

# Smart Access

Solutions for Microsoft® Access® Developers

## Improving Data Entry Feedback with Sound

Rebecca M. Riordan



Most applications use message boxes for providing reactive feedback, but they have some serious drawbacks in the “heads down” data entry environment. In this article, Rebecca Riordan demonstrates a technique that replaces message boxes with sound and status bar text messages.

**J**UST about every application needs to implement some type of reactive feedback. At the very least, you need to notify your users when a command fails; sometimes you need to reassure them that it has succeeded. Message boxes are the traditional mechanism for providing this feedback, but they have some drawbacks, particularly in a data entry environment where the user is unlikely to be looking at the screen.

What sort of problems? First, because message boxes always have a default button, they can be dismissed without the user even knowing they’re there. Any keystrokes other than Space or Enter are simply ignored by the message box, and many keys (Space, Enter, Escape, shortcut keys) make the message box disappear completely. This is a recipe for user confusion, as any touch-typist can confirm.

Second, even if the message box is seen by the user, it disappears as soon the user acknowledges it. Now, what was that message again? Which field had the problem?

Finally, because the message box interrupts the user, you must use it sparingly. For example, it wouldn’t be practical to display a message box after the user exits each field to confirm that the data is valid. Not only would that add an extra keystroke to each field, it would increase the chance that the user would dismiss an error notification without seeing it.

Many, if not most, developers sound a beep before they display a message box, particularly if the message box is being used to notify the user of an error.

*Continues on page 4*

### February 2004

Volume 12, Number 2

- 1 Improving Data Entry Feedback with Sound  
*Rebecca M. Riordan*
- 2 Editorial: Sounding Off  
*Peter Vogel*
- 6 Accessing Subforms  
*Rick Dobson*
- 11 Dealing with File Names  
*Bogdan Zamfir*
- 15 Access Answers: More Dragging Around and Cuing Banners  
*Doug Steele*
- 20 February 2004 Downloads

