DB/C Newsletter

November 2006

News and Comment

Two developments in the computer industry are worthy of note. The first is another case of a ridiculous patent being granted by the US Patent Office. It is patent number 6,988,138 titled "Internet-based education support system and methods" which is owned by Blackboard, Inc. In a nutshell, the patent covers most of what is today called e-learning in higher education and secondary schools. On the day Blackboard announced the awarding of the patent, it sued a competitor for patent infringement. Several companies in the education market would be put out of business if the patent is upheld in the upcoming court battles. What is truly scary is that the patent office granted the patent in the first place. It is very general (it's not limited to Internet-based applications), and it covers many aspects of education software that have been in use in both free and commercial software for many years.

The second news item worthy of note is related to the announcement by Microsoft that Windows Vista and Office 2007 are complete and will begin shipping to customers very soon. Windows Vista is pretty much a non-event. It has a new look, and is more expensive, but otherwise shouldn't have too much effect on DB/C software. Office 2007 is what's important. Microsoft has defined a new graphical user interface, and intends to license its use. Office 2007 no longer contains the menu bar, a tool bar, or floating tool windows. All have been replaced by what Microsoft calls "the Ribbon", and what is essentially a tab group at the top of the active window. The Ribbon contains all of the things previously found in the menu bar, tool bar and floating windows, except for the actions under the File menu bar item which are now found in a drop-down from a circular button in the upper left corner of the window. It's a major change. What's not surprising is that Microsoft is trying to control such a look and feel by requiring anybody who writes any software using "the Ribbon" concept to obtain a license from Microsoft. If you are building software that does not compete against Office, then the license is free, but you must contractually agree to the style guidelines that Microsoft defines. If you are making word processing software, spreadsheet software, or any other software that competes with Office, then Microsoft will not grant you a license. I'm not sure how this will play out, but I suspect it is not a good thing. And, for what it's worth, I think the Ribbon is actually a good idea. I'm just not sure how many developers will accept being constrained by Microsoft's license.

We continue to work on DB/C DX 15. We'll let you know when we have software available for testing.

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DB/C DX Class Schedule

Class: DB/C DX Fundamentals
Date: January, 2007
Location: Woodridge, Illinois

For information, send email to admin@dbcsoftware.com.