



A newsletter of developments at QuasarSystems

Issue 14 - December 1997

We'd like to use this forum to inform you of changes and enhancements we've made to our systems. We continue to improve the processing and feel of *R², The Reinsurance Resolution*.

R² User Group Meeting

On October 16, 1997, QuasarSystems, Inc. hosted its first *R²* User Group meeting. We were quite pleased with the unexpectedly large turnout (due to short notice) of 16 client representatives. As a result of this meeting, plans are underway for a two day meeting in 1998.

People attending the meeting were given an overview of our progress on a Windows version of the system. Jim Schoen has written an article in this newsletter summarizing our progress on this project.

Laura and Janet each led a session on Error Detection and Problem Solving. They used actual data and real problems to illustrate the methods they each use to figure out why policies are not processing as expected.

We gave the users an opportunity to meet without any QSI staff present, in order to facilitate more open discussion of issues and concerns the various companies might have. Since we weren't there, it's hard to tell you what went on. I can say that when we returned to the room the temperature was about ten degrees higher than when we left.

session was to give the Users a forum to raise any concerns about the system or the company. The biggest concern seemed to be that we are "understaffed" for the work we are doing.

Our strategy since we started has been to be as efficient as possible, provide excellent service and produce a quality product at a reasonable price. This requires talented and committed employees, state of the art equipment, and flexible management.

The result is customers who are happy with the results and the cost, but concerned that we don't have a lot of cross-training and duplication of responsibilities for coverage during vacations and business travel.

We hear you. We share these concerns. However, we don't anticipate any major changes in our strategy in the short term. I see our planned changes as gradual ones that will occur as we add staff and grow carefully over the next several years. I trust we will continue to satisfy your needs, now and in the future.

Concerns were expressed over our inability to solve many LAN related problems. Unfortunately, many of these problems arise from the LAN configuration and have nothing to do with *R²* itself, so we are powerless to solve them.

Others are related to our programs, but sometimes the symptoms make them appear to be LAN problems instead. More LAN knowledge on our staff might be of some help, but that would also tend to distract us from our primary function, which is providing and maintaining a system that processes reinsurance transactions.

We discussed the concept of an "ideal" User Group meeting. As a result of this discussion, we agreed that a two-day meeting on Thursday and Friday would be best. We want to avoid the beginning or end of the month as well as the beginning or end of a quarter.

Not surprising, everyone expressed an interest in getting as much information as possible, along with hands-on training. There was little interest in recreational outings. Socializing in the evenings and at meals has its value, but for the rest of the time our clients are "all business".

But seriously, the goal of this

Window on R^2 R^2 in Windows

We conceived the concept of R^2 nearly 10 years ago and with the years R^2 is maturing into a comprehensive blending of ideas from all of our clients. In 1988, Windows was still a dream and few companies used their PCs for much more than personal word processing and spreadsheets. Standard hard drives were 40 Megabytes and memory was measured in kilobytes (thousands) instead of megabytes (millions)

We made R^2 a file-driven system so that it could adapt to changes and varying needs without major programming changes. Of course, over the past ten years we have made many programming changes for thousands of requests from our clients.

R^2 consists of more than 40 general programs and another 40 client-specific programs. We have also written special programs for utility and conversions. All these programs share many common modules (units). When we change how a calculation is done in a single unit that change is then shared by many programs.

R^2 's next growth spurt is its evolution into Windows95 (NT).

We have started from a couple of self-imposed constraints:

- 1) It is most important that the system works as it should. To

our clients, appearance is much less important than function. The most important feature the system is that it does what it is supposed to do.

- 2) The Windows version should work consistently alongside the DOS version. We are doing this for our own benefit and yours. We intend to keep supporting the DOS version as long as even one client requires it. We would rather make updates to a single source code than try to keep two systems in sync.
- 3) The system should be easy to use and understand.
- 4) The system should work consistently on different platforms.

The Windows and DOS versions will work interchangeably. We can introduce windows versions of programs and they may sit alongside their equivalent DOS version. There is no need for file conversions to use the different versions. As R^2 continues its evolution, we will take advantage of even more of the Windows features.

Since R^2 is written in Turbo Pascal, it is a natural evolution to go to Borland Delphi (3.0). Most of the code can be used just as it is.

That is to say that we are able to compile the modules in Delphi. The major changes are to add the Windows functionality to the user interfaces. The modules that do calculations all convert to Delphi very easily. The programs that involve user interface (Data Entry and other file managers) need much more testing.

We currently have the following programs in alpha testing: the main menu, the transaction generators, data entry, session cards, valuation generators. We will keep you informed of our progress in this project.

