

Smart Access

Solutions for Microsoft® Access® Developers

Dynamic Checklists

Christopher Weber



Users like to see the big picture, and often that includes items they've selected as well as what they *haven't* selected. Check boxes are interface widgets that meet these needs, but they can be cumbersome to maintain. Chris Weber shows us his technique for creating dynamically generated check box lists that don't require intervention by the developer when the possible selections change.

ONE of the downfalls of using check boxes and option groups is that the user interface needs to be updated (read “redone”) whenever the choices change. For example, check boxes used for a distribution list of departments that receive a memo would have to be updated whenever a department was added, deleted, or renamed. So, when I see an interface that uses option groups or check boxes, I see work down the road. The options invariably expand or the selections change. I'm grateful for the work, but I also take pride in the solutions I provide. I don't think the way to ensure my future employment is to create non-scalable interfaces that need reworking when my client's business changes.

The upside of option groups is that users see all the choices available, *and* they see what they've selected, *and* they see what they haven't selected. That's true, provided the option group is up-to-date—that is, implemented with the current selections in mind.

In every case where an option group is used, a combo box that dynamically provides the most current choices can replace option groups in your UI. Not only will it save you work down the road, it will save you space on your forms. The downside is that users need to be familiar with the contents to know what wasn't chosen. Alternatively, a single-select list box also provides the current choices and reveals both the selected and non-selected values.

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