

Review: Build A PDF Practice In A FlexSnap

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Building an entire practice around a toolset has never been as easy as reselling the FlexSnap editor from Snowbound Software.

Far from ordinary, FlexSnap is a complete multi-image viewer in a box. With FlexSnap, solution providers can build a complete PDF practice in hours.

Unlike Adobe's Acrobat Reader, the FlexSnap editor is a Java application with a server-side component to queue files on a network and a client to view the files. FlexSnap's Java servlet, which runs on the server side, is designed to control files from any file system or database repository.

Whenever a request is made from the FlexSnap client, the servlet decompresses a file and sends the first page. Along with individual pages, the FlexSnap client generates thumbnails on the fly at the time of viewing. FlexSnap can process huge files in seconds because it buffers them on the server side. This process allows users to open what they need to view on the fly.

Because all the pages are processed on the server side, users also can jump to any page quickly and view its thumbnails, which are only rendered on request. Scrolling and paging is seamless. Snowbound's FlexSnap developers have gone to great lengths to make the client as natural and stable as Adobe Reader. Users won't notice that they are scrolling through huge files.

Solution providers can use the process to build a quick proof-of-concept by breaking up pages at a content repository and sending single pages to a FlexSnap client on a laptop. The process takes seconds on large documents. FlexSnap's servlet and applet are highly configurable, so solution providers can offer it to multiple departments with different requirements within a company. And because it has an API and is configurable, solution providers can embed the FlexSnap applet inside applications.

By contrast, the Adobe Reader can only open locally cached files, so users that need fast access to large, server-based PDF files can't rely on Adobe Reader. With Adobe Reader, users must first download files to their local PCs

before opening them. Local copies pose a security risk because they are left unprotected after users are finished with them.

Moreover, Adobe Reader serves entire files all at once, so the process can be extremely slow when working with large PDF files. A 10,000-page PDF file can take several minutes to serve, and searching through large PDF files is slow because keywords are buffered all at once.

Besides Adobe PDF, FlexSnap was built for viewing files in IBM's ABIC, MO:DCA and AFP, including government-specified formats and graphical files such as TIFF, JPEG, PNG and PCX. Snowbound also sells a FlexSnap: HTML, a pure HTML client with a Java servlet and other servlet-applet combinations that integrate with content management systems such as Documentum's Webtop environment. The HTML client is useful for making a PDF reader available to partners and customers.

FlexSnap comes with various annotation features such as sticky notes, highlighting and boxes. In addition, FlexSnap supports preconfigured rubber stamps for text and images to eliminate repetition when working with annotations. Annotations also support properties, allowing users to track different layers. The annotation properties are customizable as well, so solution providers can configure FlexSnap clients with different permission levels.

Snowbound calls its channel program SnowCAP. The Watertown, Mass.-based company provides light training sessions because FlexSnap is comprehensive and feature-rich. Snowbound said it offers an average reseller margin of 25 percent and higher.



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