



TeraTech News

Tools for Programmers

We make you a computer hero every day

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DevCon Report

by Michael Smith

Macromedia DevCon was held in Orlando FL this year and was a hot bed for people learning about the new MX technologies. There were 2300 attendees from across the world. I saw the integration of ColdFusion backends with Flash MX front ends using XML to send small packets of data back and forth. I also saw the latest in code editors in Dreamweaver MX, which integrates ColdFusion code editing with a true WYSIWYG mode plus inline editing of Flash and image elements. The new Contribute editor was on secret pre-release display and uses the same nested template tool as Dreamweaver. In the exhibit hall IBM was showing off a 45% speed improvement for running ColdFusion MX on top of their Java server Websphere. Sys-Con publishing gave out their Readers Choice awards - including best consulting company for TeraTech!



Interview with editor of CFDJ magazine, Robert Diamond, on Syn-Con Radio at DevCon 2002

Vendor Retention in a Downturn

By Al Negrin

One of the significant advances in modern business practice has been "partnership procurement." Instead of the style of the fifties, sixties, and seventies, where vendors were treated as indistinguishably as if they all sold so many sacks of potatoes, partnership procurement tries to foster a symbiotic relationship between customer and vendor. "Just in time" delivery schedules, cooperative design efforts, and on-site vendor quality assurance are just some of the manifestations of partnership procurement, which have improved quality and cut procurement costs over the last ten years.

Partnership procurement takes as its basic premise that bringing a vendor into a customer's manufacturing processes and keeping the vendor well informed as to how his products are being utilized will improve efficiency of both vendor and customer. The success of partnership procurement has validated the correctness of this basic premise.



Most of the period during which partnership procurement has flourished has been one of prosperity, strong economic growth, and good profits. Partnership procurement in this country has not had to suffer through hard times such as high tech industries are now facing. Yet, just because times are difficult is no reason to suspect that partnership procurement would be any less effective. However, many companies are starting to act as if a fundamental change needs to take place in customer-vendor relationships, and vendors suddenly need to be treated according to the mushroom theory of management: "Keep them in the dark, heap fertilizer on them, and cut off their heads when they stick out above the ground."

[to be continued next month...]

Fudgability and Forgivability (continued)

Last month we talked about fudgability - the ability that human beings build into real-world systems to let them circumvent the rules. It provides flexibility. Now we look at how personas can help programmers build fudgability into their systems.

Hal Helms: There's a big disconnect between the way developers WRITE software and the way users USE software. And that's one reason for using personas, as we've been talking about in the last few newsletters. Personas help maintain a connection between the software developer and that end user who the developer will never see.

Steve Nelson: When a decision needs to be made, instead of saying, "Gee, how would I do this?" Or even, "What's logical?" the developer says, "What does Sue want to do? What would feel most natural to her?"

Hal Helms: One developer recently wrote about personas that he didn't really buy into the idea that it was that necessary to have fully developed personas. I told him I thought it was a bit like "method actors" who

want to know all about their characters -- where they went to school, what their favorite food is, what their views on gun control are -- even though there may be nothing about those in the movie. Knowing all that stuff--which of course means imagining a more fully realized character--helps them to know how the character would act in the confines of the script. I think it might be like that with personas, too. But back to fudgability

Steve Nelson: Is this rant time?

Hal Helms: Maybe. I recently had an experience with UPS. I had signed up over the web and had forgotten my userID, since the number of userIDs I have must number in the tens of thousands.

Steve Nelson: And they didn't have a "Forget your password?" link?

Hal Helms: Oh, no, they had one. But in order to get it, you had to give them your userID!

Steve Nelson: What? Every other site has you provide the email account you used to register and then they send you that info.

Hal Helms: Tell me about it. Not only that, if I HAD known my userID, I would have had to create a new password. There was no "Forget your userID" link, so I had to leave an email asking for help.

Steve Nelson: And you...

Hal Helms: Never heard back from them.

Steve Nelson: That's miserable. But is it a fudgability issue?

Hal Helms: Hmm... probably not, no. It's more a forgivability issue. Does the software punish the user in the best Puritanical style or is it forgiving? UPS apparently subscribes to the extreme form of Calvinism. But that's not all.



More next month on Hal's troubles with poorly designed software
Used by permission from Hal Helms newsletter. www.halhelms.com.

Fusebox Training Onsite

Michael Smith, TeraTech's president, taught three onsite Fusebox training sessions for local companies, associations and government offices this month. The material expanded on his talk at the national Fusebox conference and showed programmers and managers how Fusebox can improve software quality and team communication. Fusebox is a free programming methodology (or way of programming) that organizes both the development process with effective client communication and organizes the coding process with a structured way to local code modules and settings. Students all receive a copy of the Fusebox book by New Riders that Michael was the tech editor for.

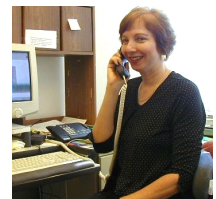
Michael says "We use wireframing and prototyping on projects to improve client communication. I find that when people can see and take a 'test-drive' of an application that we get significantly better feedback on

real requirements. Additionally the prototype can be tried out by the whole client team for easy use and to find missing features. It is much cheaper to spot problems early on in a project rather than have to add in extra features once coding is done."

The alternative approaches of either not doing requirements at all or producing a dense document of written requirements don't have the same results. In the former case we have no real idea of what the client really wants (as opposed to what they said they wanted!). In the latter case even if I understand the requirements document often the client does not, and again expensive miscommunications will occur. For more information on wireframing, prototyping and other Fusebox techniques see http://www.cfug-md.org/articles/coldfusion_mx_and_fusebox.cfm

Secure Sharing of Documents on the Intranet

By Beth Barnett



Our client is an important trade association with major lobbying responsibilities. It has a dozen committees who advocate on specific issues. The association wanted to post documents -- papers, email messages, articles, etc. -- on a website such that members of the committees could see certain documents but not all documents. Furthermore, some documents were viewable by more than one committee. The committees had subcommittees with differing rights. Committee members had certain rights (committee leaders, association members, media members, etc). Of course, only certain individuals could add and remove documents; different individuals for the different committees.

TeraTech developed the security model to protect these documents, whether called upon by a listing or through a search. The system is both easy to use and hard to hack. To simplify maintenance, the system uses the user name and password from the membership database rather than having its own internal authentication system.

To learn more about this secure sharing of documents, contact Beth at 301-881-1440 x 104.

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