

The Quill

NEWSLETTER

NEXT GENERATION DEVELOPMENT COMING TO TASSIE

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As mentioned in the February/March newsletter, Quill technical consultant Andrew Ormerod attended the VSLive! Visual Studio Developer Conference in Sydney's Westin Hotel from March 5th-8th.

Here we take a look at the skills Andrew has picked up over the 4 days and brought back to The Quill Consultancy.



Q. What was the overall structure of the conference?

A. The first day was a pre-conference introduction to Microsoft's emerging .NET platform. Over the next two days, the conference was split into two tracks – a Visual C++ track, and a Visual Basic track called VBITS. VBITS was further split into an ASP track and a Visual Studio track. On the last day of the conference everyone came back together for a full day SQL7 session, called SQL2TheMax.

Q. What information did you find most useful?

A. Everything! I concentrated on the VBITS track, attending a combination of the ASP and Visual Studio sessions. About 80% of these sessions dealt

with emerging technologies, with the remaining 20% focussing on existing technologies. There was a huge emphasis on web development in general, looking at examples and ideas of what these new .NET tools can do.

Q. What is this .NET platform?

A. The core of the .NET technology is about developing business-to-business and business-to-consumer Web services, based on XML and Internet protocols. It is the next generation of development tools. It is about allowing people to interact with a smart device (PC, smart phone, web server) to create a .NET experience. The .NET suite of programming tools is also language independent, so as a developer I could code in any language, creating the same application. As Quill is a Microsoft Solution Provider, we have had access to early versions of the .NET tools since December. They are due for final release at the end of the year.

Q. And what is a .NET experience?

A. A .NET experience is analogous to a user's interaction with a current stand-alone application, with a few differences. Each type of .NET experience could be through a completely different medium, for example, your PC or your phone, giving a completely different interface. .NET experiences are also location independent—you could use a smart phone in your car or a PC in your office to interact with the same application. .NET experiences are also completely personalised, suited to your personal profile.

Q. Can you give us an example?

A. Sure. We are all familiar with the concept that we could check our email from anywhere in the

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world, given a PC and a connection to the Internet. .NET experiences take this one step further. Imagine performing a whole host of other tasks through any smart electronic device – changing the temperature in your home from your office, or watering the garden from your phone. This next generation of development tools will completely change the way we live.

For more information, have a look at www.microsoft.com/net. There you will find white papers, Q&A, and other .NET news.

Q. How can you apply what you have learnt at the conference to the business needs of Tasmanian clients?

A. This is the most exciting part for us! With Microsoft's emphasis on web-based technologies, Tasmania is no longer restricted by geographical boundaries as we were in the past. The web means that a Tasmanian business can operate anywhere in the world, with the assistance of a web-based application. These web-based technologies are exactly what Tasmania needs to enable us to operate as the Intelligent Island.

Q. So how easy is it to create web-based applications with these new technologies?

A. Based on the way we are currently developing, I estimate that there will be a 2 or 3-fold increase in development time efficiency for most aspects of web functionality. In certain tasks there may even be a 10-fold increase; tasks such as validating fields on a web page suddenly become as easy as drag and drop.

Q. What about existing applications? Can they take advantage of the .NET tools?

A. At the conference we saw a demonstration of a conversion wizard for stand-alone applications in Visual Basic and Visual C++, converting them to the .NET platform. In the applications we are developing now, we are placing emphasis in the design phase on enabling the application to convert to the new tools when available.

Q. And what about the last day on SQL7?

A. American SQL developer Ken Henderson, author of *The Guru's Guide to Transact-SQL*, presented the last day called SQL2TheMax. Ken presented several examples of SQL applications and code, which we can apply immediately to the SQL developments we currently have underway. In some ways it was the most useful information to bring back to the Quill, as we can implement it straight away.

Q. What was your feel about the overall conference atmosphere?

A. The atmosphere was fantastic, with over 300

attendees from all over Australia and the Asia-Pacific region. The conference was run in San Francisco in January, and will run again in Orlando, Florida in October—we were very lucky to have the conference brought so close to home. A tradeshow in conjunction with the conference showcased the services provided by Australian and international developers. The social events enabled informal meetings of developers all over Australia, which is invaluable for us here in Tassie. I felt that the depth of talent and skill we have here in Tassie is easily equal to that found on the mainland.



SUPPORT FOR MANAGED NETWORKS

In the October/November 2000 newsletter, we reviewed the Department of Education's Managed Network project and the Quill Consultancy's involvement in providing network consultants in several clusters across the state.

In an extension to Quill's contribution to the project, we were contracted by the Department of Education to develop a web-based application to support consultants in the field. Known as SupportNet, this application enables Managed Network consultants across the state to submit time sheets and billing information to the Department, and to more effectively communicate with each other and with staff in the Department's Information Management Branch (IMB).

SupportNet enables direct email access between consultants and IMB staff, and also offers consultants the opportunity to post messages on a bulletin board for viewing by all IMB staff and other consultants. This allows common issues between schools to be addressed effectively and efficiently, and also allows instant problem solving to occur, with the backup of other consultants.

Developed by the Quill's technical consultant Andrew Ormerod, SupportNet was developed with an SQL 7 backend, Access 2000 and web front end using ASP technology. It is planned that SupportNet will continue to grow in functionality as the Managed Network project continues.

