

# Smart Access

Solutions for Microsoft® Access® Developers

## Dynamic Menus

George Hepworth



If you really love the switchboard menus created by the Access Switchboard menu, this article isn't for you. However, if you're one of those people who think "There has to be a better way," read on. George Hepworth takes you from design to implementation as he shows you how he creates an alternative to the switchboard.

**D**o you remember how excited you were the first time you discovered the Switchboard Wizard in Access? With your input, the wizard did all the heavy lifting to create a menu system to guide your users through the forms and reports in your brand-new application. The Switchboard Wizard helped put a professional-looking face on your databases with very little experience or expertise on your part. The Switchboard provided a central platform from which all of the functions in the database could be launched. As an organizing principle, the switchboard concept had some real advantages.

However, for me at least, the excitement was short-lived.

First, I discovered the Switchboard Wizard limited the number of buttons that I could use to eight per page. I soon discovered that I also had to use one of the eight buttons to close the database, which meant I could have no more than seven functional buttons on the main page. And, of course, adding a second page meant using another button to navigate to it, leaving only six functional buttons on the main page. Quite quickly, I ended up with multiple layers of menus—and lots of confusion on my users' part as they drilled down through all those layers and back up to move from function to function in the database.

To make matters worse, with switchboard-style navigation the forms tended to pop open one on top of the other—or on top of the switchboard menus. Not only was it cluttered, many users found it confusing and cumbersome. Users especially disliked having to click on a button to close one form in order to reveal the menu underneath it just so they could click another button (or series of buttons) to navigate to yet another menu where they could open another form or report. And, after a while, I just got tired of looking at the chunky, square switchboards themselves. They all began to look alike to me and they all shouted "Access Newbie."

To be fair, I have seen some interesting and attractive graphic features in

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