

One Last Compile...

Cubes not quite to the rescue

As part of my ongoing quest to broaden my knowledge and, more importantly, to look productive with the minimum of effort, I recently spent a morning playing with the Decision Cube components.

I was impressed. I usually am with Delphi stuff. I know there are probably parts of it that people like Dave Jewell shake their head sorrowfully over, but I think it's nearly all pretty neat. Well, except for one thing, which I'll come to in just a second. I would never have thought of something like Decision Cube, and it was simple to set up, and quick to execute, and you could see that it would give you all sorts of insights (meaningful or not) into your data.

Buoyed up with my discovery, I phoned my boss and invited him down to have a look at it. At the back of my mind... no, let's be honest, at the forefront of my mind, was the idea that here was something that would impress clients to bits and we could probably charge lots of money for, and it would involve no real work on my part. I'm sure it was fairly prominent in his mind too.

I ran through it for him, and he grunted. (It is something of a point of honour for him never to be impressed by anything his staff do. He probably thinks it would make us complacent or big-headed or make us ask for a pay rise.) As grunts go, it was a pretty positive sounding grunt. Then he pursed his lips, and I knew it was time for the torpedo. (All bosses are taught this grunt, and it is used at the end of any employee's presentation or demonstration to herald 'the torpedo': a remark or observation to render what has gone before pointless and worthless, and to make the employee feel about three feet high.)

'Can you print the data out?' he asked.

Forlornly, I switched into the help and looked through the methods for the DecisionGrid, but I knew it wouldn't be there.

'You can print the graph out,' I offered, but I knew the cause was lost.

'People like to print stuff out,' he said loftily, and returned to his office to play with his spreadsheets.

Two points from this: one minor, one major. Firstly, I don't want you to think that I couldn't have come up with a way to print the data out. It might have taken me a while, and I wouldn't have enjoyed it, but it wouldn't have been beyond me. At least, I don't think so.

Secondly, this printing thing is a recurring problem with Delphi, and it's aggravating because this is one of the rare occasions when my boss is actually right. People do like to print stuff out. Heck, I like to print stuff out too. It's so much more convenient and readable when it's in paper form. And you can scribble phone numbers around the edges, which is never a good idea on a monitor.

Yet so few of the Delphi components that you desperately want to print out actually supporting printing. TeeChart is an honourable exception, bless Mr Berneda's cotton socks, but the vast majority of, say, grid components simply sit there dumbly when it comes to paper output.

If you're working with databases then you can usually enlist the help of a report writer, if you don't mind adding a megabyte or so to your executable, but if you're trying to write a standalone non-DB app then you're into a difficult, fussy world of TextRects and WriteLns and Canvases and general tedium.

I suppose it's a bit picky to grumble when Delphi does so much of the work for you, but printing is one of those areas where I could really do with some extra help. So please chaps, in Delphi 6 could we have a bit more help on the printing side? Ta.