *The Q&A database is not on the Web server.* The remote user views selected records. Any updates or new

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Stock No.	Description	Price	In Stock as of 04/29/1999 06:41:58
WD-1233-LD	Widget, Light Duty	\$12.33	423
WD-1233-MD	Widget, Medium Duty	\$14.97	12
WD-1233-HD	Widget, Heavy Duty	\$17.44	34

Figure 3. A complete Q&A application can be entirely Web-based.

Figure 2. Retrieved records are displayed in an easy-to-view table.



EDITED BY GORDON MEIGS  
AND WILLIAM HALPERN



This month we depart a bit from our usual format and answer some of the most frequently-asked questions about Q&A.

### Which versions of Q&A, if any, are Y2K compliant?

Out of the box, all versions of Q&A are ready for the Year 2000 and beyond. However, Y2K compliance is assured only if you format all date fields in your databases to display the full four-digit year instead of the abbreviated two-digit year. (Press F10 from the database design screen until you reach the Global Format Options Screen, then select a date with a four-digit year.) With Q&A 4.0 and 5.0 for DOS, you should also apply the Y2KFix patch to ensure Q&A's file list screens display file dates properly beginning on January 1, 2000. (See the April 1999 issue of *The Quick Answer*.) The Y2KFix patch is available for download at [www.quickanswer.com](http://www.quickanswer.com) or [www.qaug.com](http://www.qaug.com).

The only other Y2K problems you might run into are the *self-created* variety—that is, database programs, Lookup Table entries, Specs, macros, and other elements added by the Q&A application developer that specify or use any abbreviated date format. To help you find and correct such potential problem areas, a special publication called the *Q&A Year 2000 Pack* is available for purchase at [www.quickanswer.com](http://www.quickanswer.com). It contains reprints of all Y2K-related tips and articles from past issues of *The Quick Answer* along with two diskettes containing utilities and related files.

### Is there a Windows 95 or 98 version of Q&A?

There is no version of Q&A designed *exclusively* for Windows 95 or 98. All versions of Q&A run well in *any* version of Windows as long as Q&A has been properly installed and set up.

All Q&A files, including temporary files (those that Q&A creates during certain operations) and database files, must reside on a 1.9G or smaller hard disk partition. Large hard drives can easily be partitioned with Partition Magic or Partition It without the loss of any existing programs or data. If you don't want to or can't repartition your hard drive, partitions larger than 1.9G can be accommodated using a utility program called Lesspace.com. For setup

and configuration details on running Q&A in Windows, click the *Setup Q&A to Run On Your New PC* link on the Home page at [www.quickanswer.com](http://www.quickanswer.com). Lesspace.com is downloadable free of charge from [www.quickanswer.com](http://www.quickanswer.com) or [www.qaug.com](http://www.qaug.com).

### Will Q&A for Windows run in Windows 95 and 98?

Yes, as long as it is installed on a 1.9G or smaller hard disk partition. Large hard drives can easily be partitioned using Partition Magic or Partition It without any loss of current programs or data. (Lesspace.com is not applicable to Q&A for Windows.) More details are in the August 1998 issue of *The Quick Answer*.

### Will Q&A run on today's fast Pentium PCs?

Yes. All versions of Q&A will run on the fastest Pentium PCs. With Q&A 5.0 for DOS only, you must apply the Speedfix patch available for download at [www.quickanswer.com](http://www.quickanswer.com) and [www.qaug.com](http://www.qaug.com). Details on Speedfix are in the September 1998 issue of *The Quick Answer*.

### When I try to install Q&A for DOS on my new PC, I get a "Divide Error" message. What's it mean?

You're attempting to install Q&A on a hard disk partition larger than 1.9G. The drive must be partitioned before installing Q&A or you must run Lesspace.com first.

### Why won't Q&A 5.0 run on my new computer?

You must apply the Speedfix patch to make Q&A 5.0 compatible with your Pentium processor. You can download the patch free of charge from [www.quickanswer.com](http://www.quickanswer.com) or [www.qaug.com](http://www.qaug.com).

