Grid FX: Enabling Your Web 2.0 Enterprise

In Web 2.0 there's a technology component, but it's not all about AJAX as many tool vendors want you to believe. More than ever, Software Development Managers will need to look beyond the simple DHTML wizardry that allows a web page to change in real-time before the users' eyes without reloading and focus on the business value of tools that developers use to build these web-based applications.

Most development projects will ultimately lead you to Data Visualization & Analysis. That's where you will cross paths with Software FX, the leading vendor of data visualization solutions for .NET, COM, ASP and Java developers. For over a decade, Chart FX has helped thousands of companies build truly interactive web-based applications and dashboards with AJAX-based components like charts, maps and gauges.

As the latest addition to the Software FX web-based family of products, Grid FX is perhaps the most exciting product release in our company's history. It combines all of the products and technologies that the company has innovated to provide developers with a truly unique and highly integrated Data Visualization platform to display graphical as well as tabular data in their web 2.0 applications.
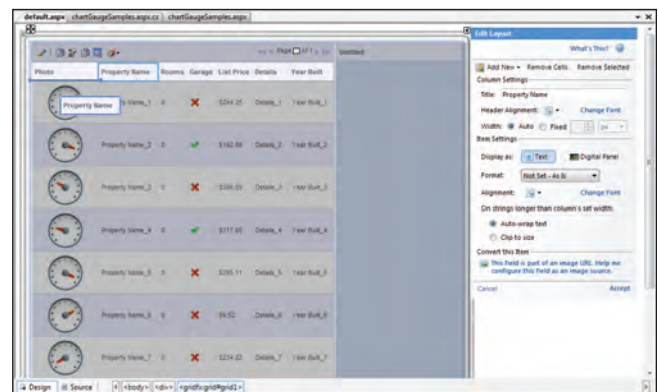
Unlike most vendors who have backwards compatibility issues with previous versions of their grid controls, we've conceived and designed Grid FX specifically for Visual Studio 2005 and the .NET Framework 2.0. We focused on three areas: 1) design-time experience to improve accessibility and shorten the development cycle, 2) integration of visualization components (namely Chart FX) to broaden the scope of the product and 3) end-user interaction through the use of AJAX to let end-users unleash unprecedented data visualization and analysis scenarios with minimal development efforts.

As far as development goes, the design-time experience for existing grids is hardly, well, an experience. These days, becoming proficient with a grid involves some serious reading, searching, and trial and error—basically time spent not producing. For most ASP.NET grid controls, the Property Grid is the primary means of setup. Some controls offer a dialog that allows you to do more advanced things, but it's pretty much just a property grid on steroids. In all of the grid products available in the market we found that the designer and integration with Visual Studio 2005 was often an afterthought (and worked as such).

Grid FX Innovates for Developers

Grid FX introduces new features never before seen in a grid control, or any other Visual Studio control for that matter. Now, instead of working through abstract modal dialogs to edit columns, the developer can just click and drag right onto the design surface. Smart Tags became full blown context sensitive wizards where most of the functionality is readily available in a graphical way rather than a simple list of properties. In addition, developers can click on a cell in the grid and get options specifically for that cell type. Grid FX offers in-place WYSIWYG template editing instead of the hiding the control and entering a "template mode". We believe these enhancements will be some of the most notable improvements to developers using Grid FX for the first time.

Drag and drop grid elements directly within the Visual Studio 2005 design surface for a true WYSIWYG experience.

