

February, 1997

## **Editor's View**

### **A Member of the Family**

#### **Microsoft uses DevCon to make FoxPro's position clear.**

By Tamar E. Granor, Editor

Great people. Innovative ideas. Too much food. Too little sleep. Answering questions. Asking questions. Brainstorming. Laughing. Putting faces to names. Putting names to faces. It must be DevCon.

I've just come back from the 7th International FoxPro Developer's Conference, held this year in Scottsdale, Arizona. As always, it was a mind-enriching, sleep-depriving experience.

DevCon '96 was a sell-out. In fact, so many people wanted to come that they added a tent to hold an extra session in each time slot. The attendees came ready to learn and with lots of questions. They went home with knowledge, answers, a copy of Visual FoxPro 5.0, a copy of the Internet Explorer starter kit, a conference CD with all the session notes and examples and a video entitled "The Power of Visual FoxPro." (Attendees will also receive a copy of the Visual Basic Control Creation Edition, a scaled-down version of VB designed for creating ActiveX controls.)

Perhaps the biggest question people walked in with was about the future of FoxPro. The subject has been a concern since Microsoft bought Fox Software in 1992. Ever since InfoWeek printed the latest "FoxPro is dead" rumor back in February and it was picked up by other publications, people's anxiety on the subject has been even higher.

Those at DevCon went home with an answer to the question - Visual FoxPro is a member in full standing of the Microsoft Visual Tools family.

This may not be the answer some want. After all, we *know* FoxPro is the greatest thing since sliced bread. Why isn't Microsoft telling the world?

Microsoft's message is clear: You can solve your business problems with Microsoft Visual Tools. The tools work well together and each is best suited to different problems or parts of the problem. Included in the conference materials was a draft of a white paper aimed at helping people choose among the Visual Tools. The paper treats FoxPro as an equal member of the family, not as the red-headed stepchild it's sometimes been in the past. By the time you read this, the white paper should be available on Microsoft's Web site.

The FoxPro marketing team has been hard at work. In addition to the white paper, they've put together the video mentioned above. It features David Lazar, Calvin Hsia and Randy Brown (all members of the FoxPro developer community who now work for Microsoft) demonstrating the product. It was given to every attendee and will be sent to all Microsoft field representatives and to all Solution Providers. (Others can get the tape directly from Microsoft.) The tape will help the Microsoft sales force understand VFP's

place in the Tools family, and provide all of us with something we can show clients and potential clients who question Microsoft's commitment to FoxPro.

In the next issue, we'll have an interview with Robert Green, the newest member of the FoxPro marketing team. Robert is a FoxPro Advisor writer, and former Vice President of the Information Management Group in Chicago. He's a knowledgeable developer who understands the product and can market it based on its strengths.

Microsoft's main theme at the conference was, not surprisingly, the Internet. The opening session and a number of the break-outs focused on Internet technology. The keynote address was given by Bob Muglia, the Vice President of the Developer Tools division in which FoxPro lives. (Next month, we'll have a summary of Muglia's talk as well as what it means for you.) The second major theme was the rollout of VFP 5 - the opening session included a demonstration of the product, which was greeted with oohs and aahs for many of the new features.

The opening also included a brief, sneak peek of the next version of VFP (presumably 6, but who knows with Microsoft). One of the goals for that version appears to be more improvement in integration with other products. It's too early to know what else that version will bring; the key point of the preview was to let us know that development continues and we can expect to see another major revision of VFP.

The break-out sessions covered a variety of topics, from reports to application frameworks to the new development tools to the Internet to ActiveX. There's far too much for me to summarize here, except to say that even the experts I spoke to found things to learn. Watch for future articles covering many of these topics.

Business was brisk at the trade show which featured products and publications related to FoxPro. One vendor told me his sales at DevCon were 50% more than his previous best for any trade show. Several booths featured new books and sold out every copy they'd brought.

An evening session talked about FoxPro-Past, Present and Future. The past was a hilarious trivia quiz about the history of FoxPro. People were chosen at random to participate and all who did received prizes. (The answer to "What's the dance craze sweeping the nation?" was "the Mac-a-Rubel.") The present was "Stump the Experts" with a panel of Microsoft employees and a few speakers (me, Drew Speedie, Y. Alan Griver and Steven Black). We took technical questions from the audience with a prize to anyone who stumped the panel.

The final section of the evening was an open question and answer session on FoxPro's future. The marketing team along with several other Microsoft folks (including Eric Rudder, the General Manager of the Tools division) answered an assortment of questions about FoxPro's position at Microsoft, problems with Microsoft field representatives, positioning of the product and so forth. This portion went on for about two hours and was, I think, a brave thing for Microsoft to do - the marketing team is aware how unhappy many of us have been with previous marketing efforts. Nonetheless, they allowed those present to express their displeasure and tried to give answers as to how things will change.

Obviously, the problems we've encountered can't be solved overnight. It will take time for the marketing team to get their message out. It will also take time for the FoxPro community to feel secure that Microsoft really supports the product. But if the message we see over the next six months is the one we heard at DevCon—that FoxPro is a full-fledged member of the Visual Tools family—I think we can all get back to work and enjoy using the greatest thing since sliced bread.