What's Brewing With Java

In this new column, BASIS will be tracking and analyzing the developments taking place in the world of Java™, which forms the foundation of our next product generation, BBj™. Here, you'll read about what makes Java such a breakthrough language, the new things happening with Java that may have an impact on BBj and information about the direction of Sun, BASIS and others developing for the Java platform. This issue's column is written by BASIS' Chief Technical Officer, John Schroeder.

The exciting news at TechCon99 was the next major product release, BBj. Many of you have heard me speak about BBj over the past six months and know that the "j" stands for a Business Basic built for the Java platform. A lot of the sessions at our recent TechCon99 presented the details of BBj and its many features, as well as the benefits of the Java environment.

What I want to concentrate on here is the answer to two questions: Why Java and what is the future of BBj?

Why Java?

In short, Java is the most significant advancement in software development in the computer industry in the last 50 years. Java, to use a quotation from Sir Issac Newton, "stands on the shoulders of giants." Many of the solid features of previous development languages have been incorporated into Java, such as object orientation and strong data typing. In addition, many newer technologies are built in, including multithreading, networking and remote computing capabilities. Some industry experts have stated that the Internet is as important as the discovery of fire in terms of the effect it will have on human advancement. The Internet/intranet/extranet is built into and readily accessible from Java.

BBj is built on Java and so benefits from the many advantages of the Java environment while preserving your investment in the business solutions you have developed over the years. You can continue to develop in the familiar environment of BBx® and enjoy the benefits of the Java environment.

One of the most important benefits of the Java environment is portability. You have heard the phrase, "Write once, run anywhere," which is Sun's trademarked slogan for Java. It's a very good phrase and I wish BASIS had trademarked it. BASIS has worked very hard over the years to ensure that BBx ran in exactly the same way across all the supported platforms. This has been a difficult and time-consuming task, and we have never been able to support all of the platforms that some customers requested.

Java is supported on many platforms on which BBx is not. Platforms like the IBM AS-400 have extensive Java support. BASIS looked at supporting the AS-400 several years ago. It would have been a very difficult port for BBx, not only requiring extensive preparation and code modification but also significantly more ongoing maintenance and support than other ports. Because BBj inherits the extensive portability of Java, BBj will be available on the IBM AS-400 as well as several other platforms, with no expenditure of resources by BASIS for the porting effort.

So why Java? Java is a development environment that provides BASIS with better tools for developing its products and provides our customers a significantly broadened market for their products and services. Maybe the question should be, why NOT Java?

The Future of BBj

Many of us graybeards have been through the evolution of software development over the past 20 or 30 years. Modular programming, structured programming, egoless programming, Pascal. Remember Pascal? Where is it now? BBj is built on Java. Will Java, and therefore BBj, survive?

Let's look at the industry as a whole. Most of the UNIX suppliers have embraced Java and collectively invested billions of dollars in Java development. Just look at the pages on IBM's, Hewlett Packard's and SCO's Web sites, not to mention Sun's. There are thousands of pages of information and gigabytes of code representing the billions of dollars invested in Java development.

It has been estimated by industry experts in the United States that 40 to 60 percent of all software development is now being done in Java. This is not a fad. It is a significant trend in our industry. It is a mainstream effort backed by the largest companies in the industry. By providing BBj, BASIS is moving Business Basic squarely into the future. BASIS and the industry have seen the future, and it is Java!

By supporting character and GUI applications across all the Java platforms, from AS-400 to Linux to Microsoft Windows, BBj offers you the choice of the hardware and operating system environment that best supports your business solutions for your customers.

BBx Lives! Its grandchild, BBj, provides you a familiar, robust, mainstream development environment to carry you and your customers forward into the next century. Our slogan for BBj is "Business Basic just got better." Slogans usually exaggerate. But with character and GUI enterprise solutions supported across all major platforms, including the Web, this is no exaggeration. This is the best Business Basic ever.