ACCESS ‹‹‹‹‹‹

By Patricia Cox

Master Budget Project: The Challenge of Nulls

This month we will create a macro to run the queries and open the report for the Schedule of Cash Payments for the Direct Materials (DM) Budget. We will also put a button on the Reports Menu form that will run the macro. Finally, we will discuss the challenge with null values when trying to create totals on a report.

A Repeatable Process

The first thing we need to do is create a query to empty out the DM Cash Payments table before we run the queries. It's one thing to get a process to run once, but to make it run each budget period or with different database values requires emptying out the table and starting over each time.

Create a query using the DM Cash Payments table as the record source. Drag the asterisk (*) from the field list to the QBE grid. Change the query to a Delete query and save it as "Empty DM Cash Payments Table."

Next create a new macro (see Figure 1). As with previous macros we've created, the first thing you want to do is turn off the warnings by setting the SetWarnings action to "No." (To show the SetWarnings action in the dropdown menu, you

may need to click the Show All Actions button on the Design tab.) Next add actions to open the following queries:

Figure 1. Macro Actions
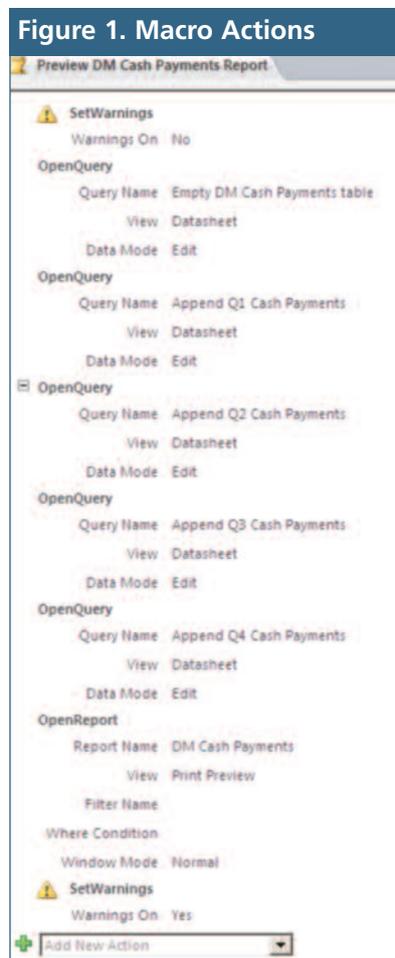
Empty DM Cash Payments Table, Append Q1 Cash Payments, Append Q2 Cash Payments, Append Q3 Cash Payments, and Append Q4 Cash Payments. These steps first empty the table and then load it with the DM Cash Payments data one quarter at a time. Next add an action to open the DM Cash Payments report and set the View to Print Preview. Finally, turn the warnings back on using SetWarnings again. That way when the macro is done, we will still get warnings as we develop queries.

Save the macro as "Preview DM Cash Payments Report."

Macro Button

Create a command button on the Reports Menu form that will run the new macro. Open the Reports Menu form in Design view. On the Design tab, select the command button in the Controls Group. Click on the form where you want the new button to appear. In the Command Button wizard, select the Run Macro action from the Miscellaneous category. Select the Preview DM Cash Payments Report. Add the text "DM Cash Payments" to the button, and click Finish. Always let Access name the but-

ton because it assigns a unique name automatically. As you can see in Figure 2, I also added a border around the field to enter the A/P Beginning Balance and the macro button.

Null Values

When a value isn't entered into a field, it's a null value. A null value isn't the same as a zero. In a report, Access has trouble adding fields that contain null values. In the DM Cash Payments report, Access yields a null when we try to add the fields in the Report footer or in the Total we create in the report detail (e.g., =[Q1]+[Q2]+[Q3]+[Q4]).

In this case, the easiest solution is to go into the design for the DM Cash Payments table and set the default value of the Q1 through Q4 fields to zero (0). When you run the queries in the macro, zeros will be entered into the fields instead of nulls.

The solution for null values isn't always that easy. It depends on how a table is populated with values or if you are getting null results in a query that a

Figure 2. Reports Menu

report is using. The Help function has a number of topics to address problems with nulls, so you might try searching on "null values in reports" if you have a similar situation with another database you're working on.

After you've changed, closed, and saved the table, test the macro. You should have zeros on the report where the nulls were previously, and the calculations should work.

Best Practice

I don't anticipate problems with nulls or change properties unless there's a reason. I research each case as it comes up. I take a minimalist approach as I work in

Access, using the KISS (Keep It So Simple) strategy. Build the minimum number of steps it takes to solve the problem. Many of the tables we have used don't have a default property value set for the number fields in them. I only change properties when there's a reason to change them. This keeps the database as simple as it can be, which is helpful because each database takes on a life of its own when you begin using it. Fewer changes to properties means that there are fewer areas to investigate when a new problem arises.

Next month, we'll begin to budget for indirect costs. **SF**

Patricia Cox has taught Excel and Access to management accounting students and other college majors and has consulted with local area businesses to create database reporting systems since 1998. She also is a member of IMA's Madison Chapter. To send Patricia a question to address in the Access column, e-mail her at kathrynmann@tds.net.