

MIGRATING  
SOLIDWORKS  
APPLICATIONS TO  
AUTODESK INVENTOR.

---

HINTS, TIPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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# Introduction

## Who is this guide aimed at?

This guide is aimed at software developers who are already integrating their applications with SolidWorks, and who are considering (or actively) migrating their applications to work with Autodesk Inventor. The guide assumes you have a good working knowledge of the SolidWorks API, software development practices, COM and relevant programming languages.

## How this guide helps you.

This guide provides you with a comparative overview of the core SolidWorks and Inventor APIs -- their similarities and differences, and how the key objects and constructs in SolidWorks can be emulated via the Inventor API.

This guide loosely follows the ten core topics of the Introductory Inventor API virtual training class, which can be downloaded [here](#).

Although this guide touches upon various programming topics and debugging tools that are available to help understand the Inventor API, the intention isn't to describe in minute detail every aspect of the API. There are recommended learning resources available as a part of the Inventor product documentation and online. The following site is a good the next step for learning about the Inventor API in more detail: [www.autodesk.com/developinventor](http://www.autodesk.com/developinventor).

## COM APIs

Both SolidWorks and Inventor API's are based on Microsoft's Component Object Model (COM) technology. The products and respective APIs also perform very similar functions, which makes migrating from SolidWorks to Inventor a surprisingly straightforward task. You can start programming in Inventor using exactly the same COM-compliant languages and tools that you will have been using to work with the SolidWorks API.

In principle you can use any COM compliant programming language to access the Inventor API, including Microsoft .NET languages (VB and C#), and Visual C++. Autodesk Inventor also currently includes Microsoft's VBA IDE, which is the same technology framework that is used for writing macros and other VBA-enabled applications in SolidWorks.

A note about VBA - although the IDE is still available in Inventor 2011, Autodesk has announced that VBA will be removed from Inventor at some point in the future. So you are encouraged to learn how to use the Inventor 'add-in' infrastructure and use that as your primary method for future Inventor application development. If you have already worked with some Inventor VBA code, here's an excellent white paper on how that could be migrated to an Add-In application: <http://modthemachine.typepad.com/files/vbatoaddins.pdf>.

For simplicity, this guide uses VBA notation for code examples. Any type of application -- whether a macro, add-in, or EXE -- will use the same underlying object model, and VBA still provides the most concise way to illustrate the architectural aspects of the Inventor and SolidWorks APIs.

Elaborate error checking steps in the various bits of sample code are omitted in the interest of brevity. It is the responsibility of the programmer to ensure good error handling practice is adhered to, to help your production code be as robust as possible.

# Application Integration Types

The table below summarizes the different types of applications supported by SolidWorks, and outlines the equivalent Inventor related application types.

**Table 1: Application Types**

| Application Purpose  | SolidWorks Application Type | In Inventor, Use...                      |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| To learn to program; inspect code and objects; create simple forms | VBA macros                  | VBA macros                               |
| Drive model generation from Microsoft Excel, Access, Visio etc.    | VBA-enabled applications    | VBA-enabled applications                 |
| External application that needs to access the API                  | Standalone EXEs             | Standalone EXEs, Add-in EXEs, Apprentice |
| Custom embedded applications                                       | Add-in DLLs                 | Add-in DLLs or EXEs                      |

## How Do You Decide?

Here's some additional information to keep in mind about the suitability of different types of applications in Inventor:

- Standalone EXEs can be developed where you have a program that uses Inventor but has its own interface and doesn't require the user to interactively work with Inventor. For example, a batch plot utility would typically be developed as a standalone EXE.
- An Add-In application is able to modify the user interface and integrates tightly within the Inventor environment. In Inventor, there is the choice of creating the add-in as a DLL, which will run in the same process as Autodesk Inventor, or an EXE, which will run in a separate process.

Almost all Add-Ins will be written as DLLs for increased performance benefits.

- Autodesk also provides a subset of the Inventor API via a dll library called 'Apprentice server'. If you need read-only access to Autodesk Inventor data such as the assembly structure, B-Rep, geometry, and file properties, you can develop an Apprentice based application. This is an ActiveX server that can be used within other applications and essentially provides read-only access to Inventor Documents.

## Finding Your Way Around the Inventor API

Now that programming languages and target application-types have been discussed, let's take a closer look at some useful tools and some important areas for consideration when developing in the Inventor environment.

### **You Cannot Record Command Sequences But Master the Macros Anyway!**

One big difference between Inventor and SolidWorks is that Inventor doesn't support recording command sequences in a macro. However, macros are still the easiest mechanism to get started with the Inventor API. Follow [this](#) link for a concise overview detailing steps to edit and run Inventor VBA macros.

### **Use a Different Ruler**

All Inventor documents use the internal units of: Centimeters, Radians, Seconds, and Kilograms. Please keep this in mind as you migrate your code, as all SolidWorks APIs use meters for length by default, and metric units in general.

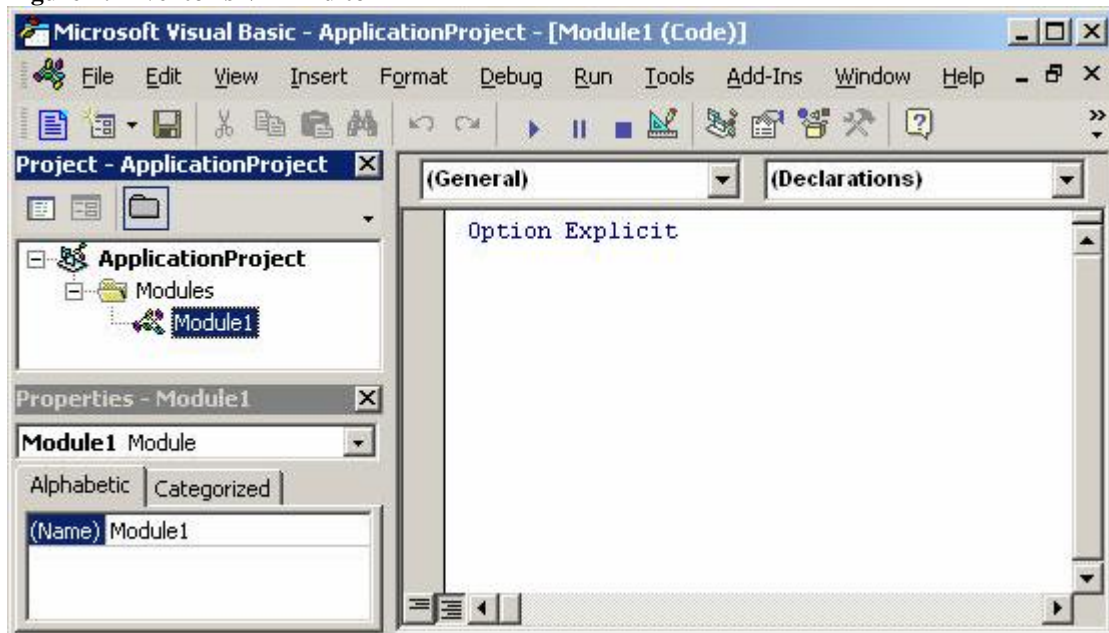
## Simple VBA Macros

To study the differences between SolidWorks and Inventor macros, let's look at some very simple code from the Inventor VBA documentation.

This simple subroutine will display a message box with the name of the active document. Although trivially simple, this example eases you into Inventor's VBA environment. A few differences between SolidWorks and Inventor will be identified along the way. Refer to [this guide](#) for a detailed look at how to get started with programming in Inventor's VBA environment, but following is a quick overview:

1. Access VBA using the **Macro | Visual Basic Editor** command in the Tools menu, or by pressing Alt-F11;
2. A code module is automatically created named "Module1". Double-click on the module in the Project Explorer window, as shown in Figure 1. This will cause the code window for that module to be displayed.

Figure 1: Inventor's VBA Editor



3. Copy and paste the Inventor code snippet below in the editor window, after the `Option Explicit` line shown in the figure.

### Displaying Active Document Name in SolidWorks

Here's how the sub would look in SolidWorks:

```
Public Sub DocDisplayName ()
```

```

Dim swApp As SldWorks.SldWorks

Dim swDoc As SldWorks.ModelDoc2

Dim sDocDisplayName As String

Set swDoc = swApp.ActiveDoc

sDocDisplayName = swDoc.GetTitle

MsgBox (sDocDisplayName)

End Sub

```

### **This is How It Will Look in Inventor**

```

Public Sub DocDisplayName ()

    Dim oDoc As Inventor.Document

    Dim sDocDisplayName As String

    Set oDoc = ThisApplication.ActiveDocument

    sDocDisplayName = oDoc.DisplayName

    MsgBox (sDocDisplayName)

End Sub

```

### **The Application and Document Are Right At Hand**

Note the "ThisApplication" global variable in the Inventor example that provides direct access to the Inventor application object. Similarly, the "ThisDocument" variable provides direct access to the Inventor document. However, it's not available for all macros, only for projects contained within an Inventor Document.

Inventor's VBA supports three types of projects: document, application, and user, which are different in terms of the location in which the project is stored. Document projects are stored within Autodesk Inventor documents. Application and user projects are stored in external files.

The document project exposes the "ThisDocument" object representing the document that contains the macro. Writing code within the ThisDocument module gives you direct access to the Inventor document.

