

Provide end users with an easy way to build custom reports

Access Updates



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Application: Microsoft Access 97/2000

Even though Access contains many wizards designed to simplify creating basic objects, you'll find that many users are uncomfortable venturing beyond the forms you create as their interface to data. Unfortunately, this can place a burden on you to perform tasks that you may find to be a poor use of your time. Reporting is a perfect example. Just about every developer has worked with people who frequently ask for simple ad hoc reports, but who just can't learn how to design reports themselves.

Gladstone Inc.'s Access Report Wizard could be just what these users need. You're probably thinking, "Access already *has* a report wizard built into it." True, but Access' wizard is really designed more for you, the developer, than end users—the reports that it produces almost always need tweaking in Design view to get them into shape. ARW, on the other hand, gives users the power to create reports like the one shown in **Figure A** with a minimal amount of fuss. The wizard takes care of tasks that may seem mundane to developers, such as formatting controls, changing control widths to appropriately display data and adding sum calculations. However, such tasks can easily frustrate end users (and are often all that's needed to make them give up and place a call to you).

The interface is especially intuitive for users because most settings are made in place on a template that resembles the finished report. For example, **Figure B** shows the initial design screen. Field selections are made using dropdown lists and there's a placeholder for the report title. As you can see, you can also customize the column header labels, format the controls and insert a graphic logo. The report wizard also aids users in setting grouping levels, allowing them to set page breaks, record counts and repeating heading options all on one screen.

Criteria can easily be set using dropdown lists and isn't restricted to fields appearing on the report, but there's a maximum limit of five criteria fields. When a text field is used for selection criteria, you can choose the value that must be met from a list of the existing entries, and multiple selections can be made for a single criteria

| PID | Product Name | SID | Price | Qty. | Dis. |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-----|----------------|------------|-------------------------------------|
| Beverages ---- 12 records | | | | | |
| 39 | Chertruse verte | 18 | \$18.00 | 69 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 | Cheng | 1 | \$19.00 | 17 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 24 | Guaraná Fantástica | 10 | \$4.50 | 20 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 34 | Sasquatch Ale | 16 | \$14.00 | 111 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 35 | Steeleye Stout | 16 | \$18.00 | 20 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1 | Chai | 1 | \$18.00 | 39 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 38 | Côte de Blaye | 18 | \$263.50 | 17 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 43 | Ippoh Coffee | 20 | \$46.00 | 17 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 67 | Laughing Lumberjack Lager | 16 | \$14.00 | 52 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 70 | Outback Lager | 7 | \$15.00 | 15 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 75 | Röhnbräu Klosterbier | 12 | \$7.75 | 125 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 78 | Lakkelikööri | 23 | \$18.00 | 57 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | | \$37.98 | 559 | |
| Condiments ---- 12 records | | | | | |
| 15 | Genen Shoyu | 6 | \$15.50 | 39 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8 | Northwoods Cranberry Sauce | 3 | \$40.00 | 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Figure A: Gladstone Inc.'s Access Report Wizard empowers users to create highly-formatted reports without the stress of working in Design view.

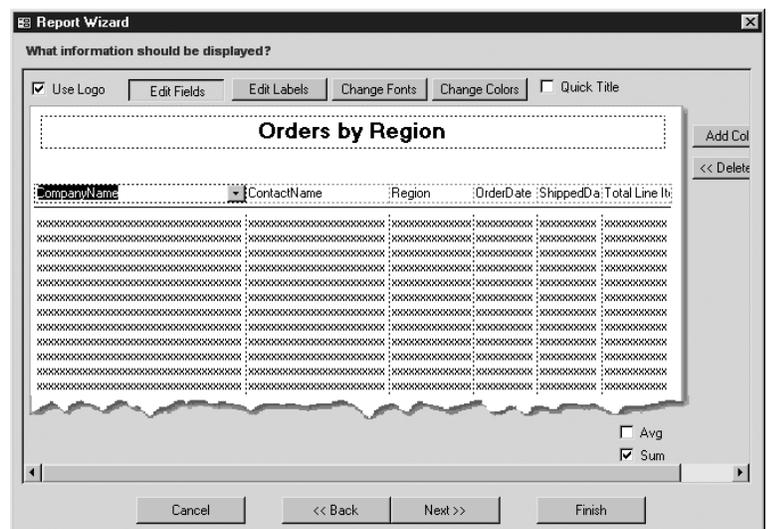


Figure B: The wizard is ideal for users because the design layout closely resembles the finished product.

field. One drawback is that you can't specify OR criteria (we also couldn't find a way in the wizard to eliminate extra criteria fields that were accidentally added). However, one promising feature is the Quick Filter option, which sets the criteria as a parameter query.

The wizard also allows you to sort on up to five fields, choose the page orientation and apply row formatting. Once a report is created, the wizard maintains the specs for later modifications. In addition to creating tabular reports, the wizard lets you build mailing label reports.

Of course, you won't completely eliminate the need for custom reports with the wizard, and if tabular reports aren't sufficient for your users' needs, the wizard may seem too limited. However, you're likely to find that many users will take to the Access Report Wizard, since it does eliminate many of the report design steps

that can be a pain to implement. Access' built-in Report Wizard may provide more layout options, but significantly more work is required to get the report design to its finished state.

For pricing information and to see firsthand what options are available through the Access Report Wizard, you can download a demo from www.gladstone-inc.com/arw/default.asp. The demo doesn't allow you to access the administrative aspect of the wizard or to save reports created with it. However, the demo does let you walk through the wizard's screens and explore the full range of available options. *