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Editor's View

Phantastic Phoenix

Plus a real end-user speaks.

By Tamar E. Granor, Editor

I've just come back from the Advisor FoxPro Conference in Phoenix. As always, going to a conference gave me lots of new ideas as well as a chance to visit with many good friends.

The conference was a huge success. About 800 people came together to learn, share, eat, sleep and breathe FoxPro. The attendees I spoke to seemed quite pleased with the speakers, sessions and overall focus.

Talking with and listening to others at the conference, I heard lots of excitement about Visual FoxPro. Microsoft says it's selling faster than anticipated—good news for all of us who've staked our careers (or at least this portion of our careers) on it.

Microsoft is aware that there's a huge international market for FoxPro. By the time you read this, Visual FoxPro 3.0b should have been released. This not-so-minor revision includes some bug fixes, but its major emphasis is allowing us to write applications that can be used in the Far East. It includes support for double-byte character sets and a host of new functions to let us use them. (The character sets of oriental languages, which are based on pictographs rather than sounds, can't be represented in 8 bits. Double-byte character sets allow enough distinct characters for these languages. $2^8 = 256$; $2^{16} = 65,536$.) 3.0b also synchronizes Visual FoxPro with the shipping versions of Windows 95, Win32S and other components.

We also got several glimpses of the future. I attended an NDA (non-disclosure agreement) session on Visual FoxPro for the Mac. Obviously, I can't say much about it, but I can say that it's a real product, it works and the cross-platform aspects look good.

Microsoft also spoke openly about the fact that they're well into designing the next major release, Visual FoxPro 4.0. If you have ideas about what should be included, now is the time to get them in. Send your enhancement requests to FoxWish@microsoft.com.

Editor's Spouse's View

For some time now, my husband, Marshal, has been asking for equal time in my column. I guess he figures if I use him for an example, he should be allowed to rebut it. So here's his contribution:

The Computer Weenie sits at the terminal. It is late at night. The kids are (thankfully) finally in bed. The day began at 6:15. Get the kids up; breakfast and lunch bags prepared; do the dishes; walk to the school bus; lock the house; go to work (I do have a job, you know).

Leave work early; stop and buy something that cooks fast for dinner. Arrive home in time for school buses and piano lessons. Make dinner; clean-up; supervise homework (I hope they don't get stuck on math problems!); answer the phone. Force them into the shower (Aw, Dad...do we HAVE to?!). Read to the little guy; turn down the radio on the other one.

Lights out. Here I am.

When your editor and I met at ages 13 and 15 respectively, there was no magazine, no authors to solicit and edit, no deadlines or columns in our future. No PCs, no FoxPro and no Microsoft, either. Just a future, together.

Now, there's reality. The Editor is off at another FoxPro conference, sharing insights about FoxPro with you and your colleagues. And here I am, at home. I've never been to Phoenix, Milwaukee, Redmond or San Diego. I have met many of the authors -- the FoxPro Gang. Nice people, really. Regular folks who just happen to shine in the same area. FoxPro. People who have visited our home or who we meet and spend time with. Men and women, with families or not, older and younger, all sizes, shapes, colors and religions.

I used to be jealous of the jaunts, the late nights, small gatherings, flying home with East Coast buddies. Now, I just sit back and vicariously enjoy being the expediter (or hijacking the computer to take over this column). I have enjoyed watching this magazine grow in stature as FoxPro evolves.

And as for me...there was that time I needed to contact your editor while she was at a FoxPro conference. After fifteen minutes of fumbling, I found the communications program on her computer. I even found her CompuServe ID. But, I couldn't get on-line to get the message to her. The little things in life are the most frustrating.

Upon her return, this Computer Weenie sat and watched the editor unpack her modem. I never contemplated a hardware problem.

So, the purpose of this column is to beg all you developers of software for mere end-users such as me to take pity on us. While you revel in FoxPro and all it can do, and as you share all those insights together, there are lots of nice folks out here who don't know a radio button from the headlights. And we do try, we're just slow. Sort of like the 286 on my desk.

Okay, so it wasn't a rebuttal, but maybe it's more believable from a real end-user. Marshal is my reality check - if he can't make sense of something I'm implementing, other users probably won't either. You'd do well to find a reality checker of your own.