
One Last Compile...

The Joy Of TClientDataSet

I'm always late picking up on new things.

For some time now you will have read articles, in this magazine and elsewhere, attended courses, seen lectures, all waxing lyrical about what a great little component TClientDataSet is. And I'm here, late as usual, to tell you that they're all absolutely correct.

Let us begin with client/server databases. Wonderful things, much better than Paradox and Access. Client/server databases, as we all know, mean TQueries. TQueries mean SQL. More importantly, TQueries mean that putting stuff into a database, which should be the easy bit, suddenly becomes rather tricky. Why should I have to write an INSERT statement every time a user needs to change a post-code? It's laborious and a pain to maintain and why should it be that difficult? So Borland came up with the TUpdateSQL Component.

I'm rather fond of TUpdateSQL, for various reasons. Firstly, because I understand it, which is something that can't be said of a number of components: periodically I think I understand TSession, for example, but then somebody says something and I lose it again. Secondly, TUpdateSQL looks like the sort of thing I might have written. This is a potentially libellous remark, but even its dearest fans would admit there is something cheerfully Heath Robinson about it. If you've

never used it I won't bore you with the details, but take it from me: don't try and work it out by just plonking one down and playing with it. Life is too short for such things. All you need to know is: it worked quite well, mostly.

Then Borland dropped the bombshell that TUpdateSQL was no longer going to be supported and that in future all cached updates should be done using TClientDataSet. I imagine they'll include TUpdateSQL in the next version of Delphi, rioting will ensue if they don't, but it will be relegated to a distant tab of the Palette, where the elderly components of yesteryear live out their days.

It was only when confronted with this grim reality that I began to investigate TClientDataSet. I had seen people demonstrate neat things with it before, but it was all wrapped up in my mind with MIDAS (groan) and odd little components that I didn't understand like TDataSetProvider, and besides, why fix it if it ain't broken, etc.

I was a fool. TClientDataSets are wonderful. They are a huge step forward in freeing you from the tyranny of data-aware controls. As I've grumbled in previous columns, the problem with all the data-aware stuff is that, because it's so easy to write database programs, you accept the downside, which is that you never really have

complete control. You have to accept whatever limitations the database and the controls place on you. Re-arrange the records in a different order? Well, you could do it before, but you'd have to commit your changes first, which you might not want, and it might be slow, as you basically have to run the query again with a different ORDER BY. And it's a pain.

With TClientDataSet, it's a breeze. Sort ascending, sort descending, save the stuff to a file and come back to it later, calculate the total from a column: all is sweetness and light. And sending your new data back to the server is a wonderfully straightforward process. It is a whole new world of database programming.

Naturally, there is a downside. But, in a spirit of adventure, and because I'm running out of space, I'm going to split this column in two and return to TClientDataSets next month. When I shall tell you why, although they're great, they still give me grief. *C'est la vie*, etc.