All Media Library

for Windows

version
3.3

Owner's Manual

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How AML works

The All Media Library is a very easy to use database for keeping track of all types of media such as books, videos, CDs, etc... Think of AML as an imaginary box of index cards with a lot of automated features. One of the advantages of the computer is that it can manipulate digital information much faster than a human could manipulate a box of index cards. Imagine if you had a collections of over 1000 video tapes and you decided one day that you would rather sort them by artist instead of title. It would probably take you hours, where the computer would take only seconds. Now imagine your collection grew to over 10,000 and a friend wanted to know how many Sylvester Stalone videos you had. Flipping through index cards would be slightly faster than going through all of your videos, but AML would be a thousand times faster.
AML keeps its imaginary index cards as "Records". AML uses a "Random Access" method for storing and retrieving records. This means at any given moment, AML can access record number 17,528 as quickly as record number 1. Because AML can sort records to your liking, the record number becomes insignificant to you, hence, the need for a "Catalog Number". A catalog number stays with a record even if its record number changes due to sorting. There are ways to avoid using a catalog number. One way is to already have you media types sorted on the shelf. This can be a pain because every time you get something new, you have to make room in the middle for it, where if you use catalog numbers, you can simply place new items at the end of the shelf. Finally, if you have 3 movies on one tape, you can assign each movie record with the same catalog number. Then, when you tell AML that you're lending out one of the movies, it will automatically mark the other 2 movies as also being "On Loan". It is crucial that no 2 separate tapes have the same catalog number for that reason. Unless, of course, that they are a set; part 1 & part 2.

Getting started

The first thing to do is to try out AML without entering a bunch of examples in yourself. AML comes with a sample library to practice with. To load the samples, simply hit the FILE button, then double-click the file entitled SAMPLES.AML. To see all of the records in the library, make sure the "Search By" box is set to "NO CRITERIA", then hit the "List records that match criteria" button. The rest is self explanitory for the most part. Play with the samples until you get a good grasp of AML. By default, AML loads the file RECORDS.AML everytime AML starts. It's a good idea to use this file as the file to keep your records. You can change the default startup file in the CONFIG section.

Entering your records into AML

To use AML, it's a good idea to assign every piece of media with a unique catalog number*, then enter each into AML. This will seem tedious. Especially if your collection is large. Once done, adding additional records later won't seem so bad. *NOTE: a catalog number is not required but is recommended, especially for larger collections where a lot of lending out takes place.

To enter a record, you first need a blank record on the screen. If the screen contains a record, simply hit the "NEW" button, and AML will create a new record and place it at the end of all the others. If the screen already displays a blank record, simply hit the "EDIT" button and that will place the cursor at the field. Next, fill in each field(Media type, title, artist, etc..) one by one, hitting the TAB key to go on to the next. Once done, AML will automatically store the record as soon as you go to do something else. You can hit the ADD button to create another record and the record you just enetered will be saved.....trust me.

MEDIA TYPE
The media type field is for recording & displaying the type of media. Because AML keeps track of all types of media, it is important to signify what type it is. The media type field is a "Combo Box" which means you can either type in your own or pull down the list and choose. A fast way to use a combo box is to type the first letter or two, and then use the arrow keys on your keyboard to find it from there.

CATALOG NUMBER
Simply type in the catalog number of the item in this box. Choose an original that you created and labeled the item with, or, use an existing number that is already on the item such as a UPC code. If multiple items are on one piece of media, such as more than one movie on a video tape, then use the same catalog number for all the items on the tape. When you tell AML that you've lent something out, it marks ALL other records with the same catalog number as also being ON LOAN. The purpose for this is that you can have a separate record for each title on a video tape describing each movie but if someone borrows the tape, AML will then know to mark the other titles as being ON LOAN because they share the same catalog number...get it? Items with no catalog number are excluded from the search when lending. So, if you're planning not to use catalog numbers, make sure you don't enter anything in this field.

TITLE
Here you enter the title of the item. Most titles are obvious for commercial items because they already have a title. If you have a home movie or a pack of photos, entering the right title can come in handy when searching for it. A title like "Latshaw Family Christmas" would be good because that gives you 3 words to search by. No need for a year there because there is a field for that.

ARTIST(S)
The artist field is used for recording either the artist, creator, manufacturer, Etc... With some types of media such as baseball cards, you may want to use this field for placing the team name or the card manufacturer. Keep in mind that the flexability of AML is up to you. Be creative.

RATED
The RATED field is used primarily for movies that have a rating by the Motion Picture Association. This field is a "dropdown combo" which means you can choose from the list or create your own rating. Other types of media, like music CDs, are rated also.

