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The Great Application Framework Shootout

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Probably the single most popular question I receive, after requests for Jeri Ryan's unlisted phone number, is "Which application framework should I use?" Obviously, that's like asking "What car should I buy?" There are a lot of fine automobiles around, and a few clunkers as well. But the answer depends on your needs.

Unfortunately, selecting your framework is not as straightforward as analyzing your needs and then picking from a list like you would with a car. With a car you have a finite number of choices with clear and obvious differentiations – a Ferrari won't carry 2 adults and four kids in car seats, a Grand Cherokee won't turn heads in Beverly Hills (well, OK, neither will a Ferrari <s>).

Selecting a framework is more like finding a spouse. First, you have to decide if you want one. Once you're over that hurdle, you have to go through the mating dance. You have to match your needs, requirements, idiosyncrasies and personality with those same attributes of a prospective candidate – each of who is more or less willing to let themselves be sized up accurately at first glance.

The final difficulty is that evaluation of a framework probably takes longer than evaluating a spouse (and isn't as much fun, except for a few folks on the far end of the pocket protector spectrum.) One is highly unlikely to spend a lot of time evaluating a framework and then turn around and evaluate several more. You've got apps to write.

You know what would be really great? What if a shop with a bunch of developers undertook a methodical evaluation of the leading frameworks, spreading the work out among several of their developers? First they would put together a set of criteria that they would use to objectively compare Framework A with Framework Z. Then they would use this set of criteria to appraise each framework they were interested in. Naturally, they would be doing so because they had their own goals, so the results they arrived at might not be the ones you were looking for. As a result, the frosting on this cake would be for them to publish the results, together with how they arrived at the results, so that you could then modify the criteria for your own purposes and go through the evaluation process to suit your own requirements.

Well, lucky you.

Vision Data Systems of Kansas City, MO, is undergoing this exact exercise, and has agreed to publish their results in FoxTalk over the next few months. Unfortunately, the evaluations result in rather lengthy articles, and so we've elected to publish each of these as Extended Articles, available for download by subscribers at our web site, www.pinpub.com/foxtalk.

In this issue, Kelly Conway kicks off this shootout by describing the criteria that Vision used and that you can use as a start for your own measurements. In subsequent months, he and his co-developers will synopsise their findings as they work through many of the well-known frameworks.

Come along for the ride now, or just bookmark this page so you can come back and refer to it when you have the need.