Subject: RE: OLE issues that could hit in coming weeks
Date: Thursday, October 14, 1993 9:09AM

agree

From: Dave Seres
To: Jonathan Lazarus; Mike Maples; Pete Higgins
Cc: Doug Henrich; Lowell Tuttman; Tim Satalich
Subject: RE: OLE issues that could hit in coming weeks
Date: Thursday, October 14, 1993 8:47AM

I think we need to do two things immediately:

+ develop rude Q&A to anticipate press questions - Tim and I can work with the Office product marketing and PR teams to do this.
+ incorporate as many third-party ISVs as possible in our OLE2 interoperability testing - we can provide candidates. I think this needs to be driven from the apps side

Longer term, we need to come up with a plan to provide some level of OLE2 confidence testing for our apps and ISVs.

-Dave

From: Mike Maples
To: Jonathan Lazarus; Pete Higgins
Cc: Dave Seres; Doug Henrich; Lowell Tuttman; Tim Satalich
Subject: RE: OLE issues that could hit in coming weeks
Date: Wednesday, October 13, 1993 6:17PM

Understand the facts, how do we minimize the exposure?

From: Jonathan Lazarus
To: Mike Maples; Pete Higgins
Subject: FW: OLE issues that could hit in coming weeks
Date: Wednesday, October 13, 1993 2:17PM

From: Dave Seres
To: Jonathan Lazarus
Cc: Doug Henrich; Lowell Tuttman; Tim Satalich
Subject: RE: OLE issues that could hit in coming weeks
Date: Wednesday, October 13, 1993 12:49PM

We have identified about a dozen Word/XL inconsistencies with the OLE 2 UI guidelines. As Collins points out, while no one difference taken by itself is all that bad, when taken as a group they could certainly present a problem for us. At a minimum, we may have to explain why our apps deviate from the guidelines that we have given thousands of ISVs. In the worst case, these differences may be perceived as bugs or present useability issues especially as they affect interoperability between our own apps and ISV apps. Also, we modified our guidelines to accomodate some of the inconsistencies changing "requirements" to "recommendations". Cynical editors may see this as another conspiracy by Microsoft giving our own apps unfair advantages. How did this happen? We have had an ongoing dialogue with Word/XL about OLE 2 UI guidelines for the last two years or so. Some inconsistencies crept in because we disagreed and they chose to be different based on what they saw as good rationale. Other differences may be simply because of schedule pressures and some may just be oversights.

With regard to outright bugs, a developer once told me that there is no such thing as a minor OLE bug. Because they involve interprocess communications, all OLE bugs tend to be critical and of the highest severity. This means we have to be much more thorough on our own testing. It also raises some interesting questions about testing ISV apps. There is lot of room for finger pointing here. Since we are supplying OLE, I suspect we will get the blame if something doesn't work right (as happened recently when CorelDraw had difficulties). This is something we should address. In my view, either we need some kind of OLE 2 certification program or a set of test tools/test harnesses that we can supply to ISVs to verify OLE 2 interoperability.

As our Systems UI evangelist, TimSat should be the lead on the UI guideline issues. He can provide details on the differences. I plan to follow up on the certification/testing issues to see if there is something more we could be doing. Our immediate problem is PR and we should be ready with rude Q&A on this. I will followup on that also.

-Dave

From: Jonathan Lazarus
To: Dave Seres
Cc: Doug Henrich
Subject: FW: OLE issues that could hit in coming weeks
Date: Tuesday, October 12, 1993 11:49PM

Would you like to draft a concise reply please...

From: Mike Maples
To: Jonathan Lazarus; Pete Higgins
Subject: FW: OLE issues that could hit in coming weeks
Date: Monday, October 11, 1993 6:06PM

do they exist and how bad are these differences? how did they happen?

From: Collins Hemingway
To: Jonathan Lazarus; Pete Higgins
Cc: Beverley Flower; Marty Taucher; Monica Harrington; Marianne Allison
Subject: OLE issues that could hit in coming weeks
Date: Thursday, September 30, 1993 6:18PM

Though we've made significant progress in bringing systems and apps together on OLE 2.0 issues, based on a lot of hard work on both sides, there remain a couple of issues that could come back to haunt us with the public and press:

1. OLE 2.0 spec: The apps division's implementation of OLE 2.0 in Office has a number of inconsistencies with the OLE spec. Many of the discrepancies have been resolved by systems changing "required" approaches to "recommended" approaches in the spec, but many small differences remain. Many are obscure or fairly trivial, but taken as a whole they could seem significant. It's hard to say what a user would note or worry about, but there are several things that reviewers will probably note. And ISVs could complain that MS told them to do it one way but then our own apps guys did it another, and thus we got some kind of "secret advantage." Any "conspiracy"-leaning reporter could make hay of this, since it will be virtually impossible to explain what is and isn't compliant, or why. Shades of the "undocumented API conspiracy."

The logical response is: OLE 2.0 is complex technology, and all apps (ours and others) are making their first implementation of it. Given all the things an apps developer has to worry about with a new release, it's not surprising there could be minor differences; and we'll clean them up over time. The key thing is that MS apps support OLE 2.0 and implement the key features per the spec, and MS IS COMMITTED TO BE FULLY COMPLIANT WITH THE SPEC as we move forward. (I personally don't care if this means changing the spec or changing the apps, but the spec has been out to a lot of people for a long time, and it will be transparent to the ISV community if we change very much in the spec just to suit MS apps -- such an action would generate Front Page controversy. A ticklish situation indeed.)

PR recommends that someone sufficiently high in the systems and apps organizations be named to reconcile this for future product releases -- and that they are empowered to make OLE compliance work across the board in MS apps. We recognize that these are tough issues to resolve, but these loose ends tend to create unnecessary controversies that waste far more time than it would take to fix it -- and have the potential to damage MS's image in the meantime.

2. Bugs. We've already had a couple of instances where a bug in an app has manifested itself during an OLE operation. This makes sense, if you figure OLE operations are complex and they "stress" apps in ways they are not normally stressed. (One of these involved a bug in a non-MS app; the other involved Excel and Word, when their betas got out of sync.) It will not take too many of these before the impression is, "OLE is buggy." And an ISV, given the choice between saying his product is buggy or OLE is buggy, will quickly claim OLE as the culprit. Similarly, if ISVs generally do a poor job of implementing OLE, it could take the rap rather than the ISVs. We have developed a Reviewer's Guide for OLE 2.0 -- with a lot of good input from apps -- to help guide reviewers through these shoals, but the biggest issue will be cross-app testing of interoperability and OLE. OLE-oriented testing must be a major component of testing for Office as products approach final. Testing has to be absolutely hard core. If MS apps break each other via OLE, then we get a triple whammy: OLE is buggy; our apps are buggy; if MS can't make it work, who can? Our competitors on both apps and systems will take our scalps.

(Tim Satalich has put together a detailed doc on current discrepancies between Office and OLE 2.0 for those who need to follow up.)