### What are the main differences between the various versions of Q&A?

Q&A 4.0 for DOS is the basic version for most users. Q&A 5.0 for DOS has additional features that are mainly of interest to application developers needing to automate and add more power to Q&A. These additional features



## 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](mailto: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.

include the following:

- The ability to launch macros via database programming commands (@Macro)
- Customizable pop-up selection lists (Userselect, @Userselect)
- Customizable pop-up selection lists containing field values from external databases (XUserselect, @XUserselect, XUserselectR, @XUserselectR)
- Customizable pop-up message boxes (@Msgbox) and Yes/No dialog boxes (@Askuser)
- The ability to post in real time to a record in another database, as in a sales and inventory application (XPost, XPostR)
- The ability to run a second copy of Q&A from a database record and automatically be returned to the original record when the second copy is exited
- The ability to interface with external programs such as the Microsoft Office family
- Programmable sounds (@Play) and programmable database field color changes (@Color)

In Q&A for DOS 4.0 and 5.0, printer selection (available printer drivers) is limited, though the basic features of most laser, inkjet and dot matrix printers are supported. (Modern inkjet printers can be problematic for all but the most basic printing tasks.) Q&A for Windows works with all printers (assuming the correct Windows printer driver has been installed) but lacks four features available in Q&A for DOS: *Crosstab reports*, *Macros* (including Custom Menus), *Posting*, and *duplicate record removal*.

Q&A for Windows includes a macro-*like* feature called *scripts* for running canned searches, reports, mass updates and the like, but they cannot perform actions such as opening a database or running a mail-merge.

### Is Q&A networkable?

All versions of Q&A are networkable on, for example, Windows 95/98, Novell, and Lantastic networks. All versions of Q&A will also work on Windows NT networks with the following provisos:

- All program and database files must reside on a 1.9G or smaller FAT partition.
- If using Q&A for Windows, it must be installed and/or run from Windows 95 or 98 workstations. (It will not run properly on an NT Workstation.)
- On peer-to-peer networks, the sharing mode for shared databases must be set to “Allow” rather than “Automatic” (File / Design a file / Secure a file / Declare Sharing Mode).

### What is the “Q&A Network Pack” and how do I use it to make Q&A available to more users?

The Q&A Network Pack converts Q&A from a single-user version to a multi-user version. (You must own a single-user version of Q&A and apply the Network Pack to it.) Each Network Pack permits three *additional* users to run Q&A concurrently. Each additional pack adds another three users (for a total of 7, 10, 13 and so on). If you own the Network Pack, you are entitled to run the legal number copies of Q&A either by installing Q&A on a network server or by installing an individual copy of Q&A on each workstation.

### Why won't Q&A for DOS print to my network printer?

On the workstation on which Q&A is installed, the network printer must be set to “Capture” a printer port such as LPT2 or LPT3. (This is done in Windows / Control Panel / Printer Properties / Details tab.) Q&A must then be set to print to that particular printer on that captured port. (This is done in Q&A via Utilities / Install Printer.)

### Can I upgrade my old version of Q&A (2.0 or 3.0) to a newer version without losing my data?

Yes. If you're upgrading to Q&A for DOS 4.0 or Q&A for Windows, just make sure you have a recent backup of your databases, then open them in the new version. Q&A will automatically update them with no loss of data. If you're upgrading from any version of Q&A for DOS to Q&A 5.0 for DOS, you must take additional steps prior opening your databases in Q&A 5.0 to ensure your old data is 100% healthy. These steps are easy to perform. See the link, *How to Upgrade from Q&A 4.0 to 5.0* on the Home page at [www.quickanswer.com](http://www.quickanswer.com). (Similar instructions are available at [www.qaug.com](http://www.qaug.com).) Follow the steps, and all your old databases will work fine in Q&A 5.0.

### Can I use Q&A for DOS and Q&A for Windows interchangeably?

Yes. The same Q&A databases can be used in both Q&A 4.0 or 5.0 for DOS and Q&A for Windows. This gives you the best of both worlds—all of Q&A DOS' database features plus the Windows environment with full printer support. You'll also get Q&A for Windows' handy Free-Form report module and powerful WYSIWYG word processor and form and label designer. An *interoperability* update is required to use your databases in both the DOS and Windows versions of Q&A. The update for Q&A 4.0 for DOS (qaup.exe) is available at [www.quickanswer.com](http://www.quickanswer.com) and [www.qaug.com](http://www.qaug.com). For Q&A 5.0 for DOS, the update is included in the installation disks. (See the README.WIN file.)

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# Print Windows Documents with Your Q&A Merge Letters

TOM MARCELLUS

Did you know that the @Shell command works in Q&A Write? Yep—a little fact that lets you perform some rather amazing printing feats.



