

We're a Scary Bunch

Whil Hentzen

Last month I promised you “the plan” for dealing with the incongruity of rates we can charge vs. rates that other professions can charge. But “plan” is French for saying “I’m just guessing here.” This means I haven’t implemented it, nor do I know anyone who has. <g> But I’m working on it. Some things have changed dramatically since I wrote that editorial, and it wouldn’t be fair to jump into half-heartedly. So just stay tuned. I’m peddling just as fast as I can.

At a recent user group meeting, we were talking about the difference between Fox and other languages. Not the technical part – but the community. Microsoft has never quite figured out what to do with us. We’re different than the VB folks, or the C++ folks, or the, ahem, Office folks. This behavior has manifested itself in a multitude of ways.

The Fox community worships their gurus. No, not everyone, but there is a much stronger relationship between the folks on the cutting edge and those who are using the tool on a day to day basis. How many folk do you know who lug a 15 pound book across the country to a conference so that they can get the author to sign it? The first time someone did this to me, I looked around for the cameras, sure that my leg was being pulled. But it’s the other sincerest form of flattery.

The MVPs are a breed apart. There’s a story that’s circulated long enough for it to have acquired the “one part fiction, one part fact” aura, and it goes something like this. At the first MVP meeting coordinated by Redmond, there were, oh, perhaps a hundred MVPs from the various arenas – the languages, the tools, Office, operating systems, and so on. While some of the MVPs knew each other by sight or by name, pretty much everyone kept to themselves. But when everyone shuffled into the auditorium, there was a group down in the front who were making a lot of noise, causing trouble, and so on. Everyone figured they were a bunch of ‘softies who worked together every day. This group told jokes, went out to lunch together, yakked about each other’s kids, and so on. Of course, by now you’ve figured out that the group were the Fox MVPs.

The betas are another source of wonder at Microsoft. The Fox betas, that is. Our beta cycles have typically had significantly higher participation, longer threads, more bad jokes, and generally an inspiring level of passion and intensity. (“Isn’t Fox just really dBASE without the GPFs?” some people in Redmond ask. “What’s the big deal?”)

And the conferences – there have been a zillion conferences for Fox. DevCon. Toronto, Milwaukee, Richmond, Washington D.C., Virginia Beach, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Frankfurt, London, Amsterdam, Madrid, Lisbon. And I’m sure I’m missing a few. But it’s not just the quantity, it’s what happens there. Most conferences go from 9 to 5, and so do ours. Except ours go from 9 AM to 5 AM. Why is it that, at each of the last six DevCons, I’ve always seemed to be in the middle of some gathering that attracts the local police, suggesting (nicely) that we “break it up, now.” Is it just me? “Honestly, officer, I was just walking around with some of my friends...”

We have a tool that’s heads and shoulders above the others, and a community to match.