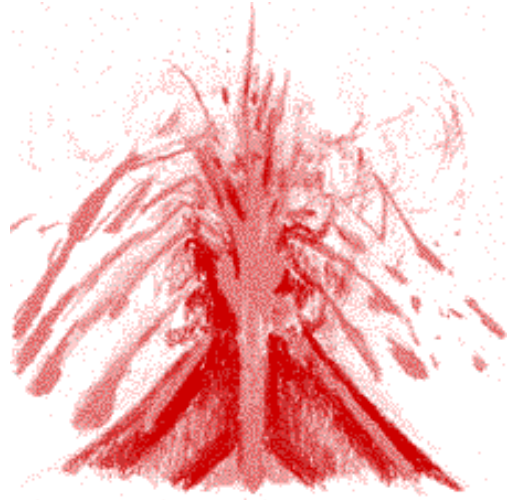


The Volcano Strategy: A Discussion

Dan Rask, BASIS senior product manager for new product development, sat down with *The Advantage Magazine* staff and discussed the new *Volcano* technology strategy and its implications for the Business Basic marketplace.

Advantage: What exactly is *Volcano*?

Dan Rask: *Volcano* is a product strategy that defines BASIS' direction for Business Basic development between now and the year 2000. We want to build on the strengths of Business Basic and BASIS products—the straight forward syntax, the business-specific language constructs, the portability, the ease of use. At the same time, we are going to evolve the product line so that it can address the growing demands on our Independent Software Vendors (ISVs) for business programs that run on Windows 95 and Windows NT platforms and move to the three-tier client/server application model.



Advantage: Let's start with the demand for Windows-based applications. What exactly are the needs of programmers developing in Windows, and how are the new *Volcano* products going to address these needs?

Rask: Microsoft has won the front-office desktop market. Windows has caught on in many industries, particularly in front-office retail, accounting, and administration programs. Even some manufacturing firms are looking at Windows as the basis for their computing solutions. Our ISVs have told us they need better tools to develop more sophisticated applications easier and faster for these new Windows-focused customers.

They appreciate the new GUI capabilities that Visual PRO/5™ has brought to the Business Basic language, but it's not enough. That's why we are making *Kilauea*, the first *Volcano* product release, a Windows development system with better programming productivity and features.

Kilauea builds on the current Visual PRO/5 architecture, so developers will still have everything they need to quickly bring their legacy code onto the Windows platform, while making it easier to create new applications within this new Windows development system.

Kilauea is also going to be a vital transitional product between Visual PRO/5 1.0 and future *Volcano* releases like *Cabazon*. Windows applications created with *Kilauea* will run on the new interpreter and file system components offered in the next two

Volcano products, *Pinatubo*, and *Cabezon*. It will give developers experience with the new visual programming utilities we are including in the product, such as the ResBuilder™ and DDBuilder™, so they will have the programs and the programming paradigms down when *Cabezon*, the new IDE product, comes out with ResBuilder and DDBuilder integrated.

Advantage: Clearly, Windows is going to be a dominant factor in business application development, but which version of Windows? Many BASIS vendors are still working with customers using the 16-bit Windows 3.x platform. Is the new *Volcano* product line going to support this platform?

Risk: First of all, we know that there is a huge Windows 3.x installed base out there that needs tools for the next two to three years. *Kilauea* is going to be the product that offers developers the tools they need for that platform. However, Microsoft has basically thrown all its resources into Windows 95 and Windows NT and has stopped supporting the earlier versions of Windows. In order to offer our customers the 32-bit power, the object architecture of OLE/ActiveX, COM, ODBC and new ISAPI Internet interface when they need it, we have to start focusing our attention on those platforms now. *Cabezon* is the new IDE product that is going to take advantage of these new technologies on the Windows 95 and Windows NT platforms.

So we have *Kilauea* and we will have a future *Volcano* product, *Cabezon*, for client interface development and the IDE. Paired with *Cabezon*, we will also offer *Pinatubo*, a release for back-end processing on NT and UNIX.

Advantage: *Cabezon* looks as if it is going to bring real improvements to Windows development-can you tell us more about that?