# Exploring SolidWorks and Inventor

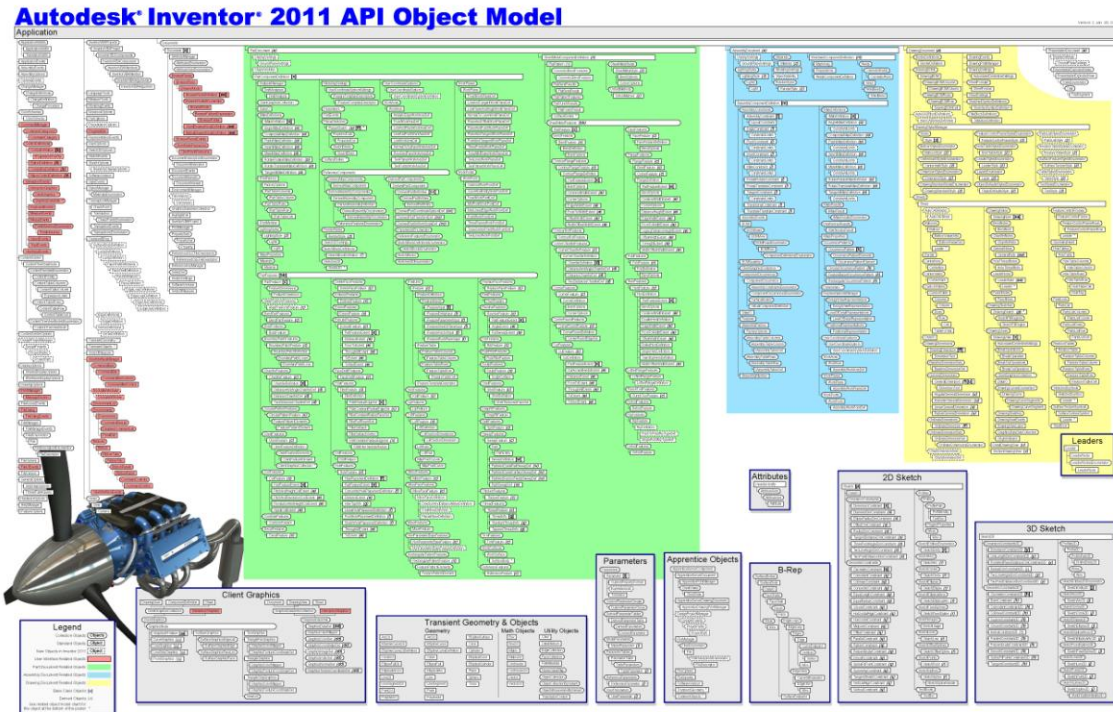
## Object Models

### Charting the Objects

The APIs for both SolidWorks and Inventor are essentially a set of "hooks", called as interfaces, into the underlying capability of the software. The terms interfaces and objects are often used interchangeably in API documentation, and the Object Model provides a representation of the various objects, their properties, and functions that are exposed to the outside world.

The various SolidWorks objects are documented primarily through API training material and the API product documentation. Similar resources are also available for Inventor and additionally, there is an Inventor 2011 Object Model diagram available [here](#) in PDF form. This can be printed as a wall poster and serves as an excellent at-glance reference to the Inventor API. Figure 2 shows an image of this poster.

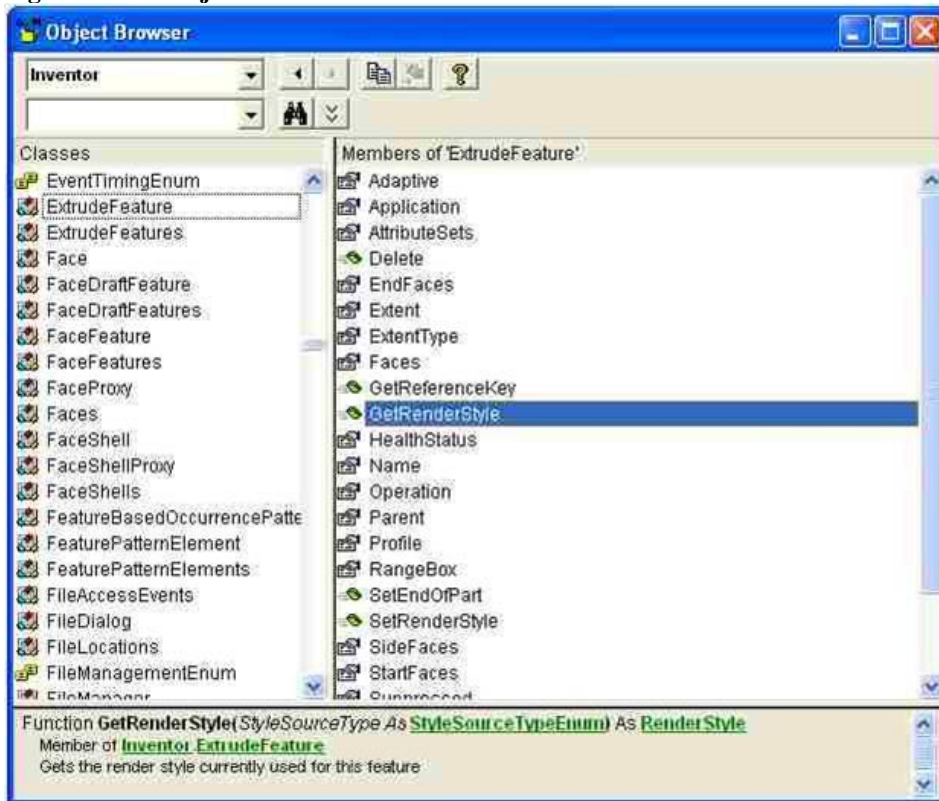
Figure 2: Inventor 2011 API Object Model




## Finding the Objects That You Need

There are two very helpful tools that you can use in the VBA Editor as you get acquainted with the Inventor object model. Use the Object Browser (Figure 3) to review the contents of the Inventor type library.

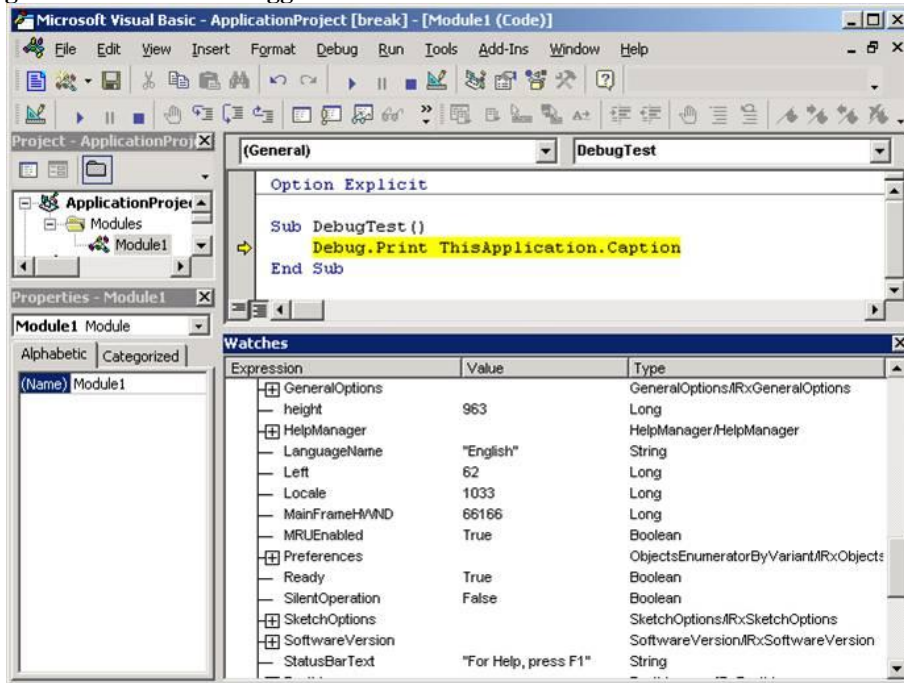
Figure 3: The Object Browser



Access it by clicking on the  toolbar button or by selecting the **Object Browser** command from the **View** menu.

You can also obtain a “live” view of the object model as you are debugging your code by using the VBA Debugger (Figure 4). Use it to see the values of object properties and contents of collections, for example.

**Figure 4: The VBA Debugger**



## Getting the Right Bucket

In SolidWorks, the core API functionality is contained within the SolidWorks.Interop.sldworks namespace. Add a reference to the type library using the "References..." command in VBA or VB. In Visual C++ you would use the #import statement.

Besides the main type library, you would reference one or more additional type libraries in SolidWorks for constants, add-ins, and utilities. In Inventor, referencing the namespace Autodesk.Inventor.Interop provides access to all of the objects that make up the Autodesk Inventor API.

## What Do You Need to Find?

The following table provides an overview of some of the key SolidWorks objects or object groups categorized by their functional area, and their Inventor equivalents.

