

Seneca Update

By Russell Pangborn

I would like to tell two stories. One about my **Mom** and my **Uncle Joe** and another one about some fish in a tank. Somehow this is going to relate to my usage of development tools supplied by IBM. Beware reader, because at this point in the column, I am working off a gut feeling and have no idea how this is going to turn out. We may just drive off a cliff together.

This summer I went to an IBM Power Systems summer school in Rochester Minnesota. One non-educational reason to do the trip is an opportunity to visit my Uncle Joe in Minneapolis. Before the final leg of the trip I remember my Cousin Jim saying to me with a gleam in his eye, "Uncle Joe is expecting you will teach him how to use his computer." Uncle Joe is a 91 year old doctor and still practices medicine. Already a piano player, he has decided to take up the violin and is making good progress with the instrument. Like all of you intelligent readers he still can be humbled occasionally.

I have been around computers a long time. There are certain skills you take for granted. When it was time to give Uncle Joe a few pointers there was an unexpected roadblock. Dexterity with the mouse. We decided to practice mouse movement on the screen. I can clearly remember the amount of effort being exerted and that damn mouse wasn't going in the direction my Uncle wanted it to. To provide some incentive for using his machine, I showed him how you could name almost any musician and search Utube and find a filmed performance. His problem was getting the cursor in that box to type in a name.

My mom had mastered the mouse by playing scrabble with the computer. She had a different problem with her computer skills. The action to deal with this problem is also something I have taken for granted. The last couple of months she told me that

her Vista password was not working on the computer. She now thought the purchase of this machine was a waste of money. It turned out that the problem was the caps lock key. I had to explain to her that the computer makes a distinction between an upper and lower case "a".

Although all the readers of this column will not have these problems, we do run into gotchas that stop us in our tracks. Some of them have a simple solution. We like to think that we are capable of always finding the intuitive one built into the product. Sometimes it is a matter of pride about the speed it takes. I remember recently feeling inadequate a few months ago as a new user of Vista. It was taking me a few extra minutes to figure out what to click on to log off my system. I finally figured it out without using any help. Vista and Microsoft Office has given me lots of those moments.

My problem sometimes is stubbornness. For example, word is double spacing my lines and instead of clicking on help I click on everything else to no avail. Finally, that very tiny question mark at the upper right gets clicked on and the solution is found and implemented immediately. I have to figure this stuff out because our department has moved everyone to Vista. This is the last semester we will have a choice of booting up our lab computers in either XP or Vista.

Our tech support people have finally gotten fed up with installing everything twice. I can sympathize because I have the dual boot on my new laptop. Some things install fine with both XP and Vista—for example Client Access. Other things have me scratching my head. I couldn't get RDi installed in both Vista or XP. It is one of my life's great mysteries that RDi works okay on my home PC in Vista, but it only works with the XP boot up on my laptop and the other install with a different directory in Vista won't start up.



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Anyway, my department is removing my choices. I will change my PC over to a single boot machine.

That is not the case with System i development tools. I still have a choice to use WDSC (now RDi) and PDM with the 5250 emulator. When we first started using WDSC there would be seemingly insignificant gotchas that did wonders for the blood pressure. Fortunately, (or unfortunately from IBM's perspective) I could always switch to the 5250 emulator. Here is an early example. I was entering a 100 line CLLE program in front of my class trying to demonstrate good coding habits including indentation, not always including the obvious keywords for a CL command, and having one keyword and value per line with a long complicated command showing those "+" continuation signs lining up nicely. But messing up my demonstration was an automatic indentation feature that kept throwing everything out of whack that was originally nicely positioned when entered. I couldn't find out how to turn it off... cue PDM and the 5250 emulator.

These issues were gradually solved, sometimes on my own or sometimes with help from IBM. Most of my students given a choice would prefer to work with WDSC or RDi rather than PDM using a 5250 emulator. I now demonstrate everything in class using WDSC. The more tips I can



give my students, the more adept they are at using the product. For example it is nice to click on your compile error and have the edited error line show up with the error message below it. It used to be irritating to have those messages still appear and get in the way while you were making fixes. One time in a summer school in Rochester I saw someone get rid of the errors with a key combination. I asked “what did you press”. It was CTRL+F5. Unfortunately that got buried with all the other stuff I was seeing. So back in Toronto I couldn’t remember and tried several combinations that didn’t work. I couldn’t locate anything with the system help—although it must be there somewhere. I ended up emailing someone for help. Now in class it doesn’t hurt to say CTRL F5 when clearing the screen of error messages. Something that feels real easy to do for my students—actually originally wasn’t for me. Part of the problem is the people who know this think, “How can you not know?”

I tried using the Key Assist in RDi and found around 100 key combinations and what they represent. My initial conclusion was there is no mention of the elusive CTRL + F5 combo. A day later, another stab at Key Assist (CTRL+SHIFT+L) turned up a CTRL + F5 entry and an additional 90 key combinations defined. What gives! It looks like I’ve been done in by context sensitive help. My mom and Uncle Joe would love this concept. It was supposed to

help me filter out unnecessary information. Yesterday that feature worked against me. IBM’s Key Assist is a great feature, but my ability to come to erroneous conclusions and screw up knows no bounds.

Another interesting key combination is the compile option. I saw this one used at the TUG meeting. I couldn’t initially find this one mentioned anywhere in Key Assist either. It wouldn’t be a bad idea to have this one showing at the spot where you click for a compile. Guessing located it for me here at the office. It involves pressing CTRL + Shift + C allowing my left hand to temporarily heal from the ever encroaching mouse induced carpal tunnel syndrome.

