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# The Best Way

## Finally, Microsoft puts some marketing power behind VFP.

By Tamar E. Granor, Editor

*This object-oriented development tool is the best way to build all types of database applications.*

That's the sentence we've all been dying for Microsoft to use when referring to VFP. Good news, they did. This sentence comes from a recent Microsoft mailing about Visual Studio. The ad was sent both regular mail and email to a broad spectrum of people registered for one or more of Microsoft's development tools. (In fact, some people report receiving as many as 30 copies.) It's signed by Tom Button, the director of Developer Product Marketing. The complete message does not include either of the terms "Xbase" or "legacy."

This mailer is the strongest indication yet that the overall marketing message for VFP (and not just what we hear from the VFP team) has changed. The question we now have to address is whether it's too late. The signs are mixed.

Just about every multi-programmer development house I know of that's using VFP is desperately looking for trained VFP programmers. They have plenty of work, but not enough people to do it.

I'm also hearing from VFP trainers that, starting around the beginning of this year, class sizes have been up. A large percentage of the trainees are new not only to VFP, but to Xbase products in general. That more people are choosing to start with VFP after the turmoil of the last couple of years is a very good sign.

So what's the problem? I see several. First, the shortage of programmers could indicate that there's more work available, or that many people have left the FoxPro community, or that the bulk of FoxPro programmers haven't made the leap to VFP. Which is it? Probably some of each.

The question then is whether the increase in training can fill the need for skilled programmers before the work dries up for lack of people to do it. I've already heard of one big project being moved to another language due to a lack of available programmers.

Also on the bad news front, attendance at this spring's conferences was down from previous years (though the quality was still at the traditional levels). It's hard to say whether the lower attendance reflects lack of interest, the fact that VFP5 has been out for a while, that people are too busy with paying work for conferences, or changes in the corporate community that are cutting back on conferences generally. Interest in DevCon is high, so people do still want to come to at least the main FoxPro conference.

Where does this leave us? Microsoft's renewed commitment to VFP says that the product isn't disappearing any time soon. There is work out there. We need to see to it that we produce the people to do it.

When the latest crisis was sparked by an article in InfoWorld early last year, I wrote "This latest incident brings the danger of a self-fulfilling prophecy. If we worry about whether FoxPro will be around tomorrow, we'll create fear that will cause people to steer clear." This is still a danger.

Some people have left FoxPro. But the trainers tell me new ones are coming in. We need to do whatever it takes to get ourselves and these newcomers up to speed to fill the market need and keep interesting work rolling into the FoxPro community.

After all, Visual FoxPro is the best way to build all types of database applications. We've known it all along and now Microsoft says so, too.

## What are you doing?

As I've been talking to people about the market, I've also been hearing about the kinds of projects people are doing with VFP, occasionally even getting to see them. There are some fascinating projects out there.

A few months ago, we told you about the world's largest FoxPro application, which manages data for the EuroTunnel. Those of you who've attended the last few DevCons have probably seen the work of Brian Jones' group, including the logistics application for Operation Desert Storm. I recently got a glimpse of a VFP app that manages scheduling for a television network. The "poster child" for VFP applications these days is the SurplusDirect web site (www.surplusdirect.com), written by occasional FPA contributor Rick Strahl.

We want to tell you about the interesting projects that are out there. Everyone knows you can build an accounting system in FoxPro, but what else can you do with it? Over the next months, expect to start seeing case studies in FPA as we share with you the possible and give you something to show your client or boss when he or she asks "What makes FoxPro so good?" If you've completed an application in VFP that does something a little different, let me know.

## DevCon Countdown

By the time you read this, there'll be about two months until this year's DevCon. The speakers have been selected, the topics are in place and lots of hard work is underway to prepare for the premier FoxPro event of the year.

DevCon is *the* place to learn from VFP experts and meet your peers. The top VFP developers in the world will be there to share their expertise with you. It's an opportunity you don't want to miss.

I hope to see you September 14-17 in San Diego. Look for the ad in this issue for all the details.