

# Survey of Technologies for Web Application Development

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Web-based application developers face a dizzying array of platforms, languages, frameworks and technical artifacts to choose from. We survey, classify, and compare technologies supporting Web application development. The classification is based on (1) foundational technologies; (2) integration with other information sources; and (3) dynamic content generation. We further survey and classify software engineering techniques and tools that have been adopted from traditional programming into Web programming. We conclude that, although the infrastructure problems of the Web have largely been solved, the cacophony of technologies for Web-based applications reflects the lack of a solid model tailored for this domain.

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## 1. THE DEMAND FOR DYNAMIC CONTENT

Within a decade of its inception, the Web evolved from a static hypertext presentation medium into a standard user interface technology for a growing class of interactive information systems. The initial Web implementation, defined by its static nature and a purposefully low barrier to entry, was sufficient for sharing documents but inadequate for more advanced applications. The early Web, despite

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its static limitations, demonstrated clearly enough the overwhelming potential and global reach of the new medium, setting in motion a rush of exploration into how to bring social, educational, and commercial applications online. Popular interest and media hype related to *cyberspace*, a science fiction turned plausible by the arrival of the Internet, raised expectations for the Web far beyond its humble origins to those of a universal hub of online information services [Bell 1997]. Up-to-date information and effective user interfaces, essential requirements for online service applications, could not be practically implemented with only static content. Methods for providing dynamic content on-the-fly in response to user requests were developed to meet the demands of Web service applications. Conceptually, dynamic content extended the early Web by providing an indirection level that allows users to request server *resources*, programs that generate documents, as well as documents [Berners-Lee et al. 1998]. Powered by dynamic content generation systems, online commerce, education, and communication services became widespread, and the character of the Web became increasingly application-centric rather than document-centric. At the same time client-side interactivity was extended far beyond its original constraints, which limited interaction to only simple page-based navigation through hypertext links.

### 1.1 The Static Web

The World Wide Web, commonly referred to as simply the Web, was developed in 1990 at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) as a hypertext system for sharing documentation between disparate computers and applications over the Internet [Berners-Lee 1989; Berners-Lee et al. 1994; Berners-Lee and Fischetti 2000]. The simple and open design of the Web attracted attention outside of CERN, initially mainly within the network research community. Acceptance of the Web accelerated after CERN released its implementation into the public domain in April 1993, which allowed organizations to experiment with the Web without concern for future licensing entanglements.

NCSA Mosaic 1.0, the first Web browser with a graphical user interface (GUI), was released by the National Center for Supercomputer Applications (NCSA) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in September 1993. The NCSA Mosaic browser was simple to install and use on the X Windows, Microsoft Windows, and Macintosh platforms. The GUI browser was an immediate popular success that was a catalyst for a rush of business interests and the public to embrace the Internet.

The success of NCSA Mosaic and the Web lead to demands for dynamic content, improved interfaces, and connectivity to external systems. The age of purely static Web was effectively over when NCSA introduced the Common Gateway Interface (CGI) in late 1993 as a feature of the NCSA httpd 1.0 Web server. CGI allows a browser client to request data from a program running on a Web server rather than from a static document. Other innovations such as browser fill-in forms and Server Side Includes (SSI) were additional early methods for making the Web more interactive and dynamic. Building on the early foundations provided by CERN and NCSA, the history of Web programming can be viewed as a continuing quest for improvements in efficiency, ease of use and reliability for interactive dynamic content generation.

Factor	Objectives
Global distribution	Reliability Extensibility Scalability Performance Portability over heterogeneity Loose coupling Security
Interactivity	Dynamic page generation Data validation Handling of browser navigation anomalies State management Event-action
Human and socio-economic factors	Agile development Designer/programmer integration Learning effort Popularity Conformance to standards and practices

Table I. Web technology design factors.

## 1.2 Web Technology Design Pressures

The Web architecture has evolved into an effective infrastructure for a wide class of complex, interactive services. Several factors shaped the mostly ad-hoc evolution of the Web. Table I summarizes the three major factors and some of their pressures on the evolution of the Web. This table provides a set of criteria that is used throughout the paper for assessing and comparing dynamic Web content development technologies.

*Global Distribution.* The Web is a distributed system that loosely couples clients with geographically-dispersed servers through message-passing over the Internet. The HTTP protocol is a specific implementation of the general distributed systems client-server communications model. Web applications are implemented within a distributed application layer above HTTP, and are therefore bound to the requirements of distributed systems. Properties and design points for distributed operating systems that are important for the Web are reliability, extensibility, scalability, performance, heterogeneity, and security [Sinha 1997].

*Interactivity.* Working around the user interface interactivity limitations of the Web architecture is a central theme of Web programming. Constraints of the HTTP protocol, which impose a stateless, strictly pull-only architecture on Web applications, mandate page-centered interactivity, limiting client processing to page rendering, form data collection, and navigation to subsequent pages. Any interaction between a client and a server results in a complete page to be downloaded in response, even if the new page differs only slightly from the previous version. The level of interactivity is similar to the archaic block-mode interfaces that connect dumb terminals to mainframe computers. The need to address the limitations of HTTP, which are justifiable for scalability and simplicity reasons, has provided much of the impetus for the development of technologies that have made the Web progressively more reliable, interactive, and dynamic.

*Human Factors.* Additional requirements for Web development technologies are related to human factors that reflect the cultural and social environment in which the applications are created.

### 1.3 Objective

The transition to the modern dynamic Web and beyond has generally been neither organized nor orderly, rather it was accomplished through independent innovation by many individuals and groups; sometimes collaboratively, sometimes competitively, and often in isolation. Web developers are pragmatic when evaluating new technologies: those that work well within the constraints of the applications are accepted; others are ignored or become obsolete, not explicitly retired, but instead gradually falling out of use. As a result, the Web development landscape is cluttered with a variety of technologies and tools, and littered with obsolete or failed options that can trap newcomers.

The objective of this paper is to derive order from the chaos by describing the foundations of the Web and classifying the related technologies and programming techniques that are used to create dynamic Web applications. Although server-side dynamic content generation is an essential part of almost all Web applications, it is too enmeshed with other concerns to be adequately explored in isolation. Therefore, the remaining sections of this paper describe the relevant technologies and techniques separately and as they evolved in relation to each another. In Section 2, the Web's architecture is reviewed, since it is the foundation for the technologies that support dynamic content. The progression of developments that made the Web increasingly dynamic and reliable is reviewed to survey important technologies and the context in which they were created. Section 3 surveys technologies specifically created for large enterprise software systems. A summary and classification of the technologies is presented in section 4, providing a roadmap for technology selection. Section 5 explores software engineering methods and tools that have been carried forward from traditional programming into the realm of the Web, and assesses their fitness and level of maturity for developing Web applications. Finally, section 6 draws the conclusions of our study.

## 2. SUPPORT FOR DYNAMIC CONTENT

Technologies are best understood in light of the context that motivated their creation. The evolution of the Web has been primarily motivated by a search for abstractions that improve its usability for end users, through richer user interfaces, and for developers with more powerful programming methods. This section recounts the road to dynamic content as a sequential narrative, starting with a brief review of the architectural foundations of the Web and design points for Web applications. The remaining sub-sections describe the progression of developments that shaped the dynamic Web, from the simple initial gateway methods that enabled dynamism, to the recent frameworks that aim to simplify development while improving reliability and functionality.

### 2.1 An Architecture for Distributed Hypermedia Applications

The architectural foundation of the Web is the request-response cycle realized by the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) [Fielding et al. 1999] and Hypertext

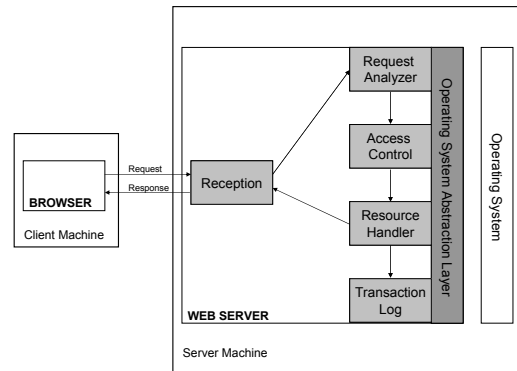


Fig. 1. A reference architecture for Web servers adapted from the architecture of Hassan and Holt [2000].

Markup Language (HTML and XHTML) [Raggett 1999; Altheim and McCaron 2001] standards. The Representational State Transfer (REST) architectural style provides a model architecture for the Web that was used to rationalize the definition of the HTTP 1.1 recommendation [Fielding and Taylor 2002]. Modularity, extensibility, and inversion of control are characteristics inherent in the Web that have allowed incorporation of features supporting dynamic content. Inversion of control is implemented on both clients and servers by various plug-in, content handling, and filtering interfaces that allow custom components to be invoked in response to events. The following sections review the operations of Web servers and browsers highlighting the extension points that are leveraged to provide interactive and dynamic content for Web applications.

**2.1.1 Web Servers.** Web servers implement the server-side duties of HTTP, the application-layer protocol that governs message-passing between Web clients and servers. Figure 1 is adapted from a reference architecture for Web servers provided by Hassan and Holt [2000]. The most common Web server implementations are the Apache HTTP server [Apache Software Foundation 2004], available for most operating systems, and the Internet Information Service (IIS) [Microsoft Corporation 2005b], available only for Microsoft Windows operating systems. Request and response messages share a common format that includes a start line, message headers, and optionally, a message body and message trailers. Request messages specify a request method, most commonly `GET` or `POST`, and a Universal Resource Identifier (URI) for a requested resource. Resources as a key abstraction for the Web, uniformly identifying documents, services, collections of other resources, and other types of information sources using a single naming scheme. Response messages include a status line and a resource representation of a resource. The protocol supports transmission of any content type that can be represented as a sequence of bytes with associated metadata. Responses are interpreted by client browsers.

**2.1.2 Web Browsers.** Web browsers process user interface commands, format and send request messages to Web servers, wait for and interpret server response messages, and render content within the browser's display window area. Figure 2 is

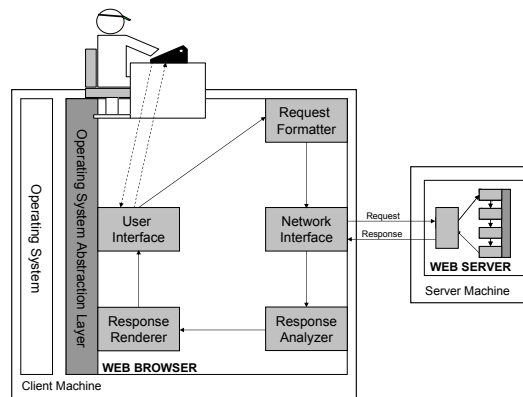


Fig. 2. An architecture that illustrates the operations of Web browsers.

a simplified architecture diagram that illustrates the operations of Web browsers. HTML and XHTML [Altheim and McCarron 2001] are the most common content types on the Web. Browser extensibility features allow many other content types to be displayed by deferring their rendering to registered plug-in components (helper applications) that handle the content. The pervasiveness of HTML makes it a friendly target for dynamic content generation systems.

**2.1.3 HTML.** HTML documents contain text interspersed with formatting elements. *Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)* allow formatting elements to be separated into reusable style sheets [Bos et al. 2004]. Uneven CSS implementations in browsers and ingrained practices resulted in an extended acceptance period for style sheets. Promotion of Web standards and improved browser implementations of the standards have recently resulted in steadily increasing use of CSS to separate presentation attributes from content [Zeldman 2003].

