

STRATEGIC TECHNOLOGY SERIES

UNDERSTANDING

ActiveX™

A N D

OLE

A GUIDE FOR
DEVELOPERS &
MANAGERS

DAVID CHAPPELL

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Understanding ActiveX and OLE

Published by **Microsoft Press**
A Division of Microsoft Corporation
One Microsoft Way
Redmond, Washington 98052-6399

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data pending.

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 QMQM 1 0 9 8 7 6

Distributed to the book trade in Canada by Macmillan of Canada, a division of Canada Publishing Corporation.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

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want to use ActiveX and OLE technologies in the software they develop, but it encompasses a broader audience as well. As you can quickly determine by flipping through the pages, this is not a programming book—it contains almost no code. Although I do assume that the reader is a software professional of some kind, I do not assume knowledge of C++ or Windows-based programming. ActiveX, OLE, and COM are important, and knowing what they are and how they work matters to a broader group than those who program for Microsoft Windows. Some familiarity with using Windows is taken for granted, however; this seemed safe to me, as it's hard to find anyone in this field who hasn't used Windows at least a little.

A Timestamp

The ActiveX and OLE technologies are a moving target. This book describes the fundamental COM-based technologies as of mid-1996. In particular, Chapter 10 on Distributed COM and Chapter 11 on the ActiveX Internet-related technologies were completed before those technologies actually shipped. Accordingly, some details described in these chapters might not exactly match what is finally delivered.

Where to Find More Detail

For some people, the depth of coverage offered in this book will be enough. (For others, it will surely be too much.) Developers who need a more intimate understanding of the topic will want to get a copy of the OLE "bible" for programmers, Kraig Brockschmidt's *Inside OLE*, 2d ed. (Microsoft Press, 1995). Another useful book, one that covers an important topic that's not fully addressed in *Inside OLE*, is *OLE Controls Inside Out*, by Adam Denning (Microsoft Press, 1995). (Watch for a new edition of this book, too, one that describes the recent changes in what are now known as ActiveX controls.) For the truly hard-core

to make my writing readable, correct, and clear. Thanks also to David Clark, Microsoft Press acquisitions editor, for accepting my rather informal proposal for this book.

Finally, my wife, Karen, has been eternally patient and endlessly supportive through this and many other projects, something I too often forget to mention. Without her, it would be hard to do any of the things I do.

David Chappell
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July 1996

Introducing ActiveX and OLE

Writing good software is hard. Writing software that's large and complex, as most code is today, is even harder. As computers continue to infiltrate our lives, as we depend on them for everything from running our cars to writing letters to making toast, the effectiveness and reliability of software become more and more important. Good code is becoming the bedrock of our civilization.

In some ways, the history of software is the history of efforts to write better code. Applications and system software both have suffered from endless delays, mind-boggling complexity, and more bugs than anyone cares to admit. But creating software is tough—there's no way around it. Doing it well requires the ability to take a big-picture view coupled with a willingness (an eagerness, even) to deal with a myriad of small details. The intellectual effort required is substantial, and the tools are never perfect.

Microsoft's ActiveX and OLE are a step toward the creation of better software. "Better" here means software that's more reliable, certainly, and more effective as well. But it also means software that can do things that were impossible before, software that enables solutions to new problems. Although ActiveX and OLE are built on a quite simple idea, this idea turns out to have profound implications for improving how we create software.

Writing good software is just plain hard

ActiveX and OLE are about writing better software

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