

The Inside Track August 2000

Welcome to a new column in the Solution Developer newsletter, The Inside Track. First off, let me tell you about myself. I've been working for Great Plains for a little over 6 years, most of that time as a developer on Dexterity. As such, I've written some C/C++ code and I've written a fair amount of code in Visual Basic and Delphi, too. I've also fiddled around with HTML and scripting. Prior to coming to Great Plains, I worked as an embedded systems programmer, an in-house programmer for a local business, a corporate developer for a large insurance company and I worked as a programmer for a VAR (twice!) writing custom business applications and modifying existing ones. While my VAR experience is a bit old, I remember well the kinds of pressures and wide ranging responsibilities a programmer in such a role experiences. My guess is that this is the experience most similar to yours.

The other thing you should know about me, is despite being married to a CPA and having written a fair amount of business software, I really don't know anything about accounting. But that's OK since this column isn't about accounting it's about technology. I hope to tell you about what's happening in Platform Services at Great Plains. If you think of Dexterity as our current platform, then you'll understand that Platform Services is the division within the company that will be building the platform of the future. This next generation platform will be fully web enabled to build applications that live happily on the Internet.

Speaking of the future, lets get started. I'm sure you've heard of Microsoft .NET. .NET was revealed to the world at the Professional Developers Conference in early July. .NET is a family of technologies for "programming the web". At present, each web site is like an island with dotted lines that connect it to other web sites. The .NET technologies aim to turn those dotted lines into information conduits, making the web as much a development environment as the desktop is for traditional client/server applications. For instance, if you're writing a business application that needs credit card authorization you will be able to use the web based services provided by a credit verification services company. .NET is based on existing Internet standards like HTTP and XML, but extends these basic mechanisms with additional technologies like Simple Object Access Protocol, SOAP, (SOAP has been submitted to the standards process) and ActiveX Data Objects+, ADO+. In future editions of this column, we'll be exploring these technologies in more depth.

But, you ask, where is Great Plains in this picture? Glad you asked. Great Plains, and specifically the Platform Services team, has been working with early releases of the Microsoft .NET technologies under the heading of the "Fusion" project. We called this project Fusion because it brings together and builds on the technologies that are needed to create the next generation of Great Plains web enabled applications. As you're well aware, Dexterity is a great tool for building LAN-based client/server applications like Dynamics and eEnterprise. Along with things like the Modifier with VBA and Continuum it's also an excellent tool for extending and customizing such an application. But, Dexterity-built applications tend to be rather monolithic. As a result, they don't play well in a web world! Applications on the Internet need to be broken into pieces called components and delivered via a distributed services model. If you think about it, this is a lot like the way Great Plains the company is organized. The Great Plains virtual organization provides its distributed services via pieces called Partners, you.

We will be going into more depth about the Microsoft .NET technologies and how Great Plains plans to build its platform of the future and then build the applications of the future on top of that platform. Along the way, we may also examine some shorter-term technologies and techniques, but whatever it is you find here, it will be a technical peek from *the inside track*.

Until next time, Karl Gunderson, your technical tour guide and Great Plains technical evangelist, signing off...