Parleys

The future of Java looks modular

The present and the future of Java were put in perspective on the second day of the Devoxx Conference, when Joshua Bloch and Mark Reinhold took the stage for their keynote presentations. Just like yesterday, Devoxx attendees filled no less than three of the main conference rooms to capacity.

Contrary to what had been announced in the official conference program, Mark Reinhold didn’t limit his talk to an update on Java SE 7. Reinhold, Chief Engineer for Java SE and OpenJDK at Sun, dedicated most of his presentation to Sun’s modularity strategy for SE 7. “Why should we care about modularity?”, he asked. “Mainly because both Java and the JDK have become quite big.” Too big in some cases, which actually prevents the JDK from running on some smaller devices. On top of that, the JDK isn’t just enormous, it’s also amorphous. The effort of cutting up the JDK into modules will avoid loading unnecessary classes, resulting in shorter start-up times for applications. Reinhold demonstrated how the current version of Java loads over 300 classes to simply print the line ‘Hello Devoxx’. “The problem is that we never really tried to dissect this big cloud of code into modules before”, Reinhold said. “It is our main ambition for Java SE 7. At the same time, we want to take the opportunity to solve some of the older problems we had with applications.”

The modularity exercise allows Java to take a new look at compatibility. “It’s great to know that old code also runs on a new version of the platform. But compatibility has a downside as well, especially when because of it all features of the last ten years or more move along to the new platform— including the features that nobody really likes anymore.” According to Reinhold, the module system should hold at least the option to declare an incompatible break with some of the old code. “It would be a way to finally clean some things up. But for now, that’s just me fantasizing. This probably won’t happen soon.” As preparing Java SE 7 is not exactly a small effort, the timeline that Sun has in mind is early 2010. “Next to the modularization, new big features will include VM support for dynamic languages, new I/O APIs, and more”, said Mark Reinhold. Despite the interest from the community, closures or beans binding will not yet appear in Java SE 7, simply because there are no coherent proposals around. “Anyone who is up for some solid code writing is welcome to contribute. Just keep in mind that the bar will be pretty high”, concluded Reinhold.

Brain exercise

Joshua Bloch took the opportunity to present the main topics of his Jolt Award winning book ‘Effective Java’. In the past, Bloch led the design and implementation of several Java platform features. Today he is a Principle Engineer at Google. Bloch gave a practical presentation about the new chapters on generics, enumerated types and lazy initialization in his book’s second edition. On the subject of generics, Bloch explained how wildcard types provide additional API flexibility. He also showed several examples of code that actually do work, but for which he found a better and easier way using enumerated types. To conclude his talk, Joshua Bloch elaborated on the use of lazy initialization. “There are many ways to work with this”, he said, “but it seems that people don’t really know how to pick the right method.” Bloch advised to use lazy initialization only to fix an initialization circularity or to solve a performance problem. “The default instinct should always remain normal initialization”, he concluded his 45 minute morning exercise for the brain.

Mark Reinhold, Chief Engineer for Java SE and OpenJDK at Sun Microsystems: “Dissecting the big cloud of code into modules. That’s the main ambition for Java SE 7.”
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Every day, a steering committee member of Devoxx advises us on what you should not miss at Devoxx. Frederik Santens has the honour of bringing us the last advice.

The last day of Devoxx 2008! It has already been quiet a ride so far and believe me, it is not over yet! Although it’s only half a day, the choice is abundant. Nevertheless, here’s my list.

I’ll kick off the day with the talk ‘Building Web Applications with the SpringSource dm Server’. OSGi finally got the attention it deserves. The extensions made to the OSGi platform by the Spring Source folks, again revolutionized the JEE landscape and will no doubt dictate the way we will be building, deploying and maintaining our JEE applications.

Next, I will attend the talk ‘Applied Innovations with JavaFX: A Multitouch Interface’. A sit back and enjoy talk, at least if Murphy does not attend Devoxx this year. Besides the numerous demos, I am looking forward to learn how to plug in these next generation RIA features in JavaFX applications and what components are out there to help us implement them.

The last session is a difficult one. At conferences, I usually tend to seek out the practical talks, finding out how others apply technologies and frameworks in order to solve different kinds of problems. On the one hand, the talk ‘Patterns in Mule’, applied enterprise integration patterns on one of the most popular open source ESB platforms, is, in my opinion, a no-brainer.

On the other hand, I also wouldn’t want to miss the talk ‘Dynamic service management in high resolution monitoring systems’ by Barco. The talk will discuss the architecture and use of some exciting technologies, like JMX, Terracotta, Custer4Spring in a not everyday setting, namely the large display and monitoring world.

So, for the last session I’m still not sure which one I’m willing to wait for until it gets published on the Parleys website. What I do know for sure, is that afterwards I’ll take a nap of 3 days and start longing for Devoxx 2009.
Belgian team created Java based tool for control room Aramco Oil

Digital Mosaic is a visualization tool that allows high resolution information displays from any real-time data source. It is vendor independent and developed by Barco in cooperation with Ebit for Aramco Oil in Saudi Arabia. It is based on a combination of existing Java frameworks and tools. The main challenge of the project was the enormous amount of pixels.