Risk: Well, we're not releasing too much information about the specific features of *Cabezon* until TechCon97, but I can tell you more about *Kilauea* and tell you what the overall *Volcano* objectives are for Windows programming.

We have three goals that are going to increase programmer productivity in visual applications. First, we are going to offer a visual coding method for the Windows development environment. Second, our language is going to become even more open and encompass traditional and contemporary programming methods. Third, we are going to offer object support for off-the-shelf application components.

Kilauea is the first step toward achieving these goals. This product will offer a variety of new utilities and features that move us toward our first and second goals with a new PRO/5™ Interpreter; a ResBuilder resource editor; a DDBuilder data dictionary builder; a Program Wizard; and file I/O performance improvement. The new Program Wizard and more sophisticated grid and tab controls will definitely add power to applications while making the programmer's job easier.

Advantage: You mentioned that along with improved Windows development, the new *Volcano* product line is going to move Business Basic applications towards the three-tier client/server development model. What is the importance of three-tier client/server?

Risk: Three-tier is an application design that's been used in mainframe and enterprise systems for a long time. It means that the interface, data or business processing, and data storage are separated into distinct components. There are several important reasons for Business Basic developers to want to do this. One of the most important is to provide client interfaces on many platforms without changing the business processing-look at the increase in demand for Windows client interfaces in front-office applications. Another is to allow scaling an application up to thousands of users, because data storage and business processing can be put on larger platforms where they run efficiently. And of course maintenance is easier when changes can be made and deployed in one component without changing the other two. So three-tier applications reflect the direction of the business applications world toward heterogeneous networks, open systems and the ever-increasing use of Windows for the front-end.

Advantage: Why should developers move in that direction and how is BASIS going to help them get there?

As our vendors' customers grow into mid-size corporations, three-tier is often part of their requirements. Companies are going to want to pick and choose the front-end, business processing, and back-end components that work best for them. For example, a developer using our tools could have a customer that started out with sales of \$10 million, but over the last three years has grown into a \$70 million company with more orders than its current system can handle. Now the company is looking for a serious database to handle the new load of transactions going on in the company. In the past, our ISV or VAR may have just lost this customer's business. We're going to make sure they keep that business.

Because the *Volcano* products are going to be specifically created as components, this same BASIS ISV will be able to grow with this company and offer the company an ORACLE or Informix database that talks to a BASIS business processing component with SQL calls and has a front-end created by either a BASIS product, or one from another vendor, like Visual BASIC from Microsoft.

At the same time, BASIS ISVs and VARs will be able to offer a whole three-tier solution to their smaller, low-end application customers.

Advantage: This is a real change in direction. From your description, it sounds as if BASIS is focusing more on the middle component of the three-tier model while letting developers use front and back-ends from other vendors. Is that true?

Risk: That's true when it comes to applications for mid-size businesses. We think that we can offer one of the best, most cost-effective, end-to-end systems for the small business applications

market. When you look at the larger requirements of mid-size business, companies like ORACLE or Informix offer very expensive but very good solutions. However, neither ORACLE nor Visual BASIC can touch BBx® when it comes to business processing. The language was created specifically for business processing and that strength is something that BASIS and the developers who use our products can offer to all of their customers, regardless of size.

Unlike Visual BASIC, we don't try to do everything for everybody and make developers buy lots of plug-in components to do complex business processing. We are the business application development specialists, and the best at what we do using our core products. It's all in the product, fully integrated, without the need for lots of outside vendor products to make it work.

Advantage: It looks as if BASIS has a very clear vision for the next two years that focuses on improved Windows development and three-tier client/server that will open mid-size business customers to BASIS developers. Are there any other directions or goals BASIS is working towards?

Risk: Well, we are always working towards better quality products and better communication with customers. Improved Windows development and three-tier client/server are the two main areas we are really going to zero in on in 1997 and 1998.

Advantage: Any final comments?

Risk: Yes, I want to encourage everyone to come to TechCon97 this April so they can hear about the complete *Volcano* technology strategy and look at the first demos of our new products. I think customers are going to be very excited with the direction BASIS is taking.