

S O F T W A R E A G C O N N E C T I O N S

NATURAL: HOW IT ALL BEGAN

The idea of NATURAL was first conceived in 1973 when I had to implement an ADABAS application using COBOL in an OS/MFT environment. Since I had experience developing compilers on small process-control computers that were interactive in operation, I found the batch-oriented large mainframes extremely inadequate. Punching holes in cards, using the abominable job control language and running batch compiles and links was not the best way to implement business applications. Due to other obligations within Software AG, I was not able to continue work on NATURAL until 1976. NATURAL was presented for the first time at the 3rd Users' Conference. As you can probably imagine, the concept of using a non-standard programming language like NATURAL was received with certain scepticism.

At the time it was first presented, the NATURAL concept already had the same goals as it does today. Those goals were and are:

- field oriented data handling;
- integrated database manipulation statements;
- integrated terminal communication statements;
- interactive mode of operation;
- environment independence; and
- high productivity for application prototype development.

Peter Page
Executive Vice President
Software AG Darmstadt



In this first presentation, NATURAL was described as a system for extensive reporting, online querying and prototyping, and not as an application development tool. This was due to the fact that using 'non-standard' programming languages for the development of production applications was not yet accepted.

Again due to other obligations, such as building a support group and marketing COM-LETE in the European market, the implementation of the NATURAL system was once again suspended. The developed efforts began again in the middle of 1978.

By July of 1979, the first installation of NATURAL, Version 1.0, was completed and installed at the CAB (Civil Aeronautics Board). Mr. Dan Nolan (now President, Heuristic Developments) and his group used NATURAL to develop an application that would maintain, analyze and condense the CAB data. Although NATURAL did not have the functionality it has today, the CAB was able to implement the requested application within a few months.

Since its official release in 1979, NATURAL has experienced an enthusiastic acceptance in the market place. This enthusiasm resulted in the sale of over 150 copies of NATURAL by the end of 1980 and more than 1,400 by the end of 1984.

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