Barco is a global technology company which designs and develops visualization products for a variety of professional markets such as medical imaging, media, transportation, energy, process control and security. As the amount of data grows, the demand for real-time and large screen information visualization is growing as well. Guy Van Wijmeersch, Market Director at Barco: “In 2004 Aramco Oil, a Saudi Arabian Oil Company, asked us to help them enhance their visualization tool.” Barco searched the market but could not find a product for the large amount of pixels requested. Van Wijmeersch: “So in cooperation with Ebit we started to develop it ourselves.”

Challenges
The main challenge of the project was its size. Van Wijmeersch: “The display wall in the control room covers more than 210 square meters and runs 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. It integrates the critical applications and large screen information visualization is growing as well. Guy Van Wijmeersch, Market Director at Barco: “In 2004 Aramco Oil, a Saudi Arabian Oil Company, asked us to help them enhance their visualization tool.” Barco searched the market but could not find a product for the large amount of pixels requested. Van Wijmeersch: “So in cooperation with Ebit we started to develop it ourselves.”

The project was full of technical challenges. De Veirman: “To get the speed from a local desktop at the high resolution was not easy. There are more than 200 applications running in the entire control room, running 365 days a year. We therefore needed a dynamic failover and there we developed a rather unique self correcting approach. When a server goes down, it automatically takes information from another server. A black screen is therefore excluded.” Van Wijmeersch adds another focus: “The management of an international, remote project always asks for special attention. Another cultural challenge was the use of colours and symbols. De Veirman: “In the Middle East one loves flashy control rooms. We therefore had to make very clear symbols and colours that showed the relationship between the refining, shipping and oil and gas operations. The graphics were also drilled down to the level of detail needed by the planners.” And not to forget: “The visual output was very important as a control room always has a showcase element. Key people from different ministries of energy come there for a visit”, tells Van Wijmeersch.

Existing Java
The Digital Mosaic software is completely written in Java, and uses technologies such as Spring Framework, Cluster 4 Spring, Hibernate, Terracotta, Batik SVG, JMX and many more. The choice for Java was a logical one says De Veirman: “We choose for Java as it runs on any platform. Java is easily maintained too.” The availability of many frameworks helped Barco to keep the time to market as short as possible. “The development of our own framework would have taken too much time. Therefore we used existing and proven technologies. And in the end all frameworks are open source technology to which Ebit contributes as well.”

Digital Mosaic is able to retrieve data from wide series of data delivery systems, such as OPC, RSS, RDMS and SAP. It analyzes the data to trigger scenario interaction with Barco Dekstop Management Software Apollo, and rapidly visualize it on the Barco Overview Display. Van Wijmeersch: “But we are only responsible for the visualization not for the content. So if a certain application delivers unlogical information, an unlogical graphic will be on the screen.”

At this moment Barco is implementing Digital Mosaic Suite in several other companies and changing it to a tailor made solution for any company requiring real-time process monitoring. For Aramco Oil Barco is still delivering the first and second line support. Ebit is responsible for its third line support. De Veirman: “Those are mostly changes concerning integration into an industry closed environment.”

Do not miss this talk today at 11.30 in Room 9
Guy van Wijmeersch and Joris De Veirman personally elaborate on this project in their talk on the architecture and used technologies of this mission. Some features to be discussed are:
- Scenario management rule engine
- Scalable high resolution rendering with Batik SVG toolkit (>10000px by >5000px)

The Aramco Oil control room
**xVM VirtualBox:**

*a virtualized development and testing environment on your laptop*

Andy Hall

If you could choose any machine in the world on which to develop your next Web application, what would it be? Would you choose a swanky new Mac, a new Windows Vista PC, or a souped-up Linux or Solaris machine?

Among the things you should consider are what you're developing and for which deployment platform, the availability of the toolsets you need, and what your target audience will use to access it. But what if your dream machine could run Mac OS X, Windows XP and Vista, Ubuntu, RedHat, and Solaris at the same time? With Sun xVM VirtualBox software, that dream is a reality.

**Virtualized development platform**

xVM VirtualBox software is a virtualization platform that installs just like an application on Windows, Mac, Linux and Solaris platforms. Once installed, it allows you to create virtual machines into which you can then install full-blown operating systems ranging from older legacy OSes such as Windows 98 and OS/2 to the very latest Vista, OpenSolaris, and Ubuntu versions, all on your individual desktop or laptop. You can have available at your fingertips any platform and toolset you need to start developing.

And with features such as shared folders, scriptable interfaces, and snapshots, you can build the development environment you always wanted. You can also configure your virtual machines to be clients on the network, perhaps full-citizen servers too or simply reachable from other virtual machines on your PC. This is especially useful when you want to work on the move but your application requires multiple tiers.

