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Weitere Informationen zu diesen beiden Initiativen erhalten Sie bei Sven Slazenger (slazenger@interlake.net)

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'But It's Free!'

Time to clear the air and set the record straight

There was once a time, not that long ago, when I seemed to be spending a significant portion of my life explaining why ColdFusion was indeed worthy of consideration even though other products were free. Then I stopped hearing that objection for the most part, and life was good (well, better).

But in the past two weeks I have had to defend ColdFusion against the “but [fill in the blank here] is free” objection no less than five times. So it looks like I need to address this issue one last time to clear the air and set the record straight.



By Ben Forta

What Exactly Is ColdFusion?

Let's start with the question – what is ColdFusion anyway? Is it an application server? Some think so, others vehemently disagree with that description. Is it a language? Definitely. But is it only a language? No, not at all. So, what is ColdFusion then?

There is actually a reason for me starting with this question. Because ColdFusion is not easily defined, it is not easily compared to other products and technologies. And this inability to perform comparisons usually results in one of two things happening – either ColdFusion gets compared to products that it honestly should not be compared to, or only one aspect of ColdFusion gets looked at and compared, but not ColdFusion as a whole.

So, once again, what exactly is ColdFusion? Actually, ColdFusion is many things; it really depends on your perspective, what you are trying to do, and how you are trying to do it. But at a

minimum:

- **First and foremost, ColdFusion is a language:** After all, it is CFML (the ColdFusion Markup Language) that makes ColdFusion ColdFusion. What we love about the product, what makes us productive, what distinguishes

ColdFusion from anything else out there is CFML.

- **ColdFusion is also a set of application services, complete subsystems that you can leverage in your applications – things like full-text searching, graphing, database query caching, and more:** These are not language features (although they have language elements associated with them); they are runtime services that are included with ColdFusion so that you do not have to start from scratch.
- **And yes, for many of us, ColdFusion is still an application server:** With ColdFusion MX, and its new ability to run on top of industry-standard application servers (like IBM WebSphere and Sun ONE), ColdFusion has been split in two. It can be used as a scripting engine with supporting runtime services on top of an application server of your choice, or it can be used as an application server in its own right.

All of which makes defining exactly what ColdFusion is a little tricky.

It's More Than a Language

As I already explained, part of ColdFusion is a series of runtime application services. These are included with ColdFusion in all versions (although there are some differences based on the product edition being used), and all at no extra cost. It has been this way almost since day one.

Why is this important? Well, we take many of these included services and technologies for granted. As ColdFusion we use them all the time, and never even realize that had we been using other popular languages, we'd have had to pay for these, buying them individually.

Now, I don't usually take potshots at other vendors or products (well, not often, and usually not in public and in print), but... consider Microsoft ASP, the most used scripting language out in Web-land. ASP is free, right? Maybe, but look at the chart on the next page.

The chart is not even a complete list of ColdFusion features missing from ASP, but it's enough for the discussion at hand.

Just to be clear, and in the interests of fairness, when a third party add-on was needed (because a feature is not included in ASP itself) the lowest-cost functionally equivalent add-on was used. Where multiple options were available, the one that most closely matched the feature set native to ColdFusion was used. However, unsupported free add-ons were not included.

Now before I get flooded with e-mails accusing me of rigging the data, yes, I am sure I could have searched and found cheaper options too. And yes,

there is stuff out there for free. And yes, some of those add-ons might have features and options that ColdFusion does not support. Agreed. This is not official data, nor is it an apples-to-apples comparison. I did not put tons of time into this research, that was not the intent.

What this is, however, is proof positive that you get what you pay for. Or in other words, pay now or pay later. And if you do opt to pay later, you'll likely pay a lot more. (Plus the integration will not be as clean or as simple, it just can't be.)

This is not just true of ASP – it is true of every one of the free options. ColdFusion is not free, but from a raw cost of goods standpoint it is an absolute bargain – matching the features in any other development product will cost you a lot more than ColdFusion.

And It's an Incredible Language Too

From a cost perspective, just by looking at what you get in the box, ColdFusion is already a far better option. And we haven't even mentioned the cost associated with the language – or rather, the cost associated with using the wrong language.

CFML is not a general-purpose language; it was never intended to be one. But CFML is the very best language for

integrating with Internet clients and technologies. Take something as simple as a database query – in ColdFusion we use a single tag named <CFQUERY> and it just works. Have you ever looked at what it takes to do the same in ASP or PHP or even JSP? Or how about something as trivial as sending an SMTP e-mail message?

Or even a simple thing like making data persist in a shared scope? A colleague recently shared with me some ASP code that he was so proud of – code that helped him eliminate unnecessary database reads by caching results in the application itself. When he was finished with his lengthy and very detailed code walkthrough and explanation I showed him <CFQUERY NAME="APPLICATION.result"> and <CFQUERY CACHEDWITHIN ...>. He just stared and said nothing (although I think he was trying to respond – his lips moved but no sound escaped).

At DevCon in October I discussed Web services in detail, and had the opportunity to demonstrate ColdFusion Web services being consumed by .NET (using C#) as well as .NET Web services being consumed by ColdFusion MX. One of the most blatantly obvious differences was the amount of code it took to consume a Web service – .NET is built


around Web services technologies, and ColdFusion puts it to shame with something as simple as consuming a Web service (a .NET Web service at that) – one tag compared to pages of code.

I am not going to go into when CFML should be used and when it shouldn't; I've written and talked about that many times before. But one thing is a given, an indisputable fact. For the right parts of your application, CFML is the cleanest, the simplest, the most productive, and simply the best solution available to you.

What does that have to do with other products being free? Not only do you get more product for your money as already explained, but by using CFML, your development costs drop dramatically. Using CFML, your development will be simple and will take less time, and time is money. It's as simple as that.

Summary

So, why buy ColdFusion when ASP (or JSP or PHP or Perl or...) is free? Well, if they were indeed free that would be a very good question. But, as you can see, they are not free, and thus it's not a good question at all. The truth is that the question should be exactly the opposite – with ColdFusion being such a bargain, offering such value for the money and ongoing savings in development costs, why would you ever want to use a supposedly free product?

That's not to say that no one should be using those products. I have found one scenario where they make perfect sense – if you are a contract developer getting paid by the hour, then you may benefit from legitimately having to take so much longer on your projects. But for everyone else, the choice is clear. Enough said. 

About the Author

Ben Forta is Macromedia's senior product evangelist and the author of numerous books, including ColdFusion MX Web Application Construction Kit and its sequel, Advanced ColdFusion MX Application Development, and is the series editor for the new "Reality ColdFusion" series. For more information visit www.forta.com.

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	ColdFusion Professional	ASP
Product	\$799.95	\$0.00
Verity full text searching	Included at no extra cost \$0.00	Verity K2 Bronze \$31,000.00
Charting	Included at no extra cost \$0.00	Not included, Dundas Chart \$699.00
POP support	Included at no extra cost \$0.00	Not included, AspPOP \$69.95
Server-side HTTP support	Included at no extra cost \$0.00	Not included, AspHTTP \$49.95
Server-side FTP support	Included at no extra cost \$0.00	Not included, Dart FTP Tool \$249.00
File uploads	Included at no extra cost \$0.00	Not included, AspUpload \$149.00
COST	\$799.95	\$32,216.90