10 New Utilities That Will Add Wizardry To VisualAge TPF

by Jeff Robinson

Compared to other development platforms, VisualAge TPF lacks one feature which would enable it to help it to rank in the same category of applications such as Microsoft's Visual C++, Microsoft's Visual Basic, and Borland's Delphi. That feature is the inclusion of "Wizards".

Wizards are "helper" functions within a complex application which provide new users a way to get through difficult tasks in a step-by-step manner. After the developer understands the platform better, use of the wizards become optional as the developer will find it easier and quicker to perform the essential steps on his own. Nevertheless, even experienced users opt to continue using the wizard method interface because wizards provide a helpful, intuitive interface, to accomplish tasks that would otherwise be time-consuming and unpleasant.

In the issue, I'll introduce 10 new "wizard" utilities that can be added your VisualAge TPF arsenal. These utilities will help ease administrative and development tasks associated with using the VisualAge TPF environment. You'll have the flexibility to either add these utilities to the VisualAge toolbar or set them up as new container and/or file actions.

Furthermore, these are free utilities that can be obtained by simply visiting the ACP*TPF Today web-site at http://www.tpftoday.com or by requesting a disk copy be mailed to you. We will also attempt to have copies of these disks available for distribution at the Fall TPFUG in Phoenix, AZ.

Administrative Utilities

The first 5 of these utilities can be thought of as composing an "Administrator's Toolkit". They provide needed functionality to maintain some of the configuration files that are used by VisualAge TPF. The list below shows the name of each utility in this category and their primary functionality. For further, more detailed information, consult the online help that comes with this software package.

1. Container Actions Wizard

This utility provides a much simpler, step-by-step way to update container actions configuration files (bbsactct.cpa, bbsentct.cpa, bbsibmct.cpa). Since VisualAge TPF now comes with the three different types of container actions (separated into local, enterprise, and IBM actions), this wizard will save administrators the hassle of maintaining the associated files manually.

2. File Actions Wizard

This utility is the counterpart to the Container Actions Wizard. It works in much the same way except it applies to the file actions configuration files (bbsactfl.cpa, bbsentfl.cpa, bbsibmfl.cpa). Most VisualAge TPF actions are file-level actions, so this utiltiy will prove even more useful than the previous one.

3. File Types Wizard

VisualAge TPF depends on the declaration of valid file types in the "bbstypes.cpa" file to know which actions to allow a user to perform. Use this wizard to maintain (add,update, delete) the file types needed for the installation.

4. Maintain User Variables Wizard

The recent introduction of the "bbsusr.tpf" file allows developers and Administrators to declare user-defined variables. Since the current method of making changes to this file is a manual one, using this wizard will provide an error-free, easy alternative to updating these variables.

5. Project Configuration Wizard

The project configuration file (bbsproj.cfg) is used to determine the options used during compiling, assembling, and building your output modules. Currently, the only way to maintain this file is manually. Adding this utility to your VisualAge TPF toolbox will give Administrators a safe, step-by-step interface to making changes to this very important configuration file.

Development Utilities

The next 5 utilities were created with the VisualAge TPF developer in mind. Although VisualAge TPF is PC workstation-based environment, it doesn't yet provide an interface for generating code for the developer. I've created these wizards to aid developers in getting started quickly by generating code "templates" needed to begin their projects.

After the VisualAge Administrator setups or configures the templates needed by a specific project, the developer can then use the specific template wizard to generate the code into either "C/C++", Assembler, or a DLM/DLL File. Yes, these utilities were intended to make the development life-cycle a little simpler and using them will eliminate some of the confusion developers face when trying to navigate some of the VisualAge "Property" panels on their own.

1. C/C++ Template Wizard
Developers canl use this wizard to specifiy the coding framework they need for their C/C++ source files. The process involved can be as easy as giving a name to a new source file or as detailed as specifying the code to insert into that new source file. It'll be up to the Project Team Leader and VisualAge TPF Administrator to determine how much detail developers will need to supply.

2. Assembler Template Wizard
This utility will work basically the same as the C/C++ Template Wizard except it applies to TPF Assembler source files.

3. DLM Template Wizard
The purpose of this Template wizard will be to make it easier for developers to create the files (.dlm) needed to build dynamic load modules from VisualAge TPF. The current dialogs that do this can be quite intimidating to the new VisualAge TPF user. With the use of this utility, developers will only need to specify what they want to "build" and not have to worry about all of the PDS concatenation information required to do the build.

4. DLL Template Wizard
This wizard is the counterpart to the DLM Template Wizard except its used to build dynamic link libraries on the target system. The developer will use this utility to create the ".dll" file on his workstation that builds the final DLL.

5. Loadset Template Wizard
Developers can use this utility to create the ".lset" and ".data" files needed to generate loadset from VisualAge TPF. The wizard will make the process of creating these files a pleasant and quick experience from the developer's point of view.

Installation Setup
Althought these utilities were developed to be installed and used in a multi-development VisualAge TPF environment, they can be used most effectively by single developers who want to add the features discussed in this article to their stand-alone workstation.   To properly configure all of the tools, follow the directions given in the online help and installation instructions that accompany these tools.

Also, for the the Development "template" wizards, Administrators (or the individual developer) will have some additional setup work to do before developers will be able to use the associated wizards.