BubbleHelp
Version 3.0
by
# Resource Development Associates

RDA's BubbleHelp allows you to add pop up help to objects on your forms. It works similarly to Paradox 9's tooltips except that messages over a certain length will wrap to multiple lines. You can essentially put in any amount of text in a BubbleHelp message. Because you create your own help message text **BubbleHelp works in any language**! You can attach BubbleHelp messages to practically any object on your forms. You can use it to present anything from short prompts to long instructional messages to users for buttons on your forms. You can attach BubbleHelp to fields to provide instructions for data entry, code displays, explanatory messages etc. You can set BubbleHelp to display messages when notebook tabs are clicked. You can have different messages display on the same object depending on various conditions.

You can cut your support and training costs by providing direct, on screen assistance to users rather than having them look things up in help. And once you have added BubbleHelp, managing messages is as simple as typing text. You can be as creative with the uses of BubbleHelp as you want! RDA's BubbleHelp is currently available for Paradox versions 7-32 bit, 8 and 9.

RDA's BubbleHelp comes with a main form (at right) which includes demonstration objects which show BubbleHelp messages at bottom right, top right, bottom left and top left of button objects and show how a message can pop up from a field object. There are also 5 page tabs which include instructions for installing and using BubbleHelp, code examples for launching and clearing
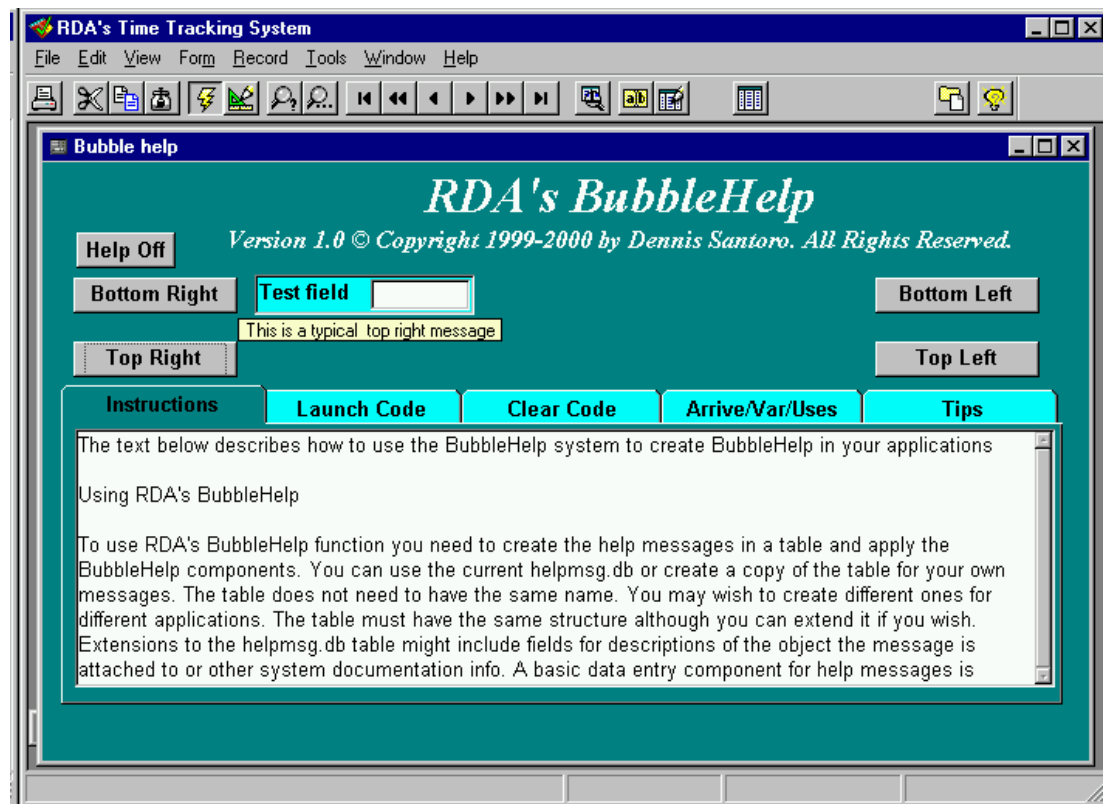
BubbleHelp messages and the code required to access BubbleHelp from your forms. You can copy the code directly from the text in the page tabs and paste it into your object with only minor modification to tell BubbleHelp which message to display for any object and where to find the message table.

You also get the BubbleHelp Object Form (see below). This is an undelivered form which allows you to copy Bubblehelp objects such as the text display objects (which are required) and code, or objects with BubbleHelp code already embeded so that you can get a quick start in using BubbleHelp.

