

Developer on the Move

By Dr. Neil Roodyn

I guess it's that time when we start asking ourselves what we did in 2003 and what was it that made the year memorable, special, awful etc... So here is my opportunity to tell you what I have made of this last year and what I expect to see happening in the year that stares us in the face.

Another year in the life of...

2003 has brought its fair share of surprises for me, although I'm sure if I'd paid more attention to what other people were saying they may not have been quite so unexpected. All bar one of the projects I worked on in the first half of 2003 were related to integration, mainly integration of existing (legacy) systems to new technologies. All of the new technologies were .NET based development projects. I realize that as someone with experience in this field I am going to be seeing more of these projects but it was encouraging to see the take up of .NET becoming so widespread this year. So why do I care about .NET becoming more widely used? For me development on the .NET platform has become the obvious choice for new development projects because it helps promote a far more agile approach to development. The first article I wrote for this publication at the beginning of 2003 was about teams that I worked with in 2002 that had used extreme programming techniques with .NET development tools to get their jobs done. This year has just reinforced this belief that lightweight development methods work best when used with a solid framework and a set of tools that can support the techniques prescribed. The .NET ecosystem provides a host of these tools to aid rapid delivery of software to the customer, be they internal or external.

Along with this jump to the new platform came a bunch of work using old tools and technologies. It was bound to happen that we would need to get our hands dirty in C/C++/Delphi/BASIC again when the value of the software that had been written in those languages was being leveraged into the new.NET world. So out came various toolkits to help connect these worlds together and of course to use the tools I had to get back to using some of these good old languages, and not for the last time in 2003.

Another area I have got involved in has been the Tablet PC; I have always had a strong interest in Pen computing and followed closely Microsoft's movements in the last few years. Culminating recently in the release of the Tablet PC version of Windows XP, this works with laptops and tablet devices that have digitizer screens. While the programming model for this is based mainly in a managed .NET API, the first couple of tablet projects I worked on this year had a requirement to leverage their existing software components and make them tablet aware. Again the word 'integration' rears its head, and again I am delving into BASIC and Delphi code to try to connect it up to the Digital INK API.

After a month in the USA in the middle of the year I found myself in Europe working in C++ again, this time on the Smartphone 2002 platform which does not support the .NET Compact Framework, and even if it did would probably be too slow for the applications being developed.

From Europe in summer I flew back to Australia in winter, although landing in sunny Brisbane helped to soften the blow. The TechEd event was well attended and there were

lots of interesting people around to talk to. Every single person I spoke to there said they got good value from the event and enjoyed themselves immensely. Even I had a good time. Off the back of TechEd I went straight into a whirlwind tour of Australia running Tablet PC development workshops. These were tiring but a lot of fun, starting in Brisbane I did the entire trip by road, driving all the Tablets and equipment with me to Sydney, then Canberra and finished in Melbourne.

I then had to play fun and games with the airlines to get me to my next assignment in Denmark. It never fails to astound me how difficult it can still be in this day and age to get around this small planet. I ended up flying from Melbourne to Singapore, to Tokyo, to Frankfurt, to London and finally to Copenhagen. All that travel to work on a project in C++ on Embedded Windows XP. Actually it turned out to be more interesting than that the team was looking at exposing .NET events from an existing unmanaged C++ application so that third party developers could build plug ins to their application. So there I was working on another form of interoperation again.

Of course I am now writing this at the beginning of October for the end of the year publication, so who knows what the last quarter of the year will hold in store, but based on the current trend I would bet there is more C++ programming to be done and at least one more integration project on the horizon.

Even with all these great new software toys to play with I have found myself working with some old favourite languages for integration of legacy applications through to developing on new platforms with the cool 'mobile' tag attached.

So what of the year ahead? Will it bring more surprises, or more of the same?

I have no doubt that a few interesting integration projects will be placed in my path but keep silent on the matter of surprises. It is the constant change that keeps the software industry exciting for me; no surprises = no challenges. If there is no challenge then I have to question the value I am adding to the project. What is certain is that the 'old' languages will not die quietly or quickly, C++/BASIC/PASCAL code will need to be maintained and enhanced in the years to come. For me the other certainty is plenty of travel, with clients in the USA, Europe and around this great country the prediction I can make with certainty about the coming year is that I will be sitting on airplanes, meeting new people and writing more stories for you to laugh at.

Dr. Neil travels the world working with software companies. He loves Australia, where he spends half of his year enjoying the Sydney lifestyle and helping software development teams get more productive. Neil brings his business and technical skills to the companies he works with to ensure he has happy customers. Dr. Neil can be contacted on Neil@Roodyn.com