**Table 2: Mapping High-Level Objects**

| SolidWorks Object/<br>Object Group   | Inventor Object/ Object Group         |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b><u>Application Interfaces</u></b> |                                       |
| SldWorks                             | Inventor                              |
| ModelDoc2                            | Document                              |
| PartDoc                              | PartDocument                          |
| AssemblyDoc                          | AssemblyDocument                      |
| DrawingDoc                           | DrawingDocument                       |
|                                      |                                       |
| <b><u>Model Interfaces</u></b>       |                                       |
| Attribute                            | Attribute                             |
| Body2                                | SurfaceBody                           |
| Face2                                | Face                                  |
| Loop2                                | EdgeLoop                              |
| CoEdge                               | EdgeUse                               |
| Edge                                 | Edge                                  |
| Vertex                               | Vertex                                |
| Dimension                            | FeatureDimension,<br>SketchDimensions |
| Modeler                              | TransientGeometry                     |
|                                      |                                       |
| <b><u>Assembly Interfaces</u></b>    |                                       |
| Component2                           | ComponentOccurrence                   |
| Interference                         | InterferenceResult                    |
| Mate2                                | AssemblyConstraint                    |
|                                      |                                       |
| <b><u>Drawing Interfaces</u></b>     |                                       |
| Layer                                | Layer                                 |
| Sheet                                | Sheet                                 |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| HoleTable                              | HoleTable                                      |
| RevisionTableFeature                   | RevisionTable                                  |
| TitleBlock                             | TitleBlock                                     |
| View                                   | DrawingView                                    |
|  |  |
| <b><u>Feature Interfaces</u></b>       |  |
| Feature                                | PartFeature                                    |
| Fillets                                | FilletFeatures                                 |
| Holes                                  | HoleFeatures                                   |
| Mold Tools                             | CoreCavityFeature                              |
| Patterns                               | PartFeatures                                   |
| Reference Geometry                     | Work Features                                  |
| Sheet Metal                            | SheetMetalFeatures                             |
| Surface                                | PartFeatures                                   |
| Weldments                              | Welds  |
|  |  |
| <b><u>Configuration Interfaces</u></b> |  |
| Configuration                          | iPartFactory, iAssemblyFactory                 |
| DesignTable                            | iPartTable*, iAssemblyTable*                   |
|  |  |
| <b><u>Sketch Interfaces</u></b>        |  |
| Sketch                                 | PlanarSketch, Sketch3D                         |
|  |  |
| <b><u>Annotation Interfaces</u></b>    |  |
| CenterLine                             | Centerline                                     |
| CenterMark                             | Centermark                                     |
| Note                                   | DrawingNote                                    |
| BomTableAnnotation                     | PartsList,<br>AssemblyComponentDefinition::BOM |
|  |  |

|   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <b><u>Enumeration Interfaces</u></b>    |                                       |
| EnumBodies2                             | SurfaceBodies                         |
| EnumComponents2                         | ComponentOccurrences                  |
| EnumDocuments2                          | Documents                             |
| EnumModelViews2                         | Document::Views, DrawingViews         |
|   |                                       |
| <b><u>Utility Interfaces</u></b>        |                                       |
| CustomPropertyManager                   | PropertySets                          |
| EquationMgr                             | Parameters                            |
| MassProperty                            | MassProperties                        |
| MathUtility                             | TransientGeometry                     |
| SelectionMgr                            | SelectSet                             |
|   |                                       |
| <b><u>User-interface Interfaces</u></b> |                                       |
| CommandManager                          | CommandManager, CommandBar, RibbonTab |
| FeatMgrView                             | BrowserPane                           |
| Frame                                   | Views/ UserInterfaceManager methods?  |
| ModelViewManager                        | Document, Views                       |
| PropertyManager                         | BrowserPane and/or Dockable Dialogs   |
|   |                                       |
| <b><u>Custom Interfaces</u></b>         |                                       |
| SwAddin                                 | ApplicationAddInServer                |

### **It's Arranged A Little Differently**

Glancing at the object model diagram, there are quite a few singular and plural forms of the same object name -- Document and Documents, Parameter and Parameters, etc. There are also a lot of "Definition" objects, or object names of

the form "xxDefinition". For example, PartComponentDefinition, FilletDefinition, iMateDefintion, and so on. These are explained in a bit more detail below.

## Collection Objects

In SolidWorks, collections are mainly used when working with the B-Rep; i.e. when building lists of specific faces, edges, and so on.

In the Inventor API however, most of the key objects have top-level collection objects. For example: Documents is the base collection that contains all open documents in the current session; the PartFeatures collection contains all the PartFeatures defined in a part, and so on.

A collection is a special type of object that provides iteration over existing objects. Collections, at a minimum, support the Count and Item properties which provide access to the number of objects within the collection and return specific objects from the collection respectively. They also support methods that allow you to create new objects.

Here's an example of how the collection object for extruded features makes it easy to get their count and names in Inventor:

```
Dim i As Long
For i = 1 To oExtrudeFeatures.Count
Debug.Print(oExtrudeFeatures.Item(i).Name)
Next
```

In SolidWorks, you would traverse the feature tree using the FirstFeature and GetNextFeature methods as we'll see in a later section, identify extruded features using the GetTypeNames2 string, and increment a counter within the loop to accomplish the same.

One important thing to note with collections in the Inventor API is that the index always begins with '1' and not '0' for all collections.

## Definition Objects

Definition objects are used in Inventor if you need to modify an object, and not just change its settings or visibility. For example, you will need to go through the `PartComponentDefinition` object if you need to change the BRep or geometric feature constraints for a part.

So for example, to add a sketch in SolidWorks, you would directly access the sketch object on the part document as follows:

```
Dim sketchManager As SldWorks.sketchManager  
  
Set sketchManager = partDocument.sketchManager  
  
sketchManager.InsertSketch True
```

In Inventor, you would need to go through the definition object for the part as follows:

```
Dim oCompDef As PartComponentDefinition  
  
oCompDef = _InvApplication.ActiveDocument.ComponentDefinition  
  
Dim oSketch As PlanarSketch  
  
oSketch = oCompDef.Sketches.Add(oCompDef.WorkPlanes.Item(3))
```

Note that in some cases definition objects are abstract forms, from which you create instances. For example, `TitleBlockDefinition` is used to create `TitleBlocks`. Others like `PartComponentDefinition` and `AssemblyComponentDefinition` are concrete objects, associated with Part and Assembly geometry respectively in this case.

## Getting Things Done

Now that we have a handy reference to the Inventor object model and a preliminary correlation with some of the key SolidWorks objects, let's take a closer look at some commonly used objects and tasks.

### Accessing the Application Object

As we have seen in an earlier section, you can access the top-level Inventor application object from Inventor's VBA using the ThisApplication property. Additionally, you can access it from an add-in, which we'll cover a little later, and also from outside Inventor using GetObject or CreateObject methods.

[Here's](#) a very detailed explanation of various means available to you to connect with Inventor and to get access to the Application object.

### Creating and Accessing Documents

Here's a side-by-side example of how you would open an existing document or a new one based on the default templates using Inventor API as compared to SolidWorks.

| SolidWorks Code  | Inventor Code  |
|--|--|
| <b>'Opens an existing document</b>   |  |
| <pre>Public Sub OpenDoc()      Dim swApp As SldWorks.SldWorks     Set swApp = Application.SldWorks     Dim fileerror As Long     Dim filewarning As Long      swApp.OpenDoc6     "C:\Temp\Part1.sldprt",     swDocPART,     swOpenDocOptions_Silent, "",     fileerror, filewarning  End Sub</pre> | <pre>Public Sub OpenDoc()      Dim oDoc As Document     oDoc =     _InvApplication.Documents.Open("     C:\Temp\Part1.ipt")  End Sub</pre> |
| <b>'Creates a new document using the default template</b>  |  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <pre> Public Sub CreateDoc()      Dim swApp As SldWorks.SldWorks     Set swApp = Application.SldWorks      'Get the default template file     name with path for Part document     Dim templateFileName As String     templateFileName =     swApp.GetDocumentTemplate(swDocu     mentTypes_e.swDocPART, "", 0, 0,     0)      'Create a new SolidWorks part     document with the default part     template     Dim partDocument As     SldWorks.ModelDoc2     Set partDocument =     swApp.NewDocument(templateFileNa     me, 0, 0, 0)  End Sub </pre> | <pre> Public Sub CreateDoc()      'Get the default template file     name with path for Part document     Dim templateFileName As String     templateFileName =     _InvApplication.FileManager.GetT     emplateFile(DocumentTypeEnum.kPa     rtDocumentObject)      'Create a new Inventor part     document with the default part     template     Dim oDoc As PartDocument     oDoc =     _InvApplication.Documents.Add(Do     cumentTypeEnum.kPartDocumentObje     ct, templateFileName, True)  End Sub </pre> |
|--|--|

Here are the main objects that we used in this example:

- SolidWorks: SldWorks, ModelDoc2
- Inventor: Inventor, Documents, FileManager.

