

One Last Compile...

We should be so lucky, lucky, lucky, lucky

I imagine I am not alone in getting a lot of mail from Inprise these days. These envelopes are always a welcome diversion from doing any work, but recently they have tended to fall into one of two categories.

The first category, which I read with puzzlement and more than a little irritation, is the inappropriate mailshot. Given that I'm a registered Delphi user, and I have filled in various questionnaires stating that my only interest is in Delphi, Inprise spend a disproportionate amount of time trying to flog me copies of C++Builder. Even more bizarre is that when I fail to reply they usually send me a copy of it anyway, presumably in the forlorn hope that one day I'll just load it up and magically start coding in it, and then I'll be hooked: a veritable C++ junkie.

Actually, the last time I got a copy from them I did load it up. You know how it is: something in your ego whispers that it would be nice to be able to say that you program in C++, which is considered to be a 'true' language (ie harder than it needs to be). I loaded it up and was gratified and encouraged to see that it does indeed look like Delphi. I dropped a button on a form with the intention of doing a ground-breaking *Hello World* program, but as soon as I saw the first squiggly bracket and the word `void` I lost my nerve and scurried back to Object Pascal.

The second category of Inprise correspondence I've read with a sigh and a heavy heart. These mailings are concerned with something that, like it or not, is bound to affect me and make my life more complicated. They're concerned with (roll of drums please) Kylix. (Brief aside: I hope they come up with a better name than this. It sounds like a cross between a breakfast cereal and that singing Australian from Neighbours, which in marketing terms is not exactly a launch pad for success.)

Do I think Linux is an important platform for the new millennium? Well, I've been reading a lot about it and giving it some thought, and my firm conclusion is this: I have absolutely no idea. Ditto as to whether Inprise are doing the right thing by concentrating so much of their energy on porting Delphi to Linux, rather than, say, tidying up their C++Builder mailing list.

The trouble is, I know I can't afford to ignore Linux because there's a chance it might be Big. After all, if it became mega, and I missed it, this would reduce my already limited employment prospects, possibly to the point of redundancy, and poverty and misery would soon follow. Secondly, and more importantly, I would look stupid. It's the ego again, you see. Delphi for Linux is sooo seductive, because it's an easy solution. In theory, we simply recompile our Windows projects on our Linux machines and wow the world with our speed, productivity and responsiveness to change, all the while thumbing our noses (again) at those poor VB programmers.

Do I think Delphi for Linux will work? Well, again, I've been reading the briefing papers and giving it some thought, and my firm conclusion is this: sort of. The whole business reminds me of the early days of Delphi, when we were supposed to be able to scale smoothly up from 3-user Paradox applications to 5,000 Oracle users with just a change to the alias. And it sometimes worked, in a hypnotically painful sort of way, but the truth was you always had to make loads of changes to get the best out of the platform, and in many cases you were better off re-writing your whole app. I suspect (and it could just be that I'm bitter and jaded) that moving apps between Windows and Linux will be much the same.

I shall be more than happy to eat my words on this, not least because I'm always short on ideas for columns and to be able to do one in six months' time on *How Great Linux Is And Does Anybody Else Remember Windows* would suit me just fine. For the time being I'm afraid I shall remain a skeptic. But, like you, I look forward to Inprise's next envelope with interest.