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## Editor's View

### Doing Data in a Component World

#### What is FoxPro's role in the brave new world of components?

By Tamar E. Granor, Editor

Since DevCon, I've seen a change in the discussions on CompuServe's VFox forum. Of course, there are still plenty of questions and answers and the usual good-natured bantering. But a number of threads have focused on Microsoft's data access strategy and the role of VFP in that strategy.

At DevCon, Microsoft made it clear that it sees our future in components and that VFP is being positioned primarily as the middle-tier component of a three-tier client-server architecture. The first tier is the user interface piece. The third tier is the actual data store. The middle is where the business rules and logic are kept.

VFP is unusual in that, depending on the size and scope of the project, it can be well suited for any of the three tiers. (VB and Access are good for the UI and perhaps the middle; SQL Server is a back-end only.) So, why is Microsoft focusing on the middle?

One reason may be specifically to give VFP a place in its plan. One of the big issues we've faced over the last few years is the difficulty Microsoft has had in differentiating among its tools, and specifically in telling people where FoxPro fits. Designating the middle tier as VFP's territory makes that task easier.

In reading these discussions, I've been coming across a veritable alphabet soup of acronyms—ADO, RDO, DAO, ODBC (at least this one I know), OLE DB, COM. To implement three-tier applications involving independent components, you need a way to let them talk to each other. Microsoft has been through a series of interfaces for this purpose, each with a slightly different acronym. The threads I've read have been fascinating. People are looking hard at the three-tier model and proposing alternatives. They're also talking about where this technology is really ready yet. (Even if not, there's general agreement that we need to learn about it now so we can be ready when it's "soup.")

My overall enthusiasm for components has been increasing anyway as I begin to see how well-built components can decrease my development effort. With that in mind, I've started to do my homework and read about where Microsoft is now with data access, where it's headed, and how it all works before I actually need to use this technology.

The potential here is tremendous. Let's hope the results are, too. In the meantime, you probably have some homework to do, too—check out <http://www.microsoft.com/data> for starters and, of course, watch future issues of *FOXPRO ADVISOR*.

## What's a "semi app?"

I was driving up the street one morning (knowing I had to write this column) when I noticed the license plate on the truck in front of me. Along the bottom, I saw "Semi App". Naturally, the first thing that jumped into my mind had nothing to do with tractor-trailers. Instead, I found myself thinking about all the semi-apps I've written.

You probably have some of these, too. They're those little projects you started because it seemed like a good idea to automate something or to handle a task for an organization you're involved with. Somehow, these apps often don't get finished, but live perpetually in a state of chaos. They're good enough for *you* to handle the task, but never good enough to hand over to someone else.

I've written quite a few semi-apps over the years: the elementary school t-shirt sale, our couples' club membership list, the invitation list for my son's Bar Mitzvah (double whammy—this one was a beta-testing semi-app, written during the VFP beta test), and many more. I always feel guilty about not cleaning these up and handing them to someone else to work with. On the other hand, because they're usually written for me to be the primary user, I use the opportunity to try some technique that I'm interested in and I almost always learn something from the experience.

So, what do you suppose was unfinished about that truck?

## Get those entries in

The deadline for the Visual FoxPro Excellence Awards is rapidly approaching. This program offers US and Canadian developers the opportunity to show off their stuff by submitting case studies in any of six categories. Finalists in each category will be invited to DevCon '98 in Orlando where the winners will be announced. In addition, the finalists will be featured in a special section of FoxPro Advisor.

If you're planning to enter, it's time to pull your submission together. All entries must be received by January 9, 1998. For more information and official program rules, check out [www.microsoft.com/vfoxpro/excellence/](http://www.microsoft.com/vfoxpro/excellence/).

I can't wait to learn about all the interesting projects that have been completed with this fantastic product we all use.