

One Last Compile...

An artist and his palette

As I flicked through the Delphi palette the other day I started worrying about the components that never featured on my forms. What was I missing out on? Are people who use `TTreeView`s and `TUpdateSQL` components intrinsically superior to those of us who struggle along with `TOutlines` and multiple linked `TTables`? Did it reflect badly on me as a programmer that I always gravitate towards the same small set of components, and always spurn the others?

Take the `TDrawGrid`, for example. I should kick off our discussion by saying that I'm something of a grid junkie. My first action on doing any kind of database work is to happily plonk a grid down, connect it to a data source, and zoom up and down the record set a few times just to amuse myself. `DBGrids` and `StringGrids` are meat and drink to me. And from time to time I will be seduced by advertisements for components like the `SuperDuperGrid` and the `MegaFabGrid` and lash out my company's hard earned cash to play with them (they never seem to live up to expectations). But the poor old `DrawGrid` has never, not once in four years of Delphi, made it into one of my applications.

I don't know why this bothers me. After all, probably I just do the kind of applications that don't need `DrawGrids`. But I don't know that for certain. Perhaps `DrawGrids` have all sorts of neat uses that I don't know about, although the Delphi 3 help file is at its most spectacularly useless when it comes to giving me pointers. One day I might need to code my way out of a life or death situation using only a `DrawGrid`, two labels and a buggy ActiveX control, and then I could really be in trouble.

`HotKeys` is another one. I suspect I have less of an excuse here, but really, what are you supposed to make of the following little gem from the help file? `THotKey implements the generic behavior introduced in TCustomHotKey. THotKey publishes many of the properties inherited from TCustomHotKey, but does not introduce any new behavior.` Ah. Yes. Thank you so much. Of course, if you then trek your way up the object hierarchy in the help and look at the explanation of `TCustomHotKey`, and were then to spend twenty minutes messing around with the component, maybe the fog would start to lift slightly. But I'm too lazy to do that. Besides, none of my books on Delphi seem to deem them worthy of mention, which is probably a sign that I needn't bother too much either.

There are others. I would love to be able to use the `TMediaPlayer`. If ever there was a component designed to make you look like a programming god with absolutely no effort on your part, it's the `TMediaPlayer`. Ever since Delphi 1 I've waited for a client to come stumbling in with a disc of .avi clips and a despairing look, but to no avail. I have no idea what to do with a `TPaintBox`, but given that it seems likely to require some kind of

drawing ability that's probably a good thing. And although even I understand the `TDateTimePicker` component I can't use it, as even users get fed up with them after about five minutes. (Great name though. If I ever have a pop group we're going to be called 'Captain Combo and the `TDateTimePickers`'.)

I continued to flick through the Delphi palette, and mused some more. Can a person's life, I wondered, be summarised through their use of components?

'Like all youngsters, he was initially very dependent on TButtons and TLabels. He had a flirtation with TMaskEdits which was messy but mercifully brief, and a rather self-conscious, visually fussy, period which featured extensive use of TBevels and TShapes. Although he had been scornful and dismissive of the TSession component on first encountering it, he clutched it to his bosom once he began WebBroker work and was seldom parted from it. In his maturity he settled down into a happy, settled relationship with a range of InfoPower components, although he would have occasional, short-lived and usually disastrous flings with home-made components of his own.'

Then I dismissed it as a stupid idea. But I could probably use it for a column, I thought.