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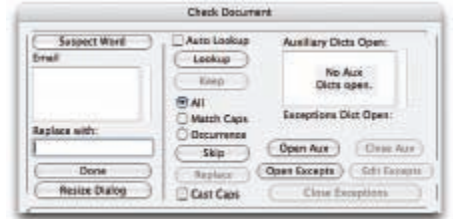
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Web Forms, Part One

BY JOE CAPONSACCO

No matter how limited your web surfing skills, chances are that at some point you have given information to a web site. When you order something from an online store, or request an email newsletter, fill out a survey, or even just type into a search field, you successfully use an online form.

While forms can be created using many of today's web-creation tools, QuarkXPress makes form creation quite simple and easy.

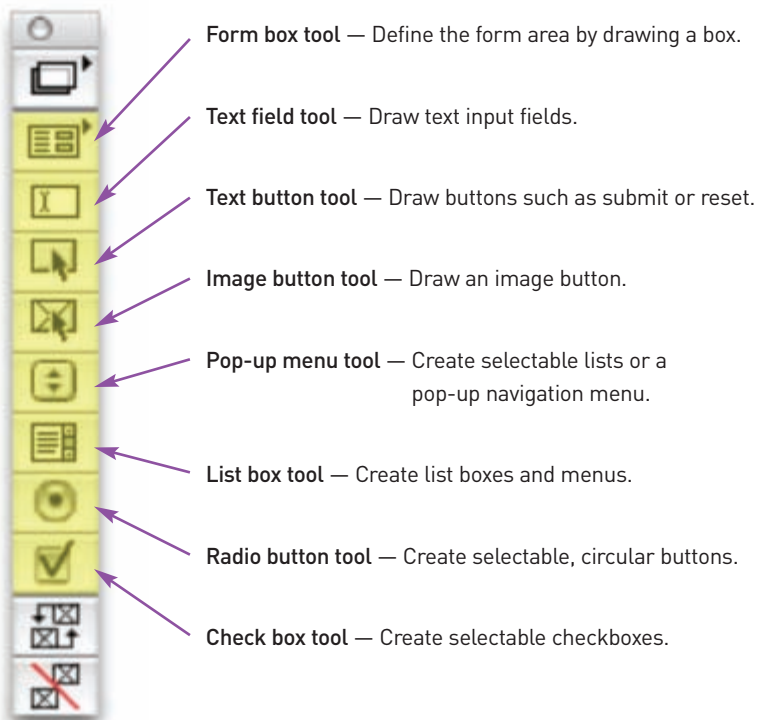
As easy as forms are to create using QuarkXPress, enabling them to collect and process the data requires an application running on a web server using Common Gateway Interface (CGI) scripts. These scripts receive the data that the user provides and processes it to give you the desired result. Information, an order, or survey results are typical forms that you use on the web.

After you create a form and are ready to upload it with your web page or site, you will have to talk to the webmaster of your web service so that you can link your form to the correct script to gain the desired results.

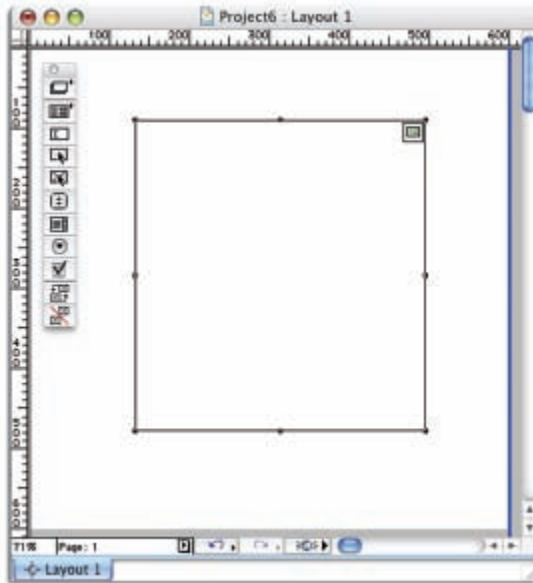
Of all of the QuarkXPress web features that I have written about thus far, this is the first that relies upon outside applications and technology to process information. Once you have created your site, you will need assistance from the web service to link your site's forms with their web servers. All good services will already have this information and capability available for you, usually only dependent on the monthly package that you choose. Many will also offer assistance to get you up and running. Do a little research to ensure that your ISP has the options that you need.

The Web Toolbar

The first step in form creation using QuarkXPress is to understand the web toolbar. Many of the items that will populate a form are found here. All of the yellow highlighted tools are form tools or objects.



► fig. 2



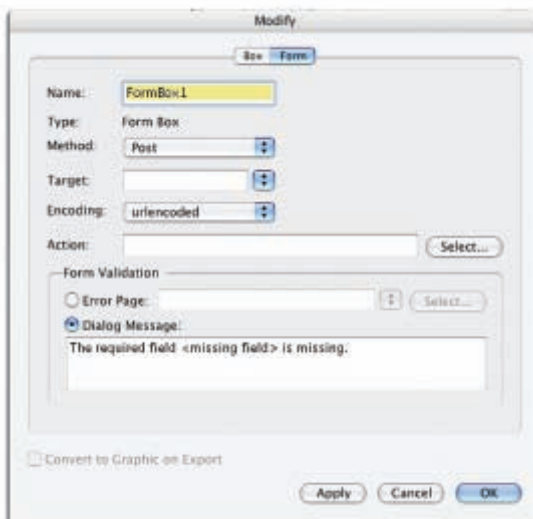
Form Creation

As with any item in QuarkXPress, the first step is to define or draw the area to be used as I've done in figure 2.