Client-side scripts can be embedded in HTML documents to add interactivity to Web pages and further process a document before it is rendered by a browser. The *Document Object Model (DOM)* [W3C 2004a] interface allows embedded scripts to modify the structure, content, and presentation of documents. The combination of HTML, client-side scripting, and DOM is informally known as *Dynamic HTML (DHTML)*. The most popular client-side scripting language is JavaScript. It is also possible to reference Java applets, Flash presentations, and other kinds of pre-compiled programs within HTML documents, but the approach has compatibility, latency, and security issues that limit its effectiveness [Bellovin et al. 2000].

**2.1.4 XML.** The *Extensible Markup Language (XML)* is a widely accepted markup language that simplifies the transmission of structured data between applications [Yergeau et al. 2004]. XML is a meta-language for creating collections of custom elements, in contrast to HTML, which provides a fixed set of elements. The *Extensible Stylesheet Language (XSL)* family includes a XML-based element matching language for XSL Transformations (XSLT) that is used to programmatically transform XML documents into other formats [Clark 1999].

XML has been extremely successful standard since the original recommendation was released in December, 1997. XML provides the base syntax for the XHTML and

CSS standards that normalize and will eventually replace HTML as the dominant presentation technology for the Web. Configurations for Web applications and services are now commonly maintained within XML files. The extensive availability of XML parsers makes it more convenient for programmers to work with XML files rather than develop parsers for proprietary file formats. Web services standards including SOAP [W3C 2004b] and XML-RPC [Winer 1999] leverage XML for configuration and as a request and response message format for remote procedure calls over HTTP.

## 2.2 Initial Dynamism

The earliest technical elements that allowed for interactive and dynamic content were HTML forms, the HTTP `POST` request method, and the Common Gateway Interface (CGI). HTML forms are used to collect user input data that is submitted to a forms processor on a Web server in a `GET` or `POST` message. By 1993, the availability of CGI completed the forms processing path by providing a means by which Web servers could process and respond to submitted data. CGI is functional but not scalable; as its limitations became clear other solutions were developed that were more efficient but more complicated. This section reviews the first wave of technologies for the dynamic Web including CGI, its server-side successors, and client-side extension interfaces.

**2.2.1 Forms.** The HTML forms capability naturally extends the Web's document metaphor by allowing user input to be entered on Web pages. A form is a section of a document that contains named user interface controls such as text boxes, check boxes, radio buttons, list boxes, and buttons [Raggett et al. 1997]. The definition of a form specifies a request method (`GET` or `POST`) and a URI for a server-side forms processor. When a form is submitted, the browser formats a request message containing the form data as a sequence of name-value pairs. For `GET` messages, the form data set is appended to the action URI as query parameters. When `POST` is used, the form data is sent in the message body.

The forms capability of HTML is relied on by many Web applications. The forms interface is simple, cross-platform, supports light data validation, and allows pages to be event-driven. The event model of a form is implicit in the URI references associated with submit buttons. The loosely coupled interaction between forms and their processors can be a source of reliability problems since there is no static guarantee that the data types of submitted data elements conform to the expectations of form processor.

**2.2.2 CGI.** CGI was the first widely available means for integrating Web servers with external systems, initially provided as a method to process data submitted from HTML forms [NCSA 1993]. CGI allows server-side programs to be invoked in response to HTTP requests. A Web server creates a new process for each CGI request. Figure 3 shows the architecture of CGI. CGI programs can be written in any programming language that supports environment variables and the standard input and output streams. The earliest CGI programs were written in C, but the deployment ease and portability of interpreted scripting languages such as tcl, Perl, and Python has made them the languages of choice for CGI [Ousterhout 1998]. Perl is the most popular language for CGI scripting. User input and metadata about

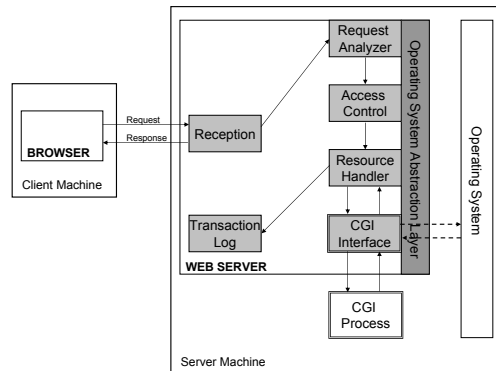


Fig. 3. The CGI architecture.

```

#!/usr/local/bin/perl
# Display the form data set sent in a GET or POST request.

print "Content-type: text/html\n\n";
print "<html><head><title>Form Data</title></head> \n";
print "<body bgcolor=\"#FFFFFF\"\n>"

if ($ENV{'REQUEST_METHOD'} eq 'POST') {
    read (STDIN, $buffer, $ENV{'CONTENT_LENGTH'});
    @pairs = split(/&/, $buffer);
} elsif ($ENV{'REQUEST_METHOD'} eq 'GET') {
    @pairs = split(/&/, $ENV{'QUERY_STRING'});
} else {
    print "<p>$ENV{'REQUEST_METHOD'} message received</p>";
}
foreach $pair (@pairs) {
    ($name, $value) = split(/=/, $pair);
    $value =~ tr/+// ;
    $value =~ s/%([a-fA-F0-9][a-fA-F0-9])/pack("C", hex($1))/eg;
    $name =~ tr/+// ;
    $name =~ s/%([a-fA-F0-9][a-fA-F0-9])/pack("C", hex($1))/eg;
    print "<p>Field $name has the value $value</p> \n";
    $FORM{$name} = $value;
} print "</body></html> \n";

```

Fig. 4. An example of a Perl CGI script.

requests is passed into CGI programs through environment variables and within the standard input stream, respectively. The output written by a CGI program to its standard output stream is sent to the client within an HTTP response message. The example Perl script in Figure 4 reads an environment variable to determine the request method (GET or POST) and displays the data that was submitted from a form.

CGI was the first widely supported technology for dynamic content and is still supported out-of-the-box by most Web servers. In tandem with scripting languages,



CGI is a platform-independent solution with a simple, well-known interface. The disadvantages are related to scalability and usability concerns. CGI is not highly scalable because a new process must be created for each request. For busy Web sites serving thousands of concurrent users, the CPU and memory usage required to constantly create and destroy processes severely limits the number of concurrent requests that can be handled. The use of scripting languages further strains a Web server's capacity due to the need to start an interpreter for each request.

The usability problems of CGI stem from the limitations of its thin abstraction over the HTTP protocol. Programmers must understand the workings of HTTP, down to the level of formatting details of resource identifiers and messages, to be able to create CGI scripts. No page computation model is provided; the programmer is responsible for generation of the response by printing HTML to the standard output stream. Role separation between designers and programmers is diminished due to the fact that the presentation attributes of pages are embedded with print statements in programs. Web page authoring tools such as FrontPage or Dreamweaver can not be used since the presentation HTML is embedded within a program's logic.

Other responsibilities including state management, security, validation, data access, and event handling are completely delegated to programmers. A spate of fragile, idiosyncratic Web application implementations were the result of the lack of structure allowed by CGI. The introduction of software engineering discipline in the form of coding guidelines, scripting libraries, and frameworks has improved the situation to some extent [Stein 1998].

Despite its limitations, CGI is not obsolete. It natively exists within most Web servers, in contrast to other dynamic content solutions that require additional component installation. The out-of-the-box, universal availability of CGI makes it a possible target for small to medium-sized applications with low-volume expectations. Wu et al. [2000] found CGI to be inefficient in handling concurrent client requests and therefore suitable only for low-traffic applications based on benchmark comparisons to other options for generating dynamic content. The technology is still in use mainly due to the increasing popularity of scripting languages, which can provide a straightforward, portable alternative to Java.

**2.2.3 Scalable CGI Implementations.** FastCGI (Open Market), `mod_perl` combined with the `Apache::Registry` module (Apache), and `PerlEx` (ActiveState) are examples of Web server extensions that improve the scalability of CGI. FastCGI is a CGI implementation that maintains a pool of persistent processes that are reused for multiple requests to reduce process creation overhead [Brown 1996]. Figure 3 shows the architecture of scalable CGI implementations. `mod_perl` is an Apache extension that embeds a Perl interpreter within the Web server that allows Perl scripts to access the Apache C language API. `Apache::Registry` is a Perl library that supports CGI under `mod_perl`. The combination of `mod_perl` and `Apache::Registry` improves performance by avoiding the overhead of starting and stopping a Perl interpreter for each request. An Apache Web server can also be extended to support corresponding capabilities for other scripting languages including Python (`mod_snake`, `mod_python`), tcl (`mod_tcl`), and Ruby (`mod_ruby` with `eRuby`). `PerlEx` provides similar capabilities for Microsoft IIS by maintaining

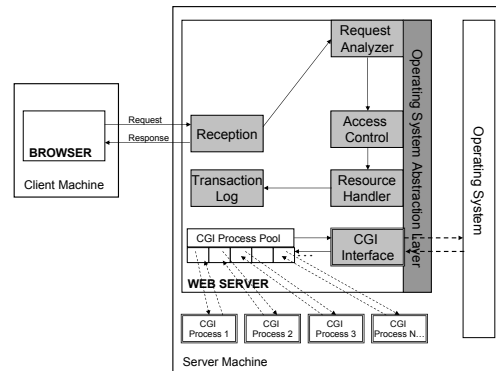


Fig. 5. The scalable CGI architecture.

a pool of interpreters that is managed by a Web server extension module [ActiveState 2003].

Gousios and Spinellis [2002] compared the performance of FastCGI, mod\_perl, and other technologies (PHP and Java servlets) on a Pentium III 733 MHz server with 384 MB of memory running Suse Linux 7.3. The conclusion was that FastCGI was the best performing option for small sites without extensive integration requirements, while Java servlets were found to be more appropriate for large e-commerce sites. Apte et al. [2003] compared the performance of CGI, FastCGI, Java servlets, and JSP and found FastCGI to be the best performing technology.

**2.2.4 Web Server Extension Interfaces.** The initial reaction from Web server providers to CGI performance issues was to create proprietary APIs with similar capabilities [Reilly 2000]. All of the major Web servers have APIs that can be used to introduce new functionality into a Web server through extension modules. The most well-known examples are NSAPI, originally created for Netscape Web servers [Sun Microsystems, Inc. 2003]; Microsoft ISAPI [Microsoft Corporation 2005a]; and the Apache module API [Apache Software Foundation 2003]. Extension modules are usually required to be written in C or C++ and compiled into dynamic link libraries that are linked into the Web server at runtime. Extensions can run extremely fast since they are compiled code that runs in the Web server address space.

ISAPI and the Apache interface are representative of Web server APIs in general. ISAPI supports the development of *extensions* and *filters* that modify the behavior of IIS. Figure 6 shows the placement of filters and extensions within the reference architecture. The corresponding Apache API constructs are *modules*, *handlers*, and *filters* [Thau 1996]. ISAPI extensions behave like CGI scripts; extensions are invoked directly by clients or through URI mapping, and are responsible for handling requests and creating responses. On IIS servers, a well-known example is the mapping of `.asp` files to `asp.dll`, the Active Server Pages interpreter. A corresponding example for Apache is the association of `.php` files to the `mod_php` extension module. ISAPI filters perform additional behaviors in addition to the default behaviors, and can be used to implement custom logging, authentication,

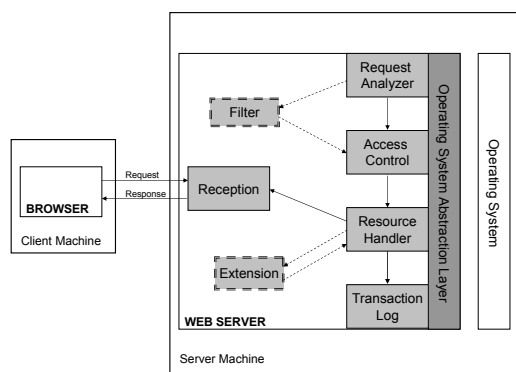


Fig. 6. The reference architecture for Web servers modified to show filters and extensions.

mapping, and retrieval features. The Apache API also filters as a modular way to manipulate request or response data streams.

