

# Re: I need some expert advice on database design

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- *From:* "jpwgh via AccessMonster.com" <[u39688@uwe](mailto:u39688@uwe)>
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Thank you for taking the time to listen to me and for your feedback. I came into this project 4–5 months after it started due to staff turnover. There have been frequent meetings along the way to discuss our requirements, workflow etc. My concerns aren't with design or concept issues. I expect those type of issues. Like, he didn't really understand what we were saying or we didn't understand what he was asking. Or when you actually test something and see it, you find out it doesn't work exactly how you expected. I expect that.

I also understand there are a variety of ways to accomplish the same task. I also know getting a programmer to criticize another programmer may be like getting a doctor to criticize another doctor. It is a touchy thing. Just because a user didn't get what they wanted doesn't necessarily mean there was a problem with the programmer. In this case I feel there are serious problems with his programming skills. If I am wrong about this, please let me know.

There are examples where it looks like he used the "I wonder what this does" approach. The first two items in the code for the first form are:

```
Private Sub Command 31 Click()  
End Sub  
Private Sub Command 31 Enter()  
End Sub
```

That's it. No actual code to go with it.

There is also code for a command button for a word application and one for auto dialer. Both set up using the wizard. We have no use for either. And none of these command buttons are actually on the form.

There is another form with 33 command buttons in the code. This particular form only has two command buttons. Only one is controlled by code. The other is controlled by a macro. It looks like this code was copied from somewhere else since it references forms and queries that are not in our database and we have no reason to use. Again, none of these command buttons are even on the form. Looks like he broker a number of the commandments.

He actually had the following set up as a macro, but I converted it to code.

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I have never used SendKeys and don't understand what they do. I never bothered to learn about them since everyone says don't use them. What is he trying to do here?

```
DoCmd.SetWarnings False
' % alt (t)ools (d)atabase utilities (c)ompact database
SendKeys "%tdc", False
```

Part of me thinks the reason it has been taking so long, is his lack of skills. We do use a lot of forms and collect a lot of information, but other than that, I don't think our requirements are that complicated. What we got so far from him, should not have taken this long. Because of what I do know about programming, I don't have any confidence about anything else he does, especially things I don't know anything about.

Thank you. You have given me some good information. When I meet with management I will suggest we look at the specs from this project. If I am correct about his programming skills, I need to convince management that it is a serious problem and not just me.

Larry Daugherty wrote:

From what you report, you may have just cause for concern...

Anyone who programs using Access's "Macros" as opposed to VBA is highly suspect as a professional Access developer. Professional Access Developers implement their designs using VBA to code just about everything (depending on the version of Access there may be justification for a few, very few, Macros). They use VBA from the start. They don't program using Macros and then convert to VBA later. Complex programs can develop mysterious bugs. VBA provides a rich debugging environment. Macros are difficult and sometimes impossible to debug.

From February to January is a calendar year. If there has been full time development effort going on then you folks must have some pretty hefty requirements! That must cover several separable applications or chunks of functionality. There must be some prototypes out and running by now; at least for evaluation. Maybe replacing the applications that went before.

Has anyone been working diligently with your developer in the role of analyst to help her or him really understand the requirements and workflows? What Specifications have been developed between the developer and yourselves that you have both signed as essentially the "contract" for the work being done? No matter how far along you think you are in the project you need the specifications: Problem Statement, Product Specification and Functional Specification. Those documents

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are required to know that management, developer and all interested parties really know the goal and when it has been achieved. They are required before a Preliminary Design and Project Plan and Estimate can be completed.

One absolute test of basic competence in developing with Access is familiarity and proficiency in splitting the application into Front End and Back End components and knowing several reasons why that is a good thing to do. A competent developer can perform the actual splitting (with or without the supplied tools) in under 5 minutes. Make sure that you have copied the current application to a safe backup area before you brace the developer with actually doing it. If s/he is not familiar with the process the application could get screwed up. Backup first! If you're concerned with demonstrating misrepresentation or even fraud on the part of the developer then that whole test might be carried out in the presence of yourself and one or more senior managers in the office of a senior manager.

Another hallmark of a good developer is knowledge of Relational theory. It is absolutely, positively impossible to produce good schema without understanding the theory and practice of relational design. The rule of thumb is to normalize one's data unless there is a good reason not to do so on a case by case basis. Just so that you'll have some understanding, visit

[www.mvps.org/access](http://www.mvps.org/access) and look for the "10 Commandments of Relational Databases".

Keep an open mind. With one client I was asked to come on site and overhaul and enhance all of their Access applications. There were quite a few. With one exception, they were all enhanced and delivered to rave reviews. That one balky project never did get totally finished. The primary customer for that application was insecure and balky and would not communicate. The parts of that project that were defined by others were well done and quickly done. Her part never got defined and never got done. The difference in the outcomes was directly related to the difference in the quality of communication with the analysts. None were "Analysts"; they were all users of the applications in question.

Be aware that all is not lost regarding Macros and VBA. There is a facility within Access to convert Macros to VBA. Again, back up your complete application first. If the design was good then the conversion should bring you along the desired direction. My concern is that someone using Macros reflexively probably doesn't understand the capabilities of Access.

Some other things:

Your superior knowledge of the desired outcomes may have given you a huge leg up in producing your results.

You may have taken a different path to achieve the results you

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did. You may be comparing apples and oranges.

Good luck with your application,

HTH

I work for a non-profit organization. With the help of a grant, we hired a consultant to come in and design a database incorporating 3 divisions of our

[quoted text clipped – 24 lines]

Any suggestions/recommendations would be greatly appreciated.  
Thanks.

<http://www.accessmonster.com/Uwe/Forums.aspx/access-tablesdbdesign/200712/1>

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Message posted via <http://www.accessmonster.com>

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