You do not actually have to define a form box first. You can choose any of the form tools and draw the object that you want to use. QuarkXPress will automatically draw a form box around your form object. Additionally, you can finetune the size of the form box that is created by selecting the form tool icon and modifying its dimensions.

1 SELECT THE FORM BOX TOOL and draw the rectangular shape that will hold your form field items. After you define the form area, QuarkXPress will need information on the type of form that you are trying to create, and how it will handle the information it gathers.

► fig. 3



2 SELECT THE FORM AREA and choose ITEM ► MODIFY ► FORM (tab) so that you can input information on the type of form you are creating (see figure 3).

► **Name.** By default, your form is named `FormBox1`. The naming of the form is important if you or a webmaster will be adding JavaScript that will either reference the form or validate the information in the form. Also, because you can create multiple forms on any given web page, giving the forms unique names is very important so each box can be easily identified and targeted. When giving the form a name, do not use any special characters or spaces. My default way of tagging and naming is to type in all lower-case characters.

► **Method.** How will the data be submitted to the web server? Check with your webmaster, but generally the post method is preferred because the get option can exceed the character length allowed for a URL name resulting in lost information.

Select `POST` to send the user data as a separate packet to the server.

Select `GET` to append the data to the end of the URL that you set in the action field.

► **Target.** Specify how you want any server-returned information to display. Server scripts generally respond in the form of a URL. If you do not specify a target, the form page will be updated with this info.

`BLANK` loads the page in a new window.

`SELF` loads the page in the same window, replacing the form.

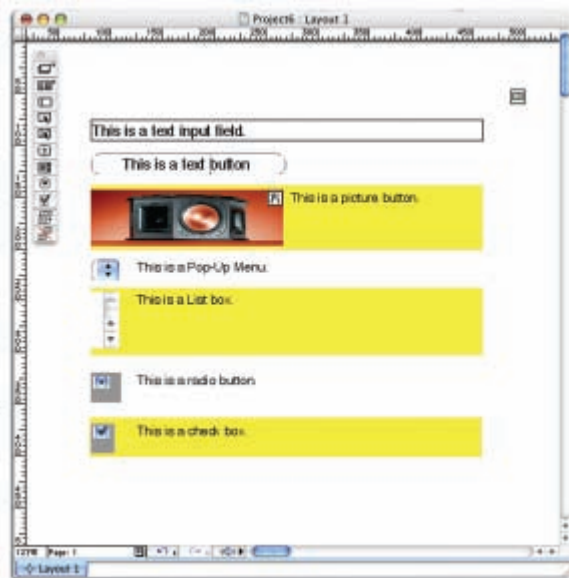
`PARENT` loads the info into a frame target.

(Consider this only if you know how to create and target frames in HTML.)

`TOP` loads the information into the full browser window. (Consider this only if you know how to create and target frames in HTML.)

► **Action.** Enter the URL for the CGI script that will process the form or click `SELECT` to locate a script on your computer.

► **Form Validation Area.** Set a response to the user if they failed to fill in each required field in your form.



◀ fig. 4
Here are examples of each of the different form objects in use.

Select **ERROR PAGE** to have an existing web page display with an error message.

Select **DIALOG MESSAGE**, then enter an alert message to display in the text field below.

Select **OK** when done, and then repeat this process for every form that you create prior to adding any form objects.

Things to Know About Form Areas

The form box can be positioned just like any other box that you create in QuarkXPress. When you move a form box, all form objects that you created within it will move along with it.

Word of caution, however, any independent text, picture, or line objects that you created and placed within the form area will not move with the form. You cannot create a group that contains both form objects and standard QuarkXPress objects. Generally, when forms are designed they are designed in place so this limitation should not adversely affect you unless major structural changes are being implemented to the web page after its creation.

Keep in mind these simple rules about forms behavior and your work will go more smoothly.

- ▶ A form object can be duplicated within the same form box in the standard manner. Form objects can be deleted.
- ▶ Forms and their objects can be placed on multiple layers. Form boxes can be created inside of table cells.
- ▶ Form objects cannot be created outside of a form area. Forms cannot overlap each other. If you try, the new form will be drawn butting up against the first form's boundaries.
- ▶ Form objects within a form area cannot overlap or reside inside of each other.

Conclusion

With your QuarkXPress skills and these highlights, you are well on your way to creating a form. Do not be discouraged because the functionality is tied to a back-end server system that you may not control. The vast majority of web sites implement ISP web servers to do tasks in association with their web sites. Forms are just a part of it.

In the next installment, we will cover each individual form object and all of the settings associated to give you the optimum control over both your design and your results. ✂