MEET BETH WARREN...

One of the things Beth Warren really likes about her role as Project

Coordinator at The Quill is that she never gets bored! A typical week might see her running a training course in Microsoft Project or Access, developing a Visual Basic macro for a "smart" Word template, meeting with clients to discuss their requirements for a database development, and writing a proposal for a tender submission. She also works with David Norton, Andrew Ormerod and other members of the consultancy team to ensure that project timelines are met, and quality products are produced.

Beth has been involved in the IT industry for more years than she is prepared to admit. She graduated from the University of Tasmania with a Bachelor of Science degree majoring in Computing and a Diploma of Education, then taught Computer Studies and Maths at Hellyer College for six years.

At the end of 1987, Beth decided it was time to put her programming skills to the test in the 'real world' and headed off to the UK for a working holiday. This turned out to be far more 'work' than 'holiday'.

Over the next four years, Beth worked as a software engineer and team leader for a software house that provided database solutions to legal firms. She also acquired an English husband!

Beth returned to Hobart in 1991 and was at work at the Quill six days later (on a Sunday afternoon – this should have been a warning!) after having an 'interview' by phone whilst still in London.

Over the last ten years, Beth has developed and delivered training courses in almost all the Microsoft applications, as well as languages such as Visual Basic and Visual Basic for Applications. She has also taken courses in PageMaker and FileMaker Pro.

In July 2000 Beth took on the role of Projects Coordinator. This allows her to once again use her technical and development skills, and also her experience with the development cycle as she liaises with clients and other consultancy staff to ensure



successful project management of all work undertaken for clients.

In life outside the Quill, Beth is busy with her two young boys, singing with the TSO Chorus, and writing short stories.

QUILL TRAINING FOR PNG VISITORS

The Quill Consultancy was recently involved in training two visitors from Papua New Guinea (PNG) in the use of the State Government's innovative online legislation publishing system EnAct.

Roslyn Hoping and Vela Konivaro from the Papua New Guinea Office of Legislative Counsel undertook a 7 day program developed by Mike Gluskie from the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Quill's Beth Warren. The Quill Consultancy developed the training material for the Tasmanian State Government when EnAct was first implemented, so was the obvious choice for the PNG visitors.



Roslyn Hoping, Beth Warren, Vela Konivaro and Mike Gluskie during training at the Dept of Premier and Cabinet

The State Government provided the training to help PNG implement EnAct into their parliamentary system. The implementation of EnAct in PNG is part of a larger project that is receiving funding from the overseas aid program AusAid. Premier Jim Bacon said he was delighted to be able to share Tasmanian knowledge and skills with people from other parts of the world.

The training will replicate the drafting environment in PNG by using PNG legislation and the same computer software that is used in PNG.

BOOK REVIEWS

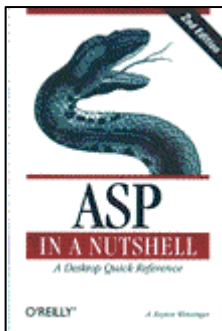


ASP in a Nutshell—2nd Edn

Publisher O'Reilly & Assoc.

ISBN 1-565-928-431

Price \$75.00 (inc GST)



This book provides the high-quality reference documentation that web application developers really need to create effective Active Server Pages. It focuses on how features are used in a real application and highlights little known or undocumented features. This book also includes an overview of the interaction between the latest release of Internet Information Server (version 5) and ASP 3.0, with an introduction to the IIS object model and the objects it comprises.

Topics covered include:

- > An ASP overview and the application of ASP objects
- > Browser capabilities
- > Working with page and hit counters
- > File access
- > Response, Request and Session objects
- > Logging utilities
- > Permission checking
- > Converting CGI/WinCGI applications
- > ASP on other platforms
- > Configuring IIS
- > Global.ASA
- > Installable components (ActiveX Data Objects 2.6)
- > Working with Ad Rotators
- > Content linking and rotating
- > MyInfo
- > CDO for Windows NT

- > ASPError functionality
- >ObjectContext

From an Amazon.com reviewer: "As an ASP developer and back-end programmer, this is one book I keep within arms reach at all times! As can be expected, the book covers the ASP object model very well for a 'pocket' reference and is logically presented in a way that makes it easy for me to look things up quickly."

FROM THE HELP DESK

Q. Can you change the value of a variable in Visual Basic while debugging?

A. Yes. By activating the Immediate window, you can query or change the value of a variable while running an application. Activate this window by pressing Ctrl+G, or choosing View | Immediate. To use the Immediate window, type a line of code in the window, and press ENTER to execute the statement. Adding a "?" before the line evaluates the code and allows the result to be returned in the Immediate window. This is useful for finding out the result of a function that is embedded within operators or other functions.

Q. Sometimes when I deploy an Access database, some basic inbuilt functions start causing errors. Why?

A. This could be caused by some references that are not installed on the new machine. To remedy this problem, open a code window and choose Tools | References. Remove any references that are marked "Missing". If one of the missing references is actually used by your code you will need to install the object as part of the deployment process. Note that only the references above the first missing one load correctly.

STOP PRESS!!!

The Quill Consultancy invites you to a sneak preview of the next version of Microsoft Office—**Office XP**.



When: 3:30pm-5:30pm
Wednesday 23rd May 2001

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Before Friday 18th May 2001