

TODAY'S NIAKWA NEWS

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RENEWING OLD FRIENDSHIPS

MOTHER'S DAY, 1998

*(l to r, back row - Mary Jean & Alan Green, Susan Knox, Dick & Pat Drew, Pat Dederich.
Front Row - Charles Knox and Jerry Dederich)*

TODAY'S NIAKWA NEWS

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Comments, questions and suggestions are welcome and can be directed to the Editor, Today's Niakwa News, Niakwa.

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NIAKWA'S ROLE AT THE 1998 NSG CONFERENCE

At the request of NSG, Niakwa contributed a strong presence to the 1998 VAR Conference in Key West. Most of the first day of the conference featured NPL related topics, which generated a great deal of excitement.

Among the topics covered were:

- NSG's plans to promote a *two language strategy*, offering new versions of FourD in both NPL and KCML.
- The *Niakwa Roadmap*, and how it applies to NSG, FourD, and NSG VARs.
- The *NPL-based FourD GUI*, developed and presented by Chris Maxwell of Maxwell & Co.
- *Open FourD*, a new version of FourD accessing truly open databases like Oracle and SQL Server through the use of Open NDM.
- A new *KCML trade-in program*.
- *Availability* of these products and programs *through NSG*.
- And of course, the *Margaritaville* hospitality suite.

Look for updates on specific portions of the agenda in the rest of this Newsletter.

NSG PROMOTES A TWO LANGUAGE STRATEGY

NSG understands the wisdom of making their products available in both the NPL and KCML environments. To that end, NSG will provide and support new versions of FourD in NPL. These versions will include the new Windows GUI and the upcoming Open FourD (open database access.)

NSG will add these products to their standard price list, and will make them available under standard guidelines. In addition, NSG will administer the KCML trade-in program mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter.

THE NPL ROADMAP

By now, all NSG resellers should have received a copy of the Niakwa Roadmap, an open letter from Alan Green, Niakwa's Director of R&D. (If you haven't received your copy, please let us know and we'll send one out to you.)

At the Key West conference, Alan presented our Roadmap and highlighted how it will help the FourD community. A couple of examples:

- The Niakwa Workbench, a full-featured editor/debugger suite, will not only speed development and maintenance of NPL-based code in general, it will specifically assist FourD developers who will be able to customize some of its options for FourD code.

- Open NDM (see article in this newsletter) will make Open FourD possible. This means open data, in which your customers can specify any of a number of popular SQL databases to house their data, rather than restricting it to proprietary (closed) formats.

Alan stressed that the idea of the Roadmap is "openness", not only in the sense of open data, but also in an open line of communication between those of you who develop in NPL and those of us who build NPL for your use and success.

NPL-BASED FOURD GUI

by Chris Maxwell, Maxwell & Co., Inc.

Maxwell & Company, Inc. is nearing completion of its FourD based Windows product. This product provides the developer a way to switch the user interface for FourD to a GUI interface while continuing to use FourD as the primary development platform. The system was initially announced and publicly demonstrated at the October NSG conference in Key West, FL.

The product is entirely 32-bit and utilizes NPL 5.0, Visual

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NPL, Instant Vinny, and NDM. There are three components to the product: Logic Engine, Database Engine, and User Interface.

The **Logic Engine** remains written in NPL 5 and continues to utilize the FourD system to coordinate the other components. *Very few code changes will be needed.*

The **Database Engine** uses NDM to convert FourD native files into Btrieve. A utility written by Classic Financial Systems *makes the conversion of the data dictionary simple and quick.* The developer can choose whether to continue using the existing NSG format or convert to Btrieve format.

The **User Interface** has a conversion utility that will convert all FourD function screens and menus into a format that can be used by the Visual Basic display driver. The user can create a text icon and a GUI icon and run both versions simultaneously using the same diskimage for programs.

All three components are invisible to the developer and load automatically as needed. *No knowledge of Visual Basic is required.* Developers can continue to use FourD as the primary development platform and use the GUI User Interface for a Windows style appearance. The developer can modify color selections to enhance the appearance of the screens and the user can choose from either a web-style button menu or an explorer-style outline menu.

For complex programs or unusual situations that do not employ standard FourD functions, the Instant Visual NPL(Instant Vinny) interface can be used. The developer can define groups of buttons in NPL and then activate Instant Vinny. A GUI screen with the buttons that you defined will appear with the text screen in the center. *100% of FourD applications should convert, with about 10% utilizing Instant Vinny, depending on the application.*

A web demonstration will be available within the next sixty days.