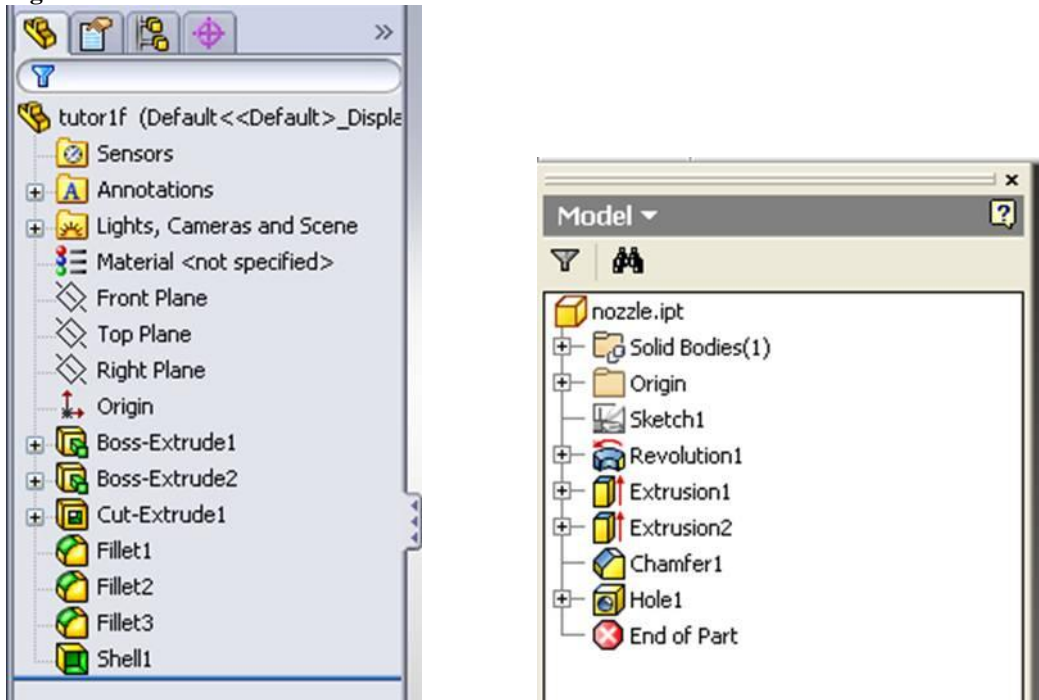
## Traversing Features

We have seen a code snippet above of how the PartComponentDefinition object would need to be accessed first in order to insert a sketch in Inventor. Creating a sketch is typically the first step of creating a part feature.

The PlanarSketch and Sketch3D API's in Inventor are very similar to the equivalent SolidWorks Sketch API, so let's focus on traversing existing features instead. This is typically a very frequent operation in SolidWorks, so it's important to understand how to traverse the features in Inventor.

Figure 5 shows the features of the tutor1f.sldprt part file in SolidWorks and nozzle.ipt part in Inventor. Both of these files are installed as standard samples with your installations.

**Figure 5: Feature Trees in SolidWorks & Inventor**



The collection objects in Inventor greatly simplify traversing features - we simply use the Features or PartFeatures collection. The code, as you can see below, is fairly straightforward:

```
Private Sub FeatureTraversal()  
  
    Dim Doc As PartDocument  
  
    Set Doc = ThisApplication.ActiveDocument  
  
    Dim oFeature As PartFeature  
  
    For Each oFeature In Doc.ComponentDefinition.Features  
  
        Debug.Print oFeature.Name  
  
    Next  
  
End Sub
```

This macro produces the following output, and can be compared with the model tree shown in the figure:

```

Revolution1

Extrusion1

Extrusion2

Chamfer1

Hole1

```

Accessing Inventor Part features is typically accomplished using this technique, however if you were looking to do something equivalent of traversing the SolidWorks FeatureManager Design Tree in Inventor, then you would use methods on the Model BrowserPane, which is similar to the FeatureManager user interface in SolidWorks.

The main objects that we would use for the model tree traversal are as follows:

- SolidWorks: SldWorks, ModelDoc2, Feature
- Inventor: Inventor, Document, BrowserPanels, BrowserNode, BrowserNodeDefinition.

Here is a side by side look at the above objects in action:

**Table 3: Feature Tree Traversal**

| <b>SolidWorks</b>   | <b>Inventor</b>   |
|---|---|
| <pre> Sub main() 'First, obtain the Document object.   Dim swApp As SldWorks.SldWorks   Dim swModel As SldWorks.ModelDoc2   Set swApp = Application.SldWorks   If Not swApp Is Nothing Then     Set swModel = swApp.ActiveDoc   End If  'Now obtain the first feature in the </pre> | <pre> Private Sub QueryModelTree() 'First, obtain the Document object.   Dim Doc As Document    If (ThisApplication.Documents.Count &lt;&gt; 0) Then     Set Doc = ThisApplication.ActiveDocument   End If </pre> |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <pre> FeatureManager design tree      Dim swFeature As SldWorks.Feature     Set swFeature = swModel.FirstFeature  'Print the feature name if the feature is visible 'and move on to the next feature, if any     While Not swFeature Is Nothing         If Not swFeature.GetUIState (swIsHiddenInFeatureMgr) Then             Debug.Print swFeature.Name             Set swFeature = swFeature.GetNextFeature         End If     Wend  End Sub </pre> | <pre> 'Now obtain the top node for the browser pane of the model tab.     Dim oTopNode As BrowserNode     Set oTopNode = Doc.BrowserPanels ("Model").TopNode  'Call the routine named "recurse", which prints 'the node definition label and moves on to the next 'node, if any.     Call recurse (oTopNode)  End Sub  'This routine calls itself for each node in the collection of browser nodes, 'printing the node definition label of each node.  Sub recurse (node As BrowserNode)     If (node.Visible = True) Then         Debug.Print node.BrowserNodeDefinition.Label         Dim bn As BrowserNode         For Each bn In node.BrowserNodes             Call recurse (bn)         Next     End If End Sub </pre> |
|---|---|

Here is what the output looks like in the VBA Immediate window:

**Table 4: Feature Traversal Output**

|                           |                  |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| Comments                  | nozzle.ipt       |
| Sensors                   | Solid Bodies (1) |
| Design Binder             | Solid1           |
| Annotations               | Revolution1      |
| Surface Bodies            | Sketch1          |
| Solid Bodies              | Extrusion1       |
| Lights, Cameras and Scene | Sketch1          |
| Equations                 | Extrusion2       |
| Material <not specified>  | Sketch1          |
| Front Plane               | Chamfer1         |
| Top Plane                 | Hole1            |
| Right Plane               | Sketch2          |
| Origin                    | Origin           |
| Sketch2                   | YZ Plane         |

|               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| Boss-Extrude1 | XZ Plane     |
| Sketch4       | XY Plane     |
| Boss-Extrude2 | Center Point |
| Sketch6       | Sketch1      |
| Cut-Extrude1  | Revolution1  |
| Fillet1       | Sketch1      |
| Fillet2       | Extrusion1   |
| Fillet3       | Sketch1      |
| Shell1        | Extrusion2   |
|               | Sketch1      |
|               | Chamfer1     |
|               | Hole1        |
|               | Sketch2      |
|               | End of Part  |

As you can see, this has generated a listing of all the nodes in the model tree.

### Accessing User Selections

User selections are typically made via the graphics area, model view or the client area (or whatever you like to call the model display area). The following section illustrates how items and objects in a model that can be selected via the screen are accessed through the API.

The example below compares how a single face, picked by the user on screen, is accessed programmatically, and its surface area calculated. Models used in the previous example are re-used here.

The respective objects used are:-

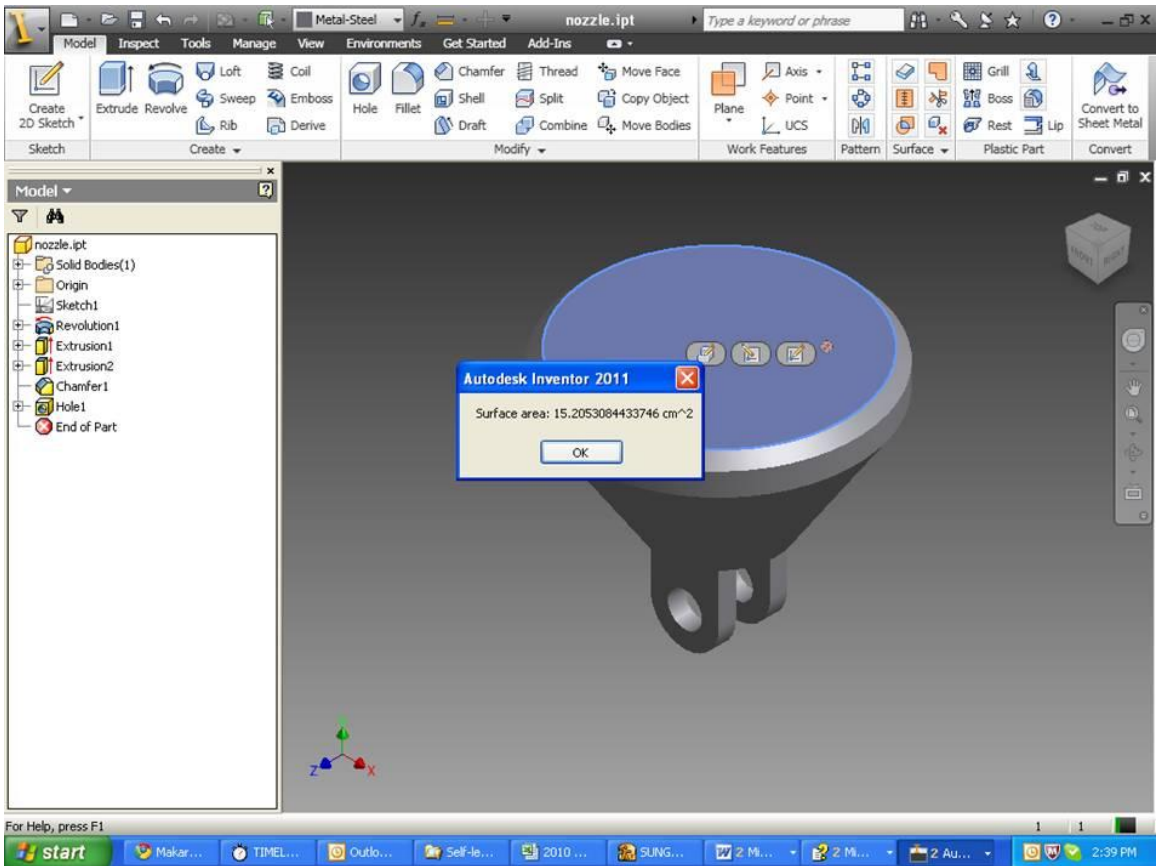
- SolidWorks: SldWorks, ModelDoc2, SelectionManager, Face2
- Inventor: Inventor, Document, SelectSet, and Face.

