

VA FileMan 19 Brings Welcome New Features for Users, Programmers

by Ed Hinkle

Background

VA FileMan is a database-management system of computer routines written in ANSI Standard MUMPS. VA FileMan runs in an interactive dialogue for the continuous exchange of information and questions between a computer program and a user. VA FileMan is a central package within Kernel and is used by programmers and end users alike.

It can be used as a stand-alone database or as a set of application utilities. Either way, it defines, enters, and retrieves information from a set of computer-stored files, each of which is described by a data dictionary. Every VA FileMan file has a data dictionary. The data dictionary includes parameters within which users drive all input to and output from the files.

The data-dictionary listing is a printable report that shows the definition of the data elements of a file and also will describe the relationship with other files. Users and programmers alike use the data-dictionary listings.

VA FileMan is a public-domain software package developed and maintained by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and used by VA Medical Centers nationwide. Clinical, administrative, and business organizations also use the package here and abroad. There is an overview of VA FileMan in the "Focus on FileMan" column making its debut with this issue of *M Computing*.

Version 19 Improvements

VA FileMan version 19 has many enhancements over previous versions. User-oriented improvements include:

- **Screen Manager.** The Screen Manager allows developers to design input and display screens. The screen designer creates blocks of fields from a file or subfile, which then are linked together to create a form. Users are presented with a screen containing all the fields in a block. The user may navigate to the fields within the block by using the cursor keys or by up-arrow jumping to the field's caption. The user may edit the values of most field types by using the cursor keys to move to a location where characters may be inserted or deleted.
- **Screen Editor.** The Screen Editor, a second native editor for VA FileMan, is a simple screen-oriented text editor. After being presented with the text, users may use the cursor keys to edit.
- **Online Quick Reference Guides.** Users can get "help" screens within the Screen Editor and the Screen Manager.
- **Alternate Editor.** When editing word-processing fields within the Line Editor, users may now choose an alternate text editor.

New Database-Management and Programming Tools

- The Compare/Merge utility has been enhanced by the Indian Health Serv-

ice so that duplicate entries are easier to identify and resolve.

- The M syntax checker now has features of the 1990 MUMPS standard. With V. 19, DIM validates the syntax of extrinsic functions, parameter passing, commands such as NEW, the argumentless FOR, and incremental LOCK, and other new features supported under the standards.
- Users may now give the print report a more appropriate heading instead of the previously established default. The user will be prompted to enter a new header.
- All regular locks have been replaced in this version with incremental locks to preserve the effectiveness of locking by the application package that is calling VA FileMan.

Added Documentation with VA FileMan

The functions exported with VA FileMan are now more completely documented in the user manual. VA FileMan includes more than 450 pages of documentation and is available to M Technology Association members on magtape, and 5 1/4" or 3 1/2" disks for \$95. ❖

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