

Developer Network News Turns Five

Paula Ladenburg

Five years ago, an eon in tech time, the Microsoft Developer Network was launched. From the start, a special feature of MSDN has been the printed *Developer Network News*.

Art Schumer, then manager of Developer Programs at Microsoft, launched the new service, writing in that first issue, "My goal for the Microsoft Developer Network is simple: to help you develop great applications for Windows successfully." As the first step toward that goal, MSDN offered the Win32 Preliminary SDK for Windows NT, which allowed developers to transition to 32-bit code for Windows. This SDK was the centerpiece of the first Developer Network CD, which was made available in a large-scale pre-release program in September 1992. In early 1993, the Library became a subscription product. That first CD contained over 30,000 pages of technical material. Early subscribers to the Library complained that it took up 5 MB hard drive space. If you were to download the entire contents of the Library onto your hard drive now, it would require over a gigabyte!

The birth of the *News*

The first issues of *Developer Network News*, edited by Andrew Himes (in various guises), were packed with articles about Microsoft developer products, including Visual Basic, OLE 2, and C++. "Ask Dr. GUI" debuted in the November 1992 issue as well (see ["Ask Dr. GUI #35"](#) for a trip down memory lane with Dr. GUI). This product-centric focus continued for some time, with the blessing of readers such as the one who wrote in a letter to the editor, "My only real observation would be to do fewer specific 'How To' articles (with the exception of the good doctor). . . . [E]mphasize current and timely information and leave the in-depth stuff for the other MS documentation resources." Regular columns such as "Deep C++" and "Programming with Visual Basic" offered more in-depth tips and tricks.

In September 1994, Andy Himes passed the editorship of *Developer Network News* into the capable hands of Jonathan King, who held the post until May 1996. Tom O'Connor took over and shepherded the paper through a major redesign before handing it off at the end of 1996 to the current team.

The newspaper gradually moved toward publishing technical articles (those dreaded "how tos") by such famous (infamous?) Microsoft developer/writers (a life form caused by early experiments in genetic mutation) as Dennis Crain, Ruediger R. Asche, Dale Rogerson, Kenneth Lassen, Nigel Thompson (a.k.a. Herman Rodent), Nancy Cluts, Paul Johns, Ken Bergmann, and many more. If you've read the last couple of issues of this newspaper, you will have noticed that MSDN's current team of writers has been very busy and very prolific. That's because we never allow them out of the building.

The regulars

Dr. GUI, MSDN's own answer man, stirred strong emotions from the start. Some people loved him, some hated him. In May, 1994, he received the harshest blow yet from a reader who wrote, "I find the column by the so-called Dr. GUI extremely offensive. The stereotypical image of a wild-eyed, off-the-wall crackpot is totally unnecessary and reinforces negative stereotypes of scientists." Fortunately, Dr. GUI has many fans, many of whom rallied to his defense in the next issue, one writing, "I'm tired of those heartless, humorless goons picking on Dr. GUI. Who do you think you people are-vigilantes of a new breed of holier-than-thou, no-frills, all-serious yuppies who think humor and high tech computing do not go hand in hand?" The use of humor in the newspaper continues to be a source of contention-see the Editor's Corner in the last issue. One man's trash, as they say, is another's treasure. Generally, our readers seem to welcome a little bit of levity to spice up what could potentially be dry technical material. (Not, of course, that our writers produce anything but *riveting* copy!)

"Backtalk" premiered in January 1993 as a forum for responding to the concerns of MSDN subscribers. From the start, you all just wanted more, more, more. More about Visual Basic, more articles from *Microsoft Systems Journal*, more samples. "Backtalk" columnist Melinda Hohlbein established a precedent of straightforward replies and a lighthearted approach that survived the surrendering of the throne to James Van Eaton in November 1995. As the MSDN Library has comprised more and more content and the subscription levels have evolved, James has bravely faced the torrent of e-mail messages that daily flood the MSDN@microsoft.com mailbox. (When his editor can pull him out from under his desk, that is.)

May 1993 marked the first appearance of a popular column, "The Human Factor," by Tandy Trower, director of the advanced user interface group at Microsoft. Tandy's been busy working on Microsoft Agent, but we promise, one of these issues we'll have "The Human Factor" back.

About Face

Speaking of user interface, the design of the newspaper has evolved over the past five years too. The newspaper in its first days was printed in two colors, with fairly simple cartoon or woodcut-like graphics. It wasn't until the first issues of 1996 that the color scheme and the graphics became a little flashier. And the paper underwent a complete makeover in May/June 1996. Kurt Hughes, our talented designer, continues to find new and exciting ways of presenting information visually.

MSDN on the Web

When the Internet began to emerge as the Next Big Thing, we put the newspaper on the Web. It's been up there for several years now, at <http://www.microsoft.com/devnews/>. We post all the new articles from the newspaper and a few that we can't squeeze in but want to get out to you right away. *Developer Network News Online* also offered special coverage of Developer Days and Tech·Ed this year. We hope to continue bringing you coverage of these events as they occur.

MSDN made another giant leap forward on the Web when MSDN Online (<http://www.microsoft.com/msdn/>) launched in May. In addition to free access to the MSDN Library, the site offers SDK downloads, links to product and technology sites, a link to the new subscription services site, and more.

Into the future

While the MSDN program continues to grow and evolve and the faces change, our focus remains the same: to help you develop great applications successfully. We continuously search for new and useful content and better ways to make it available, all with the goal of making the Library an even richer source of developer-related information. And *Developer Network News* will be right there, keeping you up-to-date and even, we hope, entertained.

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