Web server APIs were originally designed as scalable replacements for CGI, but they are rarely directly used to build Web applications. The APIs are complex, non-portable, and require advanced programming knowledge, so extension modules are difficult to build, test, and maintain. Reliability can be compromised due to the tight integration of extensions into Web servers; a single flaw in an extension module can crash a Web server. The cost of developing extensions is easier to justify for widely reusable features than for those supporting only a single application. In spite of their weaknesses, Web server APIs are an important building block for dynamic content generation systems. In fact, for performance reasons most server-side technologies that support dynamic content are based on Web server extension modules.

*2.2.5 Browser Extension Interfaces.* One of the first browser extension interfaces was the Common Client Interface (CCI) for NCSA Mosaic [NCSA 1995]. CCI was an API that allowed external applications to communicate with running browser instances by requesting a URL to be displayed. CCI is obsolete but influenced the browser extension technologies that followed.

During the browser wars of the mid-1990s all of the major browser providers created proprietary APIs to differentiate their products. The Netscape Plug-In API and Microsoft ActiveX are examples of browser-specific APIs. For systems requiring dynamic interfaces, the key features of browser-specific APIs are support for plug-in components and access to internal browser methods and properties related to the presentation of content. Security that prevents downloaded components from performing undesirable actions is a key requirement for browser extensions. ActiveX makes use of “Authenticode”, a code-signing scheme that verifies that downloaded binary components are pristine as offered by a certified provider prior to their execution by a browser. Figure 7 illustrates the place of extensions with the architecture of browsers.

**Applets.** Java applets represent an extension approach that is not browser-specific since it leverages the portable Java byte code format. Applets are Java class files

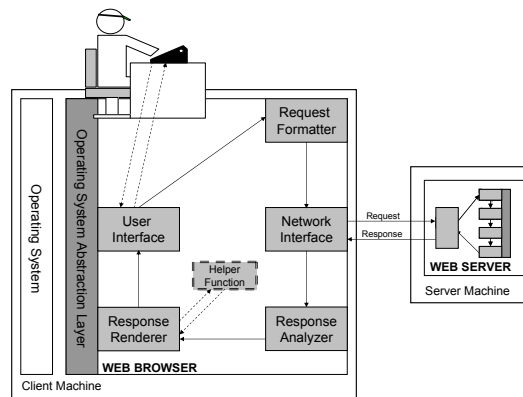


Fig. 7. Browsers are extended through plug-in and scripting interfaces that influence the rendering and handling of the user interface.

that are downloaded and interpreted by a Java Virtual Machine (JVM) running within the browser address space. The JVM executes applets only after verifying that their code is safe, meaning that it not been tampered with and contain no instructions that violate the client's security policy. Applets can also be digitally signed and verified to provide an additional level of security. Java applets initially suffered from poor perceived performance due to extended download times and slow interpretation; therefore the technology has been relegated to a secondary role, even though performance has since been vastly improved by the introduction of just in time (JIT) compilation to native code. The pervasive Macromedia Flash animation player plug-in provides an alternative to Java applets that is now commonly used to embed marketing presentations in Web pages.

**Client-side Scripting.** Interpreters for lightweight scripting languages such as JavaScript and VBScript were available for most browsers by the end of 1996. Client-side scripting languages interfaces are more accessible than browser extension APIs, since they remove the need to know an entire API to add pieces of useful functionality to an HTML document. Client-side scripts are slightly less efficient than plug-ins, but the advantages of easy access to browser properties and methods outweigh the performance penalty. Initially, each browser creator implemented a proprietary scripting language and API that was incompatible by design with other browsers. Scripting language standards, including ECMAScript and DOM, have improved the situation to the point that cross-browser scripting is possible.

**Rich Internet Applications.** The applet concept has recently been revived under the guise of *rich Internet applications (RIA)*. The objective of the RIA concept is to break away from the page-centered constraints imposed by the Web to support a more interactive user experience. RIA solutions that attempt to introduce a new plug-in architecture on to the Web (Konfabulator, Curl, and Sash Weblications, to name a few) have attracted attention, but eventually lose momentum due to the requirement to download and install a plug-in. Laszlo and Macromedia Flex are RIA environments that are attempting to exploit the large installed base of Flash users to provide improved interactivity without requiring plug-in installation. Laszlo applications are described using an XML application description language. The

Laszlo Presentation Server is a Java servlet that dynamically composes and serves Flash interfaces in response to requests for Laszlo applications. RIA solutions can improve the responsiveness and presentation quality of Web user interfaces, but have not reached the mainstream of development. More experience with the technologies is needed to assess their compatibility with the existing Web infrastructure before widespread adoption of RIA will occur.

**Expanded Use of Dynamic HTML.** Garrett [2005] coined the term *Ajax* for using the combination of XHTML, CSS, DOM, XML, XSLT, Javascript, and XMLHttpRequest, a JavaScript API for accessing Web services, to deliver RIA completely within the existing Web infrastructure. The production application of Ajax within several popular, high-volume web sites including Gmail, Google Suggest, Google Maps, and the Amazon.com A9 search engine provides evidence that the combination can be effective and scalable. The disadvantages of Ajax lie in browser compatibility issues and the non-straightforward JavaScript coding that can be required to implement simple functionality.

### 2.3 Interpreted Template-Based Scripting

The use of templates is a common characteristic of pattern-based program construction systems. A *template* is a model for a set of documents, composed of fixed and variable parts, that is contextually expanded to yield conforming document instances. The variable parts of a template encapsulate programming logic such that each variable part exposes a program function that specifies how it is expanded in context. Predominately-fixed templates are easier to construct and comprehend than more variable templates since less programming is required and the defined structure is largely static. Many Web sites consist of generally fixed HTML pages with small amounts of variable content. In contrast to template processing, CGI processing is more suitable for applications with mostly variable content, which are not as common on the Web. The template model better supports the common Web application pattern by embedding logic within fixed presentation markup. Templates reduce the programming skill needed to create dynamic content. Role separation is well-supported since the addition of logic can be delegated to programmers. Figure 8 illustrates that template-based scripting interpreters are implemented as Web server extensions.

**2.3.1 Server-side Includes.** The *Server Side Includes (SSI)* capability was introduced by NCSA in 1993 as method for embedding trivial computations within HTML pages to be processed directly by the Web server, instead of by a separate process as with CGI. SSI templates contain fixed HTML text and variable areas with commands that execute before a response is sent to a user. The technology is *tag-centered*, in that dynamic behavior is specified by special HTML tags, formatted comments that denote command keywords and parameters.

The initial SSI implementation supported the `include` command for text file inclusion, the `echo` command for variable output, and the `exec` command for running external programs. Conditional processing and other features were independently added to SSI by Web server providers. On Apache Web servers, SSI plus several extensions is known as *Extended SSI (XSSI)*. Figure 9 is an example Apache XSSI template with conditional processing commands (`if`, `elif`, and `endif` commands)

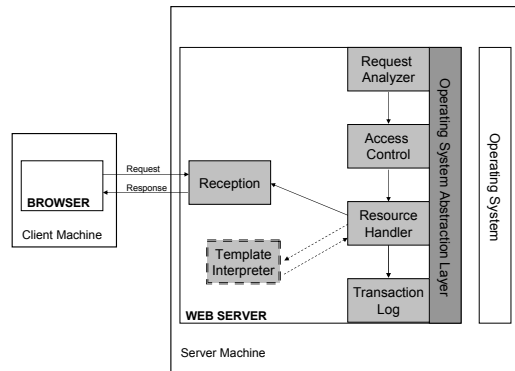


Fig. 8. The Web server architecture is extended with a template-based scripting interpreter to implement server-side templates.

```

<html>
<head>
  <meta http-equiv="Content-Language" content="en-us">
  <title>SSI Example</title>
  <!--#set var="VAR.css" value="msie" -->
  <!--#if expr="($HTTP_USER_AGENT=/Mozilla/)"
    && ($HTTP_USER_AGENT !=/compatible/)" -->
  <!--#set var="VAR.css" value="nav" -->
  <!--#elif expr="($HTTP_USER_AGENT=/Opera/)" -->
  <!--#set var="VAR.css" value="opera" -->
  <!--#endif -->
  <LINK REL="stylesheet" type="text/css"
    href="/css{<!--#echo var='VAR.css' -->.css}>
</head>
<body>
  <!--#include virtual="pageheader.shtml" -->
  <p>This is an example SSI page.</p>
  <p>Document name: <!--#echo var="DOCUMENT_NAME" --> </p>
  <p>Server local time:<!--#config timefmt="%I:%M %p %Z" -->
  <!--#echo var="DATE_LOCAL" -->
  </p>
  <p>Browser type: <!--#echo var="HTTP_USER_AGENT"--> </p>
  <!--#include virtual="pagefooter.shtml" -->
  <p>Last updated:<!--#config timefmt="%c" --> </p>
</body>
</html>
  
```

Fig. 9. An example of an XSSI document.

and core SSI commands including `config`, `include`, and `echo`. The example shows two typical uses of SSI which are to include common elements on a group of pages, and content adaptation based on client attributes.

While infrequently used, SSI is not completely obsolete and the core set of commands is supported by most Web servers. Role separation is better supported by SSI than by CGI since the fixed and variable areas of pages can be built indepen-

```

<cfquery name="AuthorResult" datasource="bookdb">
  SELECT authorName FROM authors
</cfquery>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>ColdFusion Example Author Listing</TITLE>
  </head>
  <body>
    <h1>Author List</h1>
    <cfoutput query="AuthorResult">#authorName#<BR></cfoutput>
  </body>
</html>

```

Fig. 10. An example of a ColdFusion document.

dently. Web designers can work strictly with HTML to design the appearance of a page, adding `exec` commands to retrieve information where dynamic content is required. Development of logic invoked by `exec` commands can be delegated to programmers.

The disadvantages of SSI are related to scalability and usability concerns. SSI is no more scalable than CGI, and can be worse for documents with multiple `exec` commands. Each `exec` command leads to a process creation, adding appreciably to the Web server processing load even relative to CGI. The usability concerns are due to the primitive syntax and CGI-based process model. The syntax is error-prone, difficult to internalize, but does not support complex processing other than through CGI via `exec` commands. The dependence on `exec` for non-trivial processing renders templates defeats role separation. For larger applications, the inevitable reliance on `exec` leads to barely maintainable, multi-language tangles of templates, scripts, and programs. While SSI is rarely appropriate for new applications, it provides an accessible, low cost alternative for non-critical, low-traffic Web applications

**2.3.2 ColdFusion.** ColdFusion was introduced in 1995 by Allaire Corporation as an “easy to program” technology for creating dynamic content. The defining feature of the technology is the template-based ColdFusion Markup Language (CFML), originally interpreted but now JIT-compiled into servlets. CFML advanced the templating model of SSI by providing a large set of commands, originally focused on database processing but ultimately also supporting other functions including file management, flow control, and forms processing, that is designed to be comprehensive for Web applications. The command syntax is simple, in that ColdFusion commands are recognizable as tags with names starting with `cf` with variable references enclosed in `#` characters. Figure 10 shows an example of a simple ColdFusion template that displays dynamic content retrieved from a database.