For example, you can use Mac OS X as your host platform; Windows XP or Vista as a client, maybe using tools such as Visual Studio for debugging the client-side logic; Ubuntu as the application tier running, say, an Apache stack with a Java application server; and at the logical back end, you could have an OpenSolaris server for running MySQL, all on a single physical computer. The Linux and Solaris ‘server’ virtual machines can be either 32-bit or 64-bit, and guest platforms will run at near-native speeds.

**Time-saving testing platform**

One of the biggest challenges facing Web application developers is ensuring that your pages work as intended regardless of the user’s platform and browser. But testing on the various permutations of Windows, Linux, Mac, and Solaris operating systems as well as the full range of Internet Explorer, Firefox and Safari browsers requires a large bank of test machines that must be multi-boot capable so that you can cover all combinations.

With xVM VirtualBox software, you can create whichever platform you need, or even a library of virtual machines for each platform, each service pack level, each revision, and each browser. After successful completion of a test cycle, the virtual machines can be reverted back to known ‘clean’ states using snapshotting, such that one test does not impact another. And when your test team does encounter an issue, they can clone and share the problem environment so that the engineers can instantly have at their disposal a setup that can easily reproduce the problem.

**Easy to install and manage**

xVM VirtualBox software is the first free and open-source hypervisor to support all major host operating systems, including Mac OS X, Linux, Windows, Solaris, and OpenSolaris. To date, approximately eight million people around the world have downloaded xVM VirtualBox, which is licensed either as a free-for-personal-use binary or in an open-source edition under GPLv2. Developers can view the source code and join the growing community, participate in users’ forums, report problems, and view the status of issues at virtualbox.org.

At just 30 MB, xVM VirtualBox software installs in minutes and is very compact. It has been designed to be expanded upon, with APIs exposed through local or remote Web services interfaces. The modular core makes it easy to embed it in many other solutions, and it offers the flexibility to choose between a graphical user interface or a command-line interface, enabling you to write PERL scripts to test your application on all of your virtual machines.

Avaquest Software, one of the world’s leading software publishers, is among the companies taking advantage of the flexibility that xVM VirtualBox provides by offering Mac users a solution to run the Windows OS through Sun xVM VirtualBox. “There’s a huge need for cross-platform virtualization technologies that enable the growing Mac population to still use Windows-based software”, says Andy Goldstein, European COO, Avaquest Software. “Sun xVM VirtualBox provides a lightweight, easy-to-use solution that will enable users to easily work across operating systems and access their favorite applications.”

xVM VirtualBox software has garnered a number of awards and positive reviews from industry experts. Most recently, it won InfoWorld’s 2008 Bossies (Best of Open Source Software) awards in the ‘Best of open source platforms and middleware: desktop virtualization’ category. xVM VirtualBox software was chosen for its OS support and seamless support of Windows. And a review that recently appeared in PC World said that xVM VirtualBox software “is more capable than Microsoft’s Virtual PC 2007 in most respects and a bit friendlier than VMware’s free VMware Player and VMware Server...” Positive reviews have also appeared in other major IT publications, including eWeek, CRN, ZDNet, and ITWire.

xVM VirtualBox software is a key component of Sun’s broader xVM virtualization and management software portfolio, which also includes Sun xVM Ops Center, xVM Server, and the Sun Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) software. xVM VirtualBox software is the entry-level offering into the Sun xVM platform and is designed for a broad range of developers, end users, and businesses of all sizes.

To find our more about xVM VirtualBox software and to download the software, go to: [http://www.sun.com/software/products/virtualbox/get.jsp](http://www.sun.com/software/products/virtualbox/get.jsp)
Co-sourcing brings Argenta up to speed

ICT and business specialists are literally working side by side behind a computer screen at the head office at Argenta in Antwerp. They are building a front and middle tier to provide the 580 local branches with a straight through processing application to keep them up front in the fast changing financial and insurance environment. Between the strategic decision and the day they go live only a year has passed. Parleys had a talk with Jos Nijs, CIO and Member of the Board at Argenta, Jan Van Reusel, software factory manager at Cegeka and Philippe Herickx, finance sector manager at Cegeka about this challenging co-sourcing project.

“Argenta, is the fifth largest banking and insurance company in Belgium”, starts Nijs. “Our company offers banking and insurance products mainly to retail customers. Contributing for only 15% of the overall revenue end of 2007 the Board decided to invest into the big cross-selling potential of insurance products.” Therefore Argenta decided to invest in a Straight through processing application that supports the sales process for its car, hazard and personal liability insurances. Nijs: “We want a multi channel application to be used by the branches in the first phase, but ready for roll-out to end-customers (B2C) in a second phase, this at limited extra investment.”

With these clear goals in mind, Argenta established an RFP based on both business and architectural requirements. Nijs: “To keep total investment budget low and efficiency high Argenta decided to build the mid-tier-level on top of the existing back-end application leveraging investments made in the past. Our choice for Java was a logical one. On mid tier level you find a lot of Java based banking applications, Microsoft.net is less used.”