If you use merge letters to send sales information, quotations or the like to your clients or prospects, chances are you usually enclose some preprinted items such as a price sheet or product information insert.

If you know the trick, *you can have Q&A print these enclosures right along with your merge letter.* That's right, you simply press F2, F10 as usual, and Q&A prints *everything*. This means you don't have to use a separate program to print your enclosures, or maintain stocks of preprinted literature that always seem to need revision right after the print shop delivers them.

The technique I'll show you works on any printer that supports PCL (printer control language)—most lasers and inkjets do—and will automatically print your selection of Windows documents (the enclosures) when you print a Q&A merge letter in the usual way. (You don't have to run Q&A in Windows for this to work.)

Q&A will print the Windows document(s) first, followed by the merge letter(s), which won't create a collation problem if you print only one or a few merge letters at a time. (This is *not* for big merge-printing jobs.)

## Prepping your Windows docs

By "Windows documents," I mean documents created in a Windows program such as Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, PageMaker, Corel, or Adobe Acrobat, to name just a few. The documents can be as graphics-rich, as complex, and as many pages as necessary. If you can print a document from the Windows program in which it was created, chances are you'll be able to print it from Q&A as well. Follow these steps to prepare a Windows document for printing in Q&A:

1. Create the document in a Windows program, or open an existing document in the Windows program in which it was created.
2. Select File / Print to display the Print dialog box.
3. Select the same printer you'll be using to print this document with your Q&A merge letter.
4. Look for a *Print to File* checkbox. Click on it, then click OK.

5. The program will prompt you for a filename for the document, and might propose a .prn filename extension. (.prn is a common extension for a file you can print to a printer from the DOS command line.)

6. Choose a directory and name for the document, then click OK. (You might want to save all your .prn documents to the same directory. This way they'll be easy to locate. In Windows 95/98 you can assign a long filename to the document, then use its DOS abbreviation when specifying it in your Q&A Write merge document.)

## Testing the output

To test print the Windows .prn document, go any DOS command prompt and enter the following command, substituting your own path, filename, and printer port. (If the document has a long filename, see below.):

```
copy /b c:\qa\prnfiles\prices.prn lpt1
```

The document should emerge from the printer looking the same as it does when you print it in the program that created it. If the printer chokes or you receive a print-related error message, see the sidebar, "When Print Spooling Helps" on the next page.

## The Q&A Write merge letter

Next, open your merge letter (or create it) in Q&A Write. It must be a document in which a merge database has been specified on the Print Options screen. For a laser printer, in the header or footer or at the end of the document, type the following lines:

```
<-*v1T
*PG {@Shell("copy /b g:\pdf\y2k\9-0399.prn lpt1")}*
*PG {@Shell("copy /b g:\pdf\y2k\9a-0399.prn lpt1")}*
<-*v0T
```

If you're using an inkjet printer, see the sidebar, "For Inkjets (and Lasers, Too)" on the next page.

All printing between the <-\*v1T and <-\*v0T commands is made invisible. This prevents the "0" return code that @Shell generates from appearing in the output. (Type the <- escape printer control code character by pressing Alt-F10, then holding down the Alt key while pressing 27 on the numeric keypad.)

The two @Shell commands in the above example print documents named 9-0399.prn and 9a-0399.prn (in the

g:\pdf\y2k\ subdirectory) to the printer attached to LPT1. Substitute your own path(s), filename(s), and/or printer port. Use one @Shell command for each Windows document to print with the merge letter.

If you're printing a document with a long Windows filename, use its DOS abbreviation in the @Shell statement. For example, if the Windows filename is *Price Updates 4-99.prn*, the DOS filename abbreviation should be *priceu~1.prn* (the first six characters excluding any spaces, then "~1" followed by the ".prn" filename extension

When you've got everything in place, press F2 and F10, select a database record to merge print, then press F10 to continue. The Windows document(s) should print, followed by your merge letter.

I like this approach because it saves having to print enclosure-type documents in advance. I print only what I need. When the information in any of my enclosures needs to be updated, I simply edit the document in the Windows program and reprint it to the same .prn file.

### Choose your Windows docs at print time

You can have the option of choosing, on-the-fly, which Windows documents, if any, to print with a merge letter.

