

# AIMS Tech Notes

by Scott Johnson, director of Angus Information Management Software



## From the home office in Saint Joseph, Mo. ...

Thanks to this larger issue of the *Angus Journal*, I have extra space; and since we're headed into the busy season for the Association and AIMS recordkeeping, I thought I would cover some "generic" topics this month, mainly geared toward new AIMS or new computer users. Of course, if you've been using AIMS for a while, this will be a good refresher.

First, some "quick tips." These are things to have in mind while using your computer.

- No one ever has blown up a computer by pressing a key or clicking on something about which they were unsure. So, in the words of Nike, "Just do it!" You can learn about your computer and the program you are using by experimenting with things you haven't tried.
- Right-click on things, and see what happens. By *right-click*, I mean using the right mouse button instead of the normal left mouse button. Programmers love to add functionality to a program by using a right-click. They usually add a shortcut to things you could do with a lot of left-clicks. The best example in AIMS is to right-click on any tattoo or tag. In virtually all cases, AIMS will bring up an animal-information window that provides quick access to key data about that animal. As a general rule, anything after the right-click will be a left-click after you are in the "special function."
- Similar to a right-click, try double-clicking. Another AIMS example is to double-click on the label (not the actual data field) for a user field, and change the text. The label could be "Pasture" instead of "User Field 1."
- There is often a difference between single clicks and double clicks; try a single first, if it doesn't work, double-click. This concept is more relevant to programs like Windows® Explorer, starting programs from the desktop, and surfing the Web with Internet Explorer or Netscape. It's better to single-click

first, and if nothing happens, double-click. If it only needed the single-click, the computer may "save" the second click until after the screen changes and use the second one for something you weren't expecting.

- Use the Help system in the program. The newer the program, the better the help system. The trick is to search on key words that identify your question. I'll explain Help later.
- Occasionally, a computer simply is tired. This sounds ridiculous, but in reality any computer running Windows occasionally needs to be restarted. To make a long story short, as you open and close various programs, parts of the memory do not get "released" for general use. After a while, the resources get limited, or at least "confused," and your computer will lock up. This is a notorious problem with the Windows operating system, but unless you want to switch to a competitor (yes, there are competitors to Windows), you're stuck with it. Simply close all the programs and click on Start, Shutdown, then Restart. Things should improve.

Those are some basic things to remember as you run your computer. Now, in the spirit of David Letterman's top-10 list, here are the "Top 10 Things You Ought to Know About Your Computer and AIMS."



### 10 What is a filename, and what does it mean?

In the old days, the operating system known as DOS only would allow filenames with eight characters — no spaces or special characters. At the end of the filename came a period, then a three-character extension. With the advent of Windows 95, we gained the ability to use long filenames. There's still a 250-character limit and some restrictions on punctuation.

A full filename still consists of two parts: the actual filename and the extension.

Although you could create a 250-character filename, it's best to limit them to around 20 characters so they will display well in various lists.

The extension is a necessity (but not a requirement) for the operating system to know how to use the file. It tells Windows with what program to open the file. If the extension is *.doc*, it is a Word file. If the extension is *.xls*, the file is an Excel spreadsheet. Normally, you don't have to worry about giving a filename its extension **if** you are saving the file when in the program. Word will save its files with *.doc*, and Excel, with *.xls* without your adding it.



### 9 How and why would you use two programs at the same time?

Windows got its name from the ability to have multiple "windows" open at one time with a different program running in each window. So don't be afraid to have AIMS running, then start other programs. Crystal Reports Writer (CRW) is a good example. By having more than one program running, you can switch back and forth to accomplish multiple tasks.

To run more than one program at a time, simply start the next one. You don't have to do anything with the current program; just leave it on the screen, click on the Start button, then Programs, etc., and find the program you want. If you typically start a new program with an icon on the desktop and you can't see it with the first program running, minimize the first window. To do this, notice the three icons in the top-right corner of any window. The left one minimizes; it is a dark bar at the bottom of the icon, representing the program's being minimized to its icon on the task bar next to the Start button. Once the window is minimized, or if it's "behind" another one, you can get back to it by clicking on its icon in the task bar.

The middle icon toggles between maximize and restore, depending on the current size of the window. This is hard to

describe, but if you just try it, you'll see what it does. The right icon closes the window, which usually closes the program, too.

Don't be afraid to run more than one program at a time, especially if they are related. Simply switch back and forth between them with the icons on the task bar.

A word of caution: Having too many programs open can be a problem, too, especially if you don't have much memory.



### **What version of the software are you using?**

There are some aspects of Windows that are fairly standard, and one of them is the way to determine the version of the software you are using. Simply click on the Help command, then About. The screen that opens will tell you what version of the software you are using. People who support programs (including our AIMS support staff) often will want to know or to confirm the version you are using to help track down

a problem. In the case of AIMS, you should be using version 2.0c to be current.

The Help, About screen also is a place where software programmers may put their names or other interesting features like pictures or games. (We haven't done anything like this ... yet.)



### **How do you find Windows Explorer, what is it for, and how do you use it?**

I highly recommend you learn more about Windows Explorer (go to Start, Programs, Windows Explorer). It is a file-management tool that will help you see, copy, move, rename and organize the files on your computer. It would take a whole column and a lot of screen shots to fully describe it. Use the Help system under Windows Explorer; it does a good job of explaining the program. (This is a good candidate for a program that runs while AIMS is running.)



