From The Editor

Visual FoxPro 3.1 Announced; Plans for 4.0 Readied

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Despite protests to the contrary, I have first-hand news from a very reliable source in Redmond that Visual FoxPro 3.1 will be out any day. Like earlier versions, the 3.1 edition will provide additional functionality, but, unlike earlier releases, this one is chock full of surprises.

You may be pleased to learn of a number of new functions: SYS(20376041) will return the logical value "0", SYS(20376042) will return the logical value "1", SYS(20376043) will return the logical value "more than 1", and SYS(20376044) will return the logical value "A gazillion."

A whole raft of file extensions have been added to the language as well, including TRX/TRT, RGX/RGT, SLX/SLT, HIX/HIT, LXE/LXP, BRK/BLK, OWX/OWT, NUX/NUT, PRE/PET, and WRX/WRT. Based on reader feedback, I know you've been waiting for these as much as I have.

The spellchekcer (sic) has been enhanced as well. It now recognizes most four-letter words in the English language, and optionally expands them to their full length. The developer can also choose to block the use of four-letter words in all user interfaces, based on the age of the user.

Improved developer safeguards have been added as well. When you save a form, you're now prompted to save the form and each modified method with an enhanced series of warning messages: "Do you want to save <name of method>?", "Do you really want to save <name of method>?", "Are you absolutely, positively sure that you want to save <name of method>?" and "Come on now, don't be sly—are you drop dead sure that you want to save <name of method>?"

The Class Browser has a "Buy Now!" feature for those who get the impulse while browsing.

The hottest new feature is VFP's enhanced transaction processing capabilities. As you may recall, the current incarnation of the product is limited to five levels of nested transactions, which seems to have been a significant limitation for some applications. 3.1 now supports ten levels of nested transactions, but more importantly, includes a new command, READ TRANSACTION. With this, developers are able to create what the guru community is already calling the "Mother of All Transactions." Using some sleight of hand, the developer can create a Foundation Transaction through which a virtually unlimited number of transactions can be handled.

Although he has modestly denied having a hand in the concept, Jim Booth is widely credited with coming up with the idea in the first place. According to an anonymous source, Jim cornered Microsoft's Susan Graham at last year's DevCon in San Diego and suggested that the five-transaction limit could be circumvented. "Jim, you've really outdone yourself this time. How you can come up with these ideas is beyond me," Graham reportedly said. When asked for confirmation, Graham rolled her eyes in admiration and excused herself to attend a meeting.

I've talked to a number of competitors in the database arena, and publicly they're not impressed. "Transactions? Database applications virtually never need to handle transactions," said a high-placed manager in the Access product group. "That's why power developers everywhere turn to Access95, with it's ease of use and powerful replication features. And did we mention that it only requires 12M of RAM to load?"

A product manager with Visual dBASE also scoffed at the idea of improved transaction handling. "Why should we be interested in how well a Pontiac handles? We write database software." A Netscape PR spokesman claimed that they invented the Foundation Transaction, although they really didn't like the shortened name, indicating it was confusing. "Foundation Transaction Processing", or FTP, is part of the core of our business."

On the other hand, Wall Street analysts as a group were overwhelmed. "I don't know of a single analyst in New York who doesn't think that software should be built on a solid foundation. And if you can have 10 of them—that's what you said, 10 foundation levels, right?—well, that must be just that much better!" Microsoft stock shot up 12 points on the news.

I've also got hot news on Visual FoxPro 4.0, but unfortunately, there isn't enough room this month to print it. Sorry 'bout that, chief. But I do have space to wish you a Happy April First.