NSG is the exclusive distributor for FourD, the Btrieve data dictionary utilities, and the Visual FourD interface.

Beta testing is planned for January, with full release in the first quarter of 1999.

OPEN FOURD

by Alan Green, Director of R&D

Open FourD is based on our forthcoming Open NDM, which will give NPL developers an avenue to open data.

Open NDM Phase 1 takes all of the existing NDM (Niakwa Data Manager) API calls and maps them to most popular databases via ODBC, a Microsoft standard. While traditional NDM is record-oriented, the SQL databases which ODBC accesses are transaction-oriented.

This marks a departure from the "closed" databases that NPL programs interacted with in the past. Closed data systems use:

- Proprietary access methods, such as NPL's DATALOAD commands or NDM's interface to Btrieve's proprietary API, and
- Proprietary data structures, such as NPL's disk catalog (DC) mode or NDM's interface to Btrieve's private data formats.

Despite the fact that their performance can be good, the industry has moved away from closed data systems because:

- Proprietary access methods are not industry standard,
- Closed data formats are often inaccessible to third-party tools such as Crystal Reports, and
- Users of closed data systems can't easily switch to different databases.

Examples of closed data systems:

- Native Basic-2 formats: (KFAM, IDEAS, AIMS, SPEED)
- Proprietary ISAMs: (Btrieve, C-ISAM, DISAM, KISAM)

Open database systems, on the other hand, clearly represent the direction that the vast majority of developers and users demand. They use:

- Open access methods such as ODBC driving SQL
- Open or proprietary data structures (an open data structure is one for which the format is published)

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Open NDM delivers access to open data systems, with these advantages

- Data is highly portable without code changes,
- It's industry-standard (IS departments like it), and
- It's highly accessible to third-party tools.

Here's how open data systems compare to closed data systems:

- Open data permits standardization, such as access by a common set of SQL calls.
- Open data encourages third-party tools, such as query-and-reporting tools like Crystal Reports.
- Open data gives users more choices. For example, users may "drop in" a different open database which should work seamlessly with an applications existing calls.

Note: NPL developers who adopt Open NDM will not be required to know or use SQL, because Open NDM handles all of the SQL calls. Similarly, they won't be required to know ODBC, because Open NDM handles that interaction too.

Open NDM Phase 2 will debut in NPL 5.2, and will add SQL-specific extensions to Open NDM. These will not only provide faster performance, but will also supply more powerful processing.

KCML TRADE-IN PROGRAM

by Jason Dederich, Sales Manager

Availability of the exciting NPL-based FourD GUI and Open FourD products leads to one obvious question: How do I get it?

If you are currently using NPL, you simply call NSG to order an updated version of FourD, and if you are not yet at NPL 5.0, and upgrade to your Gold Key.

If you are currently running under KCML, are you out of luck? No. For a limited time, Niakwa is offering a special KCML trade-in. We will allow a

KCML dongle to be "upgraded" as though it were a Gold Key. Thus for the small upgrade fee, your customer can move from KCML to NPL Release V! Just like a Gold Key, the dongle must be returned to receive this special discount.

These trade-ins will be available directly from NSG. Please contact NSG for more details.

P.S. Increased discounts may be available for upgrading your entire customer base at one time!

MARGARITAVILLE

by Dick Drew, V.P. & General Manager

No conference is all business. This years meeting in the "Conch Republic" was no exception. After a full day of presentations, demonstrations and meetings, Niakwa hosted a hospitality suite. The theme of the event was "MARGARITAVILLE" in honor of one of Key West's infamous citizens, entertainer Jimmy Buffet.

The suite featured palm trees, fish, streamers, refreshments, frequent drawings and of course margaritas. Although it was a standing room only crowd, there were enough refreshments for everyone. We were prepared to deliver additional demonstrations of Niakwa's new products, but for some reason never turned the computers on. We must have had a good time.

HELP WANTED

Reinforcing our commitment to the NSG community, Niakwa is looking for an experienced SPEED/FourD developer to become a permanent member of the Niakwa team. Responsibilities will include advising our R&D group on the development of products leading to Open FourD, assist our tech support group in supporting NPL applications based in FourD, maintenance of our NSG-based in-house system, and contract SPEED and FourD work. The ideal candidate would have experience with SPEED, FourD and NPL IV structured programming techniques.

If you or someone you know is interested in this position, please contact Kurt Skaronea at kas@niakwa.com (phone 847-816-7400).