Spinning A Basic Web Utility

By Allen Miglore

On September 18, 1998, BASIS International released the free Basic Web Utility to all of its customers. This product release was the result of several days of negotiation and years of development. As the creator of BB-Web--the technology behind the new Basic Web Utility--I was very pleased to see my product made available to Business Basic users around the world.

BB-Web did not start out as a product but as a tool I developed to help me do my online work. Since the 1980s, I've had an ongoing interest in development platforms. Around my house, boxes and bookcases are full of products like dBaseIV, Powerbuilder, Superbase, and languages like C, Perl, Java, and various Basics. I would try them out for fun, learn the pros and cons of each product, and then end up turning back to Business Basic to actually get work done. When I began developing web applications, I knew from the start that Business Basic was the tool I wanted to use. My early web efforts were crafted from scratch and they provided me some ideas for a Business Basic tool that would make web development easier. I used those ideas to create a simple tool that evolved as my web work became more sophisticated.

After talking with several members of the Business Basic community, I realized that my web tool could be of use to other developers and I released BB-Web as a product in 1996. Several companies adopted the technology and began integrating it into their products. I-SYS (formerly BSI systems), resellers of FACTS software from Software Solutions Inc., decided to use the tool to create a Web-to-FACTS product after finding that developing the system using ODBC technology was too slow and cumbersome. I-SYS tried the tool and redeveloped its Web-to-FACTS product in only a few weeks. Today, it has sold many copies of its FACTS OnRamp web product to FACTS users. Other large Business Basic companies, like Open Systems, found the tool helpful in developing web-based order-entry and inquiry modules for their accounting applications.

Seeing such key Business Basic developers using my web tool, BASIS President George Hight contacted me last summer to discuss purchasing it. His goal was to package the tool with other BASIS products. After several discussions with George and BASIS Chief Technical Officer John Schroeder, it was decided that BASIS would buy the tool from my company, Synergetic Data Systems Inc. (SDSI), and then give it away as a free utility to all Business Basic developers. Our hope was that by providing tools that made web application development easier, Business Basic resellers would become more interested in web technology and the entire Business Basic market would gain web savvy. BASIS would have an opportunity to make its customers happy with a needed tool, and I would gain a chance to do more web-application development consulting with firms creating commercial websites.

At the time of the BASIS acquisition, SDSI was just about to release an upgrade. Using BASIS resources and several live sites of mine, this upgrade was thoroughly tested and became the renamed Basic Web Utility. Now the Basic Web Utility can handle one of the most tedious aspects of designing a web application--managing data for a user session. In the past, when a customer ordered something online or submitted a form, the application restarted the form from scratch and developers would have to use CGI techniques, such as

hidden fields, query strings, or cookies, to handle the data through the system. Today, the Basic Web Utility offers a new, automated session-tracking feature that lets developers manage data simply by defining a string template for the session and placing it in a global string. This, of course, is in addition to a long list of features that make the Basic Web Utility one of the most comprehensive CGI toolkits available in any programming environment.

What began as a simple tool to make web-application design easier has transformed into a sophisticated web utility that can help Business Basic developers create competitive web applications. Although I sometimes have mixed feelings when I think about giving this product up, I know that BASIS has the technical support and sales staff needed to help developers really take advantage of this tool. As a developer whose business has thrived combining Business Basic and the web, I know how powerful web tools can be. I encourage everyone to take a few minutes and download the new Basic Web Utility from the BASIS website at www.basis.com and see what this tool can do to help your business.

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