Editorial

Optimizing Your Development Environment

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FoxTalk readers have asked me over and over for practical advice on making their work-a-day development life easier. So I'll share some ideas I've found useful in taking care of the day's little annoyances . I encourage you to respond with your own ideas, which I'll review in *FoxTalk* on a regular basis.

Developers tend to fall into two categories: those who tend to work on a number of systems simultaneously, and those who spend all of their time on a single humongous application. Likewise, some development environment optimization techniques are more valuable to one type than the other. As you know, I run a small (less than a half dozen developers) shop, and each of us usually works on a number of systems at the same time. Thus, I'll concentrate first on things that we find useful in our shop.

We try to have each machine set up with reasonably the same setup so that when two developers are working together on a project, it doesn't matter which box they're using—everything is in a familiar place. The first thing we do is rip out that silly "Run" menu pad in FoxPro 2.6 by renaming FOXSTART.APP in FoxPro's root directory. We don't use Run ourselves, and since we add more menu pads to the default menu ~~and in DOS~~, the Run menu pad pushes our pads off the edge in DOS.

The next thing we do is modify CONFIG.FP/W. After much experimenting, our approach has settled to a minimalist one, instead deciding to call a custom setup program from CONFIG.FP/W. Our configuration file contains a few GENSCRNX drivers, sets the default location for temp files, sets MVCOUNT to 1600, and turns CATMAN off. The last line calls GOFOXGO.PRG, which has sections for DOS and Windows.

Once in GOFOXGO, we set up GENMENU and GENSCRN calls and our development path inside FoxPro, and turn the clock on (in the title bar in DOS and in the status bar in Windows). Next, we handle the look of the environment. In DOS, we pick a random color set from the FOXUSER file just for fun; in Windows (both 2.x and 3.0), we set up a colorized editor. Then we load our custom menu, open up the various windows we want available on the desktop (View and Debug in 2.x; View, Debug and the Class Browser in 3.0), and we're ready to cut code!

We use two custom menu pads: Apps and Dev. Apps contains menu options for each of the applications we're currently working on. If we have more than one application for the same customer, we either separate the customers by separator bars or use a submenu to display all of the applications for that customer. Selecting the menu option for an application switches FoxPro's default directory to the location of the source code for that application, and handles any custom pathing, if necessary. We also change the title bar in Windows to display the current drive and directory.

The Dev menu pad is where things get interesting. Each of these menu options calls a custom tool or routine that we use in our day to day work. The first batch includes Array Browser, Table Compare, and Help's Angel, which were featured as Cool Tools in the April 1994, February 1995, and December 1995 issues of *FoxTalk*.

We also have menu pads that launch search tools to about five years of FoxForum messages and a list of articles from all of the popular Fox-related publications. We also have an internal "knowledge base" of tips and tricks that can be queried and modified by all developers.

Finally, the last set of menu options under "Dev" includes a variety of little utilities that we use in the shop. For example, our error handler enters records into a table called A_ACTIV in each application. We often open up this table and examine the various components for the last batch of errors during debugging. One menu option does this for us automatically. Admittedly, it's just a few minutes of work, but since it seems that we open this table an awful lot, it's pretty handy. Another utility simply duplicates the current record in the current table. Just two commands—scatter and insert—but you'd be surprised at how handy it is.

So that's a quick peek at part of our environment. I'd love to hear about what you've done to make your life easier, and so would the rest of *FoxTalk*'s readers.