

Excuse me, has anybody seen the FOCAL interpreter?

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One of my now-retired colleagues joined Microsoft back in the early days when Steve Ballmer was the mail boy.

As I noted, the company at the time was very small. An order arrived in the mail (because that's how you ordered software back then) for a copy of what I vaguely recall was Microsoft FOCAL, but don't quote me on that. (I used to have a copy of a FOCAL manual, but I misplaced it decades ago.)

FOCAL was a simple interpreted programming language similar to BASIC in many ways, but far less popular. Orders for it came in very infrequently.

The FOCAL software was available on paper tape, or if you wanted to splurge, you could order it on plastic tape for extra durability.

Anyway, the order came in, the first order in ages. But there was a problem: Nobody could find the master tape! We lost our only copy of the software.

The order had to be canceled, with an apology that the product had been discontinued.

What we didn't mention is that it was discontinued because we had lost it.

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