

Automated Datasetting

A highly-leveraged, new Adobe product concept

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About two years ago (before I left Adobe), John Warnock wrote an internal white paper that described how Adobe core technologies could be used as “headless formatting engines” for the variety of data that would be pumped onto the web in the coming years. That paper struck me immediately as very insightful and similar to the Camelot white paper he wrote that coincided with the start of the Carousel project. Truthfully, I haven’t stopped thinking about the concepts and possible implementations since the day I read it. I believe that the current state of online publishing, web development and market driven real-time information requirements have aligned such that John’s concept could be productized and become a highly successful future business direction for Adobe.

Looking at the list of Adobe’s products and technologies, you’re struck with the incredible coverage across the entire publishing process, whether for print or online consumption. I think few would disagree that Adobe is sitting on the world’s best technologies in their respective areas. Some application products allow the customer to merge many of the technologies together into various types of documents and presentations. I know there have been concerted efforts for interoperability between apps. This forms the core of the implementation for the core technology and product concept I call “Automated Datasetting”.

In essence, **Automated Datasetting** is the process where text, stories, images, video, audio and metainformation is automagically poured into flexible templates by an intelligent layout engine. That engine harnesses and leverages the incredible Adobe core technologies for each type of data. A way to image the end result is to look at the C|Net News website, www.news.com.



Everyday, multiple times per day, the site is automatically refreshed with the latest news and images. C|Net has built a complex, automated system for doing this, that allows individuals to concentrate on their areas of expertise while the automated system handles the details of layout and delivery to the web.

This process is not only targeted at the Web, but could be used in Enterprise applications where quick layout of critical information would be very labor intensive and possibly too costly to make it a viable option.

An example of how this process could be used is the Pointcast client, www.pointcast.com, which presents in many cases, near real-time information in clean, understandable layouts.

Everyone would agree that you cannot beat an artist's eye for creativity and originality of design. Adobe has built its products to allow the most flexibility possible to the designer. But, there is a vast number of applications where an intelligent use of layout techniques (that Adobe's customers have perfected over the last decade) could be applied to produce an acceptable, if not beautiful result. This appears to be on many people's minds, as the proliferation of web-based Enterprise level reporting and formatting applications continues to rise.

I believe Adobe already owns much of the core technology required to perform this feat, as its being done manually everyday by businesses using Adobe products. There are even APIs and plugin interfaces to use some of the Adobe apps as headless content servers. This part would need to be fully investigated. The other parts of the process and core technology could be licensed by third-party vendors and adapted for use in this system. An example of that is an industrial strength backend database to hold all the individual pieces of data before automated formatting.

I agree with John Warnock that the applications for this type of automatically formatted data pump continue to grow in importance in today's real-time data driven world.

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