

DATABASE BY DESIGN, INC.

To Build or Not to Build

When do you need a custom database vs. using an Application Service Provider?

Many organizations want databases that are integrated with their web sites to provide a dynamic element. Examples of such systems include:

- ✓ **Collect orders from customers**
- ✓ **Registrations for events**
- ✓ **Project collaboration**
- ✓ **Order status for customers**
- ✓ **Reference materials**
- ✓ **Courses, Seminars, and Events**

For more information regarding “when” and “how” to integrate a database with your web site, please see the following newsletters:

http://www.mycustomdatabase.com/newsletter_archives/newsletter_0207.pdf

http://www.mycustomdatabase.com/newsletter_archives/newsletter_0211.pdf

Option One: Build the System Yourself

When you want a section of your web site to be database driven, you may choose to have one custom built for you. A system typically costs between \$1,000 to \$100,000, depending on the complexity of the requirements. To set up your database driven site, your ISP will upgrade your web site to handle database integration. Once the database is created, the web pages are then linked to the database and tested. Once it is finalized, the system must be maintained for top efficiency.

Option Two: Application Service Provider

In many cases, your needs can be met by a previously developed system. Some people offer their specialized database driven systems to the public. You simply pay a monthly fee and they will provide you with access to the application.

E-Commerce is a good example of this setup. Instead of creating your own system, you pay a monthly fee for the ability to link to an existing one. You save time and money while adding database-driven functionality to enhance your web site.

This capability is offered by an Application Service Provider (ASP). The concept of an ASP is much like your Internet Service Provider (ISP). Instead of buying all the expensive equipment required to connect directly to the Internet, you pay your ISP a monthly fee to handle the connection for you. Similarly, when you use an ASP you pay them a monthly fee to handle the database creation, setup and maintenance for you. Here's how it works:

- 1) **Sign up for an account with the ASP:** You are now authorized to use the service. This also determines how you get information from the ASP, such as orders from e-commerce.
- 2) **Enter system information that is unique to your company:** For example, with an e-commerce service, you would enter the names, descriptions, and prices of the products that you offer.

- 3) **Format the information:** Some ASPs allow you to format some of the information that you have entered into the system. Changing colors and adding logos can offer a customized look.
- 4) **Create a link in your web site to the ASP:** The ASP will provide you with the proper link information so that your web site will link to your information in the database system. When a user of your site clicks on the link, they are transferred to the ASP. The user sees the information that you entered. When the user leaves that section, the service brings him/her back to your web site. From the user's perspective, he/she has never left your web site.

Build vs. ASP

	Benefits	Drawbacks
ASP	<p>Lower cost - monthly fee.</p> <p>No development time - benefits available immediately.</p> <p>Someone else handles the maintenance.</p>	<p>Limited control of how the system works.</p> <p>Limited control of web page formatting.</p> <p>Not available for all needs.</p>
Custom Built	<p>Total control over all functionality.</p> <p>Better integration with web site look and feel.</p> <p>Best for unique or complex needs.</p>	<p>Can be costly.</p> <p>Management of system can be cumbersome.</p>

Which One to Use? How to Decide:

Should you choose a customized solution, or contract with an ASP? Sometimes, the choice is already made for you. For instance, if needed functionality isn't available through an ASP, build a custom solution. Consider the following when making your choice:

Use ASP When...

- ✓ Funding for web site enhancements is limited.
- ✓ Formatting of your site easily fits in with the service offered by the ASP.
- ✓ Technical expertise is limited.

Use Custom Built When...

- ✓ Your plans call for the functionality to expand over time.
- ✓ Look and feel of the database portion is critical.
- ✓ Some aspect of the system is unique to your organization.

If you need help assessing your web site database options, we would be happy to be a resource for you. We also offer various database services for use through the ASP model described above. At Database by Design, Inc., we can help you find the right system for your needs. Contact us so we can help you enhance the success of your web site!

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Next Month's Topic: What's Up with the Web? Latest web usage trends.