### **How do you send, receive and find attachments with e-mail?**

If you're using e-mail, you've probably received an attachment. Chances are, your first attachment was a picture. In the case of pictures, you probably were able to double-click on the attachment icon, and the picture "magically" opened. In reality, Windows knew what program to start, based on the extension of the file, and everything worked fine.

In the case of AIMS files, however, you can't just open the attachment; it needs to be imported by AIMS first. The trick is to save it somewhere, because most e-mail programs don't separate the attachment when the message is received. Typically, you can right-click on the icon, and one of the pop-up options will be Save As. Navigate to the *c:\aims20\files* folder, and save the file with its original name. Then get into AIMS and import the file from that location.

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In the interest of space, refer to the March 2000 issue for an entire column about e-mail.



### 5 How do you send a file using HyperTerminal?

If you don't send your files on disk or by e-mail, there's another way to send them electronically. Although any modem program probably would work, the most common (and the default) program in Windows is HyperTerminal. I'll refer you to the Help file in AIMS for a comprehensive description of how to send the files.

The key element that many people miss is that, when you get connected and set up, you also have to send the specific file by using the commands Transfer, Send File. Be sure to tell the computer where the file is on **your** computer. You have to work fairly quickly since the communications software is on a timer, and it will hang up after about 30 seconds. Hint: If you use the default AIMS location when you save the file, the location will be `\aims20\files\`, then a filename like `W0123456.001`.



### 4 What is your e-mail program?

We often get support calls to help send e-mail, which is fine, but you need to know the answer to the basic question, "What program are you using?" This is easy to answer now that you've read No. 8.



### 3 How do you get help from the book or the Help files?

There are two absolute truths in the world of computers (at least for the sake of this column). One, no one makes enough backups of their data. Two, no one reads the manual. I'm just as guilty as anyone on both counts, so I can preach about this with confidence.

If you need help with a program, start in the obvious place — the Help system of the software you are using — no matter what software package you're running. Simply click on the Help command (it's always there). The options after clicking on Help may vary. You may see Contents, Index, Search or other commands, but if you try a few things, you will get into the Help system. As a general rule, the help usually is good, no matter what program you use. AIMS has a good help system, although it's

not as fancy as some other Windows programs.

If you are the type who prefers to read a printed manual, but you think there isn't one for AIMS, you didn't read the installation manual. There are instructions in there about how to print a 141-page manual from the CD-ROM using Adobe Acrobat, which also is on the CD. For more details, read my column in the June-July 2000 issue. You also can order a copy from us for \$20.



### 2 How do you get updated EPDs?

Although many animals get interim expected progeny differences (EPDs) that can change on a daily basis, the National Cattle Evaluation (NCE) is run only twice a year — in January and July. In those months you will want to get the new EPDs. A key point is that there are two files that need to be updated.

First, there are your animals, the ones with which you work every time you use AIMS. To get their EPDs, you need to send a request file. Create the file under File, Data, Export and use the EPD Request operation. After we get the request, we send you a file with updated EPDs that are imported into your AIMS system. The cost is \$15.

The other place to get updated EPDs is the National Sire Evaluation (NSE) under the Tools command. This is the feature where you can search the NSE database, just like the one on the Internet. The simplest way to get this is to download it from [www.angus.org/aims](http://www.angus.org/aims). The instructions are on the site, and the file is free. If you can't or don't want to get it from the Internet, you can request it from us for \$10.

Read "Tech Notes" in the June-July 2000 issue for more details.



### 1 How, when and why should you make a backup?

As mentioned in No. 3, we're all guilty of not making enough backups. Actually, it's not the volume of backups, it's the frequency and media that matter.

First of all, how to make backups. This is the easiest part. In AIMS, go to File, Backup, Save, and it will make a backup of the data. Of course, this doesn't address the issue of where the file is, but that's next.

You quickly can make a backup that is

saved on the hard disk, as was just described. It will be in the `\aims20\backup` folder. It's a good idea to back up on a frequent basis — like every time you finish working with AIMS. I also would suggest making a backup right before you do any type of import.

In addition to these quick backups, you also need to make backups that do not reside on the hard disk. When you get to the last screen of a backup, change the Save In field to your floppy drive (a:) and click the Save button. This will save you if your hard disk crashes.

Lastly, make a copy to a disk, and store it in a different location. That way, in the terrible event that your building is destroyed, you have a backup disk off-site. You also can send us a copy for this purpose, and we will check to verify the backup is viable.

By the way, you don't have to accept the default filename for the backup. You can type in a different name to signify when or why the backup was made. These all could be backup names: "Friday," "December," "Before Performance Update."

Why make backups? Trust me, you don't want to experience the reason firsthand. Many computer users have become sick when something went wrong with a set of data and we didn't have a backup. If you haven't made a backup lately, your computer will crash soon. It's one of Murphy's laws. Conversely, if you make timely and proper backups, your computer may never crash (no guarantees, but it seems to be true).

Don't fall into the trap of "I'll make a backup next time." That will be the time your computer won't start. Make the backup now!

### Final announcements

Wendy has created a Web page for reports. You can check out screen shots of various custom reports she has created. If you like them, you can download them to your computer and use them in AIMS. You don't need to own CRW; simply follow the instructions on where to put them, and you can use them as custom reports. Simply go to [www.angus.org/aims](http://www.angus.org/aims), and look for the link.

For those of you still thinking about buying AIMS, there's also a page showing examples of the standard reports built into the software.

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