Co-sourcing

Today IT departments are generally expected to react fast and flexible on business’ changing demands. A good alignment between business and ICT is a prerequisite. Lacking the right skills for this project, Argenta decided to close this gap based on a co-sourcing model. Nijs: “For the new partner long term cooperation, awareness of the position of Argenta in the banking and insurance industry and transfer of know-how to our own team were basic requirements. We therefore opted for a co-sourcing model. Philippe Herickx: “Strategic partnerships, co-sourcing and transaction based sourcing are three mutually exclusive sourcing models. In a co-sourcing model customer and supplier share the responsibility for project management and are both working together to make success of the project.”

The selection process of the co-sourcing partner was handled in a very short timeframe. The RFP was sent out on 8 March, the presentations held on 9 April and on 18 April the decision was to go ahead with Cegeka. Why did you choose for Cegeka? Nijs: “They had conceptually the best proposition and demonstrated proven methodology and experience with Java development in a SOA environment. Additional trumps were the Cegeka University, the capacity of the software factory and the flexibility a co-sourcing model offers.” Herickx adds laughing: “We were simply the best.”

Project organisation

The project organisation was set up in May 2008 with 6 persons, 4 from Cegeka and 2 from Argenta. “It was a very hands-on team that formulated the project details and made an estimate on man days”, tells Van Reusel. In this phase Nijs felt the only bottleneck till now. “I did not expect the discussions on SOA to be so tough.” Van Reusel explains: “An iterative process which includes a circle of plan, develop, inspect and adapt is very efficient and conflicts with the traditional SOA method.” Both agree now that detailed up-front definition and description of all service contracts would have slowed down the development process.

The project was split in three phases estimated for a total of 2500 man days. Van Reusel: “There are 2 teams with each 10 persons, 8 Cegeka and 2 Argenta.” “The overrepresentation of Cegeka people is very logical”, says Nijs. “Transfer of know-how is very important but takes time and we have a very short deadline to hold.” In the mixed team, several roles are defined. Herickx: “The project manager tracks and resolves issues. The customer proxy takes care of the analysis, user stories, planning, testing and budget. The developers are responsible for the incremental design, test driven development, pair programming, shared coding, continuous integration, and build continuously. The onsite customers have the business expertise and do the testing.” Nijs adds: “It is very important that the business people are included. Decisions have to be taken all the time.”

Live

In January 2009 the first sites go live. “Meetings with branch managers have already taken place and training sessions are planned”, tells Nijs. Both Argenta and Cegeka are positive about the project. All agree upon that the shared corporate culture might be a part of that success. In the words of Nijs: “Argenta and Cegeka are privately owned companies and both have a no nonsense culture.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is outsourced?</th>
<th>Project management and implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key metrics</td>
<td>Project success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client-vendor relation</td>
<td>Joint project management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client expectations</td>
<td>Cost savings and access to expertise on demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vendor offerings</td>
<td>Labour arbitrage, project management expertise, expertise on specialized technologies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hidden Choices with open source

Antoine Borg

The world around us, as the song goes, is a-changing. In this day and age, more and more companies are focusing on getting better software value for their money and striving to do all they can to avoid cutting corners at the same time. Is this a pipe dream or achievable reality?

The open source market has often marketed itself as a lower cost commercial alternative to the proprietary vendors’ wares but in some cases, this claim was not taken seriously. Now, more than ever, this claim is being put to the test so many people are facing the open source vs closed source dilemma for the first time. The key is in choosing a product that can deliver the value that you need without compromising on quality. Here is a simple check list for such a decision:

1. Labour costs will certainly take up the bulk of your resources if you do not already have the appropriate skill set in-house. However, the proper skill set should not be a secretive set of well-guarded tools and mantras but be publicly available information. Does the product you’re looking at have proper training programs in place? Are the training programs run by the vendor or independent third-parties? Having an independent, un-biased view can be priceless.

2. Keeping the product running for longer means being able to support it. Supporting it means more than having the skills to diagnose and repair problems or assist users but also to be able to continue to do this in the future. While business related information about the financial health of a company are helpful, it is more useful to find independent contractors and support companies that use and support the product. Apart from being able to choose between vendors for the same service, you also have better chances of finding someone to help you when you need it.

3. Everyone likes to talk about their success stories so every company should have a list of happy customers who would be able to talk to you about their experiences with the vendor and the product and would be good referrals. While hearing positive reviews is good, do not shy away from asking firm questions to see how the product reacts under stressful conditions.

Jaspersoft announces upgrade to BI Suite at Devoxx

American Business Intelligence specialist Jaspersoft picked Devoxx to announce the new community edition of its BI suite, Jaspersoft Business Intelligence Suite v3 Community and Professional Editions.

The new release includes advanced charting and visualization capabilities that supplement the dynamic dashboards and interactive Web 2.0 interfaces introduced earlier this year.