PERSONAL RATING
The personal rating field can come in very handy. You decide how much you like the particular item on a scale from 1 to 10. This can be useful later when you want to search through the items that you enjoyed. This field is in a combo box like the media type field, and can be accessed by hitting the up and down keys on the keyboard or via the mouse.

QUANTITY IN SET
If you have a title with more than one piece of media holding it, enter the quantity here. For example, if you keep track of diskettes, and you're entering CorelDRAW! 5, you'd use only one catalog number but place a 16 in this field because CorelDRAW! 5 is contained on 16 disks. If you have a movie like "The Sound of Music" which is 2 tapes, you'd place a 2 here.

VALUE
The value field is where you enter what the item is worth. You can either enter what you paid for it, or what it's worth to you. This is handy if you lend someone something and they break it or loose it. You can then tell them what they owe you. Without my younger brother, I may have never thought of including this feature.

DATED
The dated field used to say YEAR in earlier versions of AML but now gives you a little more flexability. This field used to allow only a 5-digit entry. It now allows a 10-digit entry for FULL date format(MM-DD-YYYY), dashes included. This is where you place the items date. This is when the item was created or originated. For example, if you were entering a book or video, you'd enter the copyright date here. This field is good if later on you want to search for titles that came out in a certain year.

LOCATION
The LOCATION field is used for recording WHERE you keep the item. For example, you may enter "Row B Shelf 22". This is handy for large collections. This is also handy for doing a visual inventory later on. A visual inventory is when you make sure nothing is missing. Simply pick a location: Example "Drawer 7". Do a search by LOCATION and lock on "Drawer 7". AML will display all records that are supposed to be in drawer 7. This way you can check that all pieces are accounted for. The location field also is very handy if a friend comes over and browses through your AML library and decides to borrow something. You'll then know right where to find it.

NOTES
The final, and probably most useful field is the notes field. This is where you place detailed information about the items. Remember to think about future searches when filling in this area. For example, for music CDs and cassettes, I like to place the song titles here. That way, 10 years from now, if I can't remember who sang a certain song, AML can find out for me.

Lending out items

When you lend an item out to someone, simply pull up its record, which you'll learn how to do quickly in the next segment of the owner's manual, Then hit the "LOAN OUT" button. Type in the name of whoever is borrowing, hit TAB, type in the date or leave the date given, hit TAB again and thats it!

When that person returns the item, pull up the record, hit "RECEIVE BACK" button, and thats it! Notice that the "Last borrowed by:" box automatically is updated with the name of the person who borrowed it. This is useful if you find something broken later on and want to know who had it last. Thanks again to my brother for making me think of that angle.

Searching through records

The search feature is one of the most powerful features of AML. it gives you the ability to search your entire database of records for specific things. In the middle right hand of the screen you'll see the blue "SEARCH BY" box. Here you choose which field you want to search. For example, if I wanted to see which items had the word "Love" in the title, I would choose "Title" here. Then fill in the "LOCK ON" box with the word "Love", or the text you want to search for. At this point you have 2 option. One, you can hit ENTER or hit the "LIST RECORDS THAT MATCH CRITERIA", either of which will pull up a list with all records that match the criteria given. Once in the list, You can double click an item in the list or print the entire list out. You're second option is to use the "NEXT RECORD" & "PREVIOUS RECORD" buttons, which will "flip" through ONLY the records that match the criteria. It will continue to do so until you set the "Search By" box to "NO CRITERIA", in which case, AML will allow you to "flip" through all of your records.

*NOTE: When AML does a search, it searches for the LOCK ON text regardless of upper or lower case and also regardless of placement. In other words, if you search for the word "Age", AML would also lock on a word like "Schwarzenager" because the word "Age" is contained within the word "Schwarzenager". Avoid using small LOCK ON text. If you searched the RATING field for all items marked as a "1", AML would also show those marked as "10" because "1" is found in the text "10".

Sorting records

To sort your records, hit the sort button on the button bar. Choose what you want to sort by and what direction. Forward sorts A-Z, and reverse sorts Z-A. Sorting can take time depending on how fast your computer is and how many total records you have. As your collection grows, you'll learn how much time it takes.

Someone asked me once, "I want to sort by media type and then by title within each media type group. AML only does one or the other." WRONG. If you want to do what I call "Sub-Sorting", you simply need to do multiple sorts backwards from the way you want it. In other words, to do the above example by media type and then by title, I would simply sort by title, THEN by media type. Get it? It works, trust me.

