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Editor's View

Wending My Way to the Web

Web applications that improve daily life make a case for developing for the Web

By Tamar E. Granor, Editor

Many of you know by now that I tend to be a slow adopter of new technology. I don't rush out to install the latest operating system or even to buy the newest home electronic devices. (We still have a working turntable on our stereo and even our kids use our old records, though we also play tapes and CDs.) Except when it comes to FoxPro, I like to let other folks find the problems and figure out the solutions that new software and hardware tend to require.

The Internet is no exception. Although I'd used it for email in graduate school back when it still called the Arpanet, it took quite a long time of hearing about all the information and fun available on the World Wide Web before I installed a browser and checked it out. It was even longer before I started using the browser more than just once in a while.

But, more and more, I find that I am using the web and not just to visit work-related sites. Over the last year or so, my family has used the web to plan vacations, do research for school projects, track down long-lost friends, find out about easy fundraisers for our local schools, and more.

There are lots of things that drive me crazy about the Internet, but there are also lots of great things out there. My older son tends to choose research topics that are more than a little off the beaten path. Finding source materials for him is a real challenge. But the last time around, the task was made much easier when we discovered searchable catalogs for both the Free Library of Philadelphia and Access Pennsylvania (libraries from across the state, including public, school and college libraries) on the Web. By the time my son got to the library, he knew exactly what he was looking for.

Applications like those help me to see the real potential of the Web. As a developer, they also make me think about the kinds of applications I could work on for web deployment. For the first time, I can actually imagine myself writing Web applications for a client. So, as I said about Microsoft's plans for data a couple of months ago, I'm doing my best to learn the lingo, grasp the basic ideas, and prepare for the future.

Whose machine is it anyway (redux)?

Even a slow adopter like me does install new software occasionally. This time, it was Internet Explorer 4. I skipped the beta altogether, but based on the recommendations of a number of knowledgeable friends, did go ahead and install the released version. The new version is attractive and no doubt, I'll get used to the various changes in the interface fairly quickly.

But this application has done things to my system that I find unforgivable. Actually, the problem isn't so much the things themselves (mostly, they're quite minor), but the fact that installing an application upgrade changes anything beyond that application. What ever happened to the idea that each application is a good citizen that uses only the resources it needs, stays out of everybody else's way, and cleans up when it's done?

I don't buy the argument that an Internet browser is part of the operating system, but even if I did, I've had this with other applications as well. Respecting a user's system may be one of the hardest challenges for application developers in this brave new world of components. If you install the latest version of an ActiveX control with your application, what do you do to applications that depend on the previous version? If you update a .DLL, might you interfere with existing applications?

I don't have the answer to these problems. As a user, I'm furious. As a developer, I'm scared. Let's hope that the people with the power to do something about this slow down long enough to consider these issues real soon.

Moving on up

The feedback on our December "Top 10 List" article has been substantial. It seems that many of you are still in the process of making the leap from FoxPro 2.x to VFP and really appreciate the pointers we offered. The good news is that Microsoft also sees this transition and is doing something to help you with it. The February news column announced a new CD product called the "Microsoft Visual FoxPro Migration Sourcebook." Kind of a long-winded title, but the point is that it's full of information for FoxPro 2.x developers who are moving to VFP. It has papers, chapters from various VFP books, samples, demos of products, and more. It's included in the box for new purchasers of VFP 5 and available for under \$10 for everyone else. It's nice to see Microsoft recognizing a need in the community and doing something to fill it.

A bonus for you

Packaged with this issue of FoxPro Advisor is a copy of a new Advisor magazine, Security Advisor. Security issues are becoming more and more complex of a concern as applications are distributed more widely and use new technologies like the Internet.