The included objects are a button which displays a BubbleHelp, a button pair which can toggle
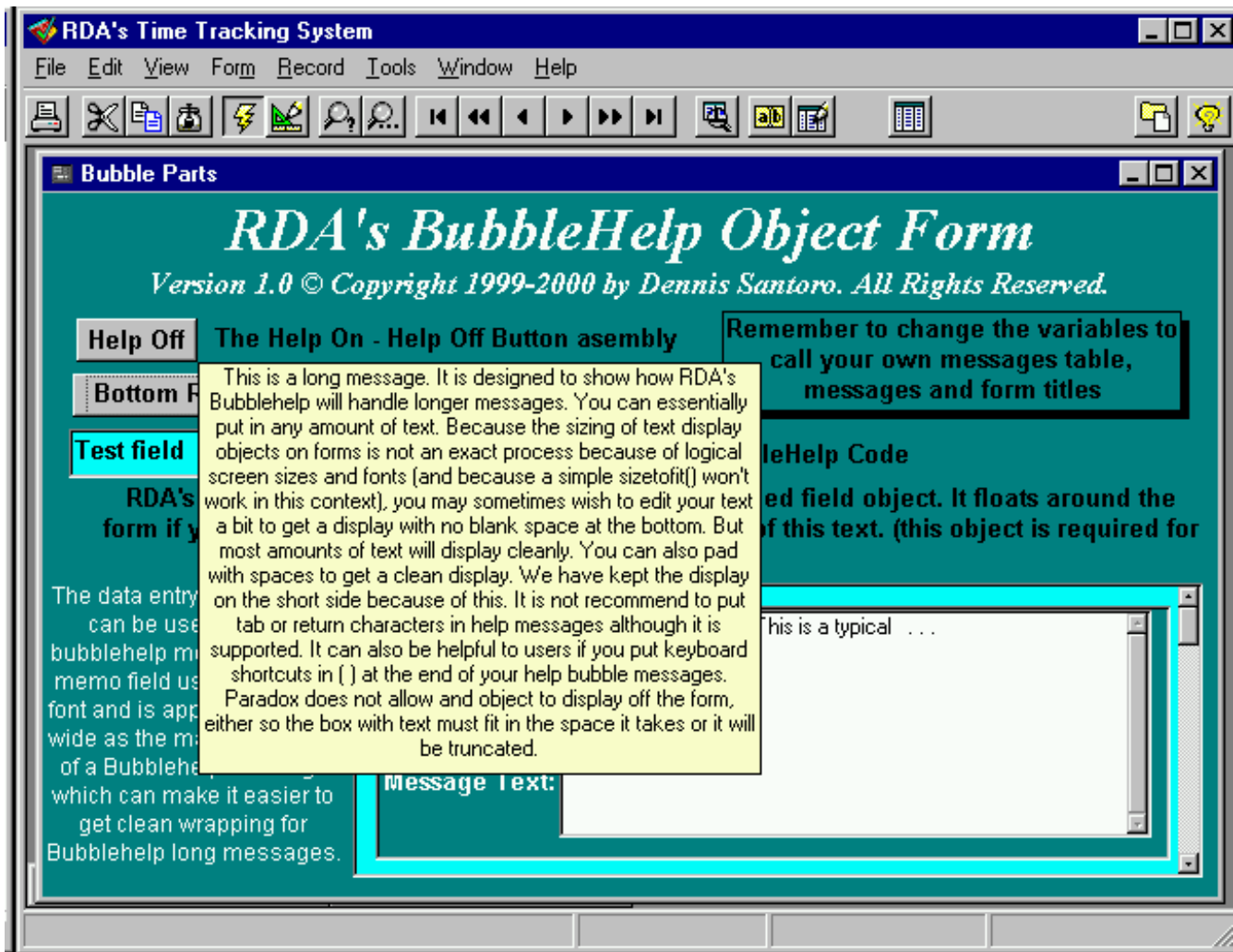
ButtonHelp on or off or between long and short messages. This form can also be used to demonstrate how BubbleHelp works and can be used as a data entry form for BubbleHelp messages. You can also copy the data entry part of the Bubble Parts form and embed it in your own data entry forms if you prefer. Because this is an undelivered form you can copy parts and paste them directly on your own forms.

