

# FoxRockX

## Communication Lost! Reconnect!

It is FoxPro DevCon time again. The SouthWest Fox Conference in October was, again, a great success. The German DevCon, in mid November 2008, will be the 15th time that FoxPro developers gather in Frankfurt/Main and we are sure that it will, as it has been every year since 1994, both great fun and a great conference.

A key focus this year will be the new "software+service" strategy being introduced by Microsoft and the keynote will focus on how this will impact the FoxPro community. So, after a long break, we will once again have a keynote speaker from Microsoft Germany and at least some marketing again, here in Germany, for Visual FoxPro.

What is more, Microsoft Germany are planning to update the German homepage for Visual FoxPro and are adding a "Developer Center" for Visual FoxPro (as they have already done for Visual Basic 6.0). They are also developing new webcasts, specifically targeted for the FoxPro community, focusing on integrating the Software+Service strategy with Visual FoxPro and also on integrating Visual FoxPro software with SQL Server.

Does this help the majority of our international readers? I am sorry to say no, it is all in German. But:

Maybe it's time for Microsoft generally to remember that there are still plenty of Visual FoxPro software developers in many countries around the world. While Microsoft may have made a strategic decision not to develop the product any further, that does not mean that people have stopped using it. How about updating some web pages? How about special offers to upgrade to Visual FoxPro 9.0 (many developers are still using old versions of Visual FoxPro)? Even if there is no new product-specific information, how about some mention of the new free tools there are available at VFPX (<http://www.codeplex.com/VFPX>) and about those still under development?

Apart from the free download for the GDI Security patch, the VFP home page at <http://msdn.microsoft.com/vfoxpro> has not changed in six months or more!

The burning question for many members of the FoxPro community is where to go from here, given that there will not be any new version of Visual FoxPro. It has been suggested, by some at Microsoft who really know FoxPro, that the new Visual Basic version that includes a "dynamic language runtime" (can you say "macro substitution"?) will suit Visual FoxPro developers very well. Maybe this information could be on the Visual FoxPro home page too, perhaps with examples of how it will work and maybe even updates on when it will be available.

We at FoxRockX will continue to update you about new tools, tips and tricks and about new technology as it becomes available.

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But surely it is time for Microsoft to stop completely ignoring the large number of existing users of Visual FoxPro. Nobody ever said that after the code freeze for the last service pack for Visual FoxPro 9.0 the website would also be frozen. It seems to us that if Microsoft really wants people to move from Visual FoxPro to other Microsoft products that maybe they should at least try to convince us why we should ever trust them with our hard-earned dollars again.

The community has, for the past decade and a half, been relatively happy with our token based language runtime with garbage collection, integrated query language, copy deployment, data-binding and DBF files. The common language runtime, LINQ, one click deployment, .NET data binding and DBF-support in Visual Studio are neither new, nor are they surprising, or even especially attractive, features for us – after all we already have them all (or reasonable facsimiles thereof) anyway. As we have pointed out before, the cost in terms of software licenses, hardware and in development time and effort for a .NET WPF application is significantly greater than if the equivalent application were developed in Visual FoxPro.

Which is, of course, part of the problem! The Microsoft marketing managers here in Germany say that they always try to pick up customers where they

are. That is smart because it is axiomatic in marketing that it is much cheaper to convert an existing customer than to create a new customer.

Maybe FoxPro developers are going to have to move, but it is not immediately obvious why they should move to .NET, nor how quickly they should make that move. After all, if we are going to have to invest in new tools and new technology anyway, why consider only the offerings from one manufacturer? When that manufacturer stops communicating with their installed user base it is not a very encouraging indicator for future relationships. We fully understand that Microsoft have no interest in spending lots of money marketing Visual FoxPro but, given the continued claims of how important "community" is to Microsoft, surely the FoxPro community is at least worth the price of a few updates to the product home page now and again?

It is way past time for Microsoft world wide to demonstrate that they are willing to continue communication with the Visual FoxPro community – even if that community is not moving to as fast as they would like, or spending enough money with Microsoft right now. Marketing is always about the future, not the present and the continued silence from Redmond does nothing to encourage the FoxPro community at large.