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World Wide FoxPro

Visual FoxPro is being used from Boston to Brazil and Canada to China.

By Tamar E. Granor, Editor

If you read FoxPro Advisor out of order or glance at the Table of Contents first thing, you may have already noticed the addition of Christof Lange to Ask Advisor. Both Ted and I felt that, after writing the column for so long (about five and a half years for me, more than three for Ted), some new blood would be useful. Choosing Christof was simple, since he's bright, capable and writes well. Even better, he thinks outside the box, as demonstrated by his article on the Report Designer in this issue and his March '98 solution for the Y2K problem. But another motivation for us is that he's not an American. Programmers outside the United States face a whole set of problems that the rest of us don't, and adding that kind of experience to the Ask Advisor team just makes sense.

After we'd made this decision and gotten Christof to agree (it took him at least a second), I went to work on this issue. As I did so, I noticed something interesting. Not only do we have an article and an Ask Advisor contribution from Christof (who is German), but this issue's writers also include a Brazilian. The Advisor Tips column has contributions from Uganda, the People's Republic of China. (Recent issues have carried tips from Argentina, Bolivia, Italy and Norway.) One of this month's questions in Ask Advisor comes from Britain, though the submitter is originally from Trinidad. Finally, in the Feedback I mention below, we heard from readers in Malaysia and the Philippines, along with North Americans.

We've always included some articles from other countries, especially the English-speaking countries (in fact, columnist Andrew Ross MacNeill is Canadian), but the tremendous diversity of recent contributors is stunning. It also sends an important message.

Visual FoxPro and FoxPro 2.x are used worldwide. In fact, I've heard some estimates that there are more FoxPro users outside North America than in it. A tremendous number of the questions sent to Ask Advisor come from outside the US. The type of questions we receive also makes it clear that programmers in North America and Europe have access to more and better resources for solving problems, and that the move to VFP has been much slower outside those areas.

One thing both North American and European FoxPro users have is conferences to give them the big picture. I've often written in this column about North American conferences (including DevCon, of course). Right now, though, my mind is on the ones in Europe.

There's a strong tradition of FoxPro conferences there. One in Frankfurt, Germany, is in its fifth year. There have also been conferences in Amsterdam and in Spain over the years. This fall, I'll be speaking at a brand new conference in Salzburg, Austria (September 13-16, www.amadeus-devcon.com) and there's also this year's edition of

the Frankfurt conference (November 18-20, www.dfpug.de/devcon/index). Both of these conferences feature both German and English sessions.

I received an email recently telling me about the tremendous success of a two-day VFP (and FoxPro 2.x!) conference held in Prague in the Czech Republic this past June. Nearly 700 people attended, with almost all sessions presented in Czech. That's pretty amazing!

All this activity makes it clear, once more, that FoxPro is alive and well around the world. It should also make you think about opportunities you might not have considered before.

Standards or Not

In the July Editor's View, I talked about things that drive me nuts (like receiving unzipped documents and applications that don't use the standard Windows keyboard shortcuts). I asked you what you thought about standards. That brought a flood of mail.

Just about everyone who wrote agreed that standards are a necessity. One reader put it best: "I always adhere to them in my applications, and when I run into one that doesn't, I'm very irritated."

However, several of you had more to say on the subject. One reader compared interface standards to road signs and pointed out that we shouldn't create our own road signs, because it would be too confusing. He added, though, that "creative design on the other hand depends on the definition and environment of the project. It involves much careful application of what fonts and colors to use."

Another reader commented that current interface standards address document-oriented software quite well, but fall down when it comes to process-oriented software. He notes that the Wizards that Microsoft and other companies (though they use different names for them) have introduced in the last few years offer "a more sensible process-oriented push-button interface" for tasks that need to be done in a particular order.

One reader pointed out that many standards don't go far enough. My problem with unzipped attachments could be easily solved if email clients automatically compressed the files they send. Sometimes, you just have to think outside the box.

On the flip side, I was reading a Microsoft publication (Microsoft magazine, which is sent to registered users of a variety of Microsoft applications) and was dismayed to see a mention of the Send To option in the same sentence as "mail recipients." Though this piece wasn't particularly talking about that use of Send To, I thought it irresponsible to mention the subject in a consumer-oriented magazine without pointing out that it sends uncompressed files.

I'll close with a slightly off-the-wall thought. We now have so many services as part of the Operating System. Couldn't efficient file compression (read that as "PKZip") be one of them?