Specific features include new built-in chart types, the ability to create and apply chart themes to customize the detailed appearance of charts, and easy integration with third-party visualization engines. Together these new capabilities deliver a richer experience for the display and visualization of data. Developers can use the new chart theme capability available in Jaspersoft v3.1 to change the overall appearance of built-in charts without having to write chart customizers or use an extensive set of chart properties. By using a single property setting it is possible to change the look and feel of all built-in chart types contained in existing and new reports. This feature makes use of the new custom component support also introduced in this release, and is particularly valuable for the many developers and ISVs who have embedded Jaspersoft in their applications. Other features available in Jaspersoft v3.1 include the recently announced certification for Sun’s GlassFish application server, and Section 508 compliance.

Yesterday, Jaspersoft also announced it has finished its second round of financing, securing 12.5 million dollars of venture capital.

Blogs at Devoxx

Check out all the blogs on Devoxx on the home page, www.devoxx.com. Here are some highlights from the last days.

“THE ‘FOX BOX’ WAS MINDBoggLING”, WRITES SVEN REIMERS

“Wow,” writes Sven Reimers, “those guys from Sun really showed the community how to sell the technology. Only few slides and many real cool demos and even a world premiere, the ‘Fox Box’, which was so mindboggling cool that I just missed taking a picture.”

More from Sven’s blog on http://mbguru.blogspot.com/.

“DEVOXX 2008: THIS YEAR’S BUZZWORD”, WRITES KOENRAD VASTMANS

“I have attended a variety of sessions the past days, but there is 1 buzzword that is being repeated like a mantra, be it in a session about REST, web sockets or AJAX/GWT: STATELESSNESS. REST is all about stateless service invocations, make maximum usage of the available keywords and statuses of http. Web sockets will make it possible to keep a connection open and stream data full duplex, in whatever protocol (anything based on TCP). Heck, we could even access our mainframe from within the browser! And AJAX/GWT? Well you know: single screen applications no longer require the server to preserve a state. Is there still a future for Spring WebFlow then...?”

More on Koenraad’s blog: http://arrayin dexoutofboundsexception.skynetblogs.be/category/1291650/1/Javapolis
Will JSF be the ‘biggest loser’?

This is the third leg in our series of articles based on talks during SpringOne last summer. Jeremy Grelle from SpringSource muses on Java Server faces.

Java Server Faces has the reputation of having some overhead and being complex. “The integration we provide is getting rid of this overhead using JSF strengths and integrating that into Spring”, said Jeremy Grelle, Senior Software Engineer at SpringSource and ‘resident Ajax Ninja’. The idea is to turn JSF into the ‘biggest loser’ – referring to the fitness reality show in which overweight people try to lose pounds as fast as possible. “The benefit and strength of JSF is the UI component model”, says Grelle. It is a little bit harder than it needs to be to write JSF components. “Hopefully we are solving that with JSF 2.0. But it provides a pretty nice level of abstraction where you can focus on dealing with your Java objects instead of worrying about parameters and typical web style concerns.”

How does Spring fit in with Java Server Faces? How similar is Spring’s integration approach to JSF to integrating other parts of Java EE. What about the traditional JSF centric approach and the new Spring Faces or Spring centric approach? In the JSF centric approach JSF is driving most applications and delegates to Spring.

The Spring centric approach takes a much deeper level of integration. “JSF really becomes part of the Spring world with the Spring programming model throughout.” Spring then plugs into JSF as a bean provider and can provide all the managed beans for a JSF application where you could get rid of managed beans in faces config completely. The general approach will not take it that far, though. So, one will usually have JSF managed beans in faces config and plug in Spring managed beans into those JSF beans through JSF’s EL (Expression Language) resolution mechanism.

The benefit of Spring all the way

“By using Spring all the way you get that common model without the conceptual mismatch between the two (JSF and Spring) and you have the full power of Spring behind you.” Spring may also be used to configure custom JSF artefacts, like navigational handlers and phase listeners. “It takes you a little bit further.”

The benefit of using Spring as a JSF Managed Bean Provider is that it provides for a less verbose configuration because of its more concise XML syntax. Spring 2.5 actually uses an elegant annotation-based syntax. Another major benefit is that there is only one facility to learn. Why not use Spring for configuring JSF, too? One has the full power of Spring’s container available with construction injection, lifecycle calls backs, aspects and autodetection of application components.

With the Spring-centric approach JSF plugs into Spring as a View implementation. It integrates with Spring MVC and Web Flow and doesn’t use FacesServlets. Spring becomes the managed bean provider, the request dispatcher, the navigation handler, the state manager and is used as a lightweight JSF component library.

In the Spring-centric approach one gains full control over URLs and uses a more concise, powerful expression of UI control logic for page navigation and exception handling. There is simply a finer-grained state management with FlowScope, ViewScope and FlashScope. “What was always missing in JSF, especially when you’re getting into more complex user interfaces, like Ajax style interfaces with a lot of controls on the page, a lot of actions firing on the same user interfaces, is... some scope that you don’t have to worry about cleaning up yourself.” If already familiar with Spring MVC why not use it for JSF views, too.

