One Last Compile...

Components? I can handle them

There's a staggering number of people around the world who seem to be doing nothing but beavering away on Delphi components, and pumping them out onto the Internet. I have no idea what their motivation is for doing this, but I thank them all, deeply. Guys and girls, you have no idea how much you've done to enhance my programming reputation.

Picture the scene: I'm lounging at my desk, trying to build a pagoda out of my business cards. (I always have lots of spare business cards. You know how it is. You send one to each member of your family, then you realise that you've still got 490 left and you've never met anybody who wanted your business card anyway. They sit in your drawer until your company changes its logo and you have to get some more done.) An anxious manager wanders in, saying that his biggest customer desperately needs a new database front end for all their PC users. One that can connect instantly to the company's intranet. And to its corporate email. The manager used to work on mainframes and he's used to programmers with beards and bicycle clips sucking their teeth and saying mournfully that it'll take at least three months.

It's nice to be able to smirk, casually reach for your mouse, drop a couple of components on a form, tap mysteriously away at the keyboard for thirty seconds and then say coolly, "You mean, something like this?" It's a bit like being a wizard. And in just the same way that the best wizards are those with the most and the best spells, so the best Delphi programmers (at least how I see it) are those with the most and the best components.

Components have the same appeal that a Swiss penknife used to have. It's reassuring to give yourself lots of options, to feel that you're ready for anything. Suddenly need a spreadsheet which burps like a bullfrog if you enter a negative number? I've got `TSpreadFrog`, and it only cost ten bucks. Want millions of little red balls to float mysteriously around your screen for no apparent reason? It's `TPointlessBalls` for you.

I know I'm not alone. There are thousands of us out there, all looking eagerly for that component which will do just what we need. Underlying our addiction is a childlike faith that the components will work perfectly. They have to. They look so neat and well behaved, sitting there tidily on our component palettes, that we can't really entertain the idea that they won't work exactly as they say they will. Who cares who wrote them and why? Just hand them over! What's happening in practice, of course, is that we're often sharing the coding effort on our client's mission critical systems with paranoid hippies from San Francisco and drug-crazed adolescents from Peru. I won't tell if you don't.

In my quieter moments, when the manager's gone and I've returned to my pagoda, I reflect that there's something rather sad about components. For every job I undertake, I know there's a component out there that already does the job. Chances are, it does the job better than I could and at about a tenth of the cost. Bosses, given enough time, will come to realise this. Each new, easy to use, feature-packed little icon is another nail in the coffin of programmers. For all I know, somebody out there is already developing a `TGeek` component which is designed to replace programmers altogether (it'll skulk grumpily around the corner of the form, complaining that it doesn't get paid as much as the sales team and that *Star Trek: The Next Generation* isn't a patch on the original.) But until then, if you know about any new, cool components, please, please, you gotta let me have 'em.

Editor's note: for everyone out there who's been wondering who the author of *One Last Compile...* is, you'll have to keep wondering! I'm under strict instructions not to reveal his identity, but I can tell you it ain't *me* – I'm not anywhere near as funny!