ColdFusion is comparable to SSI, sharing many of its advantages and disadvantages. Templates are portable since interpreters are available for several Web servers including Apache and IIS. Role separation between Web designers and programmers is possible to a similar extent as with SSI. Database access is optimized compared to CGI and SSI. The syntax is more expressive than that of SSI, but still

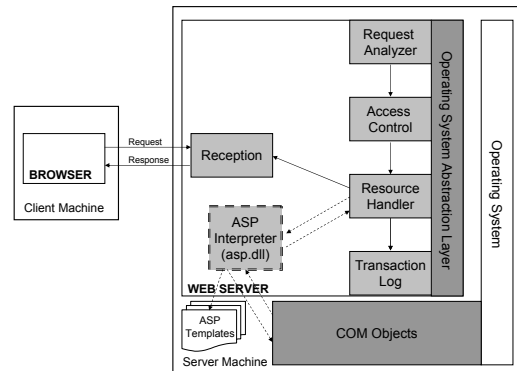


Fig. 11. The architecture of ASP. `asp.dll` is the scripting language interpreter that provides access to COM objects for interoperability.

not well-suited for expressing complex logic. The size of the language, in terms of the sheer number of options, reduces its usability.

**2.3.3 Server-Side JavaScript.** The next widely-used technology for server-side scripting was *script-centered templating* as exemplified by the introduction of *Server-Side JavaScript (SSJS)* and the Microsoft *Active Server Pages (ASP)* environment in 1996. Figure 11 shows the place of script-centered templating within the reference Web server architecture. In script-centered templating, blocks of logic are embedded in HTML pages. Script-centered templating quickly gained popularity among programmers as a more natural way to produce dynamic content. SSJS preceded and influenced ASP but did not catch on with developers and is obsolete. SSJS pages were constructed from HTML and JavaScript code contained within `<SERVER>` tags. SSJS pages were compiled into byte-code representations that were interpreted by an interpreter on the Web server. The SSJS development and runtime environment provided `server`, `application`, `database`, `client`, and `request` objects that supported state management. Output functions including `write` and `writeln` were provided to generate dynamic content into HTTP responses from JavaScript code blocks. Figure 12 shows an example of a SSJS script.

**2.3.4 Active Server Pages (ASP).** ASP is a server-side scripting environment for Web applications that provides a scripting language engine that supports several languages, an object model, and an interface for accessing server components. The most commonly used scripting language for ASP pages is VBScript. JScript, a JavaScript variant, is also supported out-of-the-box, and other languages can be installed. ASP pages are text files with `.asp` extension names that contain fixed HTML and blocks of scripting code within special brackets (`<% .. %>`) or `<script> .. </script>` tag pairs.

The integrative power of ASP comes from the ability to access COM components on the server from within Web pages. The Component Object Model (COM) is a Microsoft standard that provides a language-independent means for defining and referencing components as objects. An ASP execution has built-in access to several



```

<html>
  <head> <title>Server-Side JavaScript Example Author Listing</title> </head>
  <body>
    <h1>Author List</h1>
    <server>
      if (!database.connected()){
        database.connect("ODBC","bookdb","admin","","");
      }
      if (database.connected()) {
        qs = "SELECT au_id, au_fname, au_lname FROM authors";
        results = database.cursor(qs);
        write("<table border=2 cellpadding=2 cellspacing=2>" +
          "<tr><th>ID</th><th>First Name</th><th>Last Name </th></tr> \n");
        while(results.next()) {
          write("<tr><td>" + results.au_id + "</td> + "<td>" +
            results.au_fname + "</td>" +
            "<td>" + results.au_lname + "</td></tr> \n");
        }
        results.close(); write("</table> \n");
      }
      else {
        write("<p>Database connection failed");
      }
    </server>
  </body>
</html>

```

Fig. 12. An example of a Server-Side JavaScript template.

automatically instantiated COM components, collectively known as the ASP built-in objects that have properties and methods that encapsulate the HTTP request-response cycle. ASP scripts can also reference the properties and methods of other COM components that are available on the Web server. A standard ASP installation includes a set of COM components that support common requirements of Web applications. Figure 13 shows a simple ASP page that displays data from a table in a database.

In the hands of experienced programmers, ASP's combination of HTML, scripting language code, and access to COM components can be a powerful tool for building dynamic Web applications. ASP became the most popular scripting-based templating technology on the Web, at least partially due to the large installed base of Microsoft server operating systems. The emergence of ASP was a step forward for Web application development; many systems supporting dynamic content that followed were influenced by the technology.

The disadvantages of ASP are related to portability, scalability, integration, reliability, and usability concerns. Since ASP is still primarily applicable only to Microsoft systems despite various porting efforts, applications are generally not portable and integration with other platforms can be problematic. Scalability is limited due to runtime interpretation, which consumes extra CPU cycles compared to compiled code execution. While COM integration provides access to an ad-hoc set of advanced features including support for transactions, the technology was not designed from ground up as a comprehensive, service-oriented framework, so crit-

```

<%
Dim conn, rs
Set conn = Server.CreateObject("ADODB.Connection")
Set rs = Server.CreateObject("ADODB.Recordset")
conn.Open "bookdb", "sa", "password"
Set rs = conn.Execute("select au_id, au_fname, au_lname from authors")
%>
<html>
<head> <title>ASP Example Author Listing</title></head>
<body>
  <h1>Author List</h1>
  <table>
    <tr><th>ID</th><th>First Name</th><th>Last Name</th></tr>
    <% Do Until rs.EOF %>
      <tr><td><%=rs("au_id") %></td>
      <td><%=rs("au_fname") %></td>
      <td><%=rs("au_lname") %></td></tr>
    <% rs.movenext
      Loop
    %>
  </table>
</body>
</html>

```

Fig. 13. An example ASP page that retrieves data from a database table.

ical concerns such as security and reliability are not integral to the environment. While the programming model is conceptually simple, the fundamental mismatch between the event-driven nature of applications and the page-centered interaction constraints of the Web is not addressed. The script-centered approach is less accessible to non-programmers than tag-centered approaches, so role separation are diminished.

2.3.5 *PHP*. PHP is an open-source, cross-platform, object-based scripting language for dynamic Web applications that is analogous to ASP. Versions of PHP run on many operating systems and Web servers, and interfaces are available to many database systems. PHP is available for Windows operating systems, but since ASP being generally the preferred option on Windows systems, PHP is most prevalent on Linux systems running Apache. The PHP syntax contains elements borrowed from C, Perl, and Java. Figure 14 shows an example PHP script. While PHP has comparable advantages and disadvantages as classic ASP, the portability of PHP can be beneficial if an application needs to run on several platforms or Web servers. The open source combination of Linux, Apache, MySQL, and PHP, commonly referred to as LAMP, is gaining interest as a low cost platform for Web applications.

### 3. SCALING UP TO THE ENTERPRISE

In theory, server-side scripting environments such as ASP provide building blocks that support the needs of large enterprise systems, but in reality too much infrastructure responsibility is assigned to individual developers. Instead of being able to focus solely on business logic, Web application developers have to implement home-

```

<html>
  <head>
    <title>PHP Example</title>
  </head>
  <body>
    <?php
      $res_string = "";
      $connval = odbc_connect ("bookdb", "sa", "");
      if ($connval) {
        $rs_ret = odbc_exec($connval, "select au_lname + ', ' +
          au_fname as au_name from authors");
        if ($rs_ret) {
          echo "The SQL statement executed successfully.<br>";
          echo "The results are below:<br>";
          echo "<table><tr><td><b>Author Name</b></td></tr> "
            while ($res = odbc_fetch_row($rs_ret)) {
              $res_string =
                "<tr><td>".odbc_result($rs_ret, "au_name")."</td></tr> " ;
              echo $res_string;
            }
          }
        else {
          echo "The SQL statement did not execute successfully ";
        }
      }
      else {
        print("<br>Connection Failed");
      }
    ?>
  </table>
</body>
</html>

```

Fig. 14. An example PHP script that retrieves data from a database table.

grown solutions for transaction management, resource pooling, and other complex features. For large-scale Web application development to be practical, infrastructure concerns need to be separated from business logic and presentation concerns.

### 3.1 Application Servers, Components, and Middleware

Large-scale Web applications are typically built with an architecture that makes use of application servers and middleware to separate the Web server, presentation logic, business logic, and data access concerns into distinct tiers. Figure 15 shows several common tier configurations (two-tier, three-tier, and four-tier) that are commonly used for enterprise Web applications. The reliability and infrastructural requirements for large Web applications and the essential services that support the requirements, collectively known as *middleware services*, are summarized in Table II.

The most widely applicable and effective middleware services are standardized, portable, and support rapid application development. *Application servers* aim to meet the middleware requirements of enterprise systems and are an integral part of large, dynamic Web applications. This section presents an overview of the

Requirement	Approach/Solution	Description
Reliability	Transparent fail-over	Route requests for failed services to another server.
	Transaction support	Units of work completely succeed or are rolled back.
	System management	Provide system monitoring and control capabilities.
	High availability	Minimize time that a system is not available due to failures.
	Replication	Duplicate resources for load balancing or recovery.
	Failure recovery	Detect service failures, divert requests to another instance.
Throughput	Load balancing	Alternate requests between servers to equalize utilization.
	Clustering	Interconnect multiple servers to share a processing workload.
	Threading	Execute requests concurrently within a process.
	Efficiency	Process requests with minimal resources and latency.
	Scalability	Maintain stable performance as the rate of requests increases.
	Resource pooling	Share resources between multiple users in an optimized way.
Integration	Caching	Save computations for later compatible requests.
	Remote method invocation	Interfaces for synchronous method invocation.
	Back-end integration	Interfaces to external information systems.
	Database access	Store and retrieve database information.
	Location transparency	Allow services to be requested by directory name.
	Multi-protocol support	Integrate multiple protocols into a uniform interface.
Security	Message-passing	Asynchronous communications through message-passing.
	Legacy connection	Interfaces to obsolete or surpassed technologies.
	Logging and auditing	Record significant activities that occur within the system.
Development	Permission checking	Verify identity and protect resources.
	Rapid development	Reliable applications can be developed quickly.
	Dynamic redeployment	Running applications can be updated without interruption.
	Separation of concerns	Role-specific contributions are separate in code modules.
	Modularity	Isolated changes minimally impact other parts of a system.
	Reusability	Modules can be used for multiple applications.
	Software scalability	Software remains manageable as system size increases.
Portable languages	Modules can run without changes on multiple platforms.	
Standardization	The technology has multiple compliant providers.	

Table II. Requirements for enterprise business systems.

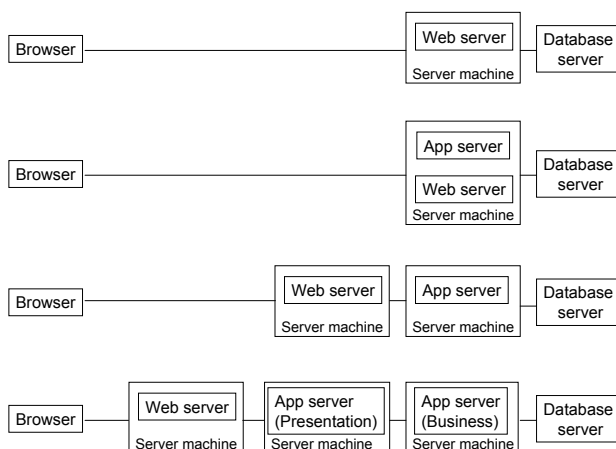


Fig. 15. Example multi-tiered configurations for Web applications. In all of the configurations an HTTP process and database server are required.

standards, programming languages, and environments that support enterprise-class Web applications.

### 3.2 Java-based Architectures

Java is a popular, garbage-collected, object-oriented language developed by Sun Microsystems. Although Java initially gained attention on the Web as a client-side technology for running secure applets within browsers, its impact has ultimately been greater on the server-side. The portability of Java applications between platforms that support Java Virtual Machine (JVM) implementations is a particularly valuable feature for the Web, the most diverse computing environment imaginable. Reliability is improved relative to scripting languages because Java is statically type-safe. The environment supports runtime reflection, interface-implementation separation, and dynamic class loading, which building blocks for components and application servers. None of the features are novel, but the packaging of the features within a single environment was timely and gained momentum with developers.

