



Tech Notes

► by **Scott Johnson**, director of Angus Information Management Software

Export without difficulty

The Angus Journal staff always gives me at least a month to write these columns, but I usually wait until the last day. This is also the day that I ask Wendy and Tammy for ideas on what to write. So these are ideas from them.

Tammy has noticed an issue with how people are naming or, more accurately, renaming files submitted for weights or registrations. In short, our request is that you do not change anything about the filename when you export any files. Keep reading for more information.

Exporting accurately

As you've probably noticed, when you go to export a file, it proposes a filename and is set to put it in a default folder (c:\aims20\files). Using a registration file as an example, the filename would be something like R0123456.789. The "R" is for Registration — each type of export has a letter, which tells us how to process the file. The next seven characters are your member code. Some member codes are seven characters; some are fewer. If they are fewer, they are padded with zeros in front of the code. The extension — ".789" — is generated by Angus Information Management Software (AIMS) to keep this file unique from any other registration files.

When you export a file, two key things actually happen. First, a simple text file is generated, which follows a very specific layout of fields that the Association computer needs to perform the requested operation. Using the above example filename, that text file is named R0123456.aaa.

The second step is to "compress" or "zip" that file. This step does a fancy computer process to make the file as small as possible, which speeds up the send operation, as well as provides a crude type of encryption. (The encryption is not considered "secure," but at least it temporarily fools Internet hacker programs that are looking for credit cards.)

Anyway, you end up with a file, which essentially "contains" a second file, and due to the way AIMS goes through the process, the filenames are the same up to the three-character extension. If you change the filename, the inside file is also changed, and that's where the problems start.

When we receive filenames with the

default format, they can be sent directly to the main Association computer for further processing. But when we receive renamed files that are not the default format, Wendy and Tammy end up having to unzip the file, change the inside filename, re-zip the file and change that filename.

Bottom line: Please leave the name of the file as proposed. Once you have sent the file, feel free to change it — most people seem to rename files to indicate what animals are in that file, which is fine.

I think I know how this concept started — renaming backups. I have often encouraged people to rename backups; the default is B0123456.BKx; the "B" is for backup as well as the "BK" of the extension, then a number is added to keep it unique. However, you are more than welcome to change the main part of the filename; this is not a file that we handle in our automated system even if you do send it in. It also makes a lot of sense to change the name to indicate when and/or why you made the backup.

Speaking of backups

Wendy suggested I remind everyone about backups. She has had a couple of people lose *all* of their data because they don't have backups. If you think it won't happen to you, that's a guarantee that it will.

The beauty of talking about backups, again, is that I can copy the information from the Help file (hint, hint), and I don't have to retype it!

The computer adage states, "If you don't want to type it again, make a backup." That's pretty good advice. As you know, Murphy's Law is working against you, and just when you can least afford to lose your data, you will lose it — the hard disk will crash, or any number of other horror

stories, and you're out of luck unless you have a backup.

Some things to think about

AIMS includes a powerful command to make a backup of your entire database. A backup can be made with three (count 'em, three!) clicks of the mouse: File, then Backup, then Save. But keep reading to understand more about what you just did.

How to make a backup: The process to make a backup of the data is actually very simple. You choose File | Backup, then enter a filename and press Enter (or click on Save). By default, AIMS will build a filename for the backup including an extension of BKx, where "x" is a number from 0 to 9, which automatically increments each time a backup is made. Normally it is better to type your own filename — which can be a Windows long filename — so that the file will mean something to you in the future.

Again, your filename will have an extension added that starts with ".BK," plus a number. The extension is only to help the Restore function know if the file is a valid backup and the number in the extension further helps filenames to be unique.

When to make backups:

- Make backups very frequently to your hard disk, as often as every day you work with AIMS. You can use a rotational system where you make a backup with the name of the day as the filename (Monday, Tuesday, etc.). It's normally better to have more than one level of backup so that if one day's backup goes bad, you have the day before that to go back to. These "frequent" backups can be left in the default folder (aims20\backup) on your main computer.
- Occasionally make backups to a floppy disk, tape, zip disk or CD-ROM. Making daily backups is great until the hard disk crashes, so be sure to save some of these files (or copy them after a regular backup) to an external media such as a floppy disk, zip disk, tape or CD-ROM. You do this by changing the Save In field on the backup screen; then providing a filename. A rule of thumb would be to make an external backup once a week during peak data entry.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 294

▣ TECH NOTES

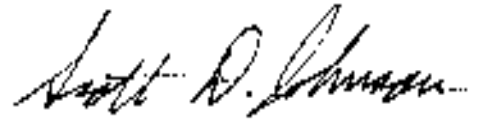
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 293

► Once in a while, take one of these external backups to a location out of the building where your computer is located. While having separate backups saves you from a hard disk crash, it doesn't save you from a more serious problem where the entire building is destroyed, perhaps in a fire or flood. Remember, your data is valuable and it's easy to protect, so put a backup on a disk and get it out of the building. Fire-safe boxes are an alternative, but it's still

recommended to take a copy elsewhere every now and then.

► While you're making backups to disk, make another copy and send it to the AIMS Department. This accomplishes two things: 1) You get a copy out of the house/office. 2) We will check that it is a good backup to confirm that backups are being made correctly. You could do this once or twice a year.

And finally, it is highly recommended that you get in a good habit of making backups. They are so easy to make and help create a sense of comfort that no matter what happens, your data will be safe.



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