The heart of RDA's BubbleHelp are the functions which size and display your help messages. These are called from the library by the items in your application which you want help displayed on. There are 16 methods for help display:

disphelp(msgid smallint, tblname string, formname string)
disphelpleft(msgid smallint, tblname string, formname string)
disphelptop(msgid smallint, tblname string, formname string)
disphelptopleft(msgid smallint, tblname string, formname string)
disphelpwobject(msgid smallint, tblname string, formname string, helptextname string)
disphelpleftwobject(msgid smallint, tblname string, formname string, helptextname string)
disphelptopwobject(msgid smallint, tblname string, formname string, helptextname string)
disphelptopleftwobject(msgid smallint, tblname string, formname string, helptextname string)
disphelpdirect(stMsg Anytype, formname string)
disphelpleftdirect(stMsg Anytype, formname string)
disphelptopdirect(stMsg Anytype, formname string)
disphelptopleftdirect(stMsg Anytype, formname string)
disphelpscroll(msgid smallint, tblname string, formname string)
disphelpleftscroll(msgid smallint, tblname string, formname string)
disphelptopscroll(msgid smallint, tblname string, formname string)
disphelptopleftscroll(msgid smallint, tblname string, formname string)

These display help messages to the bottom right, bottom left, top right and top left of objects. These are generally called from the Mouseenter method for buttons and other general UI Objects and from the Arrive method for fields. But you can call them from any object that can be referenced by the variable **self** and which has display room available for the message. Paradox can not display the messages off a form's boundaries so for all practical purposes this means you can not reference BubbleHelp messages from a page or form object nor any other object which is sized to display so large on a form that there would be no message space. This can be easily worked around by placing other UI objects on the form which can call the BubbleHelp mesages (e.g. text, graphics, etc.)

To embed BubbleHelp in your application you need call and clear routines in the objects that will have BubbleHelp and must include statements in your forms' Arrive, Uses and Var methods. These are detailed in the BubbleHelp instructions. They can be copied from the page tabs of the bublhelp.fdl or from the methods in the bublpart.fsl. You also need to place the hidden, unlabeled field, helptext, on the form at a level which can be seen by all calling objects. Usually on the page is best. It can be sized as small as you like for design purposes since it resizes on the fly at runtime. You should not change the properties of the helptext object since it is designed to work with the sizing code in the BubbleHelp library.

At RDA we typically use BubbleHelp for toggling between a short message or a long message so that users who are sure of what they are doing get short, simple prompts and users who want can get longer, more detailed prompts. We also generally list any keyboard shortcuts for the buttons so that users who prefer keyboards to mice can learn and use these shortcuts. Generally we do this with simple if statements and by toggling one variable between 2 states. You can even get

more complex if you wish and use case statements and various variable values to have different messages display on any object depending on multiple contexts and conditions. You are basically only limited by the creativity of your calling code.

