Freeware Component Review: The Delphi VCL Extensions (RX) Library

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The Delphi VCL Extensions (RX) Library contains a variety of components that can enhance the professionalism of Delphi applications. Many components found in the library contain features included in commercial component packages.The collection includes full source code,and is compatible with all versions of Delphi and C++ Builder.

The authors are Fedor Koshevnikov, lgor Pavluk,and Serge Korolev.They divide the library into three categories: RX Controls, RX DBAware, and RX ToolsThese components include user interface controls, data-aware components,and tool sets, respectively.There are over 50 components included with the library, and this article highlights a few of the more interesting ones.

THE RX Controls category contains many components that give your application a modern interface. I find them especially useful for systems deployed to mixed-Windows environments because you can maintain a consistent interface among 16- and 32-bit versions of your applications.

The TRXSpeedButton component can give your 16-bit applications the look of newer flat-button style applications such as Internet Explorer and Delphi 3.0's speed buttons. It also has features not found in the standard Delphi 3.0 SpeedButton, such as word-wrap for captions and transparency.

The TAnimatedImage component allows you to create animations. By specifying the number of glyphs in the animation and the glyph sequence, you can create attention-getting effects in your application. Two-image sequences can be used to express the on/off status of a process, while a several-image sequence can give a user more complex feedback. For example, instead of using a generic progress bar, you could create a cartoon animation that "walks" across a panel by manipulating the animation time interval and the LEFT and TOP properties of the component. Your efforts can be tested during design time, and right-clicking on the component will provide you with the ability to load an animated cursor (.ANI) file.

TDateEdit gives you the ability to use Quicken-style date entry by popping up a graphic calendar for the user to click on (see Figure 1). You can disable direct date typing into the control box, and the authors include a data-aware version of the control.

Other controls of interest are a currency edit box, a variety of spin and slider controls, a check-list box, and dice.

RX DBAware

The RX DBAware category contains data-aware components that expand Delphi's standard component set.

TRXDBGrid is an expansion of Delphi's grid component. In addition to providing standard grid behavior, the RX Library version allows you to change background color and fonts within individual cells, display icons for BLOB and picture fields, change sort order by clicking on a column header, and select multiple records.

There are many database-aware components in this library, and I encourage you to sample all of them. The authors include many enhancements to ListBox and

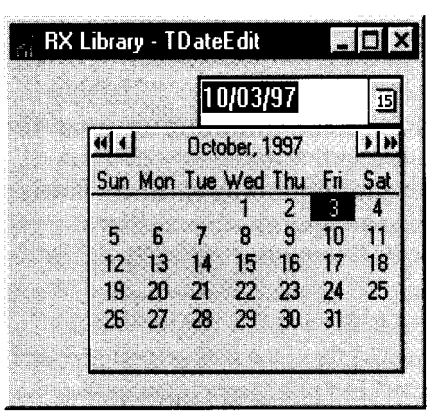

Figure I.The TDateEdit calendar control.

ComboBox controls, but you'll find the true usefulness of the library in other components that implement Paradox-style Query-By-Example, BDE In-Memory tables, and common login dialog boxes.

RX Tools

The RX Tools section of the library contains visual and non-visual tools for a variety of functions.

The TSpeedBar component houses your RXSpeedButtons. The RX Library SpeedBar component is much more than a simple panel containing buttons-it's a fully functional SpeedBar customizer that your users can take advantage of to customize your application to their needs. The TSpeedBar includes a Customize method that launches a dialog box that allow a user to drag buttons on and off the bar. During design, you can enable this function by double-clicking on the TSpeedBar and specifying button groups. For example, you can create buttons for every item in your application's File and Edit menus. The user can then add and subtract speed buttons for these functions. User SpeedBar settings can be saved to an .INI file by setting the SpeedBar's INIStorage property to a TFormStorage component, also in the RX Tools section. TFormStorage allows the specification of an IN1 filename/section and can be used to store other form properties that have resulted from user customization.

TRXCalculator presents the user with a graphic calculator. When enabled via its EXECUTE method, the calculator appears as a modal dialog and gives the user a simple, no-frills calculator (see Figure 2). I like to provide menu commands displaying this calculator component in applications where I feel a user might want to experiment with calculations before entering data. Including this component as an option in your application might save the user time over loading the Windows calculator.

TPageManager allows you to give the user a Wizard-like series of pages.

TDualListDialog displays the contents of two TString variables in separate boxes, allowing the user to move items from one box to the other. This component might be useful for selecting items for a product invoice or names for a distribution list (see Figure 3).

Despite the advantages of this library, there's a drawback. The Help files are only available in Russian. Use of the controls is intuitive, however, in all but only a few cases. You can examine the included Source Code if you need more information.

After downloading the library, make sure to load the included sample programs. They demonstrate most of the available tools and do a good job of getting you started with the data-aware controls and SpeedBar functions.

These tools deserve a serious look and are impressive considering their freeware status. If you're building a system for a mixed-Windows environment and are frustrated because you're missing out on some interface features of Delphi 2.0 and 3.0, take a look at this library.

The Library can be downloaded from the delphi VCL Extensions (RX) Library Web page at http://rx.unionjv.ru/rxengl.htm.

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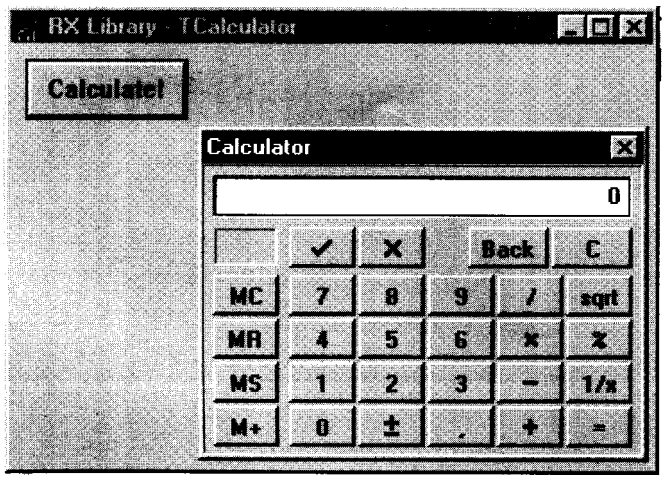

Figure 2.TheTRXCalculator control.

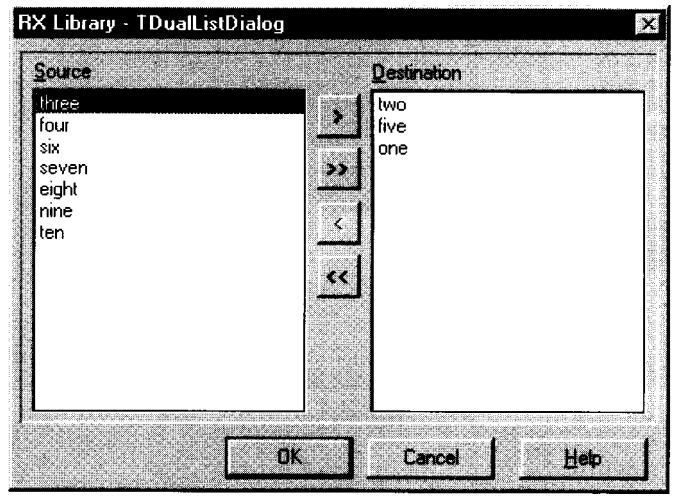

Figure 3.The TDualListDialog control.