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Editor's View

Escape from DLL Hell

A new on-line tool from Microsoft helps you figure out what version you have and what version you should have.

By Tamar E. Granor, Editor

I opened the VFP 6 help file one day and was greeted by this message: "This page provides potentially unsafe information to an ActiveX control. Your current security settings prohibit running controls in this manner. As a result, this page may not display correctly." Since I know that VFP uses HTML Help, which in turn is based on Internet Explorer, I wasn't totally taken aback, but it was still a surprise.

I tried some other HTML Help files (including the one for my book, *Hacker's Guide to Visual FoxPro 6.0*). Sure enough, all of them did the same thing. In fact, some of them not only gave me that message on startup, but repeated it every time I navigated to a new page. Yuk!

I remembered that I'd installed some new software and guessed that it had messed with my IE Security settings, so I checked those, but they all seemed reasonable. Nonetheless, I tried tweaking them, but nothing helped.

So I went fishing in the Microsoft Knowledge Base. The only article I could find that mentioned this error linked it to a problem with COMCAT.DLL. The problem the article described didn't apply in my case, but it got me thinking.

Then I remembered a new tool on the MSDN website (msdn.Microsoft.com). The DLL Help Database is designed just for situations like mine. It's available by choosing "DLL Help Database" from the Resources item on the main MSDN toolbar. When you get there, you enter the name of the DLL you suspect is giving you trouble. You then get a list of all versions of that DLL, and can find out which products install them.

With a little exploration, I determined that something had replaced COMCAT.DLL on my system with a much older version. When I replaced it with the more recent version that should have been there, the problem went away.

Most of us have either been in DLL Hell ourselves or had users there more than once. By putting the information we need to diagnose problems in one, easily updated place, Microsoft just made our jobs a little easier. Kudos.

Integrating Office with VFP

One reason I needed to solve the problem with the HTML Help files quickly was that I've been practically living in the VBA Help files for Office products this fall and winter. One of my major projects has been a new book. As I write this, it's nearly done.

This book is something of a departure from my previous books. Written with Della Martin, it's called *Microsoft Office Automation with Visual FoxPro*. As the title suggests, the focus is on automating the Microsoft Office applications using Visual FoxPro. (The book grew out of the automation experiences I described in the January '99 Editor's View.) As a result, I've spent a tremendous amount of time exploring Visual Basic for Applications. The Help files are one of my most important resources.

Della, my co-author, is a member of the team that built JFAST, the logistics application that helped move troops and equipment for every US military deployment since Desert Shield. (See the June '98 FoxPro Advisor.) Her role on the team is Automation – she wrote the automated briefing module. Della probably knows more about automating Office from VFP than anyone else around. She shared some of her hard-won knowledge in the November '97 issue.

The book should be available mid-Spring. You can check it out at www.hentzenwerke.com.

Changes

A Greek philosopher once said, "Change alone is unchanging." After more than two years of putting together the monthly ADVISOR Tips column, Contributing Editor Steve Sawyer needed a change. The good news is that, without the grind of a monthly column, Steve should be able to share his own wisdom with us more often.

Starting this month, the Tips column is edited by new Contributing Editors Ceil Silver and Ed Leafe. They've ably introduced themselves in the column, so I won't repeat their credentials here. I've known both Ceil and Ed for a long time and have a great deal of respect for both of them. Of course, they need your help to fill their column, so keep your tips, tricks and traps coming to FoxProTips@advisor.com.

Some of you may have noticed that two of our long-time columnists are also sporting new titles. Andrew Ross MacNeill and Christof Lange have joined our group of Contributing Editors. Congratulations to all four new Contributing Editors. We welcome their input to help us keep changing FoxPro Advisor for the better.

I've saved the biggest change for last. Over the last few years, the world of application development has changed dramatically. For one person to be an expert on all its facets, even within the VFP market, has become an impossible task.

In order to keep FoxPro Advisor's coverage of the development world as broad as possible, starting next month, rather than having a single editor responsible for all articles, we'll have a team of technical editors dividing that responsibility. I'll stay on as part of that team, but I'll be joined by others who are experts in areas that complement my own expertise. Liz Olsen, our wonderful Managing Editor, will take over the daily reins of organizing and coordinating among the Technical Editors. The group of Technical Editors will share the responsibility for writing this column, so I'll still get a chance to do that, but not every month.

The other Advisor magazines have been using this model successfully for some time. Now FoxPro Advisor will join the fold. For me, the big win here is a chance to devote more time to the thing I got into this business to do—develop applications.