There have been two major versions, Java and Java 2. Java 2 de-emphasized applets and defined platform editions. A platform edition consists of a JVM, an SDK, and APIs. The Java Runtime Environment (JRE) consists of the JVM and components needed to applications. Java 2, Standard Edition (J2SE) consists of the JRE and the SDK. The Java 2 platform, Enterprise Edition (J2EE) is the platform used for enterprise Web application development. J2EE includes J2SE and a set of specifications, designed to be implemented by application server providers, that defines a standards for enterprise middleware services that provide infrastructure for large scale Web applications.

**3.2.1 Java Servlets.** Java servlets extend Web servers to support dynamic content generation. The Java Servlet API was introduced in 1997 as a replacement for CGI. Servlets are functionally similar to CGI scripts in that both are intermediary components that generate dynamic responses to HTTP requests.

Problems areas for CGI that are addressed by servlets are performance, state management, and standardized access to middleware. The process model is similar to scalable CGI in that instances service multiple requests, but with servlets each instance is dedicated to a particular servlet. Servlet are executed by *servlet containers*, also known as *servlet engines*, which are Java applications that manage threads through their lifecycle. The use of threads instead of processes improves efficiency and scalability, while providing efficient access to global objects initialized by the container. Since successive requests to a servlet are handled by a continuous thread, local objects instantiated within the thread are available throughout a servlet's lifetime. Server-side state management is supported by the `ServletContext` and `HttpSession` servlet API classes that hide details of cookie writing, URL rewriting, and hidden field creation. Servlets have access to the large set of Java platform APIs.

The efficiency and scalability of servlets were the major factors that lead to the emergence of Java as an important language for server-side Web programming, which is ongoing despite the insurgence of the .NET environment. The usability disadvantages of servlet programming are analogous to those of CGI. As with CGI, the servlet model provides only a thin abstraction over HTTP. Programmers must manually generate responses by writing to the standard output stream, so role separation is not well supported. Therefore, relatively few Web applications are composed entirely of servlets. Instead, servlets are used as an underlying mechanism behind template-based, model-driven, and framework-based technologies that were subsequently developed.

**Servlet Containers.** Servlet containers extend either Web servers to implement the Java servlet API. A servlet containers can function independently as a standalone Web server, or can be connected to an external Web server so that the container is dedicated to servlet processing. Request reaches a servlet container as the result of two mappings. The first mapping forwards requests from the Web server to the servlet container. The second mapping determines the servlet class to execute based on the servlet name extracted from the request URI. After a request is mapped, the actions taken depend on the current lifecycle stage of the servlet. If the servlet is not active, the container loads the servlet class and creates a class instance, and the servlet's `init` method. Once the servlet instance identified, the servlet container invokes the servlet's `service` to process the request, passing a `request` object and a `response` object. `request` objects encapsulate information about HTTP requests, including parameters, attributes, headers, the request path, and the message body. `response` objects encapsulate methods for building HTTP responses. Servlet developers override `doGet` and `doPost` methods that are invoked by the `service` method to respond to HTTP request types (`GET` or `POST`). The container calls a servlet's `destroy` method when it needs to remove a servlet from service.

**Servlet Programming.** Servlet programming is supported by classes and interfaces of the `javax.servlet` and `javax.servlet.http` packages. Servlet must implement or extend a class that implements the `Servlet` interface. The `Servlet` interface defines the lifecycle methods of a servlet. A typical servlet class extends `HttpServlet` and overrides the request processing methods as required by the ap-

```

import com.test.search.*;
import java.io.*;
import javax.servlet.*;
import javax.servlet.http.*;

public class ServletExample extends HttpServlet {
    String searchName = null;
    SearchEngine searchEngine = null;

    public void init() throws ServletException {
        searchEngine = new SearchEngine();
    }

    public void doGet(HttpServletRequest request,
        HttpServletResponse response) throws IOException, ServletException {
        response.setContentType("text/html");
        PrintWriter out = response.getWriter();
        out.println("<html><head><title>Servlet Example</title></head><body>");
        out.println("<h1>Enter a name to search for</h1>");

        if ((searchName != null) {
            out.println("The details are: ");
            String result = searchEngine.search(searchName);
            out.println(result);
            searchName = null;
        }

        out.println("<p><form action=\\");
        out.print(response.encodeURL("ServletExample"));
        out.print("\\ method=POST>");
        out.println("<p>Search name: <input type=text size=30 name=\\\"SearchName\\\">");
        out.println("<p><input type=submit value=\\\"Search\\\">");
        out.println("</form></body></html>");
        out.close();
    }

    public void doPost(HttpServletRequest request,
        HttpServletResponse response) throws IOException, ServletException {
        searchName = request.getParameter("SearchName");
        doGet(request, response);
    }
}

```

Fig. 16. An example Java servlet program.

plication. The mapping between the servlet name used in URIs and servlet class names is specified in the `web.xml` file in the `WEB-INF` directory under the document root of a Web application. Figure 16 shows an example of a very simple Java servlet program.

**3.2.2 JavaServer Pages.** JavaServer Pages (JSP) is a templating technology that was introduced in 1999 to simplify servlet development. An example JSP page is shown in Figure 17. JSP pages are text files with `.jsp` extension names that contain HTML, and Java code within special delimiters (`<% .. %>`). Java declara-

tions can be included within (`<%! .. %>`) delimiters as can expressions within (`<%= .. %>`) delimiters. JSP translation directives can be included in JSP pages within (`<%@ .. %>`) delimiters. Commonly used directives are `@import`, used to import Java packages; `@include`, used to include JSP fragment files into pages; and `@taglib`, used to declare that a page uses a tag library.

The syntax diverges from the simplicity of ASP with the addition of elements that are closer in essence to SSI and ColdFusion. JSP pages can contain XML elements that initiate standard or custom execution phase *actions*. The standard actions defined in the JSP specification are recognizable as elements with `jsp:` prefixes. Examples of standard actions are `<jsp:usebean>`, `<jsp:setproperty>`, and `<jsp:getproperty>`, for making use of JavaBean components; `<jsp:include>`, used to include static or dynamic resources within a page; and `<jsp:forward>` which transfers control to another Web page. Custom actions invoke functionality in *tag libraries*, which are Java components that are reused by JSP pages. Custom actions are implemented by *tag files* with JSP syntax or by Java classes that conform to with the JSP Tag Extension API. The *JSP Standard Tag Library (JSTL)* provides many tags supporting common functionality for Web applications including conditional processing, iteration, internationalization, XML manipulation, and database access. JSP 2.0 introduced the *Expression Language (EL)*, a simple language used to embed expressions within JSP pages without Java scripting.

**JSP Containers.** On the surface, the JSP is reminiscent of ASP, but the implementation is very different. While ASP pages are interpreted, JSP pages are transformed by a JSP container into servlets. A *JSP container* is a modified servlet container that also serves JSP pages. JSP pages have a lifecycle that includes translation (per page) and execution (per request) phases. Translation can occur prior to deployment, on deployment, or at runtime at the discretion of the implementer. In the execution phase, the container routes requests to the servlet thread that was created on behalf of a JSP page. The underlying servlet mechanism is unchanged by the addition of the JSP technology, so JSP can be considered to be an easier, alternative path to developing servlets.

JSP is popular among developers because it is simpler than servlets for Web application development. At first glance, JSP appears to competently support role separation between designers and programmers. Simple examples like the JSP page shown in Figure 17 appear to provide evidence. In practice, JSP pages tend to be dominated by Java code and XML tags which defeats role separation. Presentation is not adequately separated from behavior, leading to maintenance problems for large applications. The use of custom actions results in less code being directly placed in JSP pages and facilitates reuse, but does not address the essential problem; rather the problem is obscured since Java code is hidden behind action tags. Experience has shown that mixing Java and HTML produces systems that are hard to maintain [Hunter 2000]. Since JSP was introduced, much of the subsequent innovation for Web development has been motivated by a search for techniques that properly exploit the capabilities of JSP and servlets.

**3.2.3 Alternative Templating Engines.** Dedicated templating engines such as Velocity and WebMacro aim to replace JSP as a presentation technology for Web applications. Templating engines are generally designed to not allow Java code to



```

<%@ page language="java" import="java.sql.*,ScheduleBean" %>
<jsp:useBean id="schedule" scope="session" class="ScheduleBean" />
<html>
  <head>
    <title>Team Schedule</title>
  </head>
  <body>
    <p>Team Schedule:</p>
    <table>
      <tr>
        <td><b>Date:</b></td>
        <td><b>Time:</b></td>
        <td><b>Location:</b></td>
        <td><b>Opponent:</b></td>
      </tr>
      <!-- Get the appointment information -->
      <%! ResultSet rs; %>
      <% schedule.setTeamName(request.getParameter("team"));
         rs = schedule.executeQuery(); %>
      <%
        while (rs.next()){
      %>
          <tr>
            <td><b><%= rs.getString("Date") %></b></td>
            <td><b><%= rs.getString("Time") %></b></td>
            <td><b><%= rs.getString("Location") %></b></td>
            <td><b><%= rs.getString("Opponent") %></b></td>
          </tr>
        %>
        }
        rs.close();
      %>
    </table>
  </body>
</html>

```

Fig. 17. An example of a simple JSP page.

be added to templates, so that developers are not tempted to mix business and presentation logic in templates. XML transformation, a notably different approach within the same problem space, is taken by Enhydra XMLC, currently an open source ObjectWeb project. With XMLC, plain XML templates are compiled into DOM template objects, which are Java classes that programmatically render the various kinds of output required by classes of clients, including HTML, WML, and other formats. Rather than embed Java code into the templates, programmers call XMLC-generated methods to manipulate properties of the DOM representation before the response is generated for the client. Apache Cocoon, another well-known XML transformation framework, supports dynamic content generation to multiple client types (channels) through its XSLT-based XSP templating language.

3.2.4 *J2EE*. The *Java 2 platform, Enterprise Edition (J2EE)* [Roman et al. 2001] is a comprehensive set of standards designed to provide a portable environment that supports the requirements of large, enterprise Web applications. J2EE

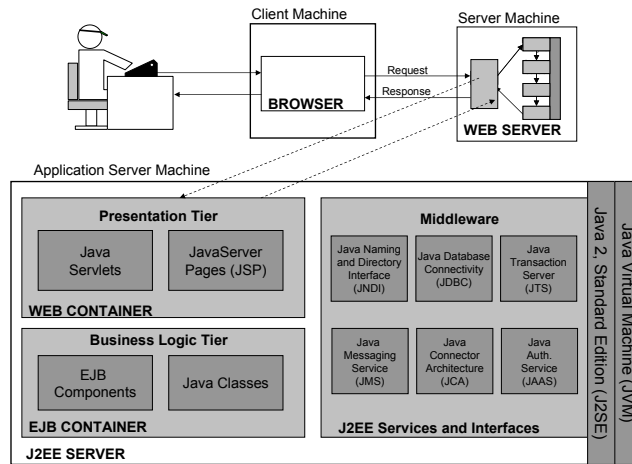


Fig. 18. The J2EE architecture for Web applications.

was first announced in April, 1997 and the first related specification, Enterprise JavaBeans 1.0, was distributed in March, 1998. J2EE-compliant application servers were widely available by the end of 1999. Previous comparable technologies include transaction processing monitors, message-oriented middleware, and distributed object brokers (CORBA and COM). The older technologies generally only provided middleware services through explicit API calls. A component requiring transactional support had to make API calls in an appropriate sequence to begin and commit transactions. In contrast, J2EE supports *declarative middleware* by which containers provide middleware services (such as concurrency, transactional support, persistence, distribution, naming, and security) to components as specified in a set of declarative configurations. The use of declarative middleware allows developers to concentrate on business logic rather than on complex infrastructural details. The architecture of J2EE that supports Web applications is shown in Figure 18.

