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Editor's View

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Where Does VFP Fit In?

Plus: Why can't installation and setup be easier?

By Tamar E. Granor, Editor

Aside from learning how to use all the exciting new features of Visual FoxPro, the hottest topics on CompuServe's various Fox forums have been whether Microsoft is giving FoxPro its marketing due, and how Visual FoxPro stacks up to the competition. There have been dozens of long threads on both topics, with a fair amount of doom-saying about how this product or that product (frequently Delphi) is better or faster or easier to learn than Visual FoxPro.

On the marketing side, many FoxPro users continue to feel Microsoft's marketing arm doesn't give Visual FoxPro the respect it deserves and that the sales force tends to push Visual Basic and Access even when Visual FoxPro is a more appropriate solution. Unfortunately, based on the stories I've heard, there is something to this perception. To a great extent, though, I think it's because the sales force doesn't really understand how Visual FoxPro fits in.

That's why I was pleased recently to see a message from George Goley, one of the original Fox gurus. Working with Microsoft sales offices, he's developed a short discussion of Microsoft's development tools and the role each plays. The document should help both sales people and customers to choose the right tool for the job.

It lists the features and strengths of Access, C++, Visual Basic, SQL Server and Visual FoxPro, then summarizes the best uses for each. Here's the summary:

- Access for ad-hoc reporting and personal applications.
- VC++ to build OCXs.
- VB for small footprint, and non-data intensive applications.
- SQL Server for sensitive, WAN, and high-transaction applications.
- VFP for line-of-business applications.

At the same time, George posted a long message explaining why he believes "Visual FoxPro 3.0 is the best development tool currently available for line of business applications on PCs." He lists 22 areas in which he considers Visual FoxPro superior to the competition. Some of George's observations drew wide agreement. Others sparked vociferous debate.

Best of all, by listing areas explicitly, the discussion was focused from the beginning instead of being just a "My platform's better than your platform" school yard argument.

Many aspects of database development were discussed in depth, especially client-server models, and all those following along came away with a better understanding of the issues.

George's threads served two purposes. First, I hope the positioning document will be distributed to Microsoft field representatives world-wide. With this document in hand, they can do a better job of explaining the differences to corporate customers.

Second, George made us step back and really look at Visual FoxPro. When you're trying to learn a new product (especially one as large as Visual FoxPro) and still get some work done, it's easy to get discouraged. For most of us, our first looks led to incredible excitement. Then, we got down to the hard business of learning about OOP and buffering and client-server and a whole new set of tools. No wonder it's hard to remember sometimes just how wonderful Visual FoxPro is. Sure, there are lots more features and tools we'd like to have (aren't there always?), but what's already there is pretty cool and there's no doubt in my mind it'll keep getting better and better. Thanks, George.

New Look

This issue premieres a new look for FoxPro Advisor. In our never-ending quest to make the magazine as useful as possible for you (not to mention attractive to potential new readers), the editorial and art departments spent months redesigning all of Advisor's magazines. Let us know what you think.