Component Library

Grelle gave some examples of what Spring has in its component library. “Decorators. We can decorate Spring Tomcat tasks by writing some java script to take the input and turn them into a widget.” In Spring java script everything is automatically degradeable, progressively enhancement enabled. If you turn java script off, everything still works. We have the same philosophy in the Spring Faces approach. Writing’s commands are Ajax-enabled.

Spring takes advantage of the capabilities provided by the Dojo components. “For simple things like validating a credit card, whether it is a required field or checking the length of it, you can do that on the client side. It doesn’t require a full trip back to the server. It tends to be a much nicer experience for the end-user.” The Date validator provides a neat Date pop-up.

Other component features are the prevention of form submission when validation errors exist, support for modal pop-up dialogues and Ajax-enabled display of UI messages. For additional controls there is integration with leading JSF component libraries such as Apache Tomahawk and Rich Faces. “It is like the 80 percent case. You can get pretty far with Spring Faces and still have all the benefits of Spring javascript with progressive enhancement and automatic degradability of your site.”

Losing weight over JSF

Grelle demo-ed two examples that are available in the Spring web load 2.0 distribution: JSF Booking and the Booking Faces application. Later he counted the controller artefacts and the lines of code needed in plain JSF and Spring Faces to get the job done. Plain JSF used 4 controller artefacts and 333 lines of code whereas Spring Faces required only 2 controller artefacts and a mere 95 (!) lines of code. Other benefits are that Spring Faces runs Ajax, has View Scope, Flow Scope, View Lifecycle Callbacks and Automatic Redirect After Post, Protected Views, Hot Reloadable Changes and Bookmarkability. Plain JSF doesn’t. Spring Faces also has modularisation, Exception Handling and URL Control that are only limited or inelegant in Plain JSF.

When to use what?

Sometimes the JSF centric approach will still be the more natural approach if you got existing JSF applications and seasoned JSF developers with little Spring experience. “We believe that the Spring centric approach will give you a more natural experience where it is Spring all the way down.” Spring would be recommended for new JSF applications. Why? Spring Faces’ annotation-based configuration and modularisation solves the proliferation of verbose xml configuration. The reduction of session state and serialisation overhead with finer-grained scopes solves memory overhead and Spring MVC’s robust UrlHandlerMapping machinery takes care of JSF’s lack of control over URLs. The automatic post, redirect and get puts an end to the browser back button usage issues.

Grelle is excited about a number of features in the upcoming JSF 2.0. “Components are going to be quite a bit easier to develop.” The state management will also be improved. “One of the problems you have with Ajax libraries right now is that they all have their own ways of doing things. So you can’t actually get Rich Faces and Trinidad and use them on the same page because they don’t know about what the other one is doing. So there is going to be a common foundation for those Ajax component libraries to share and interact nicer.”

“The integration we provide is getting rid of this overhead using JSF strengths and integrating that into Spring”, said Jeremy Grelle, Senior Software Engineer at SpringSource.
Do Java professionals feel the downturn of the economy?

In time of shortage freelance Java professionals have a chance to choose between projects and set their rates high. As most companies expect to cut budgets in 2009, Parleys talked with a recruiting company and one of his freelancers about possible changes.

Computer Futures is one of the biggest recruitment agencies in the ITC in Europe. Peter Voorneveld is sales manager of its contract division in Belgium. “We are a broker between employers and contractors. We have a living database. In Belgium 13,283 candidates are registered with a Java profile of which 60% are real Java specialists. From them 3,900 are freelance Java professionals.” Roel Van der Paal is such a freelance professional. “I am an expert in software development. Java, J2EE, Open source, IBM Websphere portfolio are my areas of specialisation. I prefer being a freelancer as it is fiscally more interesting and because you can develop your own business ideas.”

Computer Futures does not simply match profiles with a computer. Voorneveld: “We always have a personal talk with the customer. We want to know exactly why the company wants a certain profile. For example, when customers ask for a multi lingual Java Developer and we figure out that all the documentation is English, we propose to skip that requirement and show them an easier way to find a freelancer at a cheaper rate.”

Flexibility

Computer Futures sees that the market is changing. Voorneveld: “At the recruiting side we experience that the market becomes tight. More and more companies are putting headcount growth on hold now. At the contractor side, on the contrary we see more requests. When the head count cannot grow, companies hire freelancers as that is a more flexible approach.” Van der Paal does not think the shortage of experienced Java professionals will change short-ly. “There is a small intake of graduates. I also believe that employers might choose for the flexibility of freelance professionals. They are easier to hire and to fire.”