The most well-known J2EE specification is Enterprise JavaBeans (EJB), a complex standard for server-side components. An *EJB container* is an application server that provides an execution environment for EJB components. A J2EE server is an application server that implements all of the J2EE specifications. Table III summarizes the major J2EE specifications that are relevant for Web applications. When implementing a Java server-side Web application, it is important to decide which services are required for the application to help determine the class of application server that is needed. High-end application servers that implement all of the J2EE specifications tend to be much more expensive than simpler servers that provide fewer services. In many cases, support for servlets and JSP is sufficient to meet the needs of an application.

J2EE has been successful and compliant application servers are available from many providers. The platform can be very scalable if properly exploited, but the size and complexity of the architecture can make it a difficult environment to work with. The learning curve for J2EE developers can be relatively lengthy, especially if EJB is used, due to the complexity of the component architecture.

Specification	Description
Enterprise JavaBeans (EJB)	Server-side managed Java components.
Java Naming and Directory Interface (JNDI)	A directory interface for locating components.
Java Database Connectivity (JDBC)	An interface for accessing relational databases.
Java Transaction Server (JTS)	Declarative transactional support for EJB components.
Java Messaging Service (JMS)	Allows components to communicate through messaging.
Remote Method Invocation (RMI)	An interface for communication between distributed objects.
Java Servlets and JavaServer Pages (JSP)	Web server extension components.
JavaMail	Allows email to be sent from Java programs.
J2EE Connector Architecture (JCA)	Connectivity to legacy systems.
Java API for XML Parsing (JAXP)	XML parsing
Java Authentication and Authorization Service (JAAS)	Security for EJB components.

Table III. J2EE specifications.

### 3.3 .NET

.NET is an enterprise computing platform which is provided as a set of products for Microsoft operating systems. The features of .NET are comparable to those of J2EE. While designed to be a cross-platform environment, .NET is most relevant for Microsoft operating systems, although the open source Mono project promises to bring .NET to Linux. Due to the large installed base of Microsoft operating systems, .NET has been steadily gaining traction with developers since its initial production release in 2001.

The main components of the .NET platform are the *Common Language Runtime (CLR)* and the *.NET Framework* class library. The CLR is a virtual machine that dynamically compiles *Microsoft Intermediate Language (MSIL)* byte code into native executable code at runtime. .NET is a multi-language environment in that multiple source languages can be compiled into MSIL byte code and executed by the CLR. The *Common Type System (CTS)* defines how types are declared and used in the CLR, providing a basis for type interoperability between modules implemented in different languages. Self-describing components, known as *assemblies* within .NET, are managed and executed by the CLR. The .NET Framework class library is large class library that provides similar functionality as the Java Platform APIs. Assemblies and the types they define are hierarchically grouped into namespaces that can be referenced by programs. While many programming languages are supported, the primary development language is C#, which is very similar to Java.

.NET provides an environment for enterprise Web applications that is comparable to J2EE. Table IV compares the features of the two environments. ASP.NET is a reworked version of ASP that enables rapid development of Web applications that make use of the capabilities of the .NET framework. The architecture of .NET for Web applications is shown in Figure 19.

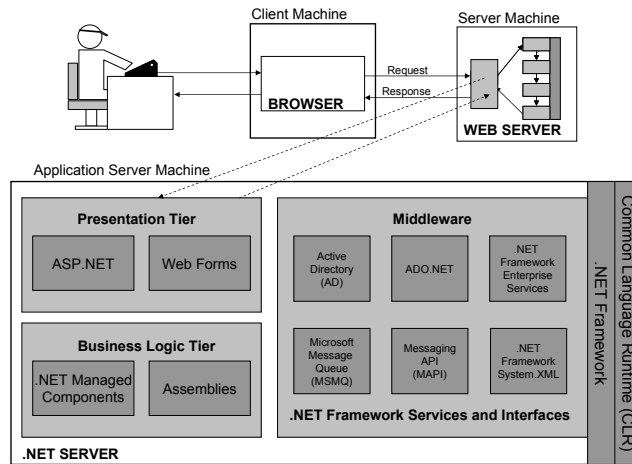


Fig. 19. The .NET architecture for Web applications.

J2EE Feature	.NET Equivalent
Java	Primarily C#, other languages are supported
Java Virtual Machine (JVM)	Common Language Runtime (CLR)
Enterprise JavaBeans (EJB)	Assemblies, .NET CLR managed components
Java Naming and Directory Interface (JNDI)	Active Directory (AD)
Java Database Connectivity (JDBC)	ADO.NET
Java Transaction Server (JTS)	COM+, .NET Framework System.EnterpriseServices
Java Messaging Service (JMS)	Microsoft Message Queue (MSMQ)
Remote Method Invocation (RMI)	Remote Method Invocation (RMI)
Swing API	Win Forms
Java Servlets and JavaServer Pages (JSP)	ASP.NET, Web Forms
Java Server Faces (JSF)	ASP.NET, Web Forms
JavaMail	Messaging API (MAPI)
Java API for XML Parsing (JAXP)	.NET Framework System.XML

Table IV. J2EE - .NET platform feature cross-reference.

### 3.4 Architectures Based on Other Languages

While J2EE and .NET are the most well-known platforms for enterprise Web applications, alternatives exist. Python is a simple, portable, freely available object-oriented programming language that has been used as a basis for enterprise systems development [Trauring 2003]. Twisted is a large, stable framework that provides support for distributed and networked applications as well as Web applications [Twisted Matrix Laboratories 2005]. The breadth of Twisted illustrates the difficulties involved in supporting enterprise Web development outside of J2EE and .NET: the framework includes a Web server and a DNS server; enterprise capabilities including authentication and database connectivity; a distributed-object broker; protocol abstractions and implementations including HTTP, SMTP, IRC, DNS, Telnet, TCP, and UDP; and interoperability with Python toolkits [Vinoski

Technology	Tier	Implementations
Markup Standards	Client	HTML, XHTML, CSS
Protocol specifications	Server	HTTP, SSL, MIME, WebDAV
Web browser	Client	Internet Explorer, Opera, Mozilla, Netscape
Web server	Server	Apache, Internet Information Server, Sun Java Web Server, Zeus Web Server, Jigsaw

Table V. Foundational technologies for the Web.

2004]. Another well-known Python framework that is similar to Twisted is the Python Enterprise Application Kit (PEAK) [PEAK 2005]. Other languages that have been proposed for enterprise web development are Curl [Ward and Hostetter 2003], Croquet [Smith et al. 2003], Haskell [Meijer 2000], LISP [Graham 2001], Perl [Rolsky and Williams 2003], Scheme [Felleisen 2002], and Smalltalk [Bryant 2004]. Each alternative language and environment faces an uphill road on the way towards widespread adoption in enterprises due to the popularity of J2EE and .NET, while also facing the difficulties of either reimplementing basic Web functionality or relying on preexisting, low-performing features of the infrastructure such as CGI.

#### 4. CLASSIFICATION OF SYSTEMS SUPPORTING DYNAMIC WEB CONTENT

This section summarizes the survey so far by presenting a classification of technologies that are relevant to dynamic content generation for the Web. Reflective of the major system requirements for dynamic Web applications, the top level of the classification is divided into foundational, integration, and dynamic user interface generation technology classes. Each top level class is sub-classified by technology type, form, and function to yield comparable groups. At the most basic level of the classification, key properties of well-known exemplars are named and compared with the objective of providing technology selection guidelines for Web development projects.

**Foundational Technologies.** The basic functionality of Web browser clients is defined by the HTTP protocol and content description language standards including HTML, XHTML, and CSS. Web server functionality is also defined by the HTTP protocol. Table V classifies the foundational technologies of the Web. Table VI shows the most commonly used Web browsers and Web servers based on market share as of January, 2005.

**Integration Technologies.** Integration technologies do not directly generate dynamic content. Rather they provide interfaces that allow web sites to access information in other systems. Table VII provides a classification of client-based integration technologies. Table VIII shows the most commonly-used server-side integration technologies.

**Dynamic Content Generation Technologies.** Table IX provides a classification of dynamic technologies for Web clients. Table X provides a classification of dynamic technologies for Web servers.

Tier	Product (Provider)	Platform (Tier share %)
Web browsers	Internet Explorer (Microsoft)	Windows (69.7)
	Opera (Opera Software)	Several (1.9)
	Mozilla (The Mozilla Organization)	Several (23.3)
	Netscape (AOL / Netscape)	Several (1.4)
Web servers	Apache (Apache Software Foundation)	Several (68.4)
	Internet Information Server (Microsoft)	Windows (20.9)
	Sun Java System Web Server (Sun)	Several (23.3)
	Zeus Web Server (Zeus Technology)	Several (1.2)

Table VI. Web browsers and servers.

Technology	Exemplars	Key Properties and Common Usage
<b>Browser interfaces</b>		
State management	Netscape Cookie API	Used for client state persistence.
Web service client interfaces	SOAP, XML-RPC	Highly portable. Increased interactivity.
Scripting interfaces	XMLHttpClient	Highly portable. Increased interactivity.

Table VII. Client-based integration technologies.

Technology	Exemplars	Key Properties and Common Usage
<b>Programming languages</b>		
Natively compiled	C, C++	Highly portable, high performance, low usability. CGI scripting and web server extension.
Interpreted	Perl, Python, Ruby	Highly portable. Performance varies. CGI scripting.
Byte-code compiled	Java, .NET languages	Highly portable. Good performance. Extensive language run-time libraries.
<b>Components</b>		
Complex components	CORBA, COM, EJB, .NET managed components	Enterprise systems development.
Simple components	JavaBeans, Spring, pico-Container, Java classes	Enterprise systems development. Improved usability.
<b>Middleware</b>		
XML transformation	XSLT, Cocoon	XML Web publishing.
Messaging	MSMQ, MQSeries, J2EE JMS	Enterprise systems development.
Security	J2EE JAAS	Enterprise systems development.
Data access	ODBC, JDBC, ADO.NET	Highly portable. Highly scalable.
Object-relational mapping	Hibernate, JDO, TopView, iBatis	Highly portable. Highly scalable. Improved usability.
Web services	SOAP, XML-RPC	Highly portable.

Table VIII. Server-side integration technologies.

Technology	Exemplars	Key Properties and Common Usage
<b>Browser extension</b>		
Browser specific APIs	CCI, ActiveX, Netscape Plug-API	High performance, low usability. Extend browser capabilities.
<b>Client dynamism</b>		
Directly interpreted	JavaScript, VBScript, DOM, SVG	Highly portable due to Web standards acceptance. Increased interactivity.
Byte-code	Macromedia Flash, Java applets	Highly portable depending on plug-in spread. Marketing presentation development.
<b>Rich interfaces</b>		
Browser alternatives	CURL, Sash Weblications, Konfabulator, XAML	Used for applications with high interactivity requirements that need to access the Internet.
Client frameworks	Jakarta Commons http-Client	Used for browser alternative development.
Forms interfaces	InfoPath, XForms	Used by forms-based business systems.
Dynamic assembly	Edge Side Includes (ESI), Client Side Includes (CSI)	Improved cached content delivery.

Table IX. Client-based dynamic content generation technologies.