Importing & Exporting(FILE button)

Importing and Exporting is designed for the sole purpose of opening a new library or copying the currently open library file to another location(or format). When you edit, delete, add and sort, those changes are saved automatically to the currently open library. REMEMBER: ALL CHANGES ARE SAVED AUTOMATICALLY. There is no need to save what you have done. The feature was designed so that if you and a friend both have AML, you can put your entire library on a floppy and give it to him to browse at his lesuire. Likewise, if he gives you his, you can IMPORT it.

OPEN
To open a file, click the DRIVE, double-click the DIRECTORY, and then double-click the FILE. Dont' be alarmed if you don't see all the files that are supposed to be in a directory. AML only shows the files that have an .AML extension.

SAVE AS
The SAVE AS button lets you save a copy of the open library, and then, makes the new file the open file. The "CURRENTLY OPEN" file is the one your working with on the screen. Any new changes are made to the currently open file.

COPY TO
The COPY TO button simply makes a copy of the currently open library. This is what you want to do if you want to give a copy of your library to a friend. Choose drive A: or B: from the DRIVE box, then type a name(up to 8 characters), and hit the COPY TO button. It's that easy. (MAKE SURE THE DISK IS IN THE DRIVE BEFORE PRESSING)

EXPORT AML.MDB FILE
This will create a copy of your AML library in Microsoft Access format with the name AML.MDB. Your library can then be viewed and manipulated using Microsoft Access version 1.1 or later. Once you've opened the AML.MDB file in Microsoft Access, you can then export it from there to one of many other database formats. The AML.MDB file will be created in the CURRENT directory.

Inventory totals

To see your inventory totals, hit the TOTALS button on the button bar. The inventory totals screen will apear. Click on any of the "MEDIA TYPE" boxes on the left to choose which items you want to calculate totals for. Then, when you've chosen all the media types to calculate, hit the "CALCULATE" button at the top of the screen. Once calculated, you then have the option to print the totals by hitting the PRINT button at the top of the screen. As of version 3.1, I added the "PIECES" field into the totals. PIECES refers to the total pieces of media. This figure is calculated by the sum of all the "Quantity in Set" fields.

Configuring AML

DEFAULT LIBRARY AT STARTUP
This gives you the option of having AML open a file other than RECORDS.AML when it starts.
If the file is NOT located in the same directory as AML, you'll need to include its PATH.
Example: C:\MYFILES\LIBRARY.AML

MEDIA TYPES
If you have less than 10 different types of media and you're sick of scrolling through all of the
different types each time you want to choose, here you can pick only the ones you use. Pick up to
10 different types of media via the combo boxs. Then check off the appropriate box underneath.
If you don't check any of the 2 bottom check boxes, it will have no effect. The "MAKE THE
ABOVE THE LISTED CHOICES" box indicates that you want to place only the above items as
your only choices for media types. The "PLACE THE ABOVE IN TOTALS SCREEN" box
indicates that these items will automatically apear in the totals screen as your choices for items to
calculate.

Network Mode

The Network Mode is designed for network multi-user use but can be used by a single user.
There are 2 modes: EDIT MODE & VIEW MODE. The first user to open a library file
automatically gains EDIT MODE. EDIT MODE enables you to use all of the edit features of
AML. If a second person on the network attempts to open the same library file, they will be
forced into VIEW MODE which disables ALL edit features of AML. Any additional users
opening the file will also be forced into VIEW MODE. VIEW MODE does enable the user to
view records, search records, & calculate inventory. AML allows only 1 user to have edit features
at a time. If the user who has the EDIT MODE in use switches into VIEW MODE, any other
user can then switch to EDIT MODE(but only 1).

It is very possible that the user with EDIT MODE, suddenly lost power or had his/her computer
"lock up". If this should happen, the library file would still think that the EDIT MODE was still
in use and no one could ever edit it again. As a precaution, I've added a secret override feature.
To override this condition and reset the library to enable EDIT MODE, go to the ABOUT AML
screen which is located off the Help menu. Click on my name which is located right under the
Latshaw Software logo. Hit the OK button to leave and then check the NETWORK MODE
menu. You should have access to EDIT MODE. If this is set up on a network, you may want to
memorize this paragraph and then delete it so that other won't know.

It is also possible that if AML isn't closed properly, AML will think that the station in question is
still in use, eventually causing an error message when starting that says "ALL (X) nodes are in
use". If your AML says all nodes are in use but they aren't, close all open AML programs and
delete the config file (AML.CFG) located in the main AML directory. This will cure the problem
but you'll have to reconfigure to your preferences such as setting the default library(if other than
RECORDS.AML) and default media types. *Note that: DELETING THE CONFIG FILE
NAMED AML.CFG IS A CURE FOR MOST ERRORS AT STARTUP.

