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DBF Files: Accessing from Macintosh

Revised: 2/5/91
Security: Everyone

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This article last reviewed: 20 November 1990

TOPIC -----

Several people in my department are interested in using their dBASEIII+ or Clipper data files in the normal DBF file format by both MS-DOS users and Macintosh users. I'm thinking of solutions like FoxBASE+/Mac, dBFast/Mac, or 4th Dimension with dB_Interface from CT-DATA.

Could you summarize all the possible solutions that we could implement? Some of these people are looking for solutions with the DBF files on a file server somewhere in the network. Others just want to take the DBF files and transfer them from a PC to a Macintosh. One of them is specifically interested in a HyperCard solution.

Are there any HyperCard externals available that make direct access to DBF files possible? Is there a similar feature like the dB_Interface with 4th Dimension, for Omnis 5 from Blyth Software?

DISCUSSION -----

We have a number of suggestions on how to access DBF files from a Macintosh.

The first solution is, as you mentioned, FoxBASE+/Mac. FoxBASE+/Mac Multi-User works together FoxBASE+/LAN to allow concurrent operation on a network that supports both MS-DOS and Macintosh users. Data on the network is available to both machines at the same time, and access and manipulation operations are done identically. If you want to transfer DBF files from a DOS machine to a Macintosh, conversion is required. The index files for FoxBASE+/Mac are different, however. The first time you use an index in FoxBASE+/Mac on a DBF file from a DOS machine, a new index file will be created.

HyperCard can also be used as a front end to DBF files. Nittany Development Group has a product called DBF-Access Tools for HyperCard. This is a set of XCMDs for HyperCard used to import and export data in a variety of different

ways to and from DBF files. This is not multi-user, nor does it update any of the DBF index files. If data was exported from HyperCard to the DBF file, and you wanted to use dBASEIII PLUS with this DBF file again, you would need to reindex the database. Using DBF-Access Tools for HyperCard, the data in a DBF file could easily be read into HyperCard and manipulated.

Another HyperCard approach is a product called DashBoard from Symmetry. With DashBoard you can again read and write to DBF files. It updates the indexes of dBASE III files. Other applications, like FoxBASE or Clipper, will not have their indexes updated. This product is currently in beta form.

4th Dimension can access DBF files by using dBinterface Rapid from CTDATA. This is a set of externals for 4th Dimension that does high-speed, data conversion. Use it to move data between DBF files and 4th Dimension and the dBASE format. CTDATA also has a product called dBinterface Interactive. This gives you index support for DBF files and record-by-record access. It supports shared access via any AFP-compatible network, though the dBASE-compatible database must support multi-user access.

DbFast/Mac from Bumblebee Software will also read DBF files. This is a dBASE language development environment. It is a single-user database.

Finally, you can use Omnis 5 from Blyth Software. Omnis can import and export data from DBF files. The DBF files cannot be accessed by more than one user at a time, though. You can create a transaction where you import data, manipulate it, and then export the data back out to the DBF file. When exporting data from Omnis to the DBF files, the indexes are not updated.

People looking for multi-user solutions using DOS machines and Macintoshes at the same time should look into FoxBASE+/Mac and 4th Dimension using dB_Interface from CTDATA. Converting data from DBF files on a DOS machine to a Macintosh is much easier, and you have quite a few options to choose from. The deciding point seems to be what application you want to run on the Macintosh.

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Tech Info Library Article Number:6515