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Editor's View

Welcome, VFP 6!

The newest version of FoxPro adds functionality without asking us to change our mindset or our environment.

By Tamar E. Granor, Editor

There's an old Chinese saying "May you live in interesting times." I'm told that the word translated as "interesting" in that phrase doesn't just mean that things should catch your interest, but that the phrase is actually a curse suggesting times of upheaval and change. Certainly, by that definition, the last few years have been "interesting" for FoxPro developers.

With the arrival of Visual FoxPro 6.0 (code named "Tahoe"), the interesting times should be over and the exciting ones beginning. The latest version of VFP adds to an already strong language, makes the product more solid, and, best of all, doesn't ask us to make major changes to our environment.

Moving from FoxPro 2.x to VFP was wrenching. It required a tremendous amount of study, as much of what we'd learned about how to organize and build an application went out the window. VFP 3 introduced so many new features that, even now, several years later, many of us are still coming to grips with some of them. In addition, the resource requirements for VFP were steep for users coming from FoxPro 2.x.

VFP 5 seemed like an innocuous upgrade. It contained lots of bug fixes and enhanced areas of the language that needed it. No new mindset was called for, nor was any tremendous change needed in the way applications were designed and implemented. So what was the problem? VFP 5 forever left the 16-bit world behind. To use it and to use the applications it built, you had to be in Windows 95 or NT. For many, that simply wasn't a choice at the time.

Nearly two years later, as VFP 6 approaches, 16 bits isn't much of an issue anymore. Users who haven't yet moved to the 32 bit platforms mostly acknowledge that it's inevitable and no one expects upgrades to 16 bit software.

Best of all, VFP 6 doesn't ask us to make any changes at that level. It runs in Windows 95 and NT and doesn't ask for any more resources than VFP 5 (which actually needed less than VFP 3). While there are substantial (and welcome) changes to the language, none of them require a total change in mindset as VFP 3 did. The only real change needed for VFP 6 is Internet Explorer 4, which is needed not for the base product, but for the HTML Help engine.

For those already using VFP 5, upgrading is an easy choice. There's no reason not to and plenty of reasons to go forward. For those still in VFP 3 because users require a 16 bit platform, it's probably time to convince the users that there's no future in 16 bits. As for

developers still working in FoxPro 2.x, over the last six months or so, I've seen a lot of them moving to VFP. VFP 6 is just another strong argument why they should.

Best of all, the enhancements in VFP 6 (for specifics, see Jim Slater's article in this issue) reinforce the point that Microsoft is not abandoning VFP and, more importantly, that Microsoft has carved out a role for VFP among its development tools. While that role, middle tier in a three-tier structure, may not be what many of us started out doing or even what we want to be doing now, what's important here is that Microsoft has a plan that includes VFP. We've always used FoxPro in ways that surprised its developers – nothing is stopping us from continuing to do so, if we choose.

Amazing Applications!

In addition to introducing VFP 6, this issue contains a look at perhaps the most astonishing application ever built with FoxPro. JFAST was used by the U.S. Department of Defense to move troops and materials to the Persian Gulf for Desert Storm, and has managed troop movements ever since. The vision and the technology in this application are truly awesome.

The JFAST group isn't the only one doing great things with VFP, though. A special section in this issue highlights the finalists in the Visual FoxPro Excellence Awards. Some of these applications are truly mind-boggling. Be sure to check next month's FoxPro Advisor for a list of the winners (to be announced at DevCon).

Why are we late?

Those of you who are subscribers to FoxPro Advisor may have noticed that you're receiving this issue later in the month than you usually do. We apologize if you've been waiting by your mailbox each day. Putting out a quality magazine often involves hard choices and when we were finishing up this issue, we had to make another of them.

Microsoft gave us permission to begin covering VFP 6 in this issue, even though the product is likely to still be in beta testing as you read about it. However, we had to guarantee that no one would have the magazine until after the official announcement of the product at DevCon.

That left us two options: hold the subscriber copies for about ten days beyond their usual mailing date; or wait a whole month to tell you about what's coming down the road. We made the choice we thought most of you would prefer. We hope you do.

Be forewarned that the July issue will also be a little bit late to subscribers (though not as late as this one) as we catch up from the delay.