CRITIQUE

by Eric Harmon

Woll2Woll's 1stClass

TECHNICALLY, 1STCLASS IS A general-purpose component library, although that term doesn't do a very good job of explaining what 1stClass has to offer. I initially wondered if there was room in the Delphi/C++ Builder arena for yet another general-purpose library, but my feelings changed immediately after installing 1stClass on my computer.

The main goal of 1stClass is to allow you to add a highly polished user interface to Delphi and C++ Builder applications. As a result, the components included in 1stClass are geared towards displaying graphics that are very visually appealing to the end user.

At the heart of 1stClass is its **TfcImager** class. **TfcImager** allows you to do image manipulation, ranging from simple contrast and grayscale settings through complex image manipulations such as embossing, gaussian blur, sponge, and wave. You can even blend two bitmaps together in an operation called alpha blend, which gives the effect of one image fading into another. Though **TfcImager** is very useful in its own right, you'll also see the component surfaced as a property in other 1stClass components, such as **TfcOutlookBar** and **TfcDBTreeView**, both of which are discussed later in this article.

Ever since the release of Microsoft Outlook, the outlook bar has been all the rage in modern applications. 1stClass includes the **TfcOutlookBar**, which lets you easily add outlook bars to your own applications. **TfcOutlookBar** goes beyond many other outlook bars. For instance, you can place just about any component in the client area of the outlook bar. What this means is that in addition to displaying a simple column of icons in the outlook bar, you can alternatively (or additionally) display combo boxes, list boxes, push buttons, or other visual components.

TfcOutlookBar also has an **Imager** property, which allows you to display a **TfcImager** in the background of the outlook bar. The fact that the outlook bar uses **TfcImager** to display the background image gives you the ability to show a faded grayscale image, for example, behind the **TFcOutlookBar**.

One of the most exciting features of 1stClass is its data-aware tree view. **TfcDBTreeView** lets you quickly and easily display hierarchies of data, simply by setting a few properties. **TfcDBTreeView** can automatically detect the master-detail relationship between two or more datasets and show that relationship in its tree structure. **TfcDBTreeView** also surfaces an Imager property, allowing you to display an image in the background of the tree view. (Relations between records within a single table cannot be displayed.)

TfcImageButton and **TfcShapeButton** allow you to create push buttons that can take on any shape. **TfcShapeButton** provides a number of predefined shapes, such as circles, triangles, and stars, whereas **TfcImageButton** will obtain its shape from an image, allowing it to assume an endless number of shapes.

In addition to the components already discussed, 1stClass also provides a number of useful combo boxes, such as a font combo, color combo, and tree combo, which can display images in the combo box in a tree-oriented fashion.

1stClass ships with a 180-page, spiral-bound manual. The vast majority of the manual is a class reference, with some how-to information included for common tasks. I would have liked to see a little more tutorial-style information included. 1stClass also ships with a well thought-out online help file. 1stClass includes a comprehensive demo that illustrates most, if not all, of its abilities. Also included are a number of smaller, focused demo applications.

The standard version of 1stClass supports Delphi 3 and Delphi 4, and does not include source code. The professional version supports Delphi 3, Delphi 4, C++ Builder 3, and C++ Builder 4, and includes full source code.

Several components in 1stClass are full-featured enough that they could stand alone as a separate package in their own right. 1stClass provides you with the equivalent of several complete libraries for one very reasonable price. I highly recommend it. ▼

SNAPSHOT

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Product: 1stClass

Summary: 1stClass is a new component library with the mission of adding a unique, highly polished user interface to your applications.

Suggested List Price: $199 Standard; $299 Professional; Numerous upgrade options are available. Check Woll2Woll's Web site or contact them for upgrade information.

www.visual-developer.com