Suppose you have a selection of 10 Windows documents, one or more of which you might want to enclose with a merge letter. For each such document, create a corresponding Q&A document that contains only the @Shell command to print it, along with the pair of printer control codes shown earlier.

This way, when it comes time to print the merge letter, you can use the F8-Options / Document / Insert command to insert the Q&A documents containing the commands to print the particular Windows documents you want to enclose with the letter.

Unfortunately, this technique works only with laser printers since you can't *insert* a document in a footer.

### Print your Windows docs from a database

You can use similarly structured @Shell commands to print your frequently-used Windows documents from a one-record Q&A 5.0 database. (Mine is named WINPRN.DTF, and it's included in the download file for Online Edition subscribers.)

You can place the document filenames (even long Windows filenames) on a Userselect list, and write a program like the following (for a PrintFile field) to auto-print the selected document:

```
< PrintFile = @Userselect("Prospect Intro.prn,Tech
Update.prn,Payment Terms.prn,Widget Flier.prn,Thingamajig
Flier.prn,Gizmos Flier.prn,Our New Location.prn,Wholesale
Prices.prn,Retail Price List.prn");

If PrintFile <> "" Then {
PrintFile = @Replace(PrintFile, " ", "");

If @Len(PrintFile) > 12 Then
PrintFile = @Left(PrintFile, 6) + "~1.prn lpt1"
else PrintFile = PrintFile + " lpt1";

@Msg(@Shell("copy /b c:\qa\prnfiles\" + PrintFile));
@Msg(PrintFile + " sent to printer.") }
```

## When Print Spooling Helps

When you print a document in a Windows program, Windows spools it to disk and feeds it to the printer in the background. This frees the program (and you) from having to wait for the printer so you can get on with life.

Windows will also spool DOS print jobs, and you might get the best results when printing Windows documents from Q&A if this feature is turned on. (Don't change anything if your Windows documents are printing okay in Q&A.)

To check for DOS print spooling, click Start / Settings / Printers. Right-click on your printer, then click Properties. Click the Details tab, then click Port Settings. *Spool MS-DOS Print Jobs* should be checked.

This program accommodates long Windows filenames with spaces (converting them to their DOS abbreviations) as well as standard 8-dot-3 DOS filenames. Accordingly, if you select *Retail Price List.prn*, the program will convert it to *retail~1.prn* before sending it to the printer via the @Shell copy command.

If you want to use this method to print, say, 10 copies of a Windows document at a crack, set the number of copies to 10 in the Windows program's Print dialog box when you generate the .prn file.

### Printing an enclosures group

If you need to print *several* enclosures with each merge letter, you can call a DOS batch file to do the job instead of having a slew of @Shell commands in your document. At Marble Publications, we use the following @Shell

*Concludes on page 12*

## For Inkjets (and Lasers, too)

The <-\*v1T and <-\*v0T on/off suppress codes won't work with most inkjet printers. You'll need a different method to hide the @Shell return code. (This method can be used with lasers, too.) *Simply place the @Shell command on a footer line that's outside the bottom margin.* That is, if the document's bottom margin is set to 6 lines at the Define Page screen, set it to 7 lines temporarily.

Then, on the document screen, press F8 / Layout / Edit Header, and place the @Shell command on the last (7th) footer line, then reset the bottom margin to 6. For *n* @Shell commands (to print *n* Windows documents), increase the bottom margin temporarily by *n*, add your @Shell commands to the last *n* footer lines, then reset the bottom margin to the usual number.

# Date Errors Uncovered In QA 4.0 for DOS

ALEC MULVEY



**R**ECENTLY I encountered two problems with dates in Q&A 4.0 for DOS that may be related. They appear only in certain circumstances and disappear if good practice is followed—so don't panic! First, I'll describe the problems, then the conditions under which they appear, followed by the remedy.

The first problem is reports incorrectly sorted by date. That is, if the records are sorted on a date field, the output will be chronologically incorrect. The report might look okay at first glance, but its sort order isn't right.

The second problem has to do with converting date formats. If you convert to global date format number 1, 5, 9, 11, 14, 16, 19 or 20, then any "ambiguous" dates (where the day of the month is less than 13) will have the day and month reversed, so that the 2nd of November, for example, becomes the 11th of February.

So far, I've seen both these problems only with Q&A 4.0 databases that:

1. Use a "European" date format (day/month/year);
2. Use a two-digit year format (effectively, global date formats 4, 8 and 17);
3. Have not been mass updated recently.

