

## Microsoft Access of Filemaker: Which One To Choose?

Microsoft Access and FileMaker Pro are the most popular database creation tools used by nonprofits. They are not custom applications, pre-designed to do specific tasks such as fundraising or tracking client demographics. Rather, they are database kits that give the user the tools to create their own database application. If you have decided to create a custom database but cannot decide which program to use, this quick overview of the differences between Access and FileMaker may help:

	<b>Microsoft Access</b>	<b>FileMaker Pro</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Ease of Use</b>	More difficult to set up at the beginning level, but less difficult to create advanced functionality.	Less difficult to set up at the beginning level, but more difficult to create advanced functionality.	
<b>Computer Platform</b>	Access will not run on a Macintosh computer, unless the computer is running Virtual PC.	FileMaker runs on both Macintosh and PC computers.	
<b>Related Data Tables</b>	All data tables are stored within one file.	Each data table is a separate file.	Because Access stores its tables in one place, it is easier to handle database systems with a complicated table structure in Access.
<b>Automating</b>	Access uses Visual Basic for Applications (VBA) to automate the database. VBA is an actual programming language.	FileMaker uses ScriptMaker, a scripting language.	FileMaker scripts are initially more intuitive and easier to use than VBA, because they consist of a set list of FileMaker commands. On the other hand, VBA is ultimately more powerful than ScriptMaker.
<b>Querying/Finding</b>	Access uses queries to find specific records, and to bring together related tables. Queries are objects that can be saved.	FileMaker uses Find Mode to select records. A Find cannot be saved, though you can create a script to run a specific Find.	Queries are a more powerful tool than Finds for selecting information and creating reports. Finds are more intuitive and easier to use.
<b>Calculations</b>	Calculations in Access are created in queries, forms and reports, not in tables.	Calculations in FileMaker are created as actual fields.	Creating calculations directly in the data files simplifies some aspects of database design, but it also slows performance.

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### Text Field Size

Access allows the designer to choose the amount of data each text field can hold.

All text fields in FileMaker can hold a large amount of data; the user cannot set a limit to the number of characters a text field may contain.

Larger text fields make for slower performance.

### Compatibility with Other Database Systems

Access is ODBC compliant, which means it can be easily linked to data tables from other ODBC compliant databases.

FileMaker is now ODBC compliant.

### Putting a Database up on the Web

The process of putting an Access database up on the web is complicated and requires a separate middleware program such as Active Server Pages.

FileMaker databases are easy to put up on the web because FileMaker includes built-in middleware.

### Bottom Line:

- Access is fast and sophisticated.
- FileMaker is easy to use.
- Access is good for technology oriented staff.
- FileMaker is good for technophobic staff.