Review:
ISGMAPI 2.0

by Peter Hyde

Communications programs of any kind used to be the bane of our lives. Because they covered the area where our tidy finite state machine met the Real World, with all its failings, they invariably resulted in thorny debugging problems: whether of code, protocol, modem init strings or cabling.

Fortunately, the Windows platform has rescued us from much of that and, with the plethora of POP3, SMTP, serial communications and fax components now available for Delphi, it is relatively easy to build a reliable solution for almost any client requirement.

But before racing out to communication-enable your application with any of those components, there is another viable approach to consider, one which can give you a comms-enhanced application yet which bypasses the need for all that paraphernalia.
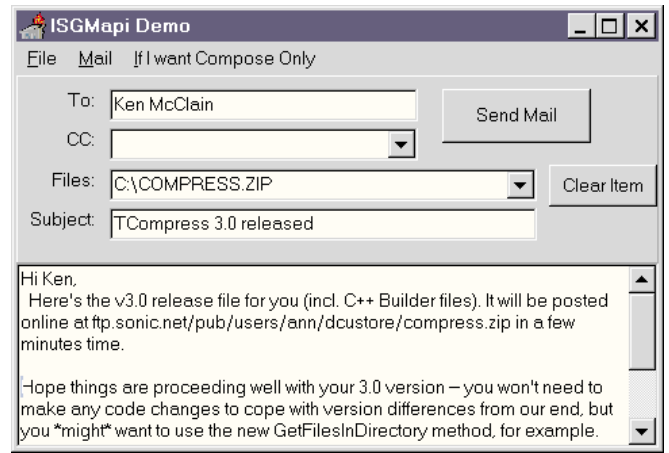
Personally, I had no use for the "Inbox" on my Win95 desktop until the day a client requested an application which could send faxes, Internet email and MSMail as required. But behind the Inbox lurks Microsoft's vast (and remarkably complex) MSExchange application which happens to provide all those services and more.

The trick, of course, is controlling that functionality from Delphi, which is where the ISGMAPI component comes in. There are alternatives, such as wading through the MAPI (Messaging API) documents and header files: *not* for the faint-hearted! ISGMAPI provides a good level of control and interaction with MSExchange and other MAPI-compliant services such as Groupwise or MS Mail, for a reasonable price.

There is something very appealing about using the same `SendMail` method to send a fax or email message, complete with Word document attached, varying only the URL passed to it. Methods are also provided for checking and reading incoming messages, composing messages on the fly and interrogating and using MAPI Address Books. Good control is provided over how much of the message user interface is handled by your application as opposed to by the MAPI service itself.

Better yet, ISGMAPI includes "EForm" capability. An EForm is an application which transmits and receives its data via MSExchange. Data management and transmission (and EForm execution at the client) is handled by MSExchange/ISGMAPI. The read/write routines are like those used to access INI files.

In surrendering much of your message management to a MAPI service like MSExchange, some compromises are involved. For example, your application may queue 1,000 faxes for transmission by MSExchange, but it won't get direct feedback on how the actual transmissions fared. Instead, the user must look at the message logs kept within MSExchange: there doesn't

appear to be an easy way to interrogate them from an external program. With such caveats in mind, MAPI communications using ISGMAPI will provide a convenient solution for many, but not all, comms applications. The example apps, help files and FAQ will get you off to a very quick start, with email support also available.

An ISGMapi 2.0 trial version can be downloaded from Infinity Software Group at http://www.infsoft.com/isgwww/mapi/mapindex.html. Credit card registration can be made by telephone or online and costs $US110 for both 16- and 32-bit versions, including source.

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