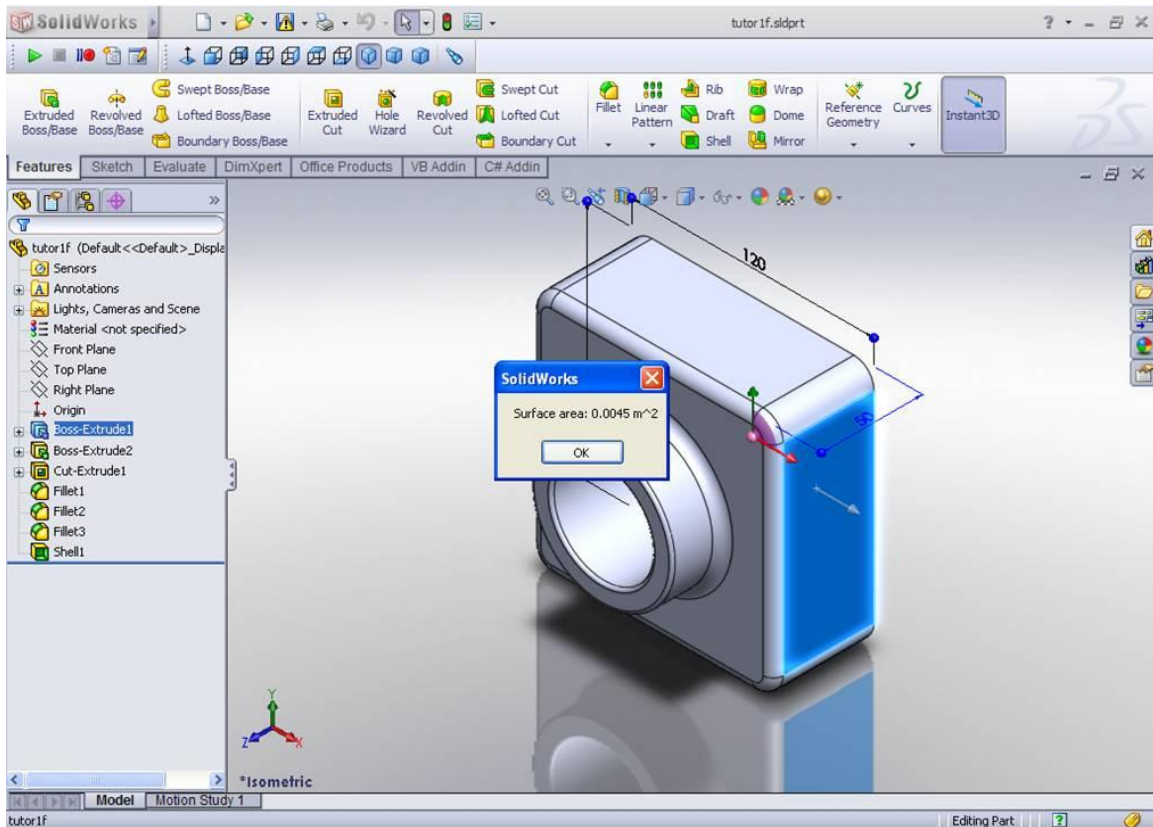
Note that both the Inventor SelectSet object and the SolidWorks SelectionManager have their first index as 1, not zero. Also, knowing what the internal default API units are, can you tell what units the area values will be in for each program?

**Table 5: Onscreen Selection & Query Code**

| <b>SolidWorks Code</b> | <b>Inventor Code</b>         |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Sub main()             | Public Sub ShowSurfaceArea() |

| SolidWorks Code  | Inventor Code  |
|--|--|
| <pre> Dim swApp As SldWorks.SldWorks Dim swModel As SldWorks.ModelDoc2 Dim swSelMgr As SldWorks.SelectionMgr  ' Set a reference to the SelectionManager object of the active document. Set swApp = Application.SldWorks Set swModel = swApp.ActiveDoc Set swSelMgr = swModel.SelectionManager  ' Check to make sure a single item was selected. If (swSelMgr.GetSelectedObjectCount2(0)) = 1 Then     ' Check to make sure a face was selected.     Dim selType As Long     selType = swSelMgr.GetSelectedObjectType3(1, 0)     If (selType = SwConst.swSelFACES) Then         ' Set a reference to the selected face.         Dim swFace As Face2         Set swFace = swSelMgr.GetSelectedObject6(1, 0)          ' Display the area of the selected face.         MsgBox "Surface area: " &amp; swFace.GetArea &amp; " m^2"         Exit Sub     Else         MsgBox "You must select a single face."         Exit Sub     End If Else     MsgBox "You must select a single face."     Exit Sub End If  End Sub </pre> | <pre> ' Set a reference to the select set of the active document. Dim oSelectSet As SelectSet Set oSelectSet = ThisApplication.ActiveDocument.SelectSet  ' Check to make sure a single item was selected. If oSelectSet.Count = 1 Then     ' Check to make sure a face was selected.      If TypeOf oSelectSet.Item(1) Is Face Then         ' Set a reference to the selected face.         Dim oFace As Face         Set oFace = oSelectSet.Item(1)          ' Display the area of the selected face.         MsgBox "Surface area: " &amp; oFace.Evaluator.Area &amp; " cm^2"         Exit Sub     Else         MsgBox "You must select a single face."         Exit Sub     End If Else     MsgBox "You must select a single face."     Exit Sub End If  End Sub </pre> |





## Assemblies -- New Terminology to Learn

Assemblies add an additional level of flexibility to modeling systems, and with it an additional level of complexity. The following concepts need to be understood when dealing with assemblies:- parts, part references, multiple instances of parts in an assembly, subassemblies; mate constraints, transforms, and interference. Taken in isolation these individual concepts are reasonably straight forward to understand. Together they provide a very powerful mechanism for building large scale models.

In Inventor, the API terminology for assemblies differs from that used in SolidWorks, and once you become familiar with these differences and understand the underlying concepts it becomes relatively easy to cross-correlate the objects and find new features and object within Inventor to supplement your toolbox to help you obtain even more power and control over assemblies. The

Inventor API online help documents provide an excellent introduction, so a brief overview is provided here.

Firstly the API object terminology. Table 6 details the key SolidWorks objects along with the equivalent Inventor API objects:

**Table 6: Assembly Objects**

| <b>SolidWorks Object</b> | <b>Inventor Object</b> | <b>Comments</b>  |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--|
| Component                | ComponentOccurrence    | As with a SolidWorks component, a ComponentOccurrence can also be a part or an assembly. There is also a ComponentOccurrences collection object. |
| Mate                     | Mate Constraint        |  |
| MathTransform            | Matrix                 | In general, use the TransientGeometry object for various matrix transform and math utilities.  |

### Proxy Objects

Inventor also uses a concept called ‘Proxies’, or ‘Proxy Objects’. These are a set of objects that make it easy for you to work with parts, features, and geometric entities while they are being used within an assembly.

For example, a part may be located and oriented differently while being used in an assembly, and the coordinates of say, a vertex on that part will be different in the original part document than in the assembly document. A transformation matrix needs to be applied to go from one system to another.

Proxy Objects take care of this transform in Inventor. Simply stated, the proxy will obtain the data related to any sub parts or subassemblies in the context of the main assembly.

The following table details some of the main tasks typically performed on assemblies, along with the associated SolidWorks and Inventor APIs.

**Table 7: Assembly APIs**

| <b>Task</b>                      | <b>SolidWorks APIs</b>  | <b>Inventor APIs</b>  |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Add components into an assembly  | AssemblyDoc::AddComponent5  | ComponentOccurrences::Add   |
| Locate and orient the components | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MathUtility::CreateTransform</li> <li>• Component2::Transform2</li> </ul>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TransientGeometry::CreateMatrix</li> <li>• ComponentOccurrence::Transformation</li> </ul>                  |
| Define Joints between components | AssemblyDoc::AddMate3   | AssemblyConstraints::AddMateConstraint  |
| Check for interference           | AssemblyDoc::ToolsCheckInterference2  | AssemblyComponentDefinition::AnalyzeInterference  |
| Traverse assembly components     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IConfiguration::GetRootComponent3</li> <li>• IComponent2::GetChildren</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AssemblyComponentDefinition::ComponentOccurrence</li> <li>• ComponentOccurrence::SubOccurrences</li> </ul> |

To use proxies, the CreateGeometryProxy method of the ComponentOccurrence object is the main access point. You can request a proxy object for any entity that exists under the tree of that ComponentOccurrence.

### **Working with Drawings**

Assuming you have an existing model that you would like to create a new drawing for, here is a look at functions that you would use in Inventor corresponding to those in SolidWorks.

