The bestselling guide to creating crystal-clear reports, fully updated!

Crystal Reports® 2008 FOR DUMMIES®

Design and build reports for the information that you want

A Reference for the Rest of Us!®

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Allen G. Taylor is a 30-year veteran of the computer industry and the author of over 20 books, including *SQL All-in-One Desk Reference For Dummies, SQL For Dummies, Access 2003 Power Programming with VBA, Database Development For Dummies,* and *SQL Weekend Crash Course*. He lectures nationally on databases, innovation, and entrepreneurship. He also teaches database development internationally through a leading online education provider and teaches microprocessor architecture locally at Portland State University. You can contact Allen at allen.taylor@ieee.org.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my daughter, Jenny Taylor Warren, who has given me much excellent advice, as well as two outstanding grandsons.

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Introduction

Crystal Reports 2008 is the latest in a long and celebrated series of report writers for personal computers. Crystal Reports is by far the bestselling report writer package in the world, even though you might not know it by name. (It's been bundled with many of the most popular applications without being acknowledged by name. For example, a version of Crystal Reports is currently bundled into Microsoft's Visual Studio .NET.) However, Crystal Reports 2008 is available as a standalone product. And if you want to produce a high-quality report quickly, Crystal Reports is the top choice to do the job.

About This Book

Crystal Reports 2008 For Dummies is a book that gets you using Crystal Reports quickly and effectively. This book covers all the major capabilities of Crystal Reports but doesn't bog you down in intricate detail. The objective is to give you the information you need to produce the types of reports that most people need most of the time. I also get into some out-of-the-ordinary report types that you might be called upon to generate on occasion.

Use this book as a handy reference guide. Each chapter deals with an individual feature that you might need at one time or another. Pull out the book, read the chapter, and then do what you need to do. In many cases, step-by-step procedures walk you through commonly needed operations. You might find it worthwhile to put the book beside your computer and perform the operations while you read about them.

Anyone who might be called upon to produce a report based on database data can profit from the information contained in this book. It's also valuable for managers who might never produce a report but who oversee people who do. This book tells you what's possible, what you can do easily, and what takes a little more effort to accomplish. This knowledge can help you estimate how long it should take to produce reports of various types.

Conventions Used in This Book

When an instruction in the book refers to a command path — for instance, "Choose File⇒Save" — that simply means to click your mouse button on File on the main menu, and then choose Save from the submenu that drops down from it.

Anything you see that is printed in a monospaced font is code, or something you'll run across in the course of

programming a database. `This is a monospaced font.` Crystal Reports executes code that you enter as formulas or SQL statements.

What You're Not to Read

You can certainly choose to read this book from cover to cover, working through the examples, although you don't have to. Regardless of whether you read it all the way through in order, think of this book as a handy quick reference by your side when you want to perform a particular operation you haven't used in a while (or ever).

An upcoming section of this introduction explains the icons you'll normally run across, and there is a good reason for paying attention to each of them. However, consider yourself exempted from the requirement to read anything that appears by a Technical Stuff icon.

Material placed next to one of these icons might be interesting to techies like me (and like some of you out there) but generally isn't necessary for a full understanding of how to use Crystal Reports.

Foolish Assumptions

I've never met you, but I have to make a few assumptions about you and what you know. For example, I assume

that you know how to use a personal computer and that you're somewhat familiar with Microsoft Word. If you know how to navigate Microsoft Word, you already know almost all there is to know about navigating Crystal Reports. The user interfaces of the two products are similar.

I assume that you've seen directory trees before, such as those extensively used in Microsoft Windows. You know that if you see a plus sign (+) to the left of a node that shows a folder (or other) icon, it means that you can click the plus sign to expand that node to see what the node contains. Crystal Reports treats directory trees in a similar way.

I assume you know how to perform a drag-and-drop operation with your mouse. In Crystal Reports, when you click an object and start dragging it, your progress is shown by a rectangular placement frame. When you release the mouse button to drop the item, the placement frame is replaced by a duplicate of the item that you dragged.

How This Book Is Organized

This book contains six major parts. Each part contains several chapters.

Part I: Reporting Basics

Part I introduces you to Crystal Reports and the art of report creation. You find out what a report should accomplish and what it should look like. Then you fire up Crystal Reports and use it to create a simple report based on data held in a database.

Part II: Moving Up to Professional-Quality Reports

You can do many things beyond the basics to make reports more focused, more readable, and easier on the eye. This part gives you the information you need to do all those things.

Part III: Advanced Report Types and Features

Part III gets into serious report creation. With the information in this part, you can zero in on exactly the data you want and display it in the most understandable way. You'll be able to nest one report within another, pull report elements from multiple non-database sources, present multidimensional data in OLAP cubes, illustrate points with charts and maps, and create stunning visuals with Xcelsius and Flash. With these tools, you can produce reports fit for the eyes of the organization's CEO.

Part IV: Crystal Reports in the Enterprise

BusinesObjects Enterprise is a companion product to Crystal Reports that controls and secures the distribution of reports. With it, you can make your reports accessible to people on your local area network (LAN), or on the World Wide Web. BusinessObjects Enterprise is also the home of the Repository, which is a great place to store formulas or custom functions so they can be used again.

Part V: Publishing Your Reports

After you create a report, you'll want to make it available to the people who need it. Crystal Reports makes it easy for you to distribute your report for viewing, whether to colleagues in your organization or to Internet users around the world. In addition, you can publish your reports using traditional methods. You can print it; export it to a file, or fax it to people far away. After you complete report development, distribution is easy.

Although Crystal Reports does a great job when used all by itself, you can also incorporate it into applications written in a computer language. The Crystal Reports SQL Expression Fields facility gives you direct control over the data in a report's underlying database. Because a version of Crystal Reports is included as an integral part of the Microsoft .NET application development environment, you can incorporate the power of Crystal Reports into applications you write in Visual Basic, Visual C++, Visual C#, or any language compatible with the .NET framework. This gives the applications you write the sophistication of the world's leading report writer.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

It's always good to remember short lists of best practices. That's what The Part of Tens is all about. Listed here are pointers that help you produce outstanding reports with minimum effort, in the shortest possible time.

Icons Used in This Book

Tips save you a lot of time and keep you out of trouble.

Pay attention to the information marked by this icon because you might need it.

As I mention earlier, Technical Stuff icons denote detail that I find interesting (and you might, too). However, if you don't, no big deal. These nuggets aren't essential to gain an understanding of the topic being discussed. Skip them if you like.

Heeding the advice that this icon points to can save you from major grief. Ignore it at your peril.

Where to Go from Here

Now you're ready to start finding out about using Crystal Reports 2008 to create professional-quality reports based on data stored in your databases. After all, Crystal Reports 2008 is the latest version of the most-popular