Technology	Exemplars	Key Properties and Common Usage
<b>Server extension</b>		
Server-specific	ISAPI, NSAPI, Apache API	Proprietary. Scalable. Complex. Implement extended server capabilities.
<b>Gateways</b>		
Simple	CGI	Portable. Not scalable. Low usability. Small-scale applications with simple navigational requirements.
Scalable	Fast CGI	Portable. Scalable. Low usability. Medium to large-scale applications with simple navigation requirements.
<b>Interpreters</b>		
General purpose	Server-side JavaScript, mod-perl	Medium to large-scale applications with simple navigation requirements.
Template-based	SSI, XSSI, ColdFusion, ASP, PHP, JWIG	Portable. Medium to large-scale applications with simple navigation requirements.
<b>Extended servers</b>		
Servlet engines	Tomcat, Resin	Highly portable. Scalable. Medium to enterprise-scale applications. Frameworks.
Template engines	JSP, Velocity, WebMacro, XMLC, FreeMarker	Portable. Scalable. Generally used as the view component of MVC implementations.
Content management	Zope, Cocoon	Scalable. Web publishing.
J2EE application servers	WebSphere, jRun, JBOSS, WebLogic	Highly portable. Highly scalable. Complex. Enterprise systems.

Table X. Server-side dynamic content generation technologies.

## 5. WEB PROGRAMMING VS. REGULAR PROGRAMMING

In software development terms, the maturity level of the state of common practices for Web development has traditionally lagged relative to the technologies and techniques used for other client-server applications [Gellersen and Gaedke 1999]. As late as 1995, the CGI was still the most practical option for dynamic Web content creation. In contrast, distributed object environments based on CORBA and COM have been available for client-server development since 1992. By the time that templating and scripting languages were commonly supporting largely ad-hoc Web development practices, client-server development more advanced, supported by graphical development tools, frameworks, and software engineering practices.

As the Web began to be used in an increasingly large class of critical business applications, it became apparent that the fundamental requirements were not well supported by existing solutions. Early attempts, roughly between 1995 and 1999, centered on trying to find a unifying API for Web programming, essentially viewing the Web as a distributed object system in the tradition of CORBA [W3C 1997; Cardelli and Davies 1999; Manola 1999; Thompson et al. 1999]. Difficulties in coordinating the efforts of the wide-ranging Web community hindered efforts to define a global API, but the mark of distributed object research can be seen in *service-oriented architecture (SOA)* standards, which implement globally distributed Web service technologies by exchanging XML over HTTP [W3C 2004b].

The continual disparity fueled a marketing pipeline for dynamic Web technology creators. Almost any advance that addressed limitations of Web development could find a waiting base of potential adopters. Even problematic technologies such as ActiveX found avenues of acceptance solely based on incremental benefits. The introduction of J2EE in 1999 was a flashpoint for the dynamic Web; instantly the maturity gap was narrowed and priorities shifted so that many software engineering advances were for the first time being driven by the requirements of Web applications. The importance of J2EE can not be overstated since it set standards that have since influenced subsequent significant advances for Web development, including .NET, which surfaced as a competitive response.

This section examines tools, techniques, and technologies that have been carried forward from traditional programming domains into the realm of the Web.

### 5.1 Frameworks and Patterns

While J2EE and .NET provide infrastructure needed to build reliable enterprise-scale Web applications, the responsibility for effectively using the technology falls on individual implementers. Many Web applications are built in an ad-hoc fashion, without regard for software engineering principles, deeply entangling content, presentation, and behavior so that the structure of the implementation is obscured [Pressman 2000]. Recently much effort has been devoted to devising methods that exploit the technology base in a disciplined way while simplifying development. The tangible result has been the emergence of a large number of Web application development frameworks. The Java community has been very influential in that the most popular frameworks are open source Java projects. Well-known Web application frameworks are also available for server-side scripting languages such as Perl, PHP, and Python. While ASP.NET and the .NET framework provide a



wealth of support for Web development out-of-the-box, .NET is also becoming a target for framework development. This section discusses frameworks in relation to Web application development along the requirements and patterns that prompt their development.

5.1.1 *Characteristics of Frameworks.* Frameworks are an extensible module sets supporting rapid development of repetitive requirements in a reliable way through reusable skeletal design pattern realizations. The objective is to allow developers to concentrate on the problem domain rather than on low-level implementation details, while providing concrete benefits beyond the associated acquisition and learning curve costs. Frameworks are comparable in terms of documentation quality, extensibility, modularity, evolvability, maturity, and white/black box properties [Fayad and Schmidt 1997]. Poorly documented and immature frameworks should be avoided for critical applications.

5.1.2 *Categories of Web Frameworks.* The most useful frameworks supporting Web application development can be categorized as Web application and user interface frameworks, persistence frameworks, and lightweight containers [Nash 2003]. Web application and user interface frameworks are the most directly relevant to dynamic content generation systems. Persistence frameworks such as Hibernate aim to allow programmers to efficiently retrieve and update database information through encapsulated objects rather than through direct SQL calls, or through EJB entity beans. Frameworks that leverage inversion of control to simplify component-based development, collectively known as *lightweight containers*, are gaining traction as a more usable alternative for J2EE applications that would otherwise needlessly incur the implementation complexity of EJB, even though high-end capabilities are not required. The open source PicoContainer and Spring frameworks are highly-regarded lightweight container frameworks [Johnson and Hoeller 2004].

5.1.3 *Model-View-Controller.* The *Model-View-Controller (MVC)* design pattern is commonly used in user interface programming to separate presentation, business, and state management concerns, is a logical architectural choice that matches the event-driven nature of dynamic Web applications. Early Web technologies did not allow convenient separation of concerns, but the more recent convergence of Java, scripting and template languages, and servlets supports the modularization of Web applications to align with the MVC roles. Figure 20 shows the most common mapping of the MVC roles to J2EE entities. For .NET, a similar mapping to ASP.NET, the IHttpHandler interface, and managed components is possible. Much attention has been focused on creating Web MVC frameworks since 2000, when the potential for reuse and streamlining the development process became evident. As a result, many competing frameworks are available, many of which are products of open source development projects. While the most well-known frameworks currently target the J2EE platform, several have been ported to .NET. Scripting languages frameworks are handicapped from the start by either reliance on CGI or the need to implement supporting infrastructure analogous to servlets, in addition to supporting MVC.

Much of the recent attention in the Web development community has been focused on building presentation frameworks based on the MVC architecture. Many

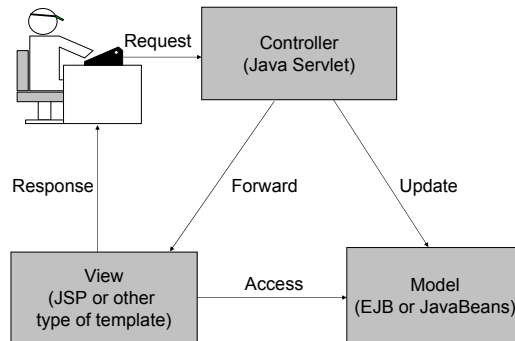


Fig. 20. Adapting the MVC architecture for the J2EE Web applications.

MVC Web applications frameworks are available, many of which are the result of open source development projects. Most of the well-known frameworks are reliant on Java and J2EE, but there are also many scripting language frameworks available. The starting point of scripting language frameworks has inherent disadvantages relative to Java frameworks since the framework must either rely on CGI or implement an abstraction layer over HTTP, analogous to servlets, JSP, or ASP.NET, in addition to supporting MVC.

**5.1.4 Application-driven Web MVC Frameworks.** Application-driven Web MVC frameworks implement MVC using the *Front Controller* pattern [Fowler 2002]. In the Front Controller pattern, events are directed to an application-level Controller that invokes the correct action in response. The event-action table is maintained at the application level, usually in an XML file. Navigation details are abstracted out of individual pages, although the encapsulation and reusability is compromised by dependencies on the configuration file that defines the event-action table. An application consists of a controller class, model classes, view page templates, and a configuration file. The main objective is event-handling rather than hiding implementation details, so programmer familiarity with resource implementation technologies is assumed. The lightweight nature of the abstraction reduces the learning curve for experienced Web developers relative to more opaque frameworks. Novice Web programmers may face an extended orientation period due to the need to comprehend the workings of a framework in addition to more fundamental concepts.

**Apache Struts.** The most well-known application-driven Web MVC framework is the open source *Apache Struts* framework [Husted et al. 2003]. First introduced in 2000, Struts continues to be the most popular Web MVC framework for Java. The framework is mature, well-documented, and effectively supports the requirements of a large class of interactive Web applications. The implementation is straightforward and based on the servlet, JSP, HTML forms, JavaBeans, and XML standards. While several well-known frameworks with active developer communities, including WebWork, Spring MVC, and Maverick, occupy the same architectural niche, the details of Struts, the de-facto leader, are broadly representative of the category.

The event-action table for a Struts application is specified in `struts-config.xml`,

an application-level configuration file. The `web.xml` configuration file for an application maps URI names to the `ActionServlet` servlet, a central Controller servlet supplied by the framework that routes requests to `Action` class instances that encapsulate response logic. `Action` instances access session data, HTML form data, and integration components to formulate dynamic responses. Form beans, JavaBean components that implement the Struts `ActionForm` or `DynaActionForm` interfaces, encapsulate the server-side state of the input fields of an HTML form. The `DynaActionForm` interface simplifies state management by dynamically creating form beans when they are needed without requiring additional programming. After processing response logic, an `Action` class transfers control to the Controller passing a *global forward*, the logical name of the View template that will generate the next page of the dynamic user interface based on the outcome of the response logic. Although View templates are normally JSP pages, the framework allows other template engines to be used, including Velocity and WebMacro. The Model is the least constrained tier of a Struts application, consisting of components that are accessed by `Action` class instances and View templates to dynamically access and update persistent information. Field-level input validations, implemented either by hand-coding form bean `validate()` methods or by declaration in the `validator-rules.xml` and `validation.xml` configuration files, are always performed on the server-side and optionally through generated JavaScript on the client-side.

5.1.5 *Page-driven MVC Frameworks.* Page-driven frameworks implement the *Page Controller* pattern [Fowler 2002] to provide an event-driven model for Web programming that recalls traditional desktop GUI programming. In the Page Controller pattern, events generated from pages are directed to page-level Controllers. The event-action table is spread throughout individual pages of an application. An application consists of related pages, classes, and configuration files. Relative to application-driven frameworks, the higher degree of page independence allows heavier abstraction over resource implementation details that supports rapid component-based development through drag-and-drop GUI page composition. The highly abstraction level may extend the learning even for experienced Web programmers due to the need to become familiar with with a completely different object model.

**Desktop API Derivatives.** Several Java page-driven frameworks, including the open source Echo [NextApp 2005] and wingS [wingS Project Team 2005] frameworks, implement the object model of the Java Swing API to literally apply desktop GUI programming techniques to Web development. WebCream [CreamTec, LLC 2005] takes the approach to its logical conclusion by converting compiled Swing applications into HTML pages at the Web server dynamically at runtime. The effectiveness of desktop API-derivative Web application frameworks is limited by their their code intensive nature, which prevents role separation between designers and programmers. GUI development tools such as EchoStudio simplify development, but are not accessible to Web designers since page designs are not based on HTML so familiar Web authoring tools can not be used.

**WebObjects.** Other page-driven frameworks take a more practical, template-based approach to incorporating desktop GUI programming practices into Web de-

velopment. The proprietary Web development framework of the NeXT (now Apple) WebObjects application server environment pioneered a page-driven, component-based approach to Web programming in 1996. The WebObjects framework was initially built for Objective-C, but was re-implemented for Java in 2000 to support J2EE development. WebObjects applications are collections of pages containing HTML and references to *Web Components*.

