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The Top Five Reasons to Take the Beta VFP 6.0 Certification Exam

Whil Hentzen

A few months ago (FoxTalk, May, 1999) I wrote an editorial warning you about taking certifications exams for the wrong reasons. If you don't remember it, go back and re-read it. I'll wait, because it's important for this editorial to have the proper background.

OK, you're back. For those of you who have been whining about the lack of a VFP 5.0 exam but weren't paying attention, the VFP 6.0 Certification Exam is being worked on as I type this editorial, and should be ready by the end of the year. However, you don't have to wait until the end of the year, and, in fact, you probably shouldn't.

Just like the product itself, the VFP 6.0 exam comes in two pieces – a beta exam and the final exam. The purpose of the beta exam is to allow people to “test drive” the exam before it's unleashed at the general populace. But the beta exam is a bit different than the final exam – here's how.

First of all, it's longer than a standard exam. Why? Because the exam was written by humans who are just as fallible as humans who write software – and we all know what kind of ridiculous bugs show up in beta software. There are probably questions that are just as ridiculous on a beta exam, and so additional questions are included in the exam so that there are enough for the final exam once the bad ones get weeded out. Second, you get to include your comments on specific questions as well as the entire exam while you're taking it. (Wouldn't you have loved to be able to do that in college?)

Finally, unlike beta tests for software, the beta exam is available for anyone to take. Well, anyone with fifty bucks. So you, simply virtue of knowing about the beta version of the exam, can take it as soon as it's ready.

But you're a busy little geek. Why should you bother? I'll get to that in a second – but first, a word from our sponsor, er, from the Justice Department, who requires full disclosure in a situation like this.

Full Disclosure

Ever wonder exactly *who* writes these exams? Do you picture some Seattle-based dweeb in a white Oxford Cloth shirt with the top button buttoned, and flair-legged corduroys that hover about eight inches off the floor? One with the double pocket protectors and a six-inch circular slide-rule, just in case the backup battery for their calculator goes dead? Yeah, me too.

Well, that is until they asked me to be take on the role of Lead Author, along with a conspirator at a competing VFP magazine who is losing just as much hair and whose beard is even grayer than mine. So now you know why I can shill for the exam with such authority – cuz I really do know what's going on underneath the covers.

OK, so what are five good reasons?

It counts toward certification, just like the final exam. Pretend the exam is like Castor Oil – take the damn stuff now and get it over with. Once you pass (If you pass? When you pass? In the far-fetched case that you pass?) the exam, you'll be a card-carrying Microsoft Certified Professional. Well, actually, I don't know if you really get a card, but I imagine you could ask nicely. The VFP 6.0 beta exam also counts toward Microsoft Certified Database Administrator certification and either core or elective credit toward Microsoft Certified Solution Developer certification.

It's a lot easier than the final exam. You like this reason, don't you? Unfortunately, I'm lying. The exam isn't necessarily easier, but it's different. You have probably heard rumours that the grading curve is easier than on the final exam, or that the passing score for the beta exam is lower than the final exam. That may be. Or maybe not. It kinda makes sense, doesn't it? On the other hand, before you get all a-sweaty and start dialing the test center for your reservation, remember that this is a *beta* exam. That means that you're also going to be dealing with questions that, er, aren't quite ready for prime time. So even if the grading curve is easier, there's definitely a trade-off here.

I will post the names of the people who complained about no VFP 5.0 exam but don't take the beta.

Once the beta exam becomes available, I will be correlating the names of the people who take the exam with the names of the people who have whined about "Microsoft hates VFP because there's not an exam" on the various electronic forums. I swear I am not making this up.

It's a lot cheaper than the final exam. The final exam is \$100 (or, at least, it was the last time I looked.) The beta is half off. Hey, \$50 is \$50.

You will make the exam better. If you take the final version of the exam, and you run into a stupid question, the only thing you can do to let off steam is to drive rudely on your way home from the test center. During the beta, however, you get to complain – and expect that your feedback will be listened to. The Fox betas are held in awe by the rest of Microsoft because our community generates more feedback per beta tester than any other product in the Redmond stable. And that feedback makes a better product as well. Ever wonder why there was hardly any VFP stuff in the first two Visual Studio Service Packs? Maybe they had to fix Really Bad Bugs in other products – but the VFP team had already nailed the big ones. Here's your chance to put the beta exam on the top of the heap as well.

If you don't take it, they won't come – back - to make a VFP 7.0 exam. Yes, that's right. What if you gave an exam and nobody came? Sounds like a threat, doesn't it? It does to me, and I believe it, and I think it makes lots of sense. I can make a guess about how much Microsoft spent developing the 6.0 exam – definitely into six figures. If you spent that type of money and ended up with 47 people taking the exam, you wouldn't do another either, would you? So take it, and tell your friends, your co-workers, your user group members, the students in your VFP classes, and the pastor at your church about it as well. And don't be surprised if you see presenters at the next Academy Awards wearing little "Fox 6.0 beta exam" buttons instead of those stupid ribbons they seem to find every year.

So when can you take it? It's a little tricky because beta exams are only available for a short period of time – the typical window for a beta is about two weeks. The VFP 6.0 beta exam should be ready by the end of October – you can find out the exact dates by checking back at

<http://www.microsoft.com/mcp/exam/stat/SP70-155.htm>

Just DO IT.

And, by the way, I really was kidding about posting names of whiners. I don't have access to the names of the people who take the beta exam anymore than you do. I only have access to social security numbers and bank account balances. Now stop reading and take the exam!