

Place Your Bets

An observation by Alan Sadowsky

Picture if you will an oasis in the desert... a metropolis of neon and steel and glitter. Born out of an obsession in the mind of a gangster, this barren patch of sand and dust has flourished into one of the most popular vacation destinations in the world. Imagine the endless tables of food (the best buffets in the western hemisphere), the fountains of drink (most of which are on the house), the almost unlimited selection of entertainment, and the temptation of wagering yourself into wealth beyond your dreams. Welcome ladies and gentlemen; Welcome to Las Vegas, Nevada!

The Spring TPF User Group Conference was recently held in Las Vegas at Caesars Palace Hotel, and I thought it would be appropriate to reflect on the conference, and the surprising turnout that we actually had.

Right from the point in time when Las Vegas was chosen as the conference site, I had some concerns about whether the attendance would be in line with previous conferences. Speaking from personal experience, I know that getting permission to attend a conference in Las Vegas is a bit more difficult than getting permission to attend a conference in Chicago for example. So I was somewhat worried that we wouldn't have a good turnout. My second concern was keeping people at the conference sessions, and away from the myriad of "distractions" Las Vegas has to offer.

Happily, I'm here to say that I was wrong on both counts. Attendance was outstanding, topping 400 registered members and vendors, and the sessions were for the most part standing room only. So as I reflect on the error of my ways, several factors become apparent, and warrant some discussion.

While the location of the conference has always been a determinant for attendance in the past, it seems that it isn't an issue any more (unless we're talking about Boston in the dead of winter). In the same vein, the temptation to hit the blackjack table, or catch an IMAX movie appears to have been countered by the pertinence of the topics and presentations in the various sub-committee sessions. So what's the bottom line here? One way to summarize it would be to say that as mature adults, the attendees came to Las Vegas to take care of business. But I think there's an even bigger

message being sent here, and that message is that TPF is alive and well.

The implications to this are both very satisfying and far-reaching. The prophets of doom have been predicting the demise of TPF since the early 80's. We've seen our share of attrition with some shops moving to other platforms, and still others swept up in the CRS consolidation fever of the late 80's and early 90's. Just looking at the number of active TPF licenses was enough to give people heartburn and sleepless nights.

But things have changed. A combination of re-structuring within IBM, and a fresh approach to targeting the potential marketplace have both resulted in a new lease-on-life for the technology. Major additions to functionality and cross-platform compatibility have pumped new life into an old workhorse.

The opportunities for TPF to play a significant role in numerous potential customer solutions are starting to be recognized, both within the existing customer base, and outside that customer base as well. IBM's marketing strategy has also evolved from its former "do-it-yourself" approach, to having it's business partners (and potential business partners) play a major role in bringing an awareness and a new suite of solutions to the marketplace - something that other companies have successfully capitalized on in recent years.

Now let's add in the human factor. The TPF talent drain seems to have been stemmed. On one hand the defections from TPF to other platforms seems to have stopped, and it's satisfying to note that there are lots of new faces in the TPF crowd. I think it's pretty safe to say that some of these new people are working with us today strictly as a result of new technologies being merged with the TPF backbone, and that's a good thing for everyone involved with the product.

The demands for TPF talent are as high as they've ever been, and the companies and individuals providing TPF education seem to have their plates full. From the vendor's standpoint, the opportunities are obvious. Fourteen different companies hosted the vendor's reception in Las Vegas

(many attending the conference for the first time), all providing products or services specific to TPF. The average number of vendors at User Group conferences has typically been 6 or 7, and having twice that number in Las Vegas is another strong indication of TPF's growing viability. There is unquestioningly a resurgence in the TPF arena, and I'm confident that the next few years will be surprisingly fruitful for all of us.

Finally, I have to extend a well deserved "hats off" to Steve Quackenbush (President), and all of the Directors and Sub-Committee Chairpeople that plan, manage, and give of their time to keep the TPF User Group functioning so well. As a former Board Member, I can honestly tell you that TPF would not be half the product it is today without the User Group driving many of the upgrade and enhancement requirements through the IBM development lab. And that's no lie!

So with apologies, I'm happy to state that I was wrong in my assumptions. Not the first time that's happened, and I

would venture, it won't be the last. The Fall 2000 User Group Conference is planned for sometime in the October timeframe, and will be held in Tucson, Arizona. We'll keep you posted on the details as they become available, through this publication, our website at <http://www.tpftoday.com>, and through our T-Mail service.

If you really want to be a part of the TPF revival, touch base with your Manager or Director now, and let him/her know that it's not going to be 3 days of "sun and fun" in Tucson. There is still a lot of work to be done, and your participation really does make a difference. In fact, tell your manager that he or she needs to attend as well. It never hurts to have their skin in the game, and they just might develop a greater understanding and appreciation for what you do.

I'll look for you in Tucson.

Alan Sadowsky