**Tapestry.** Tapestry [Ship 2004], available since 2000, is an open source Java framework from Apache that was heavily influenced by WebObjects. Tapestry provides an object model for component-based development of Web applications. A Tapestry application is a collection of pages that are composed from HTML and components that encapsulate dynamic behavior. In Tapestry, components are known as *Java Web Components (JWC)*. Tapestry supports two kinds of components, user interface components and control components. Control components are not rendered on pages but instead provide control flow constructs. Simple applications can be constructed entirely from library components provided as part of the framework distribution. A Tapestry page is defined by an XML specification, one or more Java classes, and an HTML template. The XML specification identifies a Java page controller class, and defines identifiers that indirectly bind components to HTML templates. The page controller class implements `listener` methods that handle user interface events. Templates contain HTML and component references. A Tapestry component definition includes an XML specification, one or more Java classes, and an HTML template. Both page and component templates consist of plain HTML and placeholder tags that reference components through a special attribute, `jwcid`. Role separation is well-supported since Web designers can use their preferred authoring tools to design page templates, which templates contain only valid HTML. Although the framework internally routes all requests through a single entry servlet, the `ApplicationServlet`, the Tapestry object model completely abstracts servlet processing. Programmers do not need to understand servlet processing to effectively use the framework. Tapestry appeals to desktop GUI programmers since they are familiar with event-driven programming. While the dynamic content generation process is computationally intensive, the framework avoids scalability problems by efficiently caching internal objects.

**ASP.NET and JavaServer Faces.** While Tapestry is technically highly-regarded, the momentum behind the framework has been largely eclipsed by the emergence of ASP.NET [Esposito 2003] and, to a lesser extent so far, the nascent JavaServer Faces (JSF) specification [Mann 2004]. ASP.NET is an upgraded version of ASP that supports Web Forms, a namespace within the .NET framework that provides a page-driven object model for Web programming that is similar to the Tapestry object model. JSF is a specification for a component-based Web application framework built over JSP and tag libraries, much closer in concept to Struts than ASP.NET. JSF has superficial similarities to ASP.NET, but is very different in detail. Both frameworks support rapid user interface development with GUI form builder tools, primarily Visual Studio.NET for ASP.NET and Java Studio Creator for JSF. A major conceptual difference is that ASP.NET is page-driven, while JSF is application-driven. All requests for JSF application resources are routed to views by a central servlet, the `FacesServlet`, per specifications in the application-

level `faces-config.xml` file. While the uptake of JSF is in an early stage and widespread adoption is not inevitable, the merging of characteristics of the Front Controller and Page Controller patterns provides a higher degree of deployment flexibility due to clearer separation of the navigational aspect from page definitions relative to ASP.NET.

**Portals and Portlets.** The the component model of *portlets* is closely related to JSF, which features integration with the Java Portlet API [Abdelnur and Hepper 2003]. Portlets are managed Java components that respond to requests and generate dynamic content. Java Portlet API specifies how to compose component portlets into combined *portals* that aggregate content from portlet subject to personalization. A similar component model is provided by the ASP.NET WebParts framework.

## 5.2 Other Programming Technologies

Several technologies have been developed that attempt to address the mismatch between flow control in Web development relative to other kinds of programming. The disconnect is mainly due to the fact that user interface processing is distributed in Web programs, with clients displaying interfaces that are at least partially formulated on servers. Functional programming with continuations has been used to generate dynamic content with some success, but remains outside of the mainstream. Continuations are used to abstract the retention of state information between interactions. The MAWL, <bigwig>, JWIG, and Cocoon Flow projects implement *session-centered programming*, a method for combining page template fragments with control flow logic that maintains the state of local variable by a mechanism that has similarities to continuations.

## 5.3 Model-Driven Development of Web Applications

The defining feature of model-driven development is automatic code generation of deployable applications from high-level feature specifications. Model-driven development technologies for Web applications aim to simplify the development process by generating deployable sites from presentational, behavioral, and navigational requirements specified in models. In the tradition of prior work in automatic programming and CASE, which were not completely successful, model-driven development technologies aim to reduce the dependency on low-level programming by raising the abstraction model to a higher level. Adaptation to Web development required the creation of new kinds of models, methods, and techniques that better match the unique properties of Web applications.

**Initial Progress.** Araneus [P. Atzeni and Merialdo 1997] and Strudel, [Fernandez et al. 1999] are representative of initial research progress in adapting model-driven techniques for Web development. These systems utilize data models to manage collections of generated content derived using database metadata and queries. Fraternali [1999] surveyed current work in the area as of 1999, including AutoWeb, RMM, OOHDM, and the Oracle Web Development Suite, each of which applied proprietary database, navigation, behavior, and presentation modeling approaches to Web development. WebML and its commercial successor, WebRatio, use proprietary hypertext, data, and presentation models to comprehensively extend the prior work by generating code for an abstract framework that maps to platform-specific MVC

implementations at runtime. Other products, including CodeCharge, CodeSmith, DeKlarit, and Fabrique, emphasize GUI-based maintenance of detailed models that facilitate generative programming of the presentation tier for Web applications, at varying degrees of rigor. While these initial approaches were workable, widespread usage of the technologies was limited by the reliance on proprietary modeling languages.

**Model-driven Architecture.** The Model Driven Architecture (MDA) standard from OMG chose UML as the primary modeling language for model-driven development. UML was formally extended to be computationally complete in order to be able to support the level of detail needed to generate applications of arbitrary complexity from specifications. The MDA standards are the product of an industry-wide effort to raise the abstraction level of business systems development. The Meta-Object Facility (MOF) is a set of standardized interfaces, including the XML Metadata Interchange format (XMI), that provide the basis for the specification models required for MDA. A Platform Independent Model (PIM) specifies application features generically that are converted by rule-driven translators into Platform Specific Models (PSM) that reflect the unique properties of disparate platforms. A PSM can be either directly interpreted or further processed to generate a deployable system. Web applications are supported by MDA tools as another implementation platform to target for code generation. Large vendors are backing the MDA standards with compliant toolsets, including Oracle ADF and IBM/Rational Rapid Developer, and comprehensively support Web application and Web service development. While MDA has the potential to shield developers from the implementation complexities inherent in Web applications and improving the process, the MDA processes represent a major paradigm shift for organizations and widespread diffusion of the technologies, if it occurs, will be incremental.

#### 5.4 Authoring Tools and Development Environments

A diverse range of development tools supports the creation of Web applications. The simplest Web authoring tools support static page creation through direct editing, WYSIWIG HTML editing, and the ability to save documents into other formats to an HTML representation. The tools in this category include Adobe PageMill, Amaya, and Microsoft Office applications such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. The next level of sophistication is found in site management tools that include HTML editors. Microsoft FrontPage, NetObjects Fusion, and initial versions of MacroMedia Dreamweaver are in this category, featuring tools for managing a site's link structure, simplifying deployment, and assisting in the introduction of client-based dynamism into pages. Recent versions of Dreamweaver feature tighter integration with server-side dynamic content generation technologies, blurring the distinction between Web authoring tools and full-fledged Web application development environments. This latter category includes Microsoft VisualStudio.NET, Sun Java Studio Creator, and the Eclipse-based WebSphere Application Developer. Full-fledged development environments have all of the functionality of Web authoring tools, while also supporting programming-intensive activities. As the development processes move towards component-based methods, the exposed APIs of the components may lead to less code-intensive development processes for dynamic web applications and increased convergence of the development environments towards

Technology	Exemplars	Key Properties and Common Usage
<b>Frameworks</b>		
Scripting language-based	Twisted (Python), WebWare (Python), Snakelets (Python), Rails (Ruby)	Portable. Small to large-scale applications with complex navigation requirements.
Application-driven	Struts, Spring MVC, WebWork, Maverick, Barracuda	Portable. Scalable. Enterprise web sites with complex navigation requirements.
Page-driven, component-based, desktop model	Echo, wingS, WebCream, Wi.Ser	Portable. Complex. Ease transition to Web programming.
Page-driven component-based, Web model	WebObjects, Tapestry, ASP.NET WebForms	Portable. Scalable. High usability. Rapid development. Simple to medium-complexity navigation requirements.
Application/Page Hybrid-driven component-based	JavaServer Faces	Portable. Scalable. High usability. Enterprise web sites with complex navigation requirements. Rapid development.
Portal composition	Java Portlet specification, WebParts, Tiles, SiteMesh	Portable. Scalable. Enterprise portal development.
<b>Model Driven Development</b>		
Data-centered	AutoWeb, RMM, OOHDM, Oracle Web Development Suite, WebML, WebRatio	Data-intensive applications.
GUI-centered	CodeCharge, CodeSmith, DeKlarit, Fabrique	Iteration-intensive applications.
MDA-compliant	Oracle ADF, IBM/Rational Rapid Developer	OMG standard.
<b>Development Environments</b>		
Authoring tools	Adobe PageMill, Amaya, Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint)	Static content creation and editing.
Web site management	FrontPage, NetObjects Fusion, MacroMedia Dreamweaver	Mostly static web sites with simple navigation requirements.
Full-fledged environments	Microsoft VisualStudio.NET, Sun Java Studio Creator, WebSphere Application Developer	Programming-intensive.
<b>Others</b>		
Programming languages	MAWL, <bigwig>, JWIG, functional continuations, Cocoon Flow	Research projects.

Table XI. Server-side development approaches.

the simplicity of Web authoring tools.

## 5.5 Summary

Table XI presents a summary of the current server-side application development approaches. In spite of the amount of effort that has been focused on bringing

discipline to web programming, as evidenced by number of approaches that have been tried, Web application development is still hard. Even when using the most advanced frameworks or development environments to program simple applications, programmers must internalize several programming modes and languages within a single implementation stream. Examples are abundant, as in the case of the .NET Web programmer who must be minimally be familiar with HTTP, C#, ASP.NET, JavaScript, HTML, XML, WebForms, VisualStudio.NET, and various middleware interfaces of the .NET Framework, including ADO.NET for access to databases, before even starting to build an application. The mental models are complex, not intuitive, and have built-in conceptual barriers that extend beyond the details of particular technologies. Newcomers face a long learning curve before they can become productive.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

We have presented an extensive survey and several categorizations of technologies related to web programming. The several tables presented throughout the paper can serve as a roadmap for choosing technical artifacts according to a specific application needs. The conclusions of our study can be summarized as follows.

**Infrastructure.** The technical problems related to the web infrastructure have largely been solved. Scalability is simply a matter of cost, as evidenced by the existence of Google which serves over 1000 users per second with sub-second average response time. High levels of scalability are achieved through load balancing between peer systems, and clustering systems are used to balance the processing load between clusters of low-cost servers. While the Google solution is beyond the technical capabilities of most organizations, the load balancing features of J2EE and .NET provide practical scalability. These enterprise solutions also have features that can assure reasonable levels of reliability, extensibility, portability, and security of Web applications.

**Application Development.** Simple applications that provide only small amounts of dynamic content are appropriately supported by ad-hoc programming such as CGI. However, as applications become interaction- and data-intensive, those ad-hoc programming methods don't scale well. Industrial-strength application development platforms such as J2EE and .NET, built on several years of ad-hoc experimentation, aim at simplifying application development. Unfortunately, the learning curve for mastering one of these platforms is long and steep, and even the most proficient software engineer who can master non-web application development will be overwhelmed by the complexity. Also, support for the coordinated separation between designers, business experts and programmers is lacking. The most interesting challenges ahead lie in effectively simplifying the processes and methods of web application development.

In the last few years, a significant effort has been devoted to devising methods that exploit the technology base in a disciplined way. These methods include frameworks based on proven design patterns, experimental programming language approaches, model-driven architectures and development environments. Although promising, they carry along preconceptions brought from non-Web application development. It is too early to assess their suitability and impact. Overall, our study



led us to believe that the most critical element at this point is to formulate a concise and simple model of what these applications are about, and to build a programming system around such a model.

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