

Smart Access

Solutions for Microsoft® Access® Developers

Access Interfaces

User Configuration

Rebecca M. Riordan



DOWNLOAD

This month, Rebecca Riordan discusses the importance of giving your users control over fundamental UI elements such as fonts and colors. It's simple to do, and your users will love you for it.

ONE of the fundamental principles of user interface design, and perhaps the most important, is “Put the user in control.” Get it right, and users will be amazingly tolerant of the occasional infelicities in your design. Get it wrong, and it doesn't matter how beautiful your color schemes or elegant your graphic elements are—your system will be regarded as fundamentally broken.

Most of us work pretty hard to keep at least the illusion of having our users in control. We provide multiple paths through the application and multiple levels of undo. We're careful to prevent our applications from doing anything that might seem arbitrary or high-handed (you do *do* these things, right?). But developers hardly ever allow the user to control the most fundamental characteristics of the user interface: the fonts, colors, and graphic styles. And yet, as you'll see this month, doing so is (at least technically) a simple process.

The canonical method for providing user customization in Windows applications is, of course, the Windows Control Panel. Access provides partial support for Control Panel settings, but that support is problematic.

If you use the constants shown in the list that's included in the Download file, Access will update its UI colors when the user changes them in the Control Panel. This is great, as far as it goes. Unfortunately, that's not very far.

The first problem is that it's difficult to determine how to map the Control Panel components to the elements of a database application user interface. The `vbWindowBackground` is straightforward enough, but what color should the background of a textbox be? You can't simply pick something—`vbInfoBackground`, the background color of a `ToolTip`, for example—without

September 2004

Volume 12, Number 9

- 1 Access Interfaces:
User Configuration
Rebecca M. Riordan
- 6 Sending E-mail with Access
Rick Dobson
- 11 Access Traps for the
Naïve Developer
Garry Robinson
- 15 Access Answers:
Working All Day
Doug Steele
- 20 September 2004 Downloads

