



AJAX, Web 2.0 & Beyond

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Rich Web Application Development

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ICEsoft Helps Java AJAX Developers Keep Cool

Teach a man to fish and he'll never go hungry. Tell programmers that they'll have to go through any kind of a learning curve to reap the benefits of a new developer tool, however, and they'll just might leave it on the shelf. That's because all too often, new tools and paradigms create project delays. Fortunately, at ICEsoft they know that new tools and technologies have to be both easy to learn and easy to use, and that's what you get in ICEfaces, their AJAX solution for Java EE.

"ICEfaces is a pure Java EE solution for AJAX, so it enhances the development lifecycle by not changing it," says Stephen Maryka, CTO of ICEsoft. "All AJAX interactions are transparent to developers, so they can work the way they're used to, with the same tools and methodologies."

Simply put, ICEfaces helps developers create and deploy thin-client rich Internet applications in pure Java. It delivers unique AJAX Push capabilities, leveraging the entire standards-based Java EE ecosystem of tools and execution environments. There are no applets or proprietary browser plug-ins required; ICEfaces applications are JavaServer Faces (JSF) applications, so Java EE skills apply directly. Even better, your developers are isolated from doing any JavaScript-related development.

How does it work? ICEsoft provides your team with the ICEfaces Framework and Component Suite, with an extensive array of AJAX JSF components that help you to deliver Web 2.0-ready RIA features including server-initiated, instantaneous presentation updates using AJAX Push. ICEfaces supports a broad array of Java application servers, IDEs, Java middleware, and third-party AJAX JSF components.

"Any Java-based web applications that require rich user interfaces can benefit from using ICEfaces," Maryka says. "Applications that require 'push-style' dynamic updating of the client presentation are particularly well-matched to the ICEfaces AJAX Push capabilities. We have customers building applications in a wide cross-section of industries, especially in the financial sector, where security is a major concern. ICEfaces uses a server-centric approach that fosters inherent security advantages over client-centric approaches."

Many organizations today have legacy Java EE applications that need to be updated with a richer, more effective user interface. Preserving as much of the application infrastructure as possible is imperative. In some cases, developers have identified JSF as the standards-based approach. Here, ICEfaces extends JSF with AJAX capabilities in a transparent way. In other cases, developers may be looking to add AJAX capabilities to the applications

but are wary of, or have already suffered a negative experience with JavaScript coding. Here, ICEfaces helps by eliminating the need to touch JavaScript at all.

From a development environment perspective, ICEsoft is popular because development teams of all sizes can use existing tools and development best practices. All developers need to do is install one of ICEfaces's IDE integration bundles to the existing tools, and continue to develop within standard methods. Most of the technical work is in the redesign of the UI to provide the new AJAX-enabled interface, and binding the JSF/ICEfaces UI to the existing back-end data model.

To begin with, all page updates are guaranteed to be minimal, so no matter what changes you make in the presentation, the user sees only the minimal re-rendering required to affect the changes. All user interaction is automatically submitted, so there is no requirement for the user to ever submit anything, instead the application reacts immediately to user interaction. The applications can also react to server-side state change and spontaneously push presentation changes to the client using Ajax Push.

In addition to ICEfaces' many features and short learning curve, another great benefit is the license price: Free. That's right: ICEfaces is an open source solution, available at no charge. For enterprises seeking paid support, subscriptions starts at US\$2,500 per year.

"We let your developers work the way they do today, and add RIA capabilities seamlessly to your existing Java EE development methodologies and environments, while fully reusing existing skill-sets," Maryka says. "But it doesn't stop there. More rich components are always on our drawing board. New component rendering APIs, for example, will significantly reduce development effort for new rich components. Extensive portal integration work is also underway, new architecture changes are on the horizon, and we're building mobile AJAX support.

While a plethora of new features are envisioned of ICEfaces, Maryka is quick to point out that "Ultimately, the community drives the priorities in our roadmap, and with a rapidly growing community of developers there is no shortage of good ideas about where to take ICEfaces next".

