

# Your 32-Bit Dilemma

**B**ack, literally, years ago, when VB4 was in beta, I had spirited debates with several custom-control vendors about how rapidly VB4 would be adopted. Its main features—classes, application partitioning, improved data access—seemed compelling, but the path to widespread 32-bit development looked long and twisted. I argued that VB4 would be extraordinarily successful, but the switch wouldn't be as abrupt as the switch to prior versions.

To say I underestimated the complexity of the issue is an understatement. Certainly, VB4 is a success: more than 500,000 units have already shipped into the channel. From surveys in *PC Week*, it is by far the bestselling development tool. International sales are strong overall, if mixed: in Japan, VB4/Pro J is fifth in revenues for all PC software, a remarkable achievement for a development tool, but sales in England and Germany lag.

Despite excellent facilities for migrating 16-bit applications and cross-compilation, VB4 is really about 32-bit development. And despite spectacular sales for Windows 95, the majority of the installed base is still running Win 3.x and will do so for a long time. A recent independent reader survey highlights the dilemma our readers face. While 50.5 percent of you say you're using VB 4.0, a full 76.8 percent are still using VB 3.0. Nearly 40 percent of you are using both versions to develop apps.

The OS transition is spelled out in responses to several interrelated questions:

- 48.7 percent of readers are currently developing for Win95, while 85.3 percent are still developing for Win 3.x, and 25.5 percent for WinNT.
- In the next 12 months, there will be an increase to 72.2 percent developing for Win95, and an even bigger jump for WinNT, to a surprising 43.8 percent. Yet, Win 3.x is still at 73.5 percent.
- Because 16-bit applications also run on these operating systems, we asked, "do you plan to develop applications for these 32-bit systems?" and 42.3 percent responded, "yes, within the next six months," and 34.8 percent said within a year. Only 8 percent did not expect to develop apps for 32-bit systems this year.

Slow churning of the installed base of operating systems is far from the only issue stretching out the transition. VB4 carries a far higher learning curve than prior releases carried, and the reliability and performance of VB4 in 16-bit mode has been questioned. This month's cover feature, developed during four months of testing by multiple contributors, attempts to clear up concerns about VB4's performance. Andrew Brust's Guest Opinion column in this issue expresses the angst our readers face during this tough transition. Other responses from the survey paint an interesting picture of our readers. See how well you fit this profile:

- Average programming experience is 10 years.
- VB is not glue, according to our readers. 81.2 percent use VB for the "entire development process" and only 5.9 percent create prototypes in VB for development in another language.
- Approximately half of the responding readership uses C or C++. The second most popular tool is Microsoft VC++ at 34 percent, followed by Borland C++ at 14.2 percent. Despite extensive publicity, Delphi has reached only 11.9 percent of our readers, putting it in a virtual tie with PowerBuilder for fourth place.
- Internet use is booming. 81.4 percent use the Internet, and "Internet tools" is the highest-ranking category in "intent to buy," displacing DBMS tools. Virtually every Internet user says he or she wants technical support there.
- Microsoft's Web site is the top place to visit at 47.9 percent, with *VBPI's* CompuServe Forums and Web site next at 33 percent and 30.4 percent respectively, edging the Microsoft Basic CompuServe Forum, which comes in fourth.
- DBMS development is the top application with 80 percent, and 52.1 percent create client/server applications. SQL Server has displaced Xbase tools for third place behind VB and Access.
- Each reader literally writes applications for hundreds of people, on average. 23.5 percent have written an app used by "hundreds," while the mean number of desktops reached by each reader's most widely distributed app is 286.
- Our readers are influential. 95.4 percent are involved in purchase decisions. 84.3 percent buy for multiple companies, multiple departments, or others in their workgroup.

Special thanks to the hundreds of readers who responded to this survey. ☒



**Jim Fawcette**  
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**MANY VISUAL  
BASIC DEVELOPERS  
ARE STRADDLING THE  
32-BIT OPERATING  
SYSTEM TRANSITION.**



**Note**  
**Publisher's**