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The Proof is in the Pudding

Visual Studio 97 includes Visual FoxPro along with the other developer tools.

By Tamar E. Granor, Editor

It's been about a year since the InfoWeek article that said "FoxPro is dead." Since then, I've written thousands of words about the subject, discussed it endlessly on CompuServe, spoken about it at user groups and conferences and generally devoted far too much physical and psychic energy to it. I suspect many of you are about ready to stop talking about this, too.

So I'm pleased to be able to tell you that Microsoft has taken the next step in making Visual FoxPro a full member of the Tools family. By the time you read this, Visual Studio 97 should have been released to manufacturing. Visual Studio 97 is to developer products what Microsoft Office is to end-user products, the all-encompassing be-all and end-all. The multi-CD package includes Visual C++ 5.0, Visual Basic 5.0, Visual InterDev 1.0 (the product code named Internet Studio which contains tools for dynamic web sites), Visual J++ 1.1, Visual FoxPro 5.0, Transaction Server (code named Viper) and tools to aid developers like Visual SourceSafe 5.0, Image Composer and Music Producer.

Visual Studio 97 also includes a tool called Microsoft Anomaly Tracking System for tracking bugs and enhancements for your own applications. What's interesting about this application is that it's written in Visual FoxPro.

Like the first version of Office, Visual Studio 97 isn't very well integrated. You install each application separately, though you start from a common Setup screen. Neither VB nor VFP has been integrated into VC's Developer Studio environment. VS97 is mostly a marketing package, not a cohesive development environment. But, like Office, I suspect each successive version will look more and more like a comprehensive product.

By the way, the version of VFP included in VS97 is 5.0a, which includes fixes for a number of bug in the initial 5.0 release, (including a serious bug with the DoDefault() function). When we find out, we'll let you know how you can upgrade if Visual Studio is more than you need. (Most likely, it will be an inexpensive upgrade like VFP3.0b.)

Also, on the good news front, the white paper "Choosing the Appropriate Database Development Tool" is now available on Microsoft's web site. The final version is significantly different than the one distributed at DevCon and does a good job of laying out the strengths of each of Microsoft's database products. VFP is treated fairly and, in my view, looks very strong in the comparison charts at the end of the paper. You can find the paper at http:\\www.microsoft.com\msdn\library.

All of these are signs that Microsoft meant what it's been saying since at least 1993, that FoxPro is part of the Tools family and that they're working toward common front-end tools using the language of your choice. The fact that a FoxPro application (ATS) is

included in the package as a developer tool is perhaps the strongest sign of FoxPro's health.

On the other hand, Visual Studio 97 is also a sign that Microsoft means it when they say we should plan to diversify (or "embrace and extend," as the DevCon theme had it - see Mac Rubel's article in this issue for a discussion of Bob Muglia's keynote address). While plenty of applications can be developed using only FoxPro, Microsoft believes the future is in multi-tool, multi-tier applications. We all have a lot of homework to do.

The old saying is "the proof is in the pudding." If Visual Studio 97 is the pudding, then the proof is there. Now we can stop talking about the death of FoxPro and get on with the business of learning all the new technologies we need to know for application development at the end of the 20th century.

Conference Time Again

The spring conference season is upon us. Despite all the negativity and concern about FoxPro's future, there's a full schedule of events for those who want to improve their skills this spring. Starting with the Great Lakes Great Database Workshop in Milwaukee in March, the roster includes FoxTeach in Toronto in early May, the Southwest Regional Conference in Los Angeles in mid-May, and the FoxPro User Conference in Minneapolis in early June. I'll be speaking at several of them, as will other FoxPro Advisor writers.

Regional conferences can be an inexpensive way to get into the conference habit. Registration is typically less than for national events, and a shorter conference means fewer nights in a hotel. If one of these events is close to home for you, you save on travel, too. But you still get a chance to learn from internationally known experts.

The plethora of FoxPro conferences this spring is another sign of FoxPro's health. The FoxPro community has always supported regional conferences and the folks who run them believe that support is still there. You don't put big bucks on the line renting a site, advertising, and preparing for a conference unless you think there's an audience for it.

If you're a regular conference goer, I'm sure one of these events is already on your schedule. If not, this is the perfect time to start. There's so much to learn and you can do so and, at the same time, show that you believe FoxPro's still a vital part of your development environment.