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Microsoft Puts FoxPro Out to Pasture

BY DARRYL K. TAFT

Microsoft has announced that it will not be releasing any new versions of its Visual FoxPro development software past Version 9.0, but the company will continue to support the technology through 2015.

Instead of releasing new versions of FoxPro, Microsoft will release core portions of the FoxPro software to its CodePlex community development site, said Alan Griver, a group manager within the Microsoft Visual Studio team, which leads the FoxPro team.

Microsoft will continue to support the Visual FoxPro core until 2015 with standard support through January 2010 and extended support through January 2015 via the developer tools life-cycle support plan, Microsoft officials said.

Meanwhile, some of the FoxPro-related technology can be seen in other Microsoft products such as SQL Server, Team Foundation Server and various portions of the .Net Framework, Griver said. Indeed, some observers have said they could detect a link between FoxPro and Microsoft's LINQ (Language Integrated Query) technology.

Griver said the FoxPro development team will be spread out across various groups in the Microsoft Developer Division, including those working on Visual Studio—including the upcoming next major release of Visual Studio, code-named "Orcas," and beyond.

"We believe that by working with the community to continue to allow the FoxPro technology to be enhanced, that will help" developers who currently have projects written in FoxPro, Griver said.

The FoxPro community has been very active in adding functionality to the platform, building an Outlook control bar for FoxPro, support for MSBuild and a code checking tool similar to the FXCop tool that exists for Visual Studio.

Meanwhile, Microsoft has been working on "Sedna," which is the code name for the project that takes advantage of enhancements in Visual FoxPro 9.0. The primary goal of Sedna is to expand on the ability of Visual FoxPro-based solutions to better integrate with other Microsoft products and technologies, such as Visual Studio 2005, SQL Server 2005 and Windows Vista.

Microsoft will release its Sedna technologies on CodePlex, and the company is working on a Service Pack of Visual FoxPro for Windows Vista that takes advantage of the Aero user interface, Griver said. That update will be released this summer.

Dave Dierke, president and CEO of AccountMate Software, in Novato, Calif., a Microsoft partner steeped in FoxPro, said Microsoft has been signaling its intent to drop FoxPro for some time.

"We've been watching this shoe dropping for years," Dierke said, noting that AccountMate is one of Microsoft's largest FoxPro partners.

"Our code is large; it's like the Queen Mary of FoxPro," Dierke said. "We have years and years of strict discipline here, and almost all of our engineers are CPAs." So with a view toward the future, "We started transitioning off of Visual FoxPro and started using some of the new development tools" in Microsoft's .Net stack, Dierke said.

Tommy Tan, chief technology officer at AccountMate, said the company will most likely transform its development to Visual Basic.Net.

"There are no pure conversions to convert FoxPro code to .Net, so we basically have to rewrite a lot of things," Tan said. "But Microsoft has introduced a lot of new features to do subsystems with .Net components" that can be read from FoxPro, he said.

Tan mentioned the VFPCConversion.com site as a place where developers can go for help.

"Visual FoxPro is a great tool, but so are Visual Studio (.Net) and SQL Server," says a blurb on the VFPCConversion.com site. "If you would like to convert your current VFP project (or parts of it) to Visual Studio (.Net) and/or SQL Server, you have come to the right place. ... This site contains various resources to support the FoxPro and VFP communities in enhancing their Visual FoxPro applications and adopt[ing] the latest technologies available from Microsoft, or if desired in converting applications from FoxPro to the Microsoft .Net platform."

Dierke said he is aware that some of the FoxPro developer base will be "feeling some pain, because there has been a cult-like following, but they are also technologists first and this may give them further opportunities."

Indeed, "it may be a good thing for the industry," Dierke said. And some may welcome the change. At AccountMate, "it was getting harder and harder to keep some of our younger engineers excited about developing in FoxPro," he said.