## Creating Drawing Sheets

The following methods are used to create a new drawing and add a blank sheet:

- Create a new drawing document: SldWorks::NewDocument --> Documents::Add
- Add a new sheet: DrawingDoc::NewSheet3 --> Sheets::Add
- Additionally, you will need to add a border and title block in Inventor using the following methods: Sheet::AddDefaultBorder, and Sheet::AddTitleBlock.

## Placing Model Views On A Sheet

To insert standard orthographic views, equivalent of DrawingDoc::Create3rdAngleViews2 in SolidWorks, create a base view first and then add 2 projected views using the following methods:

- DrawingViews::AddBaseView
- DrawingViews::AddProjectedView

Use methods on the TransientGeometry objects to define the locations of the views.

## Retrieving Dimensions From the Base Model

To insert dimensions from the underlying model in a drawing sheet in Inventor, use the Retrieve method of the GeneralDimension object as shown in the example below. This will produce results equivalent to the SolidWorks DrawingDoc::InsertModelAnnotations3 method.

```
Public Sub RetrievalDimensionsFromModel()  
  
Dim oDrawing As DrawingDocument  
  
Set oDrawing = ThisApplication.ActiveDocument
```

```

Dim oView As DrawingView

Set oView = oDrawing.ActiveSheet.DrawingViews(1)

Dim oDimColl As GeneralDimensionsEnumerator

Set                                     oDimColl                                     =
oDrawing.ActiveSheet.DrawingDimensions.GeneralDimensions.Retrieve(oView
)

End Sub

```

If this does not achieve the desired result for any reason, create the dimensions using appropriate "GeometryIntent" objects. The concept of Geometry Intent is explained in the next section.

### **New Drawing Document Concept: Geometry Intent**

In Inventor, methods to create drawing dimensions expect geometry points to be supplied in the form of GeometryIntent objects.

To better understand such objects, imagine a leader line and arrow pointing to a user-selected point on a drawing line. Leader line associativity to the selected spot on the drawing line needs to be maintained, but there is no point geometry midway on the drawing line to reference. In this case, a GeometryIntent object encapsulates the intent to reference a location on the drawing line, a certain distance from a particular end.

Similarly, dimensions require GeometryIntent objects because, unlike the Autodesk Inventor modeling environment, the drawing environment contains only 2D lines, arcs and circles - no points. So, a GeometryIntent object for a dimension might reference a particular end of a line or arc, or the center of a circle or arc.

There is more information on using GeometryIntent objects, and drawing automation, in the Inventor API documentation and also the following article:

<http://augiru.augi.com/content/library/au07/data/paper/DE111-4.pdf>.

# Customizing the User Interface

## Start With a Wizard

Customizing the Inventor user interface is typically done via an add-in application. An add-in provides you with the widest access to user interface elements and the tightest integration. This is true in both Inventor and SolidWorks.

The easiest and best method to get started with add-in development in Inventor is to use one of the various Visual Studio wizards provided, which are similar to the wizards distributed with SolidWorks. Use the following step-by-step guide to have your skeletal add-in application up and running in a few easy steps: <http://modthemachine.typepad.com/files/VBAtoAddIn.pdf>. The steps attributed to Visual Basic 2008 Express in this paper will apply equally well to the latest Visual Basic 2010 Express edition as well.

When following the steps outlined in the above whitepaper, take a special note of the following:

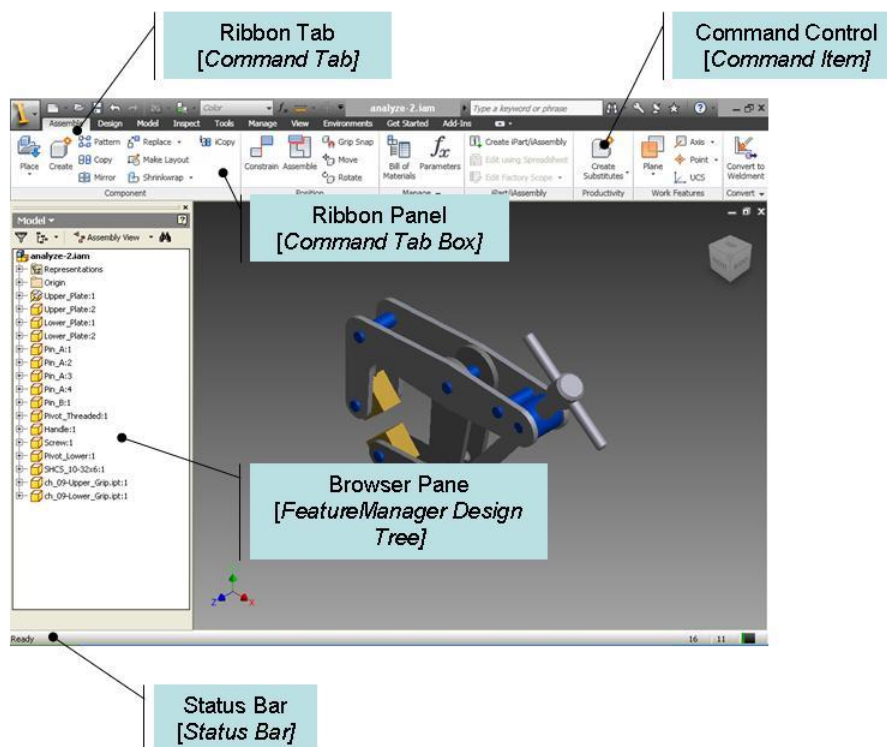
- **ThisApplication No More:** An Add-In doesn't have the ThisApplication property and needs to get access to the Inventor Application object another way. The m\_inventorApplication variable will provide this access.
- **Compare the Add-In Class and Methods:** Note the add-in object's class and required methods that correspond to your add-in in SolidWorks:
  - SwAddIn --> ApplicationAddInServer
  - SwAddIn::ConnectToSW --> ApplicationAddInServer::Activate
  - SwAddIn::DisconnectFromSW --> ApplicationAddInServer::Deactivate

# Mapping the User Interface

The default user interface for Inventor 2011 is the "Ribbon" interface, which is based on the Microsoft Windows Presentation Foundation (WPF) technology. Inventor still supports the classic interface with menus and panel bars, which you will find comparable to the SolidWorks 2010 interface. The following discussion focuses on the Ribbon interface as this is the current default in Inventor, and represents the immediate future.

The figure below shows the Inventor 2011 user interface elements along with the corresponding SolidWorks element names (in parentheses). Refer to the Overviews articles in the User Interface Customization section of the Inventor API documentation for additional images and descriptions of the UI elements.

**Figure 6: Comparing the User Interfaces**



# Comparing Customizable UI Elements

This section summarizes how the UI elements that can be customized in SolidWorks would be accessed and modified in Inventor.

## Menus and Toolbars

Although the default Ribbon interface replaces the older menu and panel bars in Inventor, the following options are available to replicate your SolidWorks menus and toolbars in Inventor:

- Add them to a Ribbon tab;
- Use the classic Inventor interface and add to the menus and command bars.

If the API for the “classic” Inventor interface is used, and the user switches to the Ribbon interface the application program will continue to work and will automatically have its controls added to the Ribbon interface, but to have better placement of controls the Ribbon API should be used.

## FeatureManager

As mentioned earlier, use the Browser Pane in Inventor to have an equivalent of the SolidWorks FeatureManager design tree.

## PropertyManager

There is no direct equivalent of the SolidWorks PropertyManager page in Inventor. But there are a few other options:

- Construct a standard Visual Studio dialog to migrate the PropertyManager page;

- Create additional panes within the browser. Because the additional panes are just ActiveX control containers, they can contain any type of information and can even consist of other ActiveX controls;
- Create dockable windows that can host dialogs and controls.

## Model Views

To add controls to the graphics screen, simply obtain View::HWND and use the relevant Microsoft Windows APIs. The View::Camera object can also be used to define or modify the model views.

## Pop-up Menus

To achieve the equivalent of adding a command group to a shortcut menu in SolidWorks, use the context menu interface provided by the Inventor API.

## Status Bar

Similar to the Frame object on the SolidWorks application object, the StatusBarText property of the Inventor application object can be used to set the text in the status bar. To provide 'real time' instructions to the end user during a specific interaction, use the StatusBarText property of the InteractionEvents object.

# Mapping the User Interface API Objects

The table below summarizes the approximate equivalents of the key objects that you would use in SolidWorks to access the UI elements described above:

- **Command Group:** CommandManager::CreateCommandGroup --> RibbonTabs::Add
- **Command Item:** CommandGroup::AddCommandItem --> CommandControls::AddButton

- **Feature Manager:** ModelViewManager::CreateFeatureMgrControl3 --> BrowserPanels::Add
- **Pop-up Menus:** CommandManager::AddContextMenu --> CommandBarControls::AddButton
- **Status Bar Text:** StatusBarPane::Text --> Inventor::StatusBarText

# Advanced Topics

## The B-Rep API

The Boundary Representation method, abbreviated as B-Rep or BREP, forms the geometrical foundation for both SolidWorks and Inventor and indeed for the majority of modern CAD applications. It is a method to represent solid geometry in terms of its constituent "boundary" elements such as faces, edges etc., and their interrelationships.

B-Rep, and computer-aided geometric design (CAGD) in general is a vast topic, so this discussion is limited to accomplishing common geometry tasks familiar to SolidWorks users using the Inventor B-Rep API. For a more thorough discussion of B-Rep, please refer to the Inventor 2011 Online API Reference and the Virtual Inventor API Training Webcast B-Rep topic.

