

Greasing the development cogs

Even with the introduction of XNA, process, build and source control tools aren't the sexiest products in the world, but they do get the game made on time, says Jon Jordan...



At its peak, around 300 developers were working on EA's Battlefield 2. Meanwhile the company's forthcoming shooter Medal of Honor: Airborne is being made by staff spread across six countries.





It's little wonder, then, that behind the scenes of development, the nut and bolt infrastructure of managing production, assets and the daily build process, is receiving more management resources and cash backing.

And, in turn, that's a good enough reason for Develop to subtly vary its own internal processes, expanding our previous roundup on source control tools into the more diverse catch-all of development process, build and source control.

There's certainly plenty going on in the sector. Old favourites such as Perforce and Alienbrain still dominant the core of asset management, while relative newcomer Hansoft seems to be making inroads with its eponymous collaborative project management tool; after all, we've still never met anyone with a good word to say about MS Project.

Perhaps most interesting however is the Build component of Microsoft's all-dancing XNA technology. Based upon the MSBuild component in Visual Studio, it's expected to bring a more high level approach to creating game builds. Time will tell how successful it is.

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PERFORCE	www.perforce.com	SAFE AND SECURE
Technology: Perforce v2006.1 (2002-2006) Clients: Activision, BioWare, EA, Epic, Midway, Sony, Ubisoft Platforms: Windows, Linux, Mac OS X, Solaris (clients) Integration with other Technologies: Office, Photoshop, 3ds Max, Maya, XSI Cost: from \$800 per user Contact: + 44 845 345 0116, info@perforce.com	Offering a highly scalable solution for multi-terabyte collections of digital assets stored in a central repository, Perforce is one of the most widely used software configuration management systems. Its rock solid reputation for handling source code has been expanded in	 recent years to encompass all assets, while advanced visualisation tools and third-party integrations enable coders and artists to collaborate effectively using Perforce Visual Client
ALIEN BRAIN	www.alienbrain.com	BUCKET O' ASSETS
Technology: Alienbrain 7.5.1 (v7.5.2 due shortly) Clients: Bizarre, Blizzard, Codemasters, id, Lionhead, Rockstar, Ubisoft Platforms: Windows, Linux, Mac OS X Cost: available on request Contact: Paul Doyle, paul_doyle@avid.com	Providing a fully centralised version control and history for digital files, Alienbrain was the first system to handle all the assets involved in making a game from models and animation to code and docs. It also integrates the flow of information through a	development team with its artist, programmer and producer-focused client applications. Plug-ins are provided for 3D art packages, programming tools and production tools. 
HANSOFT	www.hansoft.se	GETTING AGILE
Technology: Hansoft v4 Clients: Ascaron, EA, Eurocom, IR Gurus, Red Mile Entertainment, Starbreeze Platforms: Windows (2000/XP) Integration with other technologies: available through SDK Cost: €25 per user per month Contact: Patric Palm, solutions@hansoft.se, + 46 18 10 90 90	The latest version of Hansoft's production management project for scheduling, tracking, resource usage, document management and portfolio analysis, sees support added for Agile methodologies like eXtreme Programming and SCRUM.	 Additional functionality in terms of delegation and milestone tracking has also recently been released, making it easier to manage outsourcing partner.
XOREAX	www.xoreax.com	SPEED OF NUMBERS
Technology: IncrediBuild 2.0 Clients: over 300 including EA, Huge Games, Codemasters, Crytek, Relic, Ubisoft Platforms: Windows Integration with other technologies: Visual Studio 6.0, .NET and 2005 platforms Cost: \$329 per client license Contact: sales@xoreax.com	The latest release of Xoreax's distributed build system, IncrediBuild, features a more flexible way of setting up the agent PCs, which are organised by the co-ordinator, in order to cut the time taken for Visual Studio C/C++ based builds by up to 90	 percent. The package doesn't require you to make any changes to your code, and works from both independent development environment and script-based builds.
MICROSOFT	www.genemation.com	HEADS UP
Technology: XNA Build (release TBA) Clients: TBA Platforms: Windows Integration with other technologies: Visual Studio 2005 Team System Cost: TBA Contact: + 44 870 60 10100	Available in its community technology preview, Microsoft's game content creation, management and build system, XNA Build, is designed to make the process of games production more efficient. One simple example is the claim that using it can	reduce the size of games by up to 40 per cent just by stripping out unneeded assets. Constructed around a visual design surface, it exposes the dependency information across game assets. 