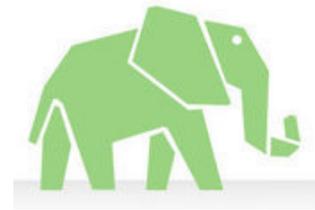


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# Visual FoxPro Microsoft's Best-kept Secret

By Les Pinter

***Microsoft sells a fabulous tool for database development;  
and if you bought Visual Studio, you already own it!***

*I've been developing database applications for more years than I care to admit. I've developed a successful consulting business and written six books and literally hundreds of articles about database development. I'm about to share my best database secret with you.*

If you go to Microsoft's database seminars, those all-day sales presentations about how to use Microsoft products to build databases, you won't hear a *word* about FoxPro. I can't say why Microsoft doesn't mention FoxPro, but go to one and see for yourself. No F-word.

That's my secret: Microsoft Visual FoxPro, the best database development platform that Microsoft sells. I know that every programmer has a special place in his heart for the language he or she uses every day, and in the case of readers of this Journal, it's probably Visual Basic or Visual C++. But if you have Visual Studio, the first CD in the set has Visual FoxPro on it, so you already own it. You really, really owe it to yourself to install VFP and take it for a test drive.

FoxPro was *born* to do data. It contains dozens of little database functions that you'd have to write for yourself in VB or VC++, so you end up writing half the code, or less, than you would in VB. It's fast - and you don't know what fast means until you've seen FoxPro in action. And its native tables, far from being a drawback, are the key to building single workstation and small LAN applications without using a SQL server that adds cost and administrative complexity to your application. It can handle hundreds of thousands of records with no perceptible slowdown in performance; and beginners can be up and running in a fraction of the time it takes to become a good VB database programmer. It's easier to learn, simpler to code, and runs faster: What's not to like?

FoxPro is object-oriented. When you open up the form designer in VB, you have a palette of components that you can drag and drop onto the screen. In Visual FoxPro, you can replace the top dozen components — textbox, commandbutton, listbox, and so — forth with your own classes *in less than 60 seconds*. Thereafter, changing a property or behavior of any one of your classes - which takes only a few seconds - automatically flows through every single form in your application. You can do something similar in other languages, but you absolutely can't do it so quickly and easily.

FoxPro is robust. As a consultant to software developers, I've written applications for my clients that have gone on to become well-established commercial products, competing with programs written in VB, C and other languages. My clients can add features or fix bugs in a fraction of the time their competitors require, because FoxPro is so easy to use. It's easy to stay ahead of the market when your competition has to work twice as hard to write code to accomplish things that are simple in FoxPro.

FoxPro is flexible. You can build ActiveX Documents or OLE servers for environments where running an application continuously isn't desirable or practical. If your ISP doesn't want to be responsible for keeping your program running on their Internet site, write it as an OLE server. You can build COM objects for 3-tier applications, using HTML as your front-end and FoxPro tables *or* MS-SQL at the back end, and use MTS to manage your connections. Or use ODBC to talk directly to your DBF tables. You have just as many choices with FoxPro as with any other language, plus a few more that are faster and easier.

FoxPro is an ideal front-end for MS SQL or Oracle. It connects seamlessly to either, with no programming. That wasn't a misprint: *No programming*. FoxPro parameterized remote views can be designed to subset your data without a single line of specialized code. You won't find a better language for SQL server applications. However, before you commit to a server product that's licensed by the seat and requires a database administrator, consider using local tables and FoxPro. Given its speed, 90% of database applications can probably be run with local tables on single workstations or small LANs, where the FoxPro DBF format is just right. Gosh, Microsoft would lose a lot of MS-SQL sales if that were widely known...

All of these things sound great, but can they be proven? I wouldn't have it any other way. And you can prove it for yourself Go to [www.lespinter.com](http://www.lespinter.com) and download the October issue of Les Pinter's Database Journal, which contains our "QuickStart tips and tricks for VB and VFP". Use the FoxPro articles to build your first VFP application. If you've already tried to build database applications in another language, you're in for a pleasant surprise. FoxPro development typically takes about half as long as it does in VB, and it's much easier to learn. Why doesn't Microsoft advertise it? Ask them. I'm sure there's a reason. But you don't have to take salespeoples' word for it. Try this simple test.

### **Take the FoxPro challenge**

If your company is about to commit, say, a million dollars to develop a database application or a database product designed to run on single workstations or small LANs, set aside twenty thousand dollars for an experiment. If you can't afford to spend twenty grand to run this experiment, you probably can't afford the million dollars that the project will cost. And, if this little analysis ends up saving you half your budget, you can send me a thank-you note or half of the savings, whichever you prefer.

Here's what you do: Build a quick prototype of the application in both Visual FoxPro and your alternative database development language. Pick a small but representative part of the application, one that can be done in a week in FoxPro. If you don't have a FoxPro developer on staff, find a consultant who loves a challenge (hint <g>). Allocate two weeks - at least *double* the time - to do the same application in the other language. That's test number one.

Now, dump in, oh, say, a hundred thousand sample records – whatever represents a year of data entry – and try a few queries. Move around the data. Print some reports. Amazing, isn't it? That's test number two.

Now, make your choice of languages. You're done! Wasn't that fun?

I can't say why Microsoft doesn't include FoxPro in its database seminars. Perhaps it's a secret. Maybe it's hidden in this article, like an anagram. But you already own FoxPro, so give it a test drive. You'll be impressed.