### Comparing the B-Rep Models

When it comes to the B-Rep API's, one of the most important concepts to understand is the classification of B-Rep elements into "topology" and "geometry". Topology refers to the structure of a part whereas geometry refers to the spacial definition of the entities that make up the part.

Here is the topology object model in SolidWorks:

- SolidWorks: Body2 --> Face2 --> Loop2 --> CoEdge --> Edge --> Vertex

The corresponding topology objects in Inventor could be outlined as follows, not considering the collection objects:

- SurfaceBody --> FaceShell --> Face --> EdgeLoop --> Edge --> Vertex.

The Inventor FaceShell object provides an additional level of representation which could be useful for determining whether the body it belongs to is closed (as opposed to open sheet metal, for example), and for calculating volumes etc.

Table 8 shows the correspondence between the topology and geometry objects in SolidWorks and Inventor:

**Table 8: Topology and Geometry Objects**

| SolidWorks Topology → Geometry | Inventor Topology → Geometry                                       |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Face2 → Surface                | Face → Surface (BSplineSurface, Cone, Cylinder, etc., for example) |
| Edge → Curve                   | Edge → Curve (Arc2D, Circle2D, etc.)                               |
| Vertex → Point                 | Vertex → Point   |

### Accessing Topology Objects

There are several ways to access the topological information of a model, including from features, from user selections, by proximity calculations, from attributes, and more. One method that is commonly used in both SolidWorks and Inventor is to traverse the B-Rep hierarchy starting with the body object.

Here are some of the accessor functions to bodies from SolidWorks and Inventor part and assembly documents:

- PartDoc::GetBodies2 --> PartComponentDefinition::SurfaceBodies
- Component2::GetBodies3 --> ComponentOccurrence::SurfaceBodies

To get to the faces in a body, the equivalent of SolidWorks' Body2::GetFirstFace and Face2::GetNextFace sequence in Inventor is as follows, starting with how the body object is accessed:

```
Dim oPartDef As PartComponentDefinition

Set oPartDef = ThisApplication.ActiveDocument.ComponentDefinition

Dim oSurfaceBody As SurfaceBody
```

```
Dim oFace As Face
For Each oSurfaceBody In oPartDef.SurfaceBodies
For Each oFace In oSurfaceBody.Faces
...

```

The B-Rep tree can also be traversed using short-cut accessors without traversing every child object, e.g.:-

- Face2::GetEdges --> Face::Edges
- Edge::GetStartVertex --> Edge::StartVertex

### Evaluating Geometry

Once the required topology object(s) are obtained, the underlying geometry element can be queried, which provides the associated geometric information such as lengths, areas, curvatures, and so on.

Here are some of the accessor objects to the geometry for SolidWorks and Inventor:

- Face2::GetSurface --> Face::Geometry
- Edge::GetCurve --> Edge::Geometry
- Vertex::GetPoint --> Vertex::Point

The geometry can then be evaluated for information that is required for any subsequent calculations or analysis. As an example, a face can be examined to determine whether or not a face it is planar by using the Inventor equivalent of the SolidWorks Surface::IsPlane method. The 2D rectangular representation of it in the parameter space can also then be obtained if necessary. The following example evaluates a face, and then obtains the range box values using the equivalent of the SolidWorks' Surface::Parameterization, as follows:

```
Dim oFace As Face

If oFace.SurfaceType = kPlaneSurface Then

Dim oEval As SurfaceEvaluator

Set oEval = oFace.Evaluator

Dim oRange As Box2d

Set oRange = oEval.ParamRangeRect

...
```

Refer to the Inventor API help documentation for a complete list of evaluator objects and methods.

### **Persistent References**

BRep objects tend to be transient in nature and change as the model features are modified. Any time the model is recomputed, the BRep object references become invalid. For example, a reference to a Face object becomes invalid if features that drive or impact on that face are added or modified.

In SolidWorks safe entities could be used to address such changes. Similarly, in Inventor, you can create a reference key to a topological entity before any features edits and then use this reference key to obtain that entity again after each feature has been added.

Reference keys provide a persistent reference to a particular BRep object between model recomputes.

For further details, search for the Reference Keys example in the API product documentation.

## Custom Attributes

This section discusses custom attributes in SolidWorks, and how they can be translated into Inventor attributes. Attributes are used to store application-specific information along with the CAD model, and can be added to almost any object.

The following table outlines the correspondence between SolidWorks and Inventor attribute objects:

- **Define Attributes**
- SldWorks::AttributeDef --> [InventorEntity]::AttributeSet
- SldWorks::DefineAttribute --> AttributeSet::Add
- **Populate Attributes**
- SldWorks::Parameter --> AttributeSet::Attribute
- AttributeDef::AddParameter --> AttributeSet::Add
- **Attach Attributes**
- AttributeDef::CreateInstance5 --> Not needed in Inventor since the attribute is already attached to an object during creation.
- **Find Attributes**
- Just as feature traversal is the preferred method to search for attributes in SolidWorks and not B-Rep traversal, Inventor provides a special object for efficient attribute searches, called Document::AttributeManager.

## Events and Notifications

Events are either user actions or software actions that are of interested to an application. The application may need to handle specific events, and respond to them in some way. The Notification capability in both SolidWorks and Inventor provide you with mechanisms to do that.

## Start with Add-In Template Code

It is straight forward to test events in Inventor VBA, but not recommended that macros take advantage of them. Events are best managed from a full blown Add-In. A wizard-generated Inventor add-in project or the AddInEvents labs solution from the Inventor webcast archives are good starting points when trying to understand this topic -- you will find this in Module 10. Familiarity with handling notifications in SolidWorks is also essential.

## Look for AddHandler Calls

Once you have the skeletal Inventor add-in application, look in the file StandardAddInServer.vb for calls to "AddHandler" in the Activate() function. As outlined in the section on Customizing the User Interface, the Activate() function is similar to the ConnectToSW() function in SolidWorks. Compare the AddHandler calls in SolidWorks as well, which can be reached by stepping through ConnectToSW(). These are the notifications that this sample application is going to handle.

Let's look at a specific AddHandler call in SolidWorks code that will notify us when a file is opened:

```
AddHandler iSwApp.FileOpenPostNotify, _  
    AddressOf Me.SldWorks_FileOpenPostNotify
```

Here's how the equivalent AddHandler call will appear in the Inventor-generated code:

```
AddHandler m_ApplicationEvents.OnOpenDocument, AddressOf  
Me.m_ApplicationEvents_OnOpenDocument
```

## Add Your Code to the Notification Functions

Now look for the subroutine with the name highlighted above, and that is where the definition of the OnOpenDocument handler is located. The SolidWorks code

to handle file open will need to appear in this function, modified appropriately to use Inventor objects. Also note that while the SolidWorks function in the above example will notify you *after* a file is opened, Inventor handles both before and after notifications in a single function and informs you which one is currently triggered via the *BeforeOrAfter* argument for the function.

Here's an example of how the function could be used to display the name of the document after it was opened:

```
Private Sub m_ApplicationEvents_OnOpenDocument(ByVal DocumentObject As
Inventor.Document, _ ByVal FullDocumentName As String, _ ByVal
BeforeOrAfter As Inventor.EventTimingEnum, _ ByVal Context As
Inventor.NameValueMap, _ ByRef HandlingCode As
Inventor.HandlingCodeEnum)

    Select Case (BeforeOrAfter)

        Case kAfter

            System.Windows.Forms.MessageBox.Show("OnOpenDocument: " +
            DocumentObject.DisplayName)

        Case kBefore

            Debug.Print " Before"

        Case Else

            Debug.Print " Aborted"

    End Select

End Sub
```

The Autodesk Inventor API supports notification of many events ranging across the entire API and notifications are available for commonly used objects.

This was just an outline describing how to migrate event handling code from SolidWorks to Inventor. For additional learning material on handling notifications in Inventor, please refer to the API Overviews in product documentation and the Module 10 presentation mentioned above.

# Graphics

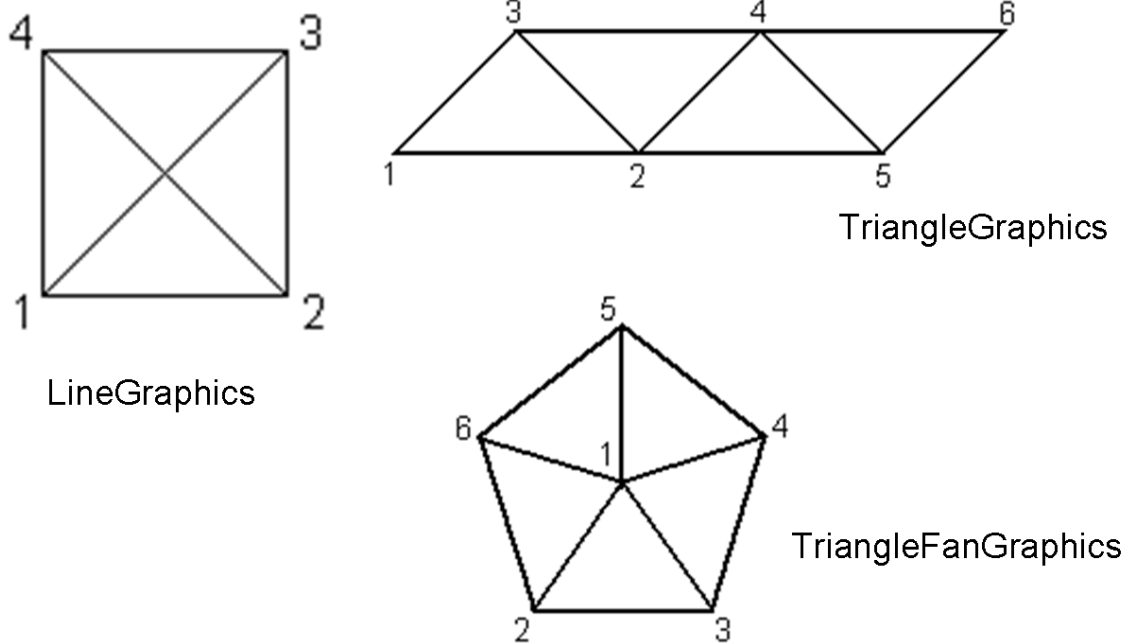
Computer graphics is a vast topic and a basic understanding of interactive computer graphics concepts can help considerably when working with CAD graphics. Some of the key concepts that are typically taught in introductory computer graphics curricula include graphics pipeline, graphics hardware, transformations and viewing, mouse and keyboard input, lighting and surface shading, rendering optimization and so on. A detailed discussion of these topics is outside the scope of this paper.

