

Unleashing the Power of FileMaker 6 with XML

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Hot Demos at Dev Con

For those of who weren't at the FileMaker Developer Conference in Palm Desert, California, in August, you missed some exciting announcements – and not only that 1,200 developers were roasting in the hot desert. The major recurring theme at the conference was the Extensible Markup Language, or XML, not to be confused with Van Diesel's latest flick.

So, why is XML so important? This article will explore some of the possibilities of using XML import/export with FileMaker.

Expanding FileMaker Capabilities

Some of the most exciting advancements XML brings to the FileMaker platform: the expansion of its native capabilities. XML allows FileMaker to do things that it was not capable of doing before – or even thought of by its developers. In particular, FileMaker can take advantage of external “services” that can enrich and expand the FileMaker experience. At the Developer Conference, we saw a demonstration of a FileMaker application that used an external web service to validate postal and email addresses. Imagine having the entire U.S. Postal service database at your disposal to validate your mailing addresses! In addition, we saw the very same application access Amazon.com to look up book titles, availability, and authors. There would have been no way that FileMaker could have done this if it weren't for XML (and a little help from the web protocol – HTTP).

But connecting to Internet-accessible databases and data sources is just the tip of the iceberg. XML import/export can bolster the ability to synchronize FileMaker databases. With XML and other technologies such as SyncML and synchronization software, FileMaker can be made to effectively sync between clients or with other data sources such as PDAs, cell phones, databases, and other data sources. Since XML treats all data the same, it no longer matters what the original format and platform the data resided on.

Other interesting expansions of the FileMaker platform include the ability to include data of all sorts into databases, such as geo-spatial data, integration with GPS devices, and other data and services that not only enrich the FileMaker experience, but also change the way in which we interact with the product. No longer is FileMaker desktop-bound. You can even use the features in XML to integrate your data with your website, portal, or other online presence.

Application Integration

Happily, XML is completely agnostic to whatever system will be “consuming” the XML data. Windows desktops, Linux servers, Macintoshes, and a range of application types that run on these machines can consume the same XML data. So, this all leads to one great thing: the ability to seamlessly connect systems without having to go through the costly, time-intensive, and complex steps of converting data and working through different communications protocols and adapters. XML can be used to tie together applications of different types without having to worry about coordinating what data types or systems are to be used.

We can now tie FileMaker to such major desktop applications such as Microsoft Office, QuickBooks, email applications, and spreadsheets with relative ease. At the Developer Conference, we saw an exciting demo where FileMaker was integrated seamlessly with an SAP server running at a remote site. Imagine! FileMaker serving as a client for SAP – we can only imagine what may come next! Through XML, FileMaker can become a full-fledged “citizen” of the corporate IT infrastructure. XML allows users to pick the application that makes them most productive (increasingly, FileMaker) yet stay connected and integrated with the rest of the enterprise.

Business-to-Business Integration

If connecting to applications within the enterprise isn't exciting enough, XML now allows FileMaker to connect to your business partners, industry groups, and government in ways easier than before. There

are over 450 different XML vocabularies for different business and government applications ranging from manufacturing and logistics to chess games and astronomy. If you have a need to exchange information with businesses, industries, or colleagues, XML will become the de-facto way to do it.

Through XML, FileMaker can connect to your trusted business partners and allow you to integrate your supply and value chains much easier than before. Rather than having to send your catalog information to suppliers, print and mail invoices, and wait for purchase order information, you can directly integrate your FileMaker system with your suppliers, using XML as a means for exchanging invoice, purchase order, catalog, and payment information. XML is quickly replacing EDI as the primary way to exchange trading information with your partners, so leverage FileMaker to make this happen for your users.

With XML you can also communicate with others in your industry and governmental bodies that are increasingly standardizing on XML. XML has made major inroads in e-Business and e-Commerce. Major initiatives such as ebXML, RosettaNet, and a number of other efforts are making it significantly easier to work with customers, suppliers, partners, and employees. Hospital administrators, pharmaceutical companies, and insurance providers alike have found tremendous value in XML. Now you can download genomic information, exchange electronic patient records, and file claims in XML format.

It has become trivial now to download and submit resumes, exchange time and billing forms, communicate professional service, and work with employee benefits in XML format through major initiatives such as HR-XML. The SEC, NASDAQ, and most accounting firms are now standardizing on XML as the way they exchange financial reporting data. XML has even found its way into K-12 and higher education. Everything from daily academic schedules to enrollment and school lunches are being encoded in XML and exchanged with state and federal agencies.

Soon, XML will be part of working with the “e-Government”. The government is making it simpler than ever to submit forms such as tax filings and voter registrations, and integrate their workflows in your business processes using XML.

Doing Things You’ve Never Thought of Before

Through XML, you can make FileMaker do things you’ve never thought of before. For example, many telephony systems are now being enabled with XML. This means you can log phone calls automatically into your database, as well as use your system to place phone calls, drive voicemail prompts, and even store voicemail messages. FileMaker can also now integrate with XML-based instant messaging platforms and deliver content to a wide range of devices. Rather than having to create your own code to communicate between devices, just use XML.

FileMaker support of XML makes it a platform for creating workgroup content management solutions. Through the magic of XML Stylesheets Language (XSL), FileMaker can produce content in XML that converts to HTML, PDF, email, or a variety of text formats. You wanted FileMaker to be the center of life? Well, with XML your wish has been granted.

So Start Your Engines

Developers, is this article getting you jazzed up to try new things with FileMaker? We hope so! These are some of the most exciting developments in the product since, well... maybe the support of client/server technology. So, don’t wait any longer! Dig into the new FileMaker 6 products, and fuel your creative engines with the power of XML.

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