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## Editor's View

### 3 .. 2 .. 1.. Blastoff!

#### Visual FoxPro launches at Devcon. What's next?

By Tamar E. Granor, Editor

The official launch of Visual FoxPro at the opening session of DevCon in San Diego was accompanied by flashing lights, smoke (but no mirrors), fireworks and a live rendition of "Take It to the Extreme", a rock song written specially for the occasion. Among the lyrics I could decipher were: "FoxPro Three-Oh" and "DevCon—Get Set. We're taking you somewhere you're not gonna soon forget."

I think most of the 2400 FoxPro users present would agree with that last statement. The rest of the week was devoted to introducing Visual FoxPro. Morris Sim of Microsoft used most of the opening session to demo the product, getting applause for a wide range of features included real Windows combo boxes, no generation of form code, a layout toolbar for lining up input fields and making them the same size, multiple independent instances of forms, scaling from local to remote data, and much more.

Some of the the memorable quotes of the week included Alan Schwartz referring to the move from FoxPro 2.x to Visual FoxPro as a "generational leap" and Meng Phua of Microsoft referring to a grid as "BROWSE on steroids." Also, a video clip of Microsoft's Steve Ballmer shown at the closing session included his reference to having "smelled the product" - the audience cracked up.

By the end of the first day, many of the attendees looked dazed. They'd seen so much that was new, they felt overwhelmed. But by the closing session on Thursday, people were excited, perhaps because they went home with a marketing Beta of the product, so they could put their newfound knowledge to work right away.

As always, DevCon was also filled with fun interactions. From the FoxGang party (open to anyone, but organized by regulars of CompuServe's FoxUser forum) on Saturday night through both the scheduled and the informal jam sessions each night, there were plenty of chances to mix and mingle with other FoxPro developers. I saw old friendships renewed, and new ones started, as well as lots of discussion of business opportunities. I missed, but heard later, how a demo of one (very cool) application just for a couple of people turned into several hours of demos and discussion in the Programmer's Exchange.

All in all, it was an exciting, exhausting way to spend a week. I don't know about other folks, but I came home and spent a weekend sleeping afterwards.

#### Is FoxPro Dead?

Perhaps the most frequent concern I hear from FoxPro developers is that Microsoft isn't committed to FoxPro, that they only bought it so they could steal the best parts and use

them in other products. This concern has been inflamed by the mixed messages coming out of Microsoft's marketing organization since the merger.

I always doubted that theory myself. It seemed like an awful lot of money to spend for a product just to discard it. Once I saw Visual FoxPro, I knew the doubters were wrong. There's no way Microsoft would invest the resources necessary to build such a product if it were headed for the scrap heap.

DevCon convinced a lot more folks. I heard many people say something like "I never really thought Microsoft was committed to FoxPro until now." I think we'll be hearing a lot less of the "Is FoxPro dead?" discussion from here on out.

## **Microsoft's Future Plans**

Now that we know FoxPro isn't dead, where is it going? Visual FoxPro 3.0 is the first step down the road that Microsoft's been telling us they're on all along - the consolidation of their development environments.

Many of you have probably seen the same Powerpoint slide that I've seen repeatedly. It shows development tools as composed of three-parts: design surfaces, language, and engine. The slide is meant to be Microsoft's goal and has common design surfaces and a common engine with your choice of language (Xbase, Basic, or C) in the middle.

We're not there yet, but this is where we're headed. The Visual FoxPro design surfaces are a big step in that direction, especially the Form Designer. Access 2.0's Jet engine incorporates Rushmore technology, another step along the path. Expect to see more movement toward commonality in each new version of any of Microsoft's development products.

While this movement is a little scary, since it raises the "Is FoxPro dead?" spectre again, what we're actually gaining is many of the skills needed to work in the other environments.

My DevCon session required me to access remote data. I chose to use Access data since I had Access available. Despite the fact that I've never worked in Access (in fact, never done more than open it up and look around and that was with Access 1.0), I had no problems making a few changes I needed without consulting manuals or help. The design surfaces looked familiar and worked similarly to those in Visual FoxPro, though the folks in my sessions can tell you how aggravated I was over ESC not closing windows in Access. Some habits do die hard.

The point here is that the increasing commonality is a big win for us. Just as common interface standards benefit our users by making it easier for them to move to new environments, so common design surfaces make it easier for us to move among development environments.

## **April Fool!**

You probably expected this to be the April issue of FoxPro Advisor when you got it. April Fool! If you check the cover, you'll find it's actually the May issue. As I explained last

month, due to the way newsstands handle magazine stocking, all Advisor magazines have advanced their cover date by a month.

What does this mean for you? Not very much. If you're a subscriber, you'll still get the same number of issues you paid for. The magazine will still arrive about the same time each month - only the date on the cover will be different. Probably the biggest annoyance for you will be the unexplained "gap" in your collection. No doubt, somewhere down the road, more than one of you will spend some fruitless time hunting for the "missing" April '95 issue.

If you buy FPA from a newsstand or store each month, this change is good news for you. Your window of opportunity to find each issue in the rack should be much longer.

We hope no one is too confused by the whole business.