Rapid Web Application Development/Deployment with FileMaker Pro/Server

Joe Parsons
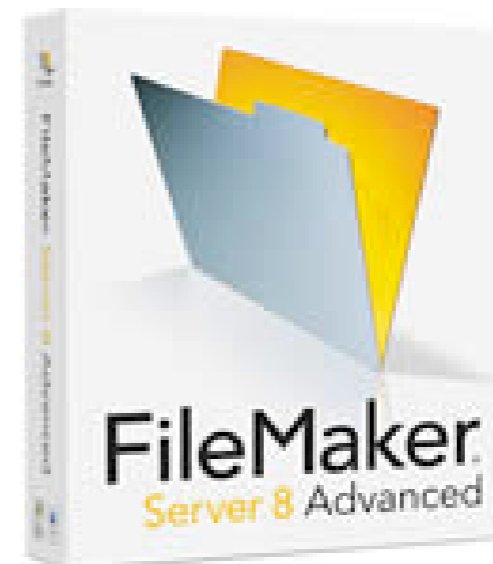College of Pharmacy

Background

- College wanted to move paper-based admissions system to an electronic system
- College accepts 50 out of 200-300 applicants each year
- Project needed to be finished in 2-3 months
- I was doing Desktop Support at the time & had very little development experience

Application Requirements

- Applicants need to be able to create accounts on the system on the fly
- Applicants need to be able to change/reset their own passwords
- Ability for applicants to save changes and finish their application in more than one sitting
- Back-end / Admin interface for Admissions Coordinator
- Admissions Coordinator needs to be able to print various reports about each applicant

FileMaker Tools Used

- FileMaker Pro Advanced
- EDU Price: $250

- FileMaker Server Advanced
- EDU Price: $1250

FM Web Publishing Methods

- Instant Web Publishing
- Custom Web Publishing (XML/XSLT)
- ODBC/JDBC
- PHP API (Public Beta)

Third Party Solutions:
FX.php (Open Source), Lasso

Instant Web Publishing

- Uses FileMaker's Web Publishing Engine (WPE) to render FileMaker Layouts as HTML/CSS

- Attempts to mimic FileMaker Desktop Interface as closely as possible

- "No HTML required"

- Includes authentication (uses FM file based accounts/privileges)

Hosting with FMSA

- Supports up to 100 concurrent WPE sessions (IWP or CWP)

- Supports up to 50 concurrent ODBC/JDBC connections

- Supports up to 250 FileMaker Pro Clients

- Includes Management Software – can be used remotely

- Can only be installed on Mac OS X and Windows

Pros of using FM (IWP)

- Relatively easy for "non-programmers"
- Built-in user accounts and privileges management
- Reasonably secure out of the box
- "No HTML Required"
- Validation easy to implement

Cons of Using FM for Web

- Limited, Limited, LIMITED
- Using custom HTML/JS not possible (IWP)
- FileMaker ScriptMaker
- No SQL (except through ODBC)
- No way to separate Data from Business Rules (MVC not possible)
- Hosting more than IWP database
- WPE does not coexist with other Tomcat apps very nicely
- Price

Conclusion

- Am I glad I used FileMaker? Yes.

- Would I do it again? Probably not.

Joe Parsons

- College of Pharmacy Computer Systems Services
- Joe.Parsons@utah.edu