

# Delphi tutorial app written in VB4

The *Delphi 2 Tutor*, a workbook and CD-ROM tutorial, teaches Delphi users how use the latest version of Delphi. What's interesting about this new package from Que is that Ron Schwarz used VB4 to write the CD-ROM application. "When I was writing it, I didn't really think about the irony," says Schwarz.

The program manages a couple hundred Lotus ScreenCam movies and a large number of cross-indexed, hot-spotted WinHelp files and bitmaps. It presents the material in a tabbed-dialog format, with Start, Lessons, Quiz, and Reference tabs. The Start section provides initial instructions, and Lessons includes an outline tree that describes whichever outline you're on. You can click buttons to play movies that correspond to the book chapters, and the Quiz section covers all 20 lessons. Users can select three to five possible answers, and they advance to the next section only if they select the correct answer. The References section provides Menus and Buttons folders, with links to descriptive screen captures.

Schwarz ran into some obstacles dealing with the Lotus ScreenCams. "You cannot make a ScreenCam movie play in another window—it takes over your screen," says the developer. "Like it or lump it, that's what it does." He was able to "cheat" by manipulating the API and using a timer to con-

stantly check the Screen Cam, but that was "crude." Schwarz settled for playing the movie while the program lurks behind it.

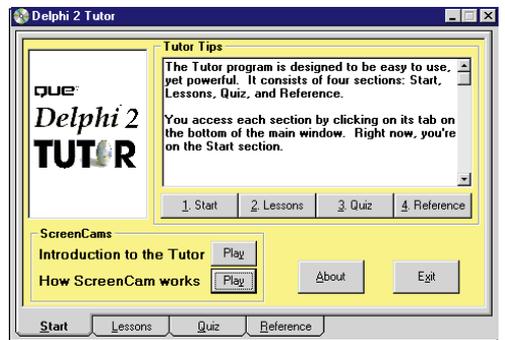
"The publisher supplied me with the movies, the questions and answers, and the bitmaps," says Schwarz. "Then, I wrote all the software to tie it together." Schwarz has worked with Que on several projects. Currently, he and Ibrahim Malluf are writing a book titled *Special Edition Using VB Script*.

In the *Delphi 2 Tutor* application, Que wanted an easy-to-use, Win95-like, 16-bit program. Schwarz chose VB because "it does what I want, and lets me focus on the task at hand, rather than the process involved in completing the task." Within a month, he wrote the 16-bit application, which has four forms, six modules, and a 212K EXE. Que was pleased with the results, and plans to make the program its standard CD tutor program, and port it to new titles.

Schwarz offers this advice to fellow VB programmers: "Don't take any guff from the Delphi camp. ... There are still people who scorn Visual Basic because it has the word 'Basic' in it. ... To discriminate against a language because of one of the words in its name is one of the hallmarks of absurdity.

"Visual Basic is the most productive environment on the planet, and likely to remain so. It's got the lead by a country mile, and I don't see anything even coming close to catching up with it."—Amy Little

Contact Ron Schwarz at [ron.schwarz@nethawk.com](mailto:ron.schwarz@nethawk.com).



# Telephony app gives instant travel facts

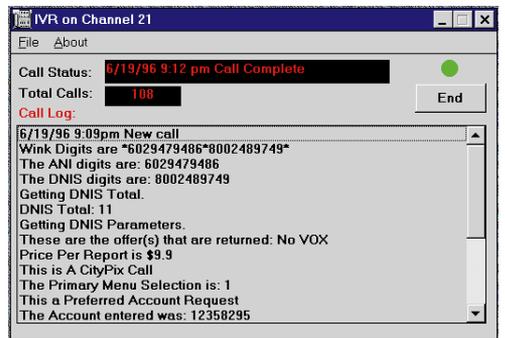
If travel guidebooks aren't current enough to suit your needs, you can get up-to-date information about your destination within 15 minutes, with a little help from a VB telephony app that runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Phoenix, Arizona-based DataPix Inc. provides an interactive voice response (IVR) and fax-back service called CityPix that provides information about airports, transportation, restaurants, and tourist attractions for 42 U.S. cities. By calling 800-CITYPIX, users with touch-tone phones can navigate the IVR menu to request a fax report about a particular city.

DataPix president Sonny Pagni and MIS director Jim Granese conceived the project a year and a half ago. They evaluated prebuilt, "canned" solutions to provide the service, says Granese, but none offered the functionality they wanted. "We wanted to do it *our way*." So Granese, who was new to software development, taught himself VB and took the plunge.

The system consists of an IVR client and a fax server, each running on Win95, and an ODBC middle tier that communicates with a SQL Server 6.5 database running on WinNT 3.51. The VB3 app, which uses a T1 line as well as phone and fax boards from Dialogic and Gammalink, was built with Visual Voice and Visual Fax from the Stylus Product Group of Artisoft Inc. Granese also used Sheridan's VBAssist, ICVerify's credit-card processing pack-

age, and a shareware DLL called Advanced Disk that checks directories for existing files.

The app generates nightly reports (built in Access) and exports them to



DCX format for faxing and PDF format for online distribution. When a request comes in, the IVR client submits it to the database. The fax server reads the request data and faxes the appropriate report to the number specified by the caller. DataPix has sold more than 13,000 reports, at \$9.90 each, since the system began in October.

The developers plan to port the app to 32-bit VB4 and to deploy it on the Web, so users can submit fax requests through DataPix's Web site and eventually download reports from the site itself. The company also plans to make the service available to users outside the U.S., and to add data about international cities.

Granese has learned a lot from writing the app, which took about a year. He encourages developers writing complex apps to research their projects extensively before they start, and consider "all the pieces that go into it."—Nina Goldschlager

You can reach Jim Granese and Sonny Pagni by e-mail at [jgranese@datapix.com](mailto:jgranese@datapix.com) and [spagni@datapix.com](mailto:spagni@datapix.com).