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Editor's View

FoxPro: Today and Tomorrow

This year's Visual FoxPro DevCon will show you how to optimize the development power of VFP, and give you a look at what's to come in the next version

I had a chance recently to see some of the features in the next version of Visual FoxPro, code-named Toledo. As with VFP 7, I was excited to see how many of the features answer requests from the developer community.

Visual FoxPro Product Manager Ken Levy, who gave the demo, was careful to say that what he was showing was only a small piece of what's new in Toledo. So, as you read down this list, don't despair if your favorite item isn't there.

One major focus for Toledo is things the people who use our applications can see. VFP 7 had a lot of productivity enhancements for developers, but it was hard for the people who pay the bills to see what had changed. With Toledo, Microsoft realizes that we need visible reasons for our bosses and clients to want to upgrade. Here are some of the UI enhancements:

- Support for Windows XP themes
- Multi-line tooltips
- Embedded hyperlinks in controls
- Rotation of images, including flipping
- Tabs on any side of a page frame
- Pictures in any position on a command button
- Proper grid highlights that stay put when the grid loses focus
- Autofitting of columns in a grid
- Locking of grid columns, so you can let some scroll while others stay put

Another focus for Toledo is to make it easier for new developers to get started. One set of changes in this regard relate to defining databases. First, there's a new data type that provides auto-incrementing keys. No more need to create a table of keys, and put a NextId routine with appropriate locking code in the stored procedures of every database.

In addition, the Table Designer has been restructured. While it contains pretty much the same information, the new format seems easier to work with.

Perhaps the most welcome changes in this demo were those to the View Designer (and, by extension, the Query Designer). This tool has never been useful for anything but the most basic queries, and, in fact, could seriously damage your hand-written views and queries, if you weren't carefully. Finally, in Toledo, it works as it always should have. There's improved control over joins, including support for the sequential join syntax that's often more flexible and readable than the nested syntax the QD/VD has always used. Another much-requested enhancement is two-way editing. That is, the SQL syntax window is no longer read-only. You can make changes there, and they're reflected in the designer. In addition, the SQL window for views now contains the DBSetProp() calls that set up the view properties in the database.

As I said, Ken made it clear that what he was showing was only the tip of the iceberg. With changes like this as the appetizer, Toledo looks like an exciting upgrade.

When will Toledo be available? As of this writing, it's not even in beta testing yet, so if you haven't yet upgraded to VFP 7, that's still a good choice now.

Want to see more?

If the description above whetted your appetite and you'd like to see Toledo for yourself, you can. This year's ADVISOR DevCon, to be held September 29 to October 2 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, will give you lots of chances to see Toledo in action. You can be sure Microsoft will be giving a demo at the Keynote. Even better, a number of the break-out sessions will cover Toledo material.

But Toledo isn't the only reason to come to DevCon. While you can get a look at what's to come, plenty of sessions will be focused on how to work better and smarter with VFP 7 and the other tools available today. The sessions offer a mix of down-to-earth VFP techniques (for example, I'll be giving a session on using the Debugger), combining VFP with .NET, and combining VFP with other technologies such as Office and SQL Server.

Even if there were no formal sessions at all, attending DevCon would be worthwhile. The opportunity to meet other developers, get answers to your tough questions, and see third-party products and books is

worth the price of admission. DevCon is a place to find clients, employers, employees, resources, and friends.

Don't worry if you've never been to a FoxPro conference before. Each year, about a third of those present are at their first DevCon. The most important thing you can do is be open to meeting new people. Don't head off to your room right after the sessions; hang out in the lobby and, of course, the bar. Go to dinner with a group of attendees. The after-hours conversations are where you'll cement relationships that may lead to new work or just to resources you can use when you're banging your head against the wall.

For more information about this year's DevCon, including the complete brochure, check out <http://www.advisor.com/event/cm0209>. Note that the early registration discount ends August 9, so you'll have to act quickly to save a couple of hundred dollars.