Network Setup

To setup AML on a network, install AML on every station, but when asked for the directory to install to, type in the drive and directory of the AML directory on the servers drive. This will overwrite the files in the servers AML directory with each install but also place needed DLL's in each stations Windows SYSTEM directory. *AML has been tested on LANtastic 6.0 and Novell 3.12 networks and will probably work on just about any other network. SHARE.EXE should be loaded in each stations AUTOEXEC.BAT unless you're using Windows 3.11 or later.

Past version history (AKA Programmers frustrations)

1.0 the first program was a bit "buggy" but was still received well. The program was a take off
      from a DOS program I wrote entitled "Tony's Video Treasures". TVT was inspired by
      Tony Patti, a friend of mine who had an enormous collection of videos and kept record
      of them on index cards. I talked Tony into buying his computer, and later surprised him
      with TVT, to show him that it was a good investment.

1.1 fixed most bugs and stupid mistakes.

1.2 fixed minor bugs which no one would have ever probably found.

2.0 - 2.1 Added IMPORT/EXPORT feature and SORT feature from user requests.. Fixed bug
                        that caused AML to mark all items with
    no catalog number as being loaned out when you
    lent out an item with no catalog number.Added new method of registration by credit
    card. This enables someone to register immediately and have the program fully
functional
    in seconds. Made small cosmetic changes.

2.2   Gave AML a "face-lift", arranging the screen to make it a tad more user friendly and
      more functional. Fixed a couple minor bugs and rewrote some code to make it go faster.

3.0   Complete "Face-lift". Added the new "Button Bar", and made the help file into this
      "Owner's Manual", utilizing Windows "Write" so users can print it out and make their
      own notes about the program. Added "Config" option and rewrote LOTS of code.

3.01   Fixed minor bug which caused AML NOT to display the record requested from the
      "List records that match criteria" screen. Pulled the "control box" from the "About"
      screen because I forgot about it and if someone tried to close it, AML froze because the
      MAIN screen wasn't "re-enabling". This is caused when a programmer or software
      company is so excited about getting the new program out, that it's tested too quickly.
      I've learned my lesson.

3.02   Gave AML the ability to run in a NORMAL size window for users who use a resolution
      greater than 640x480 and like the multi-window effect. I also dithered the logo bitmaps
to   make them look better. This was not widely released and was done rather quickly at a
      users request.

3.1   - Redid button bar to make more room for the important stuff.
      - added Microsoft Access Export feature.
      - addedcustom print ability when printing the search list.
      - added RATED and LOCATION fields.
      - added multi-user network ability.
      - added Quantity in Set field in TOTALS screen as "PIECES" column.

3.2   - added SEARCH LIST feature to enable greater detailed searches.
               - added RESET button(requested from user).
               - fixed bug from 3.1 which caused STACK OVERFLOW when sorting in reverse.
               - fixed bug from 3.1 which caused VIEW MODE for network users after a SAVE AS.
               - added BULK LOAN feature (self explanitory. not in this manual)
               - made most buttons "Picture" buttons.
3.3   - Fixed "Stupid" bug which gave error to those starting AML for the first time.

Plans for future versions

- a 32-bit version for Windows '95 (hopefully fall of 1995)
- Completely switching to Microsoft Access format with OLE 2.0 support (undecided)
- Password protection if Windows '95 doesn't have the security features it promised.
- Any reasonable suggestions from users like yourself (registered or not)

Support

Support is available for all REGISTERED users of AML. If you are not registered and you can't simply figure out what AML does or if it's worth registering, then don't spend your money on AML. Spend it on educating yourself more about computers. Computers aren't Disco. They're here to stay.

Registration

AML is released as "Shareware". IT MAY BE FREELY DISTRIBUTED. The program is fully functional. The only limitation is that AML will only hold up to 100 entries or "Records". To register AML, click the "REGISTER AML" option which is located under the HELP menu. You can register over the phone. Once registered, AML will hold over 2,000,000,000 records (provided you have enough hard drive space). Each AML record takes up 1.5K, which means 2 billion AML records translates to 3,000 Megabytes or 3 Gigabytes. I personally have not tried to enter that many, but I'd appreciate it if users who keep relatively large libraries (1,000 records or more) would keep me informed about performance speeds. I may use you to help "beta test" new versions.

How to Contact the author

To get in touch with me, read the information in the "About AML" screen which is accessed off the Help menu.

Thank you for using a Latshaw Software product and I sincerely hope you find it a useful addition to your software collection.