Rates

The need for freelance professionals might grow, but the times with extraordinary rates are over. “At the moment many contractors from the UK are coming at the Belgian market. Those candidates are 50-75% cheaper as the Belgian contractors”, tells Voorneveld. “So asking for a higher fee now is not realistic.” In the beginning of next year Voorneveld expects layoffs in the consultancy business. “Those professionals might enter the contractors market as well. Another aspect is that simple Java work is very easy to learn, so in re-schooling processes Java might be offered.” Van der Paal is optimistic in the end we might have to expect a lower rate, but that is all.” And history has shown that for experienced professionals in highly specialised niche markets there is always work.

Senior engineer Thierry Rouget explains why he likes working at De Post.

Thierry, can you tell me about your carrier path?

“I started working as a C++ programmer for a financial company. Later on, I got hooked by Java and switched to Java web application development. And that’s what I am still doing since I started working for De Post last year. I’m a senior engineer on the Masspost application, which is responsible for handling all the large volume deposits of mail made by corporate customers.”

Which technologies are you working with at the moment?

“De Post is very heavily using Java and open source technologies, which I like a lot. Most of the applications we develop are web applications and we are using technologies such as Jboss, Eclipse, JPA, JMS, web services and lots of others. The most bleeding-edge technology I am currently using is Unitils 2.0 since it is not even released at the time of having this interview! I have the opportunity of working on the same floor as the two lead developers of Unitils, so we are beta-testing their new release. I think Unitils is a very useful framework which makes it a lot easier to write unit tests.”

What do you like most about working at De Post?

“Well, De Post values technical people like me and offers me a career path in which I can grow while staying in touch with the technical aspects of software development. So, I don’t have to become a functional analyst or project manager to get a promotion. I also appreciate the way we constantly try to improve the way we do things. We have recently implemented Scrum in some of our development teams and that’s a very exciting environment to work in.

At the moment, De Post is a company which offers a lot of opportunities. With the liberalization of the postal market getting closer, there is a huge amount of work to be done. Furthermore, our customers from the business division are very committed to implementing these changes and their motivation is contagious.”

More than 700 IT professionals – more than 100 applications – millions of newspapers, magazines, letters and parcels to be collected and distributed every day – one big challenge!

www.post.be
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Java user groups are widespread among Europe. Some, like the Swiss one are more than ten years active, others such as the one in Paris, only a few months. All of them are passionate by one thing: Java, Java, Java. They gather to share knowledge, increase their professional networking and incorporate their preferred tools and language in the market. Parleys shared thoughts with ten user groups.

Java user groups are an integral part of the Java community. But why were they set up in the first place? Sharing information is the main reason. Kjell Paulsen is part of the ten year old Jug Norway and formulates it as such: "We felt the need to get the buzz going around Java and to get people with the same interest together. Martin Kemland (Switzerland) explains: "The original purpose in 1997 was to spread Java knowledge and experience between professionals and academic organizations. Java was quite young at that time." For Paris Apostolopoulos (Greece) and Grzegorz Duda (Poland) additional motivations were the lack of training in their country to start a group. In Russia it was the easiest way to meet good speakers, tells Yakov Sirotkin.

Sharing knowledge
Sharing knowledge is not only the main reason to start, but also to join a group. "There is always something new to learn", smiles Petar Tachtiev (Bulgaria). Andrew Williams (Scotland, United Kingdom) adds: "We discuss current technologies and help each other out with coding problems. Talks help to educate us on interesting topics and sponsorships allows us to obtain recent books and professional software." Filippo Diotalevi (Milan, Italy) continues: "A lot of professionals often spend years in the same company, working with the same technologies and the same people. For them, joining a Java user group means to be able to have a look to what's happening elsewhere, and to build a network with other professionals."

Heiko Sippel, (Düsseldorf, Germany) sees advantages for all involved in the Jug: "The visitors get interesting lectures, the speaker adds a new event on his list and the sponsors get the possibility to present themselves and recruit new employees from the local area." Paris Apostolopoulos adds that in a Jug you can make your preferred tools or language stronger in the market. Disadvantages have only to do with the organizational part such as legal matters and the amount of time spent. Grzegorz Duda (Poland): "You have less and less free time."

Parleys asked the Jug organizers how much time their organizational role actually takes. The answers varied. The new group in Paris is overwhelmed by its success. Antonio Goncalves: "The Paris Jug is ten months old and on our monthly conferences gathers around 160 people. The three co-leaders each spend about ten hours a week. We hope 2009 will be a phase of balance, where we can organize our monthly meetings with less stress." Goncalves can be reassured as the older group leaders spend between two till four hours a week. Williams elaborates: "Once you have a process for planning meetings, updating documents and sending out announcements it is straight forward enough." Sirotkin has a very pragmatical tip: "If I am too busy with my daily job I just do not organize the next meeting."

The time is spent on many activities. Create new ideas for meetings, lectures, presentations and events. Those events have to be organized and that means sourcing speakers and sponsors. Public relations are another important part of the work. Heiko Sippel: "I contact press services and large companies in our area so that our group gets more and more public attention." And finally, Jug organisers set the chairs and are cleaning the floor once the members have left.