Naming conventions

You will notice the following changes in names. Other than preprocessors and special programs, all programs begin with the characters "AN" which we used because we were called The Actuarial Network. The DOS versions will continue to use this convention. Windows programs will now instead begin with "QS" for Quasar*Systems. During the development stage, We have also added a "p" to the name prior to the period. For example, **anRE01.exe** is the main transaction generator. The windows equivalent of this is **qsRE01p.exe**.

Batch files that use **anre01** can be changed to use **qsre01p**. New windows applications that call

Window on R2 R2 in Windows

other programs will automatically use the Windows version of the program if it exists.

The Windows versions of the programs use the CF File shown below. They can use the CNF File, but you must specify the name as the third parameter. If you run the program with no parameters, the windows program will use the first valid CF Key it finds. A valid CF Key contains a region that exists and a company area that contains the Setup.cnf file and the input extract. The program will then prompt you for the CF key that you want to select and then for the company defined within that CF's directory.

CF File

Not directly related to windows programming, but introduced concurrently is our CF File. CF stands for Configuration file. Many of you are already aware of the CNF File that defines system configurations. The CNF file is an ascii file that you can edit using any text editor. You added lines to the CNF File as you needed them. The CF File is not an ascii file. To edit the CF File, you will use the same editor that you use for PH, TY, etc. With the CF File, all your available options are shown to you. You check the options that are appropriate.

As part of the process, we have

created a program that will read in your existing CNF File and create an entry in the CF File. The name of the entry is what the name of the CNF File was. For example, if you had ANREXX.CNF as your CNF File, you will have an entry in the CF File named ANREXX.CNF. Keep in mind that the CF keys may any twelve character names. They do not need to have the names that would have qualified as file names. For example, If you had a group of companies that were separated by Region, you could name the CF key, *Region1*, or *Canada*, or *Retro*.

With the windows programs we are introducing, we will allow you to choose the CF Key that you want to use and change CF Key if you want to.

We feel that there a number of advantages to using the CF File over the CNF File. (Windows and DOS programs can use either format).

- 1) If you are working on a company in Region1, you can switch to a company in Region2.
- 2) All the configuration options are available to you in an orderly format. With the CNF file, it is difficult to know all the options you have since entries can be put in any order.

3) You can use names that are more representative of what you intend. Actually, this is also true for the CNF File, but no one uses names other than the xxRExx.cnf type names.

Some of you may have only one company that you are using and hence are using only one CNF File. Others are using different CNF Files for each region and Retro.

The CF file should not be a major change from what you are currently doing. Generally the CNF or CF are set up when the system is initialized and then only rarely as you want to utilize new features.

We have been testing the concept for all of 1997.

Windows is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corp.

Our Favorite Recipes

One of the results of our User Group Meeting was the introduction of some of our clients to our heretofore unexplored culinary skills. Several people asked Laura for her recipe for the Brickle she made for our informal dinner party on Wednesday evening. We twisted her arm and she has revealed the secrets for general consumption. She also provided a recipe for her world famous (well, its popular around our office) Banana Bread.

Not to be outdone, I decided to offer my own contribution - a recipe for "trinities." This was passed on to me via CD Rom from a very talented musician of the Gypsy Swing genre. If you like them, I suggest you don't let anyone know. They will probably recognize your new diet as soon as you enter the room.

If you enjoy eclectic music, and are not familiar with Gypsy Swing, try visiting www.wail.com.

Look for more amazing recipes in future issues of *Q*².

Banana Bread:

(from Laura's family cookbook)

Ingredients:

1/3 cup shortening or margarine
2/3 cup sugar
2 slightly beaten eggs
1 tsp vanilla
1 3/4 cup flour
1 1/4 t. baking powder
1/2 t. baking soda
3/4 t. salt
1 cup (2 large) bananas, mashed
1/2 cup chopped nuts (optional)

Instructions:

Cream butter and sugar. Add eggs and vanilla. Mix in 1 cup flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Mix in bananas. Add remaining 3/4 cup flour and mix well. Pour into greased large loaf pan. Bake at 350° for 1 hour. For festive holiday version add one small jar of maraschino cherries and 2/3 cup chocolate chips.

(Note to our Canadian friends: these temperatures are Fahrenheit, do not try this in Celsius)

Brickle Crunch Cookies:

(from Laura's Mom)

Ingredients:

35+ Saltine Crackers
(about 1 sleeve)
2 sticks butter (NOT margarine)
1 cup sugar
6 oz (1 cup) chocolate chips
6 oz (1 cup) peanut butter chips

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 400°. Line a 10x15 cookie sheet with foil. Lay out crackers in single layer on sheet, packing tightly. In medium saucepan, melt butter, add sugar. Boil, stirring frequently for 2 to 3 minutes, until sugar is completely dissolved. Immediately pour mixture over crackers and bake for 7 minutes.

Remove from oven and immediately sprinkle chocolate and peanut butter chips on and spread evenly as they melt. (Optional: top with crushed nuts and/or coconut.) Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes. Then break into pieces.

Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Trinities:

(One of Doug's favorite recipes)

Ingredients:

Garlic Cloves (peeled)
Pickled Jalapeno peppers
Anchovies

Note: There apparently is an item called "tamed" jalapeno peppers on your grocery store shelf masquerading as hot peppers. Do not try to use these for trinities. We cannot be held accountable for the results if you do so.

Instructions:

Take a pickled pepper from the jar and slice the top off. Be careful not to cut yourself, as the blood will detract from the flavor of the final product. Clean out some of the seeds, if necessary. Insert one peeled clove of garlic into the pepper. Wrap the pepper with one anchovy strip. You can make these up one at a time and eat them, or make up a whole batch and entertain your friends. We recommend having plenty of cold beverages and maybe some bread and cheese as a chaser for the less hardy souls. Enjoy.





Questions and Answers

Q: *What happens to a UL policy when it enters the death benefit corridor?*

A: Last issue we talked about basic UL death benefit options A and B (level death benefit and level amount at risk, respectively). When the account value increases to the point that the policy enters the corridor, these two options no longer have any significance. At that point, the relationship between the death benefit and the account value is defined by the *corridor ratio*.

For R² to process correctly, the input extract needs to contain data in either of the following combinations: (Option A) the actual (corridor) death benefit and the actual account value; OR (Option B) the corridor risk amount and the actual account value. To avoid incorrect processing, if the corridor death benefit is put in the extract, the DB option should not be coded as "B". This would mean that we ignore the account value and use the entire death benefit, rather than the risk amount. If you cannot

provide information as described here, please contact us about alternate coding for corridor processing.

As in many other processing questions, the R² transaction generator has no problem with this special situation, provided the extract contains the appropriate data.

Q: *What is the "Special" field in the "Methods" box on the TY file used for?*

A: I guess you caught us on that one. The simple answer is "nothing." On a deeper level, the coding of this field does not affect any aspect of the system processing.

Q: *Why won't my car start in cold weather?*

A: You have got to be kidding, I can hardly keep my own car running, and you want me to help you with yours?

Q: *Why is the "Special" field on my screen, if it serves no known purpose?*

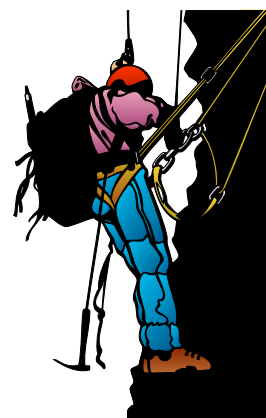
A: I'm glad you asked this question, since you could actually have asked a more meaningful question which I would have to give a valid answer to.

This field was intended to be used by one of our clients as a data indicator to pass into the R²TX files and then into their accounting extract. It was simple enough to add the field, but then the client decided not to go that

direction. Rather than spend time removing the field, we decided to leave it there. Who knows, someday someone else may need something similar, and we will be ready for them. As they say in field hockey, "no harm, no foul."

Q: *Why is there a picture of a technical mountain climber on this page?*

A: You would have to ask that. Maybe I like rock climbing. Possibly it is symbolic of the risks and dangers we all face on a daily basis as we perform our seemingly ordinary tasks. Perchance, I was too lazy to write any more answers or the next question was really tough and I chose to fill the space with a picture rather than answer it. Let me ask you one. Why is the sky blue? Better yet, if the new media are the fourth estate, what are the first, second, and third estates?



Thank you for your continued support and suggestions. We appreciate and welcome all your comments and questions. Please let us know if there are any topics you would like to see examined in greater detail.

For additional information on any option, you should first consult your documentation manual. We would be delighted to answer any questions you might have.

If you would like a back issue of Q² please give us a call. The main topics of past issues were:

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| Issue 1 - Multiple Life Processing | Issue 10 - Backups |
| Issue 2 - Retention Management | Issue 11 - Viewing Inforce Files |
| Issue 3 - Trailers, Help Screens and Policy Page Producer | Issue 12 - Extracting Test Data, Status Codes, Transaction Codes |
| Issue 4 - Report Generator and Retention Schedules | Issue 13 - Trailers |
| Issue 5 - Transaction Processing and Reinsurance Overrides | Issue 14 - R ² Windows |
| Issue 6 - Input Extracts | Issue 15 - What's in a footer? |
| Issue 7 - Schedule S | Issue 16 - Expanded Files |
| Issue 8 - Report Generator | Issue 17 - Retention Management, Reserves Q&A |
| Issue 9 - Year 2000 | Issue 18 - T\$POSrt.Idx, Trailers Q&A |
| | Issue 19 - Sorting Files |
| | Issue 20 - Testing Billing / Valuation Samples |

Wishing you a Happy and Safe Holiday Season!
From all of us at QuasarSystems



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