You must, of course, create the text of your help messages. The help messages are kept in a table. Because of this you can change your help messages with great ease and build applications with help messages in any language simply by switching to a help message table with the help messages in a different language. No other code changes are needed! This greatly simplifies your ability to produce applications in various languages.
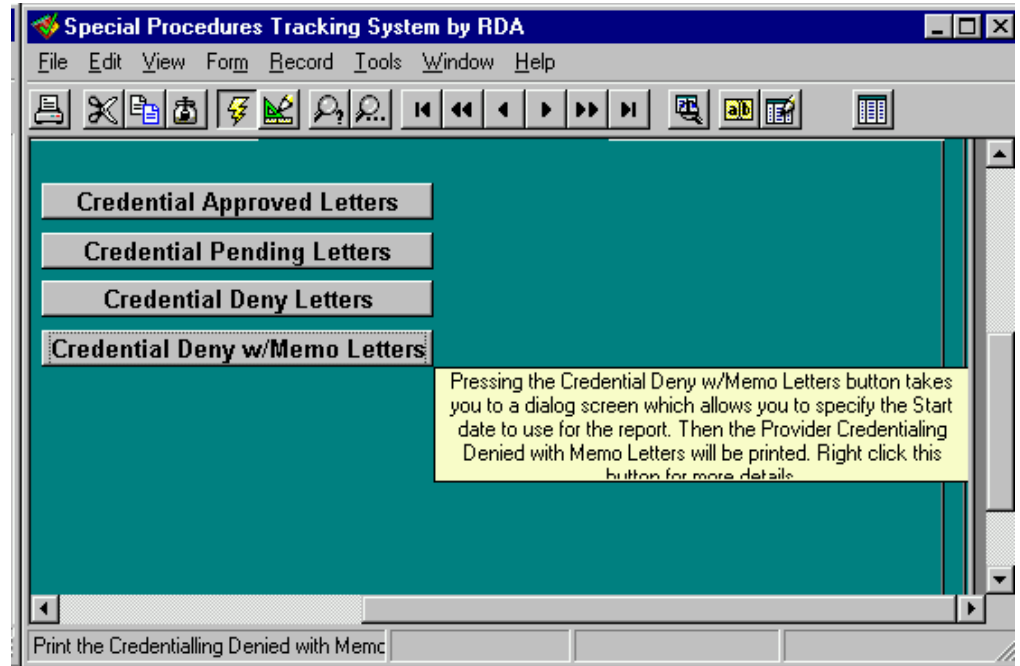
BubbleHelp with an incomplete message display
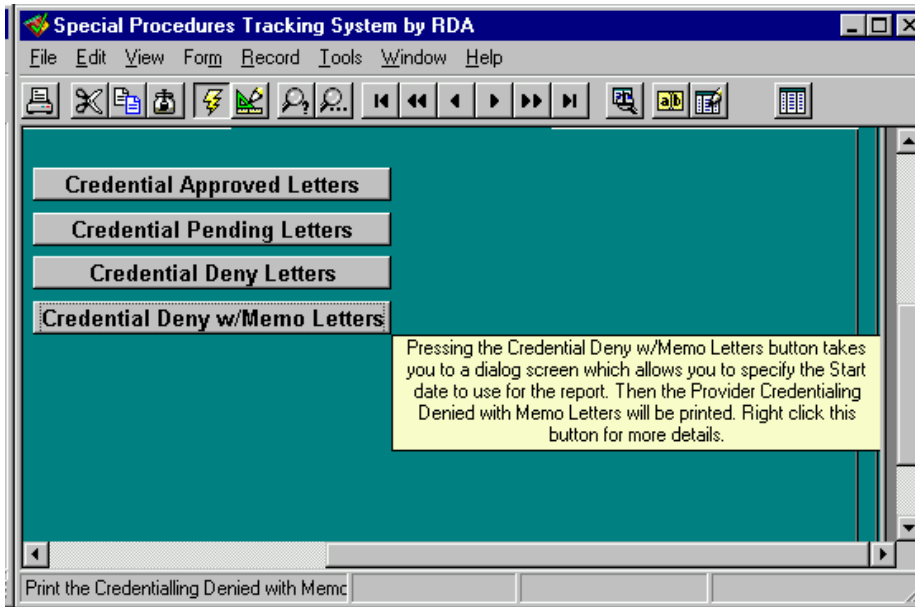
The same BubbleHelp message fixed by padding with spaces.

Once you have installed these components you will have functioning BubbleHelp when you run your forms. BubbleHelp works with delivered forms as well as with running Fsls.

The sizing of text display objects on forms is not an exact process because of logical screen sizes and proportional fonts. We tried various fixed width fonts but were dissatisfied with the look. The sizing complexity is compounded because, unlike tool tips in Paradox 9, or the help messages you can attach to toolbars, BubbleHelp wraps text after 3.1 logical inches. While this means that your BubbleHelp messages are only limited by the display size of your forms it means you may sometimes have to manipulate the text to get a display look you are happy with. Unfortunately a simple sizetofit() won't work in this context. Therefor, you may sometimes wish to edit your text a bit to get a display with no blank space at

the bottom or with the full text cleanly displayed. Often it is best to shorten the text a bit if you are not able to see the full text. You can also lengthen the text or pad with spaces to get a cleaner display if you can not shorten the text. But most amounts of text will display cleanly. We have kept the display on the short side because of this. It is not recommend to put tab or return characters in help messages although it is supported. It can also be helpful to users if you put keyboard shortcuts in () at the end of your help bubble messages. There are tips on creating the best display in the instructions document.

Note: Screen shots do not reproduce with great resolution in the PDF format. You may wish to view them on line at our web site where they look much closer to what they really look like in actual use. Note also that the screen shots of BubbleHelp forms in this document are from the 1.0 version and may look somewhat different in the current version as BubbleHelp is updated.

Licensing

RDA believes in clear and simple licensing. Each license for RDA's BubbleHelp allows the developer to use BubbleHelp at their development site and one production site if that is different from the development site. A site is defined as all users having access to a server where the data for an application which uses BubbleHelp is installed (LAN, WAN or stand alone PC). There are no user limits at a site and RDA's BubbleHelp may be used for all applications housed on that server. Additional licenses must be purchased for additional sites. For example, if you build an application which includes RDA's BubbleHelp and install it at 2 different clients, 2 licenses are needed regardless of the user count. On the other hand, if you build 2 applications which include RDA's BubbleHelp and install them both at the same site, only 1 license is required. Systems requiring different versions of BubbleHelp (for different versions of Paradox running at the same site) must purchase one license per site for each version of BubbleHelp. The full end user licensing agreement is included with the product or available by e-mail request.