Enhanced Smart Tag Wizard

Enhanced Smart Tag Wizard provides most features to limit the need to access the code or the properties grid.
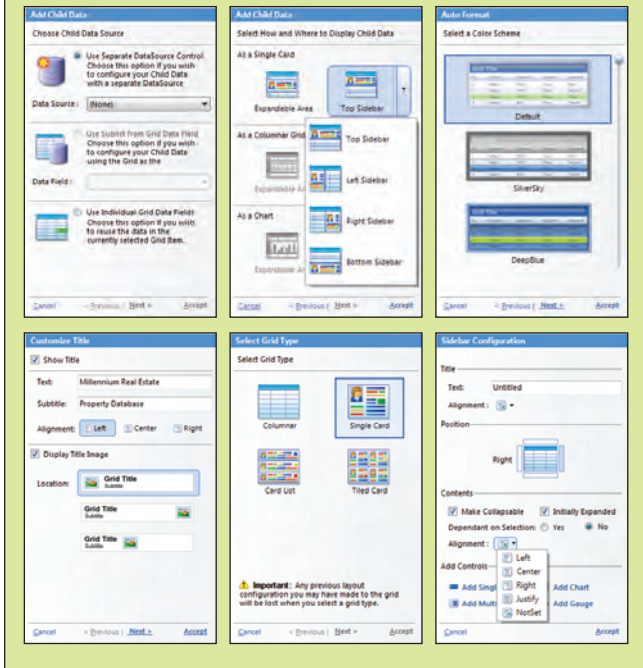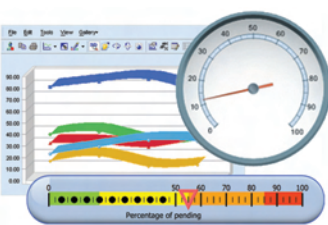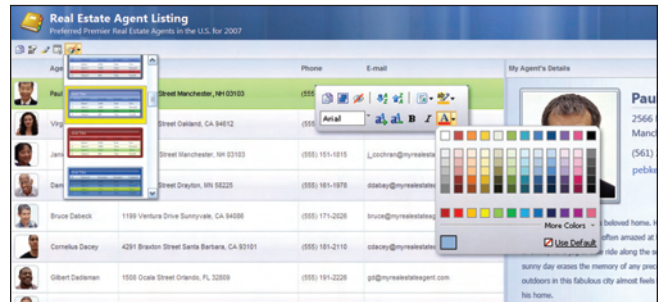

Chart FX Inside

Software FX did not ignore the vast good will created over the years with the Chart FX product line. Therefore, Grid FX adds Chart FX capabilities right in-the-box, offering immediate charts, digital panels and gauges. This integration was not taken lightly either. You can add these graphical elements in and around every area of the grid (including several new areas that we've invented). These elements can feed off of the grid's data or a completely separate data source in your Visual Studio project. In addition, these elements respond to contextual information such as clicks, drilldowns and master-detail. When it comes to visuals, the Chart FX objects are automatically configured based on grid settings which translates to faster integration and less effort synchronizing charts and other graphical elements with the grid's visuals.

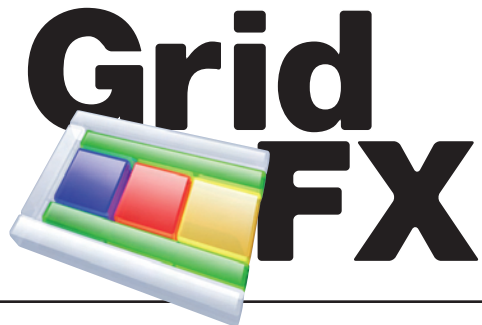## Grid FX Empowers The End-User

It is often the aesthetics of an application that inspires those who receive it. But while the average user cares more about the color scheme than its ability to prevent SQL injection attacks, developers don't. Fortunately, we went the great lengths to provide appealing visual enhancements like artistic borders, palettes, custom titles and motifs. Whichever you choose to use, we guarantee you will end up with a breathtaking grid.

The end-user experience is pivotal in a successful Web 2.0 application. We began this area of Grid FX by listing everything we found odd in grids from a usability perspective. For us, AJAX was the starting point, not the end. We went through all of the standard Grid feature areas—sorting, paging, grouping, filtering, layout, editing and formatting—and did them from soup to nuts with end-user priorities in mind. Many days were spent in the conference room figuring out exactly how to implement these features to our standards. As a result, we challenged many of the common conventions and invented new run-time features that make Grid FX downright exciting to use. In many instances, you will find that developers can simply connect to a data source and allow end-users to unleash the real power behind Grid FX.

Grid FX will alleviate your doubts about AJAX development in your organization. We've taken care of your developers through reduced development time and unparalleled integration with Visual Studio 2005 and the .NET Framework 2.0. And we've taken care of your end-users with a beautifully fluid and intuitive interface. What happens next is up to you.