

From the Editor

The Ol' Internet Head Fake

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A technical journal generally isn't the place for "hot news" like the tabloids you'd see in the check out lines at the grocery store. If it were, what would be on the cover? "FoxPro Secrets Revealed!" "Inside Objects - Experts Discover New Properties!" or "First Time Ever OLE Expose!" Jeesh, you'd want to sneak out of the store with it under your jacket like it was a girlie magazine, wouldn't you?

But this month is different. If you were wondering why this issue was a few days late, it was because we had to hold the presses (literally!) in order to squeeze this story in. And it's an amazing one. But before I begin, I should probably explain the term "Head Fake" from the headline. For those of you who don't catch the sports all that often, a "head fake" is an action by an athlete in motion where they pretend to move one way with their head but actually go a different way. An opponent who is either inexperienced or caught off guard (experienced players will watch their opponent's belly-button, not their head, in order to determine where the player is really heading) will thus go with the fake movement, and be left standing in the dust while the other player scampers down the field, the court, or whatever the playing surface is called.

Well, I have it on excellent authority that Microsoft's so-called "reorganization" of the company so that Redmond in toto is focused on the Internet is simply a head fake intended solely for their competition. Yes, Microsoft has figured out a top notch strategy to force their competition to take their eyes off the ball. In business lingo, Microsoft has pretended to be interested in the Internet, thus forcing other companies to spend resources on going head to head. Meanwhile, in the back rooms in various Redmond buildings, huge plans have been hatched.

Let's look at the reality:

1. Give away a critical piece of software - the browser? How are you going to make any money? Remember, Microsoft made their first fortune by **selling** a copy of DOS to everyone on the planet. Think I'm kidding? Remember the stories of grandmothers standing in line and buying Windows95 when it became available, despite their not really understanding what "Windows95" was - and certainly not owning - or having any intention of owning - a computer.
2. Microsoft is in the business of entering, controlling, dominating and monopolizing arenas. Excuse me, but has anyone noticed that the Internet can't be controlled or monopolized? It isn't owned by **anyone**. Pretty foolish to believe that Microsoft would change spots, simply on the basis of a few cover stories in Time magazine, eh?
3. Another thing - has any company actually made money with the Internet? Sure, a lot of individuals have - by selling stock to people whose brain power is such that they shouldn't be trying to verify that the cabbie gave them correct change.
4. The press reports that companies are making major shifts in strategy to deal with the Internet. Corel is supposedly rewriting their entire product line in Java. Borland has sold or dropped every product they own in order to push IntraBuilder. And IBM is trying to convince the U.S. Government that Big Blue actually owns the Internet and that all the phone companies should start making lease payments.

It's evident, now, that there is no business logic to this so-called Internet focus. But everyone believes it, because it's all the marketing people talk about. Remember, people don't buy marketing - they buy products - and here's what's up in the product areas in Redmond:

First on the list is Chips. The Wall Street Journal recently posited that Intel may be the most profitable company in the world in the next two or three years. If that sound you just heard wasn't that of the gauntlet being thrown down, I don't know what it was. Intel has made too much money for too long. And it's only hardware - how difficult can that be? Watch for a new set of processor and memory chips optimized for NT 5.0 to be available before end of year. And they won't be shipping from California.

Oh, golly, did I say "NT 5.0?" Actually, the real name will be NT:TNG. That's right, the next generation of NT. In fact, after the release of Windows97, Office97, DevTools97 and HomeStuff97, all future releases will be named "TNG." Say it with me: VFP:TNG, PowerPoint:TNG, Cinemania:TNG, and so on. Don't believe me? Remember how, at DevCon, all the Microsoft people kept refusing to call the next release of VFP "6.0." Instead, we kept hearing "The Next Version" - which, of course, translates nicely into "The Next Generation."

(Want to make a quick buck? Trademark the terms "Word:Voyager", "Dinosaurs: Voyager", and "C++: Voyager." I'll bet you'll be able to find a company willing to ante up for the rights to these and many others in short order.)

Another piece of hardware is a new input device that will, for the first time, provide feedback to the user. Early testers have noted that it's larger and harder to use than a mouse, and not nearly as user-friendly. Some have called it downright mean. The name for this new tool will be Microsoft Rat.

But the killer app that you'll see shortly is Microsoft Weather. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it myself - but on the TV the other night, Saturday Night, I think it was, an emergency announcement by President Clinton was interrupted by the product announcement by Chairman Bill himself, announcing that Microsoft will be controlling the weather with software.

All the other companies in the industry are worried about the Internet. Ha! Let them! It's just wires and electrons. I'm going out to hoard raincoats. And not because of April First Showers.