

## Conditional Love

One of the coolest features in FileMaker™ is conditional formatting. With it you can draw attention to fields that need entry, add color coding to areas of your screen that will change according to what type of record you have and much, much more. In fact, the only real limit is your imagination. (There is, however, one very strange oddity with it that bears mentioning because it makes no sense; for some reason, you cannot apply conditional formatting to a square or a rectangle but you can apply it, to a button in the shape of a square or rectangle which, if you remove the embossed, engraved or checkbox effect, becomes just another square or rectangle. Weird, huh!)

Because conditional formatting is so flexible, you can use it to, dramatically, but subtly, enhance your interfaces giving your users visual cues that they will react to at a subconscious level. For example, this screenshot shows a sign up sheet for an activity. The portal rows list all of the possible participants and, as soon as a participant is added to the activity, conditional formatting puts a pale green background to the name. The name that is highlighted in pale blue is on the waiting list for that activity.

klanten	inschrijv
<input type="text" value="Click here and start typing to display names"/>	185 deelnem
Alain Van Heffen	Christiaan De Spiegeleer
Alina Niculina	Christophe Impens
Amy Hutsebaut	Cindy Kaspereck
Ann Van Der Ha	Cindy Raemdonck
Anne De Bruyn	Cindy Rotthier
Anshel Symens	Cindy Struelens
Bart Briessinck	Cindy Waeytens
Bart De Bruycker	Danny Van Haarlem
Bart Moortgat	Dany Rasschaerd
Bart Schatteman	Didier Vandendaele
Benedikt Vermeersch	Dieter Van Uytfange
Boudewijn Van Keer	Dietrich Beck
Brigitte Bourgeois	Dirk De Wachter
Candy Van Strydonck	Dirk Van Hemelrijck
Carine Stuer	Dirk Van Lancker
Carmen De Bock	Dirk Van Otten
Caroline Doms	Eddy Van Heffen
Chantal Peters	Edwin Vermeiren
Charlotte Caudenys	Eliane Noreillie
Christl De Cock	Elke Van Grieken

On this same screen, we have another section that shows the number of signups:

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deelnemers	31	+	2	=	33
begeleiders	8		7		
	Helge De Lathouwer Linda De Jonghe Norbert Vanhooren Peter Loncke Sonja De Vriese Terry Hurckmans Vicky De Vos				

Below that, you'll see a field in red which is the # of volunteers required for this activity. Currently it is in red because 8 are needed and only 7 have been assigned. When the numbers match, the red background changes to green. Simple but very obvious.

Here's another simple but powerful use for conditional formatting in a selection system to build conveyors:

Conveyor Module	
Series	20
Width	02
Length	018
Drive Shaft	D
T - Slots	L
Modifications	

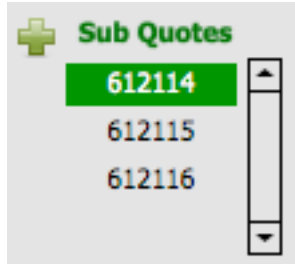
Note that the bottom field for **Modifications** is empty. Now we'll enter a value in that field:

Conveyor Module	
Series	20
Width	02
Length	018
Drive Shaft	D
T - Slots	L
Modifications	0001

The Series field is now highlighted telling the user that they have to use a different series than original since there are now modifications.

Another way I like to use conditional formatting is to let the user know which record they are currently working in.

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This portal shows all of the related records for the current quote and lets the user know that he is in **612114**. Of course, he can see that information elsewhere on the screen but this little splash of color jumps right out at him.

A very cool thing you can do, and which is one of my personal favorites, is have a block of text appear on screen overlaying a field. If the field is empty, the text shows up but, as soon as something is entered into the field, the text disappears into the background:



These are just a few ideas that you can use to enhance your own interfaces. Remember that the purpose of them is to provide users with visual cues and add an extra degree of user-friendliness. (If you have any cool ways of using conditional formatting, I'd love to hear about them).