The first problem might be merely an irritation. The first time I encountered this was at a client. I was performing a Y2K audit and found reports with derived columns that seemed to do pointless calculations on date fields. On questioning the client (who prefers to remain anonymous!), he explained that the calculations (converting the date to a number, then multiplying it by 1) was to produce a column on which he could perform an accurate date sort. I applauded his resourcefulness, if not his confidence in Q&A!

The second problem, though, is potentially disastrous. Once an "American-style" date format is adopted, saving any record "seals in" the incorrect date and it's there for good. The most worrisome aspect of this is that the error is "invisible." You simply wouldn't notice that the sale made on the 3rd of April was really made on the 4th of March. The consequences of a wrongly-completed tax return do not bear thinking about.

## What's the solution?

The solution is pretty simple, actually. First of all, no one should still be using a two-digit-year global date format.

They are not year-2000 compliant. (The fact that you *can* use them renders Q&A non-Y2K compliant in the absolute sense). Secondly, you should regularly backup, recover, and mass update your databases. This is good preventative medicine to keep your databases healthy. It's the mass update that rewrites the data and seems to overcome this date problem. There's no need to type anything in the Retrieve or Update Specs when mass updating, just leave them blank.

## Who is affected?

As far as I can tell at this point, the only affected users are those with Q&A 4.0 who use the "European" style date formats that put the day before the month, who use date formats 4, 8 or 17, and who have not mass updated their database recently. I had no trouble trawling through my archives and finding QA 4.0 databases from different clients with each of these three troublesome formats and replicating the problem. Tom Marcellus confirmed that an affected Q&A 4.0 database I sent him behaves the same. So, although the problem may be caused by *entering* the data using the English (International) release of Q&A, it can still be seen by viewing the data in the US release.

## Help Wanted

I would like to have conducted tests on QA 5.0 databases, but I can't find one that has a two-digit year date format and has not been mass updated. I don't have test data for Q&A for Windows databases either. Colleagues in the US have conducted limited tests that have so far failed to show the problem there. It might be confined to just Euro date formats which tend not to be used in the US.

Here's where you can help: Check your databases, perhaps old backups, and let me know what you find. If this problem affects US dates in QA 4.0, or any dates in QA 5.0 or QA for Windows, it's important that people know about it. So please send an email message to me at [alec@keywordtraining.com](mailto:alec@keywordtraining.com). (If you don't have email facilities, send a fax to *The Quick Answer* at 949-722-8127.)

Alec Mulvey owns Keyword Training & Consultancy based in Ascot, near London, England. Alec has been building Q&A applications and training on Q&A for nine years, and is the current president of the (Inter)National Q&A User Group. Keyword Training is also the UK distributor for the International English edition of Q&A (the "Definitive Edition" CD-ROM) and also John Dow's Utilities. Fax +44-1344-884-111, [alec@keywordtraining.com](mailto:alec@keywordtraining.com), <http://www.keywordtraining.com>.

# Word Mail Merge. . .continued from page 3

1. Start Word and display a new blank document (*File / New*) if one isn't already displayed.
2. Click *Tools / Mail Merge* to start the Mail Merge Helper.
3. Click *1 - Main Document / Create / Form Letters / Active Window*. This makes the current blank document the merge document.
4. Click *2 - Data Source / Get Data / Open Data Source*.
5. In the Open Data Source dialog box, pull down the *Files of Type* list and select *dBase Files (\*.dbf)*.
6. Navigate to where you saved your *Export90.dbf* file, select it, and click *Open*.
7. In the Confirm Data Source dialog box, select *dBase Files via ODBC (\*.dbf)* and click *OK*.

If you run into an error message here, it means the dBase ODBC (Open Database Connectivity) driver isn't installed. All versions of Word and Office come with this driver, but not all install it by default. For the standalone Word 97 and Office 97 Small Business editions, you'll need to run the data access utility on the Microsoft CD. The path on the CD is `\Valupack\Dataacc\Dataacc.exe`. For Microsoft Home Essentials 98, the path is `\MSWord\Valupack\Dataacc\Dataacc.exe`.

8. To add your merge fields, click *Edit Main Document*.
9. A special merge toolbar is now available with an *Insert Merge Field* button. Click on it and insert your merge fields in the document one at a time. (The field names might be a bit different due to dBase conventions.)
10. When you're done inserting fields, you can click the "ABC" button on the merge toolbar to see the first record's data. The arrow buttons to the right of it move you from record to record.

