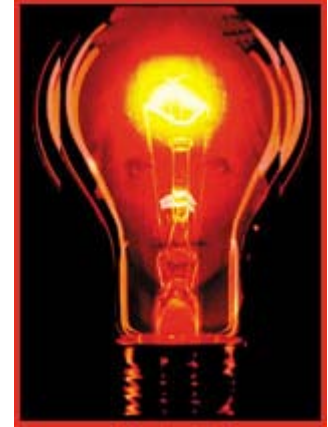# BASIS Training = Companies' Competitive Edge

By Jeff Steffanina

In today's fast-paced worldwide market, companies have to keep up with the latest software tools and trends. That means training is no longer an expense but a necessary investment that keeps a company competitive. As a software trainer for more than 17 years, I understand how important this investment is, and when companies of any size commit to training their technical staff, I take that commitment very seriously.

In training programmers who are new to BASIS products, my goal is to arm those programmers with an understanding of the key features and commands available in PRO/5® and Visual PRO/5®. For veteran BASIS developers, training is geared to new product features and functions. By combining a hands-on environment with a seminar topic matched to the experience level of the participants, BASIS training helps every attendee leave with the information he or she needs to get a running start on development projects.

Hands-On Class Structure

Over the last 12 years, I've worked with BASIS products both as a trainer and as a software reseller managing my own technical staff. This experience has helped me pinpoint exactly which topics are the most difficult for the beginning PRO/5 programmer. For example, the essential concepts of the PRO/5 workspace--BEGIN, END, START, public programs, CALL/ENTER, and ALIAS in `config.bbx`--are fundamentally different from those found in other development languages.

In order to help beginning programmers grasp these new ideas, we spend time actually writing code that demonstrates the practical use of each concept. Each program we write has a specific teaching point and is designed to simulate the programming structure attendees are likely to see in the real world. Frequently, students will bring problems from their applications and these are used in class demonstrations. Students are also encouraged to bring their own laptops to class so that they can mimic their office environments.

Customized Seminar Design

There are a few core topics, such as string templates, the SELECT statement, and MKEYED files, that BASIS considers essential for using its products. For this reason, each training class ensures that each participant gets a good review of these concepts. But beyond covering the essentials, participants are free to discuss the topics they feel are most important.

In the past, developers have presented a variety of challenges, including several `config.bbx` files with unexplained entries, corrupt data files, and production programs that stopped working after a conversion from BBxPROGRESSION/4® to PRO/5.

The Importance of GUI Training

As important as training is to effectively use a character-based BASIS product, the need for comprehensive training on the latest GUI tools is even greater. While I agree that graphical interfaces offer little, if any, advantage for some applications, in order to sell a product successfully in the current competitive environment it has got to use GUI. Learning to quickly and effectively use the GUI development environment BASIS offers in Visual PRO/5 can make going GUI easier and help your product become more successful.

Most developers who have not attended a Visual PRO/5 seminar believe that converting their existing applications to GUI is a tedious, expensive, and bug-prone process. But after learning the ins and outs of Visual PRO/5's features, most developers think differently. The one comment I frequently hear from programmers attending the Visual PRO/5 training is that they had no idea the conversion process could be so simple. Visual PRO/5 cleverly integrates sophisticated GUI functionality into a format very familiar to every veteran PRO/5 programmer. This means that the real barrier to good GUI development is not the tools involved but the concept of event-driven programming that is essential to GUI application development.

In Visual PRO/5 training seminars, we start with a simple, character-based BBx program and progress to integrate GUI functions into the software until the entire application is ready to run on Microsoft Windows.

Suggestions for Class Preparation

In order to get the most out of a BASIS training class, it is important to know what your training objectives are and have a good understanding of the operating system and hardware you are going to use to run your application. It's also good to sit down with your employer and fellow programmers and agree on exactly what information you need to return to your company. Armed with a list of goals and knowledge of your computing environment, you can ensure that you get the information you need.

In BASIS training, we work to ensure companies get back developers that are ready to handle complex software projects, while programmers have an opportunity to develop new skills and talk with other developers handling similar software challenges. The end result is big return in productivity and employee satisfaction for a small investment in training.