## Use Native Primitives

In SolidWorks add-ins can use the API to draw directly into the model view window using notifications available on the ModelView object, typically using OpenGL. The Add-In responds to repaint and buffer swap events so that custom graphics primitives can be added into the SolidWorks model window.

Inventor graphics are handled very differently. The Inventor API provides its own graphic primitives -- points, lines, triangles, text; collectively called "ClientGraphics" -- that are maintained and transformed by Inventor. Some of these primitives are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: ClientGraphics Primitives



Like all graphics programming, creating Client Graphics follows a two step process, first creating graphics data, and secondly displaying this data using primitives. This separation of data from graphics allows a single set of data to be referenced by many graphics primitives.

### Graphics for Real-time Interaction

A recently introduced object in Inventor called InteractionGraphics operates in a manner similar to regular ClientGraphics, except that it is available only when the user is interacting with the model. InteractionGraphics are much faster and so are well suited to real-time feedback during a command.

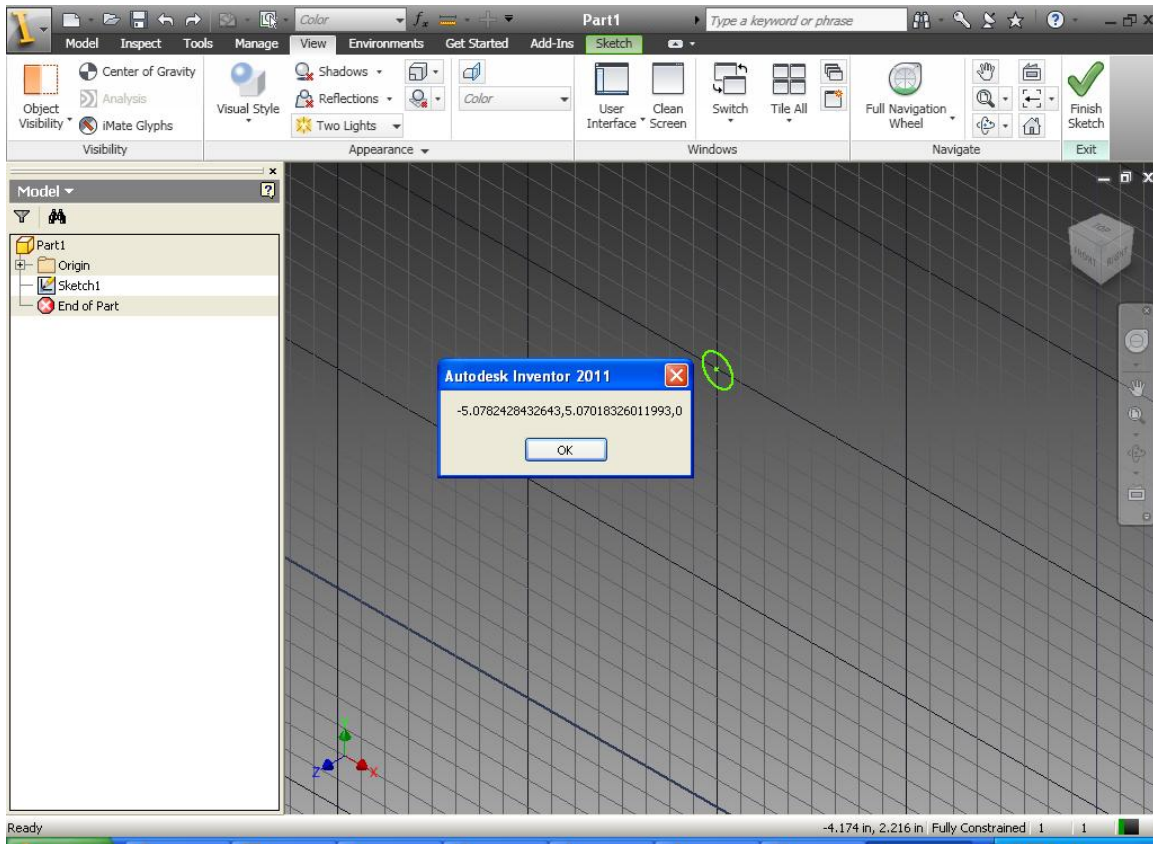
### Mouse and Keyboard Inputs

In the SolidWorks API, if you want to perform custom graphical actions or calculations in response to mouse inputs – button clicks, move, drag, etc. – mouse event handlers would typically be added and the relevant callbacks implemented using the procedure outlined above. If, however, custom graphics objects are created using OpenGL and the Add-In needs to capture selection,

keyboard input and so on, then functions outside the SolidWorks API would be required. The typical method in that case would be to override the graphics window procedure with a call to a Windows SDK function, a technique known as subclassing the WndProc.

In Inventor, if ClientGraphics are used to create custom graphical entities, there is no need to use Windows SDK API's for mouse or keyboard inputs. The InteractionEvents object in the Inventor API provides access to mouse and keyboard events, and behaves like an Autodesk Inventor command. When started, the currently running command is terminated and it becomes the active command. All input from the user is then directed to the InteractionEvents object. Depending on which events you choose to subscribe to you can listen and respond to the user's input. Figure 8 shows the output from the MouseEvents example in the API training lab 10b which handles the OnMouseDown event to let the user select a point on a sketch plane and create a circle at that point.

**Figure 8: MouseEvents Example**



The other events supported by the MouseEvents object are also straightforward and are very similar to the mouse events available for VB/ VBA forms. Using these events you can receive notification that the mouse moved or a button was clicked and the coordinates, both model and view, where this occurred. The KeyboardEvents object is also obtained from the InteractionEvents object, and Keyboard events can be listened to in conjunction with the mouse events. Table 9 shows the corresponding API event handlers for some common mouse notifications.

**Table 9: Mouse Event Handlers in SolidWorks and Inventor**

| Event                            | SolidWorks            | Inventor      |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Left mouse button double clicked | MouseLBtnDbIClkNotify | OnDoubleClick |
| Left-mouse button                | MouseLBtnDownNotify   | OnMouseDown   |

| Event               | SolidWorks      | Inventor    |
|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| pressed down        |                 |             |
| Mouse pointer moved | MouseMoveNotify | OnMouseMove |

## Redo Undo Objects

One of the basic capabilities available to users in both SolidWorks and Inventor is to be able to undo an action by using a simple menu command or the CTRL + Z key combination, and likewise, to redo that action using the CTRL + Y keys. You can typically undo and redo up to ten previous steps this way per the default settings in either application, which can be changed by the user.

When a custom application creates a complex, high-level object in a single command or offers a new feature, users may expect to be able to undo and redo that operation in the same way as normal commands. The mechanism available to application Add-In developers for this involves the ability to group several API calls into a single unit that can then be undone or redone by the user using familiar menus and keyboard shortcuts.

The typical programming constructs and steps involved in implementing undo redo capability in SolidWorks and Inventor are as shown in Table 10:

**Table 10: Redo Undo Objects**

| Description                          | SolidWorks                                   | Inventor                             |
|--------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Mark the start of the custom unit | ModelDocExtension::StartRecordingUndoObject  | TransactionManager::StartTransaction |
| 2. Mark the end of the custom unit   | ModelDocExtension::FinishRecordingUndoObject | Transaction::End                     |
| 3. Undoes the action(s)              | ModelDoc2::EditUndo2                         | TransactionManager::UndoTransaction  |
| 4. Redoes the action(s)              | ModelDoc2::EditRedo2                         | TransactionManager::RedoTransaction  |

In Inventor, this functionality is referred to as “Transaction”. As described above, transactions essentially encapsulate the ‘create’, ‘edit’ and ‘delete’ operations within Inventor to behave as a single unit.

There is a lot more to transactions including when to use them and when not to; handling notifications of transactions; nested transactions and so on. Additionally, an advanced capability called Change Processor will let you automatically implement undo/redo behavior without requiring the use of transactions. This and more complete information about Transactions and Change Processor is available in the API Overviews section of the Inventor API help documentation.

# Summary

This guide has been developed to help SolidWorks Add In developers assess the effort required to migrate their applications to work with Autodesk Inventor. The guide is also designed to provide a starting point for any migration activity.

If you are embarking on a project to port your SolidWorks application over to Autodesk Inventor, and require more information please feel free to contact:-

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