

DATABASE BY DESIGN, INC.

Addicted to Java

Explore how Java applets, Flash plug-ins, and other technologies can add to the database driven portion of your website.

Adding a database driven component to a web site can really advance the usefulness of the site. When combined with a well designed page layout, communication can be greatly enhanced. Sometimes the site needs even more features to meet the needs of the end user. In these situations, it's time to consider additional technologies like Java, Flash, or DHTML.

The State of the Web - How We Do It Now

When a web site has a database driven portion, there are several steps that a person must endure to use it. Usually the person has to navigate among many web pages before getting to the information desired. The same process occurs when submitting information through a web site. Every time a request is made or information is submitted, a new web page must be transmitted. The result is a disjointed experience where the person using the site does a lot of waiting between activities.



The Alternatives - Making Communication Better

We can enhance a person's experience when they request or submit information through a web site. Instead of constantly sending web pages to a web site user, a special program is used to allow for the efficient transfer of information without all the screen redraws. This makes the interaction between the user and the web site quick, effective, and intuitive. It can also add a very polished look to the web site. The following are some of the technologies that can be used to accomplish this enhancement:

Java - Hot technology, not hot coffee



Java is a programming language that was developed by Sun Microsystems in 1995. It is designed to work on any computer, which makes it ideal for use in web sites since a web page can be viewed on any computer system as well. Java programming is delivered in the form of applets - mini programs that are small in size and dedicated to performing specific tasks. A programmer would develop the Java applet to work specifically with your database system.

The following web sites demonstrate the use of a Java interface on a web site connected to a database:

<http://www.astrodigital.org/mars/database.html>

(A catalog of Mars surface features. After you retrieve a list, double click a feature to see its information below.)

<http://javaboutique.internet.com/CatalogView/>

(Click on the button that says "Catalog View Demo 1")

<http://javaboutique.internet.com/JSearchBox/>

(Type the first letter of a state, then click 'Open' after selecting a state)

Flash - Power from a plug-in

Flash is a plug-in provided by Macromedia (since 1997). A plug-in is a pre-made program that is designed to work with a web browser to extend its capabilities. Flash files are delivered with the rest of the web page, just like pictures in the web page. They are used by the Flash plug-in to provide the enhanced functionality that is desired. A programmer that has experience with Flash and understands graphics would develop the files that would be used to transmit and display the information from your database.



The following web sites demonstrate the use of a Flash interface on a web site connected to a database:

<http://www.muzakdeezign.com/downloads/books/>

(Click on an author's name to see their books)

http://actionscript-toolbox.com/samplemx_dbedit.php

(This is a sample address book)

DHTML - Taking HTML to the next level



HTML is the language used to tell web browsers how to display a web page. DHTML is a collection of web browser technologies that provide a dynamic component to regular web pages. Nothing extra is needed to utilize DHTML, so there is no need to worry whether the people viewing the web site have the necessary programs loaded on their computers. Web developers that are knowledgeable in DHTML can work with your database developer to provide the enhanced interactivity that is desired in the web page.

The following web sites demonstrate the use of a DHTML interface on a web site connected to a database:

<http://www.fordwebs.com/tutorials/mx-asp/samples/index.asp>

(Choose a category from the dropdown list, then choose an item from the list that appears.)

An enhanced web page using the technologies listed above can help add value to a database driven web site. Often times, it can help simplify the entry and retrieval of data. By easing the access to information, the enhanced web site can encourage more use from potential customers. It can also help improve communication which can reduce costs. At Database by Design, we consistently pay close attention to the user interface of every system we develop. Contact us so we can help you improve the usefulness of your database driven web site.

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