We are writing interactive and batch programs in our intro subject, COBOL, RPG and advanced DB2 subjects. There are spooled files to view or interactive screens to respond to with labs and assignments. One thing I could never figure out was—why did I need to sign in twice to two different products to develop and test code. A common occurrence before class involves a quick sign on with the 5250 emulator to test a new demo program. Occasionally this brings to light something that should be tweaked. What am I going to do, start up WDSC or RDi and wait or type WRKMBRPDM? Nobody likes waiting. I like working with the new tools but there are times when both WDSC and the 5250 emulator are going and my 5250

screen might be active testing a program. The decision is to still make a fix with PDM. Maybe it is old habits or the avoidance of a slightly longer response to a compile.

I asked **Don Yantzi**, (Technical Lead Rational Developer for System i), who has been very helpful through the years, the following question in an email.

“Why can’t you see your spooled files when in RDi? Why can’t you see your interactive results when running a program in RDi? I am running RDi now and looking at an empty big pane (where my edit source code goes.) We have a simple CLLE program that sets up an RPGLE program, runs it and displays the spooled file. I have to go to Client Access to see this. Why can’t this result show in that edit area?”

Don replied, “For the 5250 emulator integration, one of our goals is to get to a point where users don’t need (or want) to run 5250 development tools. Everything they need is right there in RDi. So when faced with the choice of providing an integrated emulator in RDi or adding new RDi features, we’ve always chosen to add additional RDi features to work closer to this goal.”

I know there are third party products that fill this gap. But sometimes I feel like my Uncle Joe must have felt trying to move that cursor or how my mom must have felt trying to figure out why the letter a is not the letter A when you are typing it in on a prompt that only shows you asterisks.

I really enjoyed Don Yantzi’s and **Nazmin Haji**’s presentations at the MOM in September. I brought some students with me and although we weren’t beginner users of the new tools, there were a lot of good suggestions and new improvements demonstrated. I remember one of the students, **Omar Carr**, who works in the labs helping students, leaning over to me saying, “We had better start rewriting our labs,” as Don was demonstrating some RDi features. We plan on switching from WDSC 7.0 to RDi in the upcoming winter semester. Another of my students, **Rebeca Romero** wrote a review of the session and it has been included in this issue.

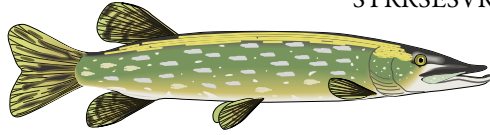
Seneca Suggestion Box (for IBM)

One feature we here at Seneca would love to see is a workspace that is easily saved and retrieved on the System i. Our students are always sitting down at different PC’s. Requesting an automated way of storing workspaces on the server may be an odd request that would only be worthwhile at a school that doesn’t have students bring in their own laptops. Currently with iSeries Navigator you can add a library to your list of libraries and this information is stored on the server. Using iSeries Nav on different PC’s always picks up the libraries or schemas you have set up on your list. I understand a workspace is a lot more involved than that. Our students do carry their workspaces around on jump drives. There used to be a problem when everything wasn’t USB 2.0.

That has gradually gone away as we upgraded our hardware. Now the workspaces can occasionally get corrupted with the use of a USB flash drive and they have to redo the workspace. That may not happen too much for people in the industry who carry a workspace around with them to different machines. I guess a group of new users or students can always push the limits of the robustness of a product.

This brings me to my fish story.

There is a story about putting minnows in a tank with pike and separating them with a glass pane. The pike will attempt to eat the minnows and smash into the glass. This happens many times—until they finally give up. At this time you can remove the partition and the minnows can swim safely with the Pike.




That's me with the WDSC interactive debugger. Several years ago I went to a session and tried this feature. My reaction was to love it the same way those pike liked consuming the tasty minnows. I eventually installed the required products at home, retried the debugging process, and spent several hours writing a demo lab to take to work. Just to be safe, the lab was gone over before class at my desk. It worked fine. I didn't realize it, but someone was lowering a glass pane as I was walking over to class. It would be firmly in place by the time I was standing in front of 60

students. After giving a glowing review of this new way of debugging the programs, I initiated the process. One of my steps was to type in STRRSESVR. That was my glass pane. It wouldn't work. There couldn't be a demonstration. Failure one time is not enough to deter me from something. Attempts were made to determine why

STRRSESVR would not work with help from IBM. We could have a lab of thirty students and it would work for twenty and not work for ten. After a whole semester of bloodying myself on this barrier of STRRSESVR and coming up with solutions that worked sometimes but not others, my mind-set was coming around to the Pike's perspective. I remember one day making the decision to type STRDBG when showing how a problem program was executing incorrectly. It was reliable. It has been a reliable demonstration tool for several years now. But while I was listening to Don's presentation I started to feel a bit guilty. I felt like a big dumb old pike. I had been ignoring those

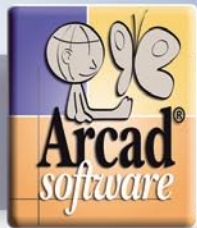
minnows for too long. In the same email I got from Don, he stated, "In 6.0.1 we redid the debugger communications architecture to make it a lot more reliable. You should have no problem debugging in any network environments anymore."

I want to be smarter than those Pike and will retry some things I gave up on. There are a lot of new features with RDi that I now can't wait to take advantage of. 

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