Do you distribute application forms?

Do your users submit completed forms electronically?

evenlogic eForms solutions

Bringing electronic forms solutions into the 21st century

The Problem

For many years, the use of paper-based forms has been a classic method of collecting information from all sorts of sources. Now, the advent of internet technology has provided an opportunity to collect this information electronically but it is surprising how few organisations pursue this opportunity fully.

It is, for instance, common for an organisation to put up a PDF copy of a master legacy form on their web site but then to require users to print the form out locally, fill it in by hand and then post it or fax it back to the organisation concerned. This approach misses a golden opportunity to make the process of submitting an application easy and efficient for users and also of reducing the probability of errors and improving the work flow processes of the organisation concerned.

The Solution

It is relatively easy to provide a mechanism that allows users to fill-in and submit electronic forms from their web browser window. There are two main approaches to this, each with its own advantages. One approach is to use HTML forms and the other is to use PDF forms. An advantage of HTML forms is that solutions are tailored-made for the web. Advantages of PDF forms approach include the relative ease of creating the forms from other documents including legacy forms and the fact that the forms look the same as the original documents and consistent on different systems and browsers.

Evenlogic, as a software house with extensive experience of the software development of web-based database solutions, has now set up a special eForms software development group that specialises in web-based electronic forms solutions. This group works on solutions based on both HTML forms and PDF forms but with a slight bias towards PDF forms solutions. Most of the PDF forms solutions make use of the evenlogic eForms server software package. This package serves master copies of PDF forms from a web server and allows users to save copies of the content of a completed or partly completed form to the web server so that he or she can continue working on the form later and then submit it to the website. Most, but not all, of the eForms solutions involve a database which is typically Oracle, SQL Server or Access.

FAQs - evenlogic eForms server

1. How does the eForms server package operate?

The eForms server software package together with master copies of PDF forms are installed on a web server. By clicking on a link from his or her web browser, a user can obtain a copy of the relevant master form and proceed to fill it in from within the web browser window.

2. What are the advantages of PDF forms over HTML forms?

There are many, but two are particularly important. The first is the ease of creating master PDF electronic forms from source documents. Word documents, Excel spreadsheets, QuarkXPress documents etc can all easily be converted into PDF files and existing legacy forms can be simply scanned in as PDFs. Having converted the source document into a PDF, standard Acrobat tools can in turn be used to convert this into a master PDF electronic form with 'active' and 'intelligent' fields. The second important advantage of PDF electronic forms is that, unlike HTML forms, they look the same as the original document and look consistent on different systems and different browsers.

3. Is the master form a standard PDF document?

The master form is a PDF document which has been converted into a PDF electronic form (eForm) and has a .PDF file extension. The fields of the form have code associated with them which performs actions such as data validation and calculations on the data. Three or four special buttons are also incorporated on to each master form to perform special functions. Typically these include a "clear form" button, a "save data" button and a "submit" button.

4. Does a user need Adobe Acrobat software to be installed on their PC?

Yes. Adobe Reader (or Acrobat Reader as earlier versions were referred to) must be installed on the user's PC. This is free of charge and can be downloaded from www.adobe.com. For best performance users are encouraged to install the latest version. When a user clicks on a master form, the form opens automatically inside the web browser window. Note that the full commercial version of Acrobat may be used as an alternative to Adobe Reader, but is not free of charge.

5. Can a user save data that they have entered on to a form?

Under normal circumstances Adobe Reader (or Acrobat Reader) does not allow a user to save data entered on a form. Using the evenlogic eForms server, however, when a user has filled in (or partly filled in) the form, the data entered can be saved to the web server, using a "save" button provided on the form. The data is protected by a user name and password and when the user later requests his or her form again, the package on the web server fills out the form server-side with the user's data and re-displays the completed (or partly completed) form in the browser window so that the user can continue working on the form.

6. Does a user need to install any special software on their PC?

No. The evenlogic solution is a server-based solution with the evenlogic eForms server software and master PDF forms being installed on the form provider's web server. The only software required on a user's PC is the Windows operating system (Windows 2000, Windows XP etc), a web browser (Internet Explorer or Netscape) and Adobe Reader (or Acrobat Reader).

7. Can a user work on a form off-line?

The package makes use of session timers to allow users to fill in the forms off-line. Provided they re-connect their PC to the web server within the time specified by the session timer, the user can save or submit the data that they have entered whilst off-line. The session timer value is configurable and is set to a value appropriate to the application. A typical value is 30 minutes.

8. How is a completed form submitted?

Once a user is happy with the data that they have entered, he or she can click the "submit" button on the form to submit the data to the website. The form data can then be processed by server-side work flow processes.

9. Can eForms solutions be integrated into database applications?

Yes, a high percentage of evenlogic's eForms server solutions operate in conjunction with databases such as SQL Server, Oracle and Access.

10. On what web servers will the evenlogic eForms server package run?

Currently the package runs on IIS web servers under Windows 2000, Windows 2003 and Windows XP. Versions for other web servers are planned in due course.

11. Can *flattened* PDFs of completed forms be created?

Many of the eForms solutions supplied by Evenlogic incorporate a mechanism to create flattened PDFs on the server (i.e. non-interactive copies of the completed eForms). The flattened PDF can then be emailed back to a user as an email attachment who can then save it locally for their records. Flattened PDF files are often also used by the form provider's work processes as a way of distributing completed forms to relevant personnel.

12. How does Evenlogic market the evenlogic eForms server package?

Evenlogic markets the eForms server package by integrating solutions based on it into customers' IT operations on a project by project basis. Typically, implementation is preceded by a short feasibility study. Contact Evenlogic for more information on 020 8876 8878 or email info@evenlogic.co.uk.

Case Histories

Illustrating different types of applications that use evenlogic's eForms solutions

ILEX Tutorial College (ITC) – Order Forms

ILEX Tutorial College (ITC) specialises in training courses in law and is the biggest UK provider of legal education through distance learning. In September 2004, ITC commenced using a web-based ecommerce solution developed by Evenlogic and based around evenlogic's eForms server package. The order forms are PDF electronic forms and allow ITC's students to order course manuals and CD-ROMs using their web browser. The system incorporates a database to store product and order details and an eCommerce facility which handles on-line payment via WorldPay.

European Pharmaceutical Company – Drug Trial Forms

A major European pharmaceutical company has adopted a solution based on evenlogic's eForms server package to collect information on drug trials. For each patient, medical practitioners involved in the drug trials complete a form and enter information based on their examination and tests on the patient. The forms are PDF electronic forms and the system which operates in conjunction with a database is being evaluated as a pilot with a view to being deployed on a larger scale.

Camp America – Applications Forms

Camp America receives more than 14,000 applications from young people for supervisor positions at Summer Camps in the USA. For its 2005 recruitment campaign, Camp America has introduced a web-based system which allows applicants to apply online and which utilises a range of electronic forms. HTML forms are used for data entry and the data stored in a SQL Server database. Evenlogic's eForms technology is then used to retrieve the data from the database and re-create the completed forms as flat PDF forms which are distributed to relevant personnel within Camp America as part of the work flow process.

The YMCA – Resource Audit Forms

With over 160 Associations nationwide, the YMCA in England is one of the largest youth welfare charities in the country. Evenlogic has developed and supports a system for the YMCA that provides a central source of information on the assets, resources and activities of all 160+ associations. The system operates over the YMCA's intranet and is based on a SQL Server database using ColdFusion technology. It incorporates a range of HTML electronic forms that enable managers at each association, from within their web browser window, to search the database and to enter and update the information relating to their association.

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