

Cool Tool of the Month: Quick Start

By Whil Hentzen

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Accelerate your application development by using this "Quick Start" methodology to create the foundation for your new systems.

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As software developers, we're in the business of automating repetitive operations. But as often happens, the shoemaker's kids are the last to get shoes... We find ourselves doing the same things over and over. One of those tasks that happens frequently (hopefully, at least!), is the creation of new applications. Quick Start is a tool from Flash Creative Management, the same folks who brought you Alan Griver's FoxPro Codebook. Quick Start facilitates the creation of a generic application foundation that you can use to build each new system.

The Problem

Unless the systems you write are extremely specialized, you're probably using a set of menus, system databases, common functions and routines, and a main or calling program that is pretty generic. And if you're like most developers, you follow the same steps when receiving approval for a new system (corporate developers with a nine-month backlog sometimes skip the first step):

1. Throw the signed proposal into the air, shouting "Yesssss!" ala Kevin in "Home Alone."
2. Create a new subdirectory for the system.
3. Create any necessary subdirectories (for Screens, Reports, Programs, Data, etc.). Mistype "MD" three times during this step.
4. Copy the main PRG, menu structure, and system files from the last system you did into the new directory.
5. Change the system name in the PRG header, delete the code that was added for the old system, clean out all but the generic options in the menus, and get rid of the application-specific information in the system files that was left over from the previous app.
6. Start building your new application - set up some screens, create the tables, and so on.
7. Fix the bugs that you introduced by wiping out "one too many" lines of code in MAIN.PRG.
8. Delete the handful of menu choices that you didn't catch the first time around.

By now you're getting the picture. This entire process should be done automatically. It's time-consuming, prone to errors, and boring. Why not use that initial surge of adrenaline you get from winning a new proposal in attacking a difficult task?

The Solution

The Quick Start utility is a series of small programs and screens that prompt you for the name and desired location of a new system, creates the directories and subdirectories for your new application, and populates it with the appropriate files. Flavors are available for FoxPro 2.0, 2.5/DOS and 2.5/Windows.

As with libraries of common routines, this technique relies on the use of your core files set up in a standard directory structure. After you've pointed Quick Start to your default application framework, Quick Start will take the information you supply, including project name, project description, and target location, and create a "clone" that you use for your new system.

Obviously, the level of sophistication of this process depends on your needs and abilities. In their help file, Flash explains how to use Quick Start to set up Codebook applications. If you're not a Codebook devotee, however, their recommendations can be adapted easily to your system. For instance, you'll obviously want to remove application-specific menu options, data files, and screens/reports from the core. If you put your customer's company and system name in any of the files, you'll want to remove those references. And you'll probably want to provide an empty set of system or data dictionary files.

Installation

Create a directory (I use a subdirectory under FPU - FoxPro Utilities) named something like QSTART. Unzip QSTART using the "-d" parameter so that the required directories are also created.

```
PKUNZIP -d QSTART
```

You'll end up with the following directory structure:

```
\FPU\QSTART
  MARKET.DOC
  QSTART.DOC
  \QUICK20 -- FoxPro 2.0 Version
  \QUICK25 -- FoxPro 2.5 DOS
  \QUICKW  -- FoxPro 2.5 Windows
  \QUICKPG -- Common Programs
  \DIRBIN  -- BIN files and ASM Source
```

Extra Goodies

A hidden treasure in Quick Start is a set of five programs that make DOS calls from within FoxPro. (They're contained in the DIRBIN directory, and contain the assembler source code.) While used in Quick Start to create the duplicate directory structure, they're freeware, so you can use these in your applications as needed.

If you've ever been annoyed by the screen flash that occurs when you use FoxPro's RUN command to create a directory, you'll especially like these handy little functions. CHDRV changes the DOS drive, CHDIR changes the DOS directory, MKDIR and RMDIR make and remove directories, and FDATE/TIME returns the date and time from a DOS file. These are all provided as BIN files, which means you can call them straight from FoxPro. The help file has examples of using each function.

Where to Find Quick Start

QSTART.ZIP can be found on this month's Companion Disk or on CompuServe's FoxForum. This is freeware, provided by the folks at Flash Creative Management. They can be reached at 201-489-2500.

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