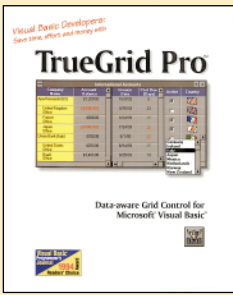


## TrueGrid Pro 2.1c



### Apex Software

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**Quick Facts:** A data-aware grid control for Visual Basic 3.0.

Bundled with combo, list box, option list, and tab controls from other vendors.

**Price:** \$99.95

If you're in the market to purchase a custom grid control for Visual Basic, you can choose from three categories: controls that aren't data aware and require a substantial amount of programming to access data (such as the GRID.VBX that comes with VB); data-aware grid controls designed to browse and edit a data source with little or no programming; and data-aware spreadsheet/grid controls designed to browse, edit, and perform spreadsheet-like functions on a data source with little or no programming.

If what you need falls into the second category, take a look at Apex Software's TrueGrid Pro. TrueGrid displays data in a spreadsheet-like format of columns, rows, and cells. You control the fonts, colors, column widths, and other elements of a view. It's a bound control, but only because of its link to the VB data control. In other words, TrueGrid is merely a vehicle to display the data retrieved by the data control. That's fine for some apps, but in a client/server environment the VB data control may not be your first choice.

I first used TrueGrid about a year ago. My task was to find a third-party grid control to use in a workshop seminar I was teaching, which was designed to show legacy AS/400 RPG developers the ease of getting to and working with databases in Visual Basic.

TrueGrid, however, can make "ease" a little deceptive: With TrueGrid you can display data simply by setting its DataSource property to a data control, which in turn has its DatabaseName (or Connect) and RecordSource properties set—but that's in a perfect world. You must set properties and cut code for validation, user interaction, and so forth.

### MORE THAN A GRID

Because Apex has forged ties to other control vendors, including the Crescent Division of Progress Software, Crystal (A Seagate Software Company), Oracle Corp., and VideoSoft, you get additional tools for managing data: Crescent's bound combo box, bound list box, bound option list, and radio buttons, all from QuickPak Pro, are bundled with TrueGrid.

According to Apex, VideoSoft's IndexTab tabbed dialog control, not included with the edition I reviewed, soon will be a part of the package. If you're already a registered TrueGrid user, you can download IndexTab from the Apex forum on CompuServe (you'll have to call Apex for the password to the encrypted download file).

If you already own VB 3.0, you get TrueGrid bundled with Crystal Reports Pro 4.0 for \$269.95 (purchasing Crystal Reports 4.0 directly from Crystal costs \$395. Without Crystal, TrueGrid costs \$99.95). The combination of TrueGrid and Crystal Reports alone makes the product worthy of consideration as part of your developer's toolset.

Drop a Crystal Reports control on a form, set its DataSource

to the data control, its ReportSource property to Bound TrueGrid Control, code `Report1.Action = 1`, and you have sharp-looking reports, as well as the power to customize them to fit your needs. (*Crystal Reports Pro is also reviewed in this issue.*—Eds.) Crystal also bundles TrueGrid in its Crystal Reports retail product.

Another of Apex's connections is worth a note: Oracle includes a demo version of TrueGrid Pro with Oracle Objects for OLE, a VBX-based replacement for the VB data control that provides access to Oracle databases. (*Oracle Objects is also reviewed in this issue.*—Eds.)

### INSIDE TRUEGRID

TrueGrid has 129 properties and 25 custom events for the control, editing, and presentation of data, so yes, it's definitely full featured. It suffers in some areas on usability, however. TrueGrid's Layout editor, for example, does a decent job of customizing the grid columns, but otherwise it needs polish.

For one of my recent development projects I had my data control on the form with the DatabaseName and RecordSource properties set. I placed the TrueGrid control on the form, but I didn't immediately set the TrueGrid DataSource property—instead I went right to the Layout property. What I got was the Layout editor itself, without any data to lay out.

Naturally, I figured I could close the Layout editor, find and set the DataSource property to the Data control, and then go back to the Layout editor to customize the columns. You would think it would work, but it didn't.

I deleted the TrueGrid control from the form and started over in reverse: I placed the TrueGrid control on the form, set the DataSource property, and then set the Layout property.

Part of the problem is that it's hard to find help on the Layout editor. With the TrueGrid manual, which otherwise is quite well written, easy to follow, and comes with great sample applications, you're on a fishing trip to find out how to get a layout for the RecordSource.

You won't find anything like "The Layout Editor Dialog" in the help file. To find help on layouts, you must click on the picture of the Layout editor in the control box/system menu. This is where it describes the menu items such as Discard, Clear Fields, and Show Sample Data. You won't find these items in the help search list, either. When I selected Clear Fields, closed the Layout editor, and selected the Layout property once more, a dialog box asked me if I wanted to "Use database layout form DataSource."

Once you have the data displayed in the Layout editor you can set many, but not all, of the column properties. Simple properties such as column background and foreground colors, for example, are not available from the Layout editor.

On the other hand, even though the Layout editor should revisit the usability labs, it does have some features that will save you time. In particular, because the Layout property is a string value with a corresponding LayoutIndex, you can save the different layouts, retrieve them at run time, and apply them to your RecordSource. This is a nice feature if you want to let the user customize the layout at run time with predefined layouts.

Here are two other nit-picky things. One: when in edit mode the edit cell has the default colors of a blue background with blue highlight. Consequently, you can't see what's highlighted.

Two: TrueGrid needs a property to force the grid to the ScaleWidth and ScaleHeight of the parent form, or at least an Align property. Most systems I've developed have been MDI with scalable child forms. Both of these can be remedied by setting a few properties and/or writing a few lines of code, but it should be easier than that.

Despite a few minor flaws, TrueGrid is a worthy addition to your collection of development tools, especially if you opt for the Crystal Reports bundle.—**Jeff Borghoff**