Revenues
In most countries the benefits of participating in a Java User Group are estimated by employers and employees. Diotalevi is a freelancer: "My involvement in the Java user group Milano has given me the opportunity to meet a lot of potential business partners. As a matter of fact, I met all my customers thanks to the Jug, or thanks to people I met at Jug meetings. Williams stays at the employer side: "The Jug enables me to get in touch with a wider base of engineers that may fit in upcoming vacancies. It is also useful to find possible interns with great potential." Most of the groups have sponsors which indicate that the Jug is taken serious in the business as well. Kemland: "We have seven sponsors that support us with annual contributions. This allows us to organize large and interesting events, and the sponsor see a great value in it." Williams: "I think that smaller businesses take the user groups more seriously. Their ability to embrace change or new thinking is larger. Big corporations seem to depend more in training their own staff." Almost all countries have more than one Jug and they are working together. Between countries the cooperation seems to be less structured. Only Goncalves mentions a global network of Jug Leaders. "Since starting the Paris Jug, this network has been a fantastic resource."

Differences
A passion for Java is the common denominator of the Jugs but there are logistical differences. Some have paying members, others not, some focus on students, others on employed people and so on. Some prefer sponsoring others value there independency. In the past there have been several discussions, some misunderstandings, and a lot of different points of view according to Diotalevi. Williams: "Whilst different groups have different areas of interest I find that largely they are not headed in opposite directions. If collaboration were cheaper it would happen more often. It is often the case that if different groups are at the same conference they will meet and collaborate over a few beers." Finally, Kemland expresses a wish for the future: "It would be nice to define common goals between the various Java groups. This way, it would be easier to coordinate. Or, alternatively, the goals of the Java groups should be made public, and then the groups can coordinate bilaterally."

Martin Kemland: “The original purpose in 1997 was to spread Java knowledge and experience between professionals and academic organizations.”

Heiko Sippel: “I contact press services and large companies in our area so that our group gets more and more public attention.”

Filippo Diotalevi: “Joining a Java user group means to be able to have a look to what’s happening elsewhere, and to build a network with other professionals.”
The show is almost over

Here’s our last photo report from the grounds of Devoxx. Enjoy the last day, and see you next year.

MORE BLOGS FROM DEVOXX

Here’s some more excerpts from blogs on Devoxx. Go to www.devoxx.com for more.

“First of all,” says Duchess, “there was the keynote. Since we were there early we managed to make it into the actual keynote room. Stephan once again proudly gave some stats about Devoxx, and rightly so, cause it really is something to be proud about. 3200 people, 6 conference rooms and 160 speakers. Then he introduced RoxorLoops who introduced us to beatboxing. I’d heard about it before of course, but I had never seen an actual beatboxing performance. And I was totally overwhelmed. I never believed that that guy from police academy could actually make all those sounds, but after seeing RoxorLoops perform, it’s suddenly a bit less hard to believe. I heard him actually make three different kinds of noises at the same time and he really, really sounded like a drumset with special effects mixed in.”

More on http://jduchess.org

“Extreme programming,” writes Wim Bervoets, “this university session was covering two main topics: an introduction to Xtreme Programming and an overview of the very popular SCRUM agile methodology. In this post we delve deeper into Xtreme Programming. A detailed Scrum post will come soon. Three loops were described where an XP team loops through endlessly: the organisational loop, the team loop and the code loop.”

For a detailed discussion of these three loops, go to http://javablog.be

Zoltan Magyar is Hungarian but works in Switzerland, for Fabware. “The quality of the presentations is very high.”

Reuben Peeris (UK) works on Java projects at TeleAtlas, who make maps for GSP and other systems. “I found the sessions on concurrency really interesting, there’s insights here we can use straight away.”

Sara Ponga (Sweden) works for Dutch services management software specialist TopDesk. “I found out a lot of my colleagues are coming here, so I decided to join them. She also attended the Duchess BDF session with other Java girls.”

Nic Van Cleemput-ten is a mathematician, working at the university of Ghent, where he teaches programming, specialising in Java. He’s looking out for new technology to include in the curriculum in the coming years. “Java FX is certainly something we will have to look into.”

Iwan Littel works for the Dutch consulting company Task24. “What they are presenting here is really cutting edge, so it may be a couple of years before we can use this at a customer’s site.”

Nico Van Cleemput-ten is a mathematician, working at the university of Ghent, where he teaches programming, specialising in Java. He’s looking out for new technology to include in the curriculum in the coming years. “Java FX is certainly something we will have to look into.”

Anton Epple and Frederic Marius (SMALS) discussing yesterday’s presentations and demo’s. Anton is a German freelancer and member of the NetBeans Dreamteam. It’s his first Devoxx and considers this a great conference. He intends to use what he learns here as soon as possible, especially anything to do with JavaFX. “Everyones hoping for JavaFX in Swing components.”