Now's the time to compose your letter and polish off the document. You can insert the same merge fields more than once anywhere in the document. When you're done, save the document to a filename such as *Export90.doc*. Word will save the data source link along with it, but not the data itself. Whenever you open this document, Word will read-in your updated dBase file.

Now, when you need to print your "Haven't-heard-from-you-lately" merge letters, here's all you have to do:

1. Run your *Last Order 90 Export* macro in Q&A.

2. Open your *Export90.doc* in Word.
3. Click the *Merge to Printer* button on the Merge toolbar.

It's as easy as running the same mail merge in Q&A, but you have a full-featured word processor that supports all your printer's advanced capabilities and all your fonts.

If you do a lot of mail merging and use Q&A 5.0, you could create a little application that prompts you for the database to use along with the records and fields to include in the export file. This way, with a few mouse clicks you'd not only be ready to run any merge printing job, the application could even start Word, auto-load your merge document, and send it to the printer for you!

Tom Marcellus is editor of *The Quick Answer*.

## Other MS Word Options

**Merge field formatting**—You can apply custom-formats to merge fields that contain dates, money, etc. Click *Help / Microsoft Word Help / Apply formatting* in Word 97. Click *Help / Answer Wizard*, and search on "merge fields" in Word 95.

**Envelopes and labels**—While the same data source (the dBase file) is still available, you can easily print matching envelopes or mailing labels for your freshly-printed merge letters. Word comes with a variety of predesigned envelope and label templates, and will even print your return address (and company logo) on plain envelopes along with the addressee's Postal bar code for 10-digit ZIP Codes.

**Programmable fields**—Word has special *Word Field* options. For example, the *If...Then...Else* option lets you specify text to insert if the data from a merged field meets or doesn't meet the condition you specify. The *Skip Record If...* option lets you tell Word when *not* to print an individual merge letter. There's also a *Fill-In* option that makes Word prompt you for the text to insert just before printing each letter. For any of these options, click the *Insert Word Field* button adjacent to the *Insert Merge Field* button.

**Retrieve and sort**—Word's Mail Merge Helper includes *Query Options*—the equivalent of Q&A's Retrieve and Sort Specs. Here you can specify parameters to filter your records and tell Word the order in which to print them. Conceivably, you could pass your entire Q&A database to Word via a dBase file, and do all your record selection and sorting in Word. This way, just one Q&A macro that exports all the records and potential merge fields could accommodate a host of Word merge-printing tasks.

## Print Win Docs. . .continued from page 9

command to call Y2KPRN.BAT, which prints a series of 12 Acrobat documents (generated from the *The Quick Answer* PageMaker files) that go into our *Q&A Year-2000 Pack*:

```
*PG {@Shell("d:\qa\y2kprn.bat")}*      (in the document)
copy /b g:\pdf\y2k\1-0496.prn lpt1      (Y2KPRN.BAT)
copy /b g:\pdf\y2k\2-0395.prn lpt1
etc... for all 12 documents
```

### Conditional enclosure printing

You can use fields in the database to specify which enclosure(s) to print with a person's or company's merge letter. Here's an example. Suppose each customer in your database has an "R" or "W" in a **Type** field to signify whether they're a retail or wholesale customer. If your retail and wholesale price lists are in *PricesR.prn* and *PricesW.prn* files, you could use a command like this in your merge document to print the correct price list with each merge letter:

```
*PG {@Shell("copy /b c:\prnfiles\Prices" + Type + ".prn lpt1")}*
```

Tom Marcellus is editor of *The Quick Answer*

## Q&A on the Web. . .continued from page 5

record(s) are transmitted to HQ, then automatically or manually applied to the database from there.

There are various approaches in between these two examples. Just about any security and data validation that you can have in a Q&A database can be incorporated into Web applications like these.

### What's next?

This isn't the place to get into JavaScript, PERL, and other Web programming tools. We know Q&A—and we know the Web. If you would like data from your Q&A databases (or the databases themselves) available on a Web site, feel free to contact us here at *The Quick Answer* for assistance. We can help you with the specific Q&A and Web elements you need to make your data available online, or work with you to create a complete interactive Q&A-based Web application. You don't need to know anything about Web sites, and we can train your non-technical personnel to manage your site—and the data on it—effectively.

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