

March, 2005

Advisor Answers

Adding Captions to Grouped Controls

VFP 9/8/7

Q: I'm using some option groups and containers in my forms and I'd like to put a caption on the border of the control to identify the group as a whole. The container controls don't have a Caption property. How can I do this?

A: As you note, container controls like optiongroups don't have a Caption property to let you label the group as a whole. The solution is to position a label control over the container and make sure it's opaque, so the line it covers doesn't show through. Figure 1 shows a form containing an optiongroup and a shape, each with a label identifying the group of controls.

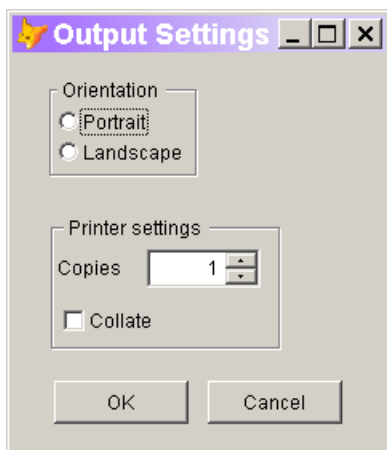


Figure 1. Labeling groups of controls—To add a caption to a container control or to a group of controls enclosed by a shape, position a label control appropriately.

The label control needs two properties set to give the right appearance. Set `AutoSize` to `True`, so the entire caption shows, and `BackStyle` to `1-Opaque` (the default). I also find the results look best if I begin and end the caption with spaces. For example, the caption for the label positioned over the optiongroup in Figure 1 is " Orientation ". The spaces provide a gap between the lines of the container and the text.

The Printer settings group in Figure 1 uses a Shape control, not a Container. In this case, we only want the controls to be grouped

visually; they're not part of the same object. The key to putting the controls "inside" a shape is to put the Shape control on the form, and then select it and choose Format > Send to Back from the menu. This ensures that the controls aren't covered by the back of the shape. The SpecialEffect property of the shape is set to 0-3D to make the border look sunken.

You also have to make sure the label you're using as a caption appears over, rather than under, the container it's meant to label. To ensure that it's over the container, click on the label and choose Format > Bring to Front from the menu.

These settings combine to provide the look you want, unless you're running in Windows XP or later with themes turned on. In that case, you want the labels to follow the color scheme for the theme. In VFP 8 or later, you can handle this by setting the Style property for the control to 3-Themed. You probably also want to set Style for the shape to 3-Themed, to ensure it takes on the rounded corners and coloring of Windows XP themes.

In some situations, though, you don't want the label to use the theme's foreground color (blue in the default Windows XP theme). You want the label to use the same color as other text. However, when you put such a container/label combination on a page of a pageframe (or another container that uses gradient coloring rather than a solid background), VFP 8 doesn't give you a way to get the desired results. If you leave the label's Style set to 0-Normal, it uses the regular text color, but has a solid background. Setting Style to 3-Themed provides the gradient background, but uses a different text color.

VFP 9 introduces a solution to this problem, a new setting for Style. Choose 4-Themed Background Only to get a gradient background, but the normal text color. Figure 2 shows a form with three captioned shapes on a page of a pageframe. From left to right, they have Style=0-Normal, Style=3-Themed, and Style=4-Themed Background Only.

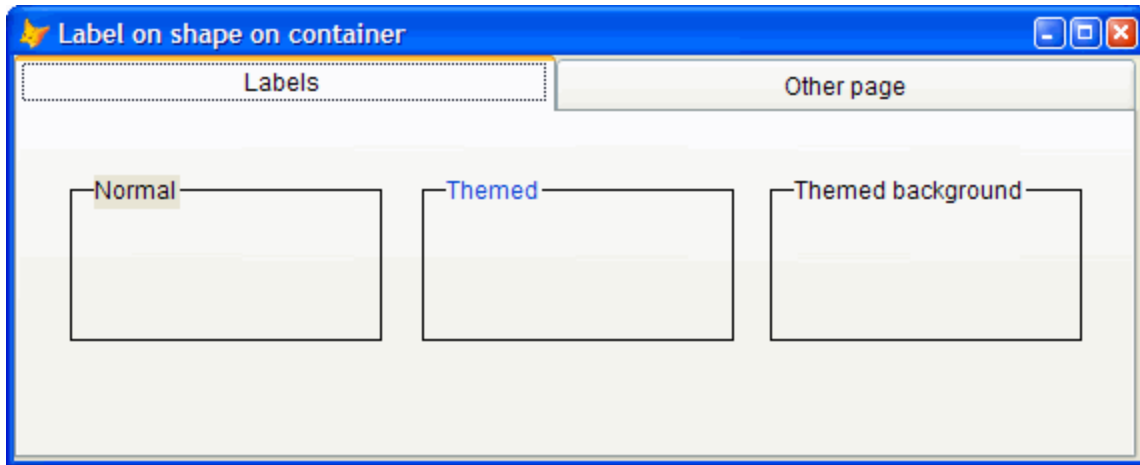


Figure 2. Combining labels and themes—VFP 9 introduced a new setting for the Style property of a Label, allowing you to have the gradient background of the theme, but use the regular text color.

Checking around in a variety of applications running with themes under Windows XP, it's not at all clear which of the two theme settings is correct, from the point of view of standards. VFP 8 uses themed background only in such cases (look at the Tools > Options dialog, for example), while VFP 9, which gives us the themed background only setting, actually uses the themed setting. Windows Explorer uses the themed setting, but Microsoft Office XP uses themed background only. A quick check of the Windows User Experience user interface guidelines didn't turn up an answer, though the information may be buried in there somewhere.

The two forms shown here are included on this month's Professional Resource CD.

–Tamar