

Cool Tool: PopDBF - Portable Access to Your FoxPro Data

By Whil Hentzen

Here's a way to get temporary interactive access to data in your customer's FoxPro applications without requiring them to have a copy of FoxPro.

The Problem

The ability to create run-time or stand-alone EXE files for your applications provides benefits for many reasons. Packaging. Professional appearance. Less expense for the customer.

However, there come instances where you're at the site and need access to the data in the system... You can't install a copy of FoxPro without an additional license, but purchasing a copy for infrequent (if at all needed) access to the data files is impractical or expensive.

In the "old" days, we could get around this problem by carrying around a "doctor's kit" of programs. I used to have a half-dozen disks that had copies of DOS, Norton, a couple editors, WordPerfect, dBase, and some miscellaneous utilities. These days, the programs with those capabilities would span several dozen disks - and many of them can't be run from diskette anymore.

So we can't install FoxPro and we can't carry it with us.

One Solution

A quick and dirty solution is to write a short program that interprets and executes hand-typed commands, much like you do with the Command Window. One sample implementation of this technique is as follows:

```
clea
do while .T.
  acce alia()+"==>" to cCommand
  &cCommand
endd
retu
```

After clearing the screen, an infinite loop is set up with the DO WHILE construct. The ACCEpt command intercepts keystrokes and stores them to a character variable. This command is then executed via macro expansion, and you are prompted for another command. Typing in "quit" will terminate the program and return you to DOS.

The ALIA() + "==>" string just provides a fancier version of the classic dot prompt that many of us have all grown up with. The regular

```
==>
```

prompt becomes

```
CUSTOMER==>
```

when the CUSTOMER database is open in the current work area.

To use this, just compile the PRG to an EXE (it runs about 10K). To use it, you'll need the run-time libraries included with the Distribution Kit (which you have, of course, since you can't create an EXE without it.)

If your application uses a stand-alone EXE, you'll need to carry the run-time files with you; if you're using the run-time files for your application, they'll already be at the customer's site.

Then, from the DOS prompt, enter the name of the program (I call mine "DOT.EXE") and you'll have a pseudo "dot prompt". Naturally, you don't have access to all the tools available in interactive FoxPro (for example, the RQBE window), but you can use multiple files, do BROWses, relate files, and so on.

A Better Solution

Don Bowen of Bowen Software has written a wonderful utility that provides "Instant Access to X-Base Files". PopDBF runs as a standalone program or as a 4K TSR that swaps to disk or EMS. The functions available in this little program take 48 pages to cover in the documentation. Here are a few that I like:

Select a database from a pick list and browse it. Configure the browse to show the fields you want, in the order you want, and change the width of character fields.

You can also modify database data, including adding and deleting records, and packing and zapping databases. Additionally, you can print the database in a variety of flavors, and the database structure.

There are also facilities for searching and for cutting and pasting data - and you can paste back inside PopDBF or into an underlying application (remember, this is a TSR that can be called up on top of another application.)

A separate utility provides the ability to create, copy and modify database structures. There are additional capabilities as far as configuring colors, hot keys, preferences, and memory.

This is a truly professional product - with context sensitive help and a 50 page manual.

Where to find PopDBF

The entire PopDBF package consists of about a dozen files - the main utility, a second program to create DBF files, help files, documentation and so on. You can find it on this month's Companion Disk or on CompuServe's IBMAPP Forum. Remember - this is shareware - if you like it and use it, send the author \$35. If you don't have access to the Companion Disk or CompuServe, you can order it for \$35 directly from the developer at Bowen Software, PO Box 2134, East Peoria, IL, 61611, 309-699-0950.

Whil Hentzen is president of Hentzenwerke, a 10-year-old computer consulting firm that specializes in FoxPro-based strategic database applications. He has commercial products and custom applications running throughout the U.S. and in 12 foreign countries. Author of The Ultimate FoxPro Reference, Whil heads up the Milwaukee Association of FoxPro Developers and has spoken on Rapid Application Development at developer conferences and user groups across North America. He can be reached at 414-332-9876 (voice), 414-963-4999 (fax), and 70651,2270 (CompuServe).