October, 1996

An Intimate Connection

The relationship between application developer and user is much like the one between performer and audience.

By Tamar E. Granor, Editor

Maybe it was the symphony orchestra ...

One of my first Editors' View columns talked about my experiences at the Billy Joel/Elton John concert a couple of years ago. My disappointment with that show kept me away from rock concerts after that. But when we heard the ad on the radio for the Moody Blues "in concert with a full symphony orchestra," my husband and I looked at each other and knew we had to go.

So we went, and the music was still too loud (though it was bearable). Sitting there listening, I got to thinking about the relationship between performers and their audience. Both make themselves vulnerable at a performance.

The performers' side is easy to see. They go on stage and put themselves on the line, giving everything they have to engage the audience. But what about the audience? They, too, have to open themselves up to receive what the performer has to offer. At the best shows, there's an intimate interaction between the performer and the listener. It's as if the performance is aimed directly at you and you alone. When the show doesn't click, you sit there counting the minutes, waiting to be released, hoping that the next moment will make it better.

The relationship between an application developer and an end-user isn't terribly different, though it's less immediate. The developer lays it on the line, gives the user what he or she has to give. When it works out right, the user can get things done in a natural and comfortable way. The application becomes a handy tool, almost a friend, to do what needs to be done. When it doesn't work, the application is a roadblock keeping the user from getting his or her job done or making it unpleasant. Yet the user may keep hoping to find the magic button that will make it easy to do the job.

As developers, we're on both sides of this equation. We write the applications that make our users' work lives productive and pleasant or tedious and miserable. We need to keep this in mind as we design applications.

We also are users ourselves and the companies that provide our application development environment(s) have the same power over us (though we may have more freedom to change that environment than our end-users do). We need to let them know how they're doing.

Welcome, Visual FoxPro 5.0

In this issue, we introduce Visual FoxPro 5, Microsoft's latest attempt at improving our professional lives. For most of us, VFP5 will make us more productive and make our work lives more pleasant. Many of the things that were tedious in the initial version of VFP work more easily now. Many nagging bugs have been fixed, and performance has been improved throughout the product. The Interactive Development Environment contains substantial improvements. Best of all, most of what we learned (or are learning) to use VFP3 carries over to the new product. This release should also answer any lingering questions you may have about Microsoft's commitment to FoxPro.

With the introduction of VFP5, our equation at FoxPro Advisor becomes even more complex. We need to balance our coverage of three distinct products (FoxPro 2.x, Visual FoxPro 3.0 and Visual FoxPro 5.0) as well as the various platforms they run on (Windows, DOS, Mac, UNIX). We'll be evaluating the responses to the survey in last month's Editors View to help us shape the magazine as we move forward. You can still give us your views if you haven't.

DevCon, Ho!

As I write this, the spring FoxPro conference season has just wrapped up. Conference attendees in Toronto, Minneapolis and Richmond had the opportunity to learn about Visual FoxPro first hand from the experts in the field. Generally, when I talk to people who've attended conferences, they tell me that there's no substitute for it in terms of learning and interaction.

The grandmother of all FoxPro conferences is on the horizon. This year's Microsoft FoxPro DevCon will be held October 27-30 at the Princess hotel in Scottsdale, Arizona. You'll find the leading authorities on FoxPro there, as well as many of the folks who designed and implemented the product. It's a unique opportunity to learn what's new in Visual FoxPro 5.0 as well as improve your knowledge in existing areas.

DevCon also gives you a chance to meet people from around the world who do what you do. The interaction in between sessions, at meals and in the evening creates relationships that transcend the physical distance between people's homes. It's pretty convenient to have colleagues you can talk to spread across North America and the world, especially since electronic communication isn't measured in miles.

If you're serious about working with FoxPro, you should give DevCon real consideration. It will cost you some money and time away from the office, but what you gain is likely to be far more valuable.