

Ext Conference: Day 1

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Related Categories: Learning ExtJS, ColdFusion 8, Development, ColdFusion, AIR, My First ExtJS DataGrid, ExtJS

Day 1 of the **Ext JS** Conference has been busy. Last night I had dinner and drinks with Jeff, a really nice guy who heads up development for a group writing web based interfaces to hardware appliances. Turns out Jeff is also the guy who introduced **JavaScript** to **Douglas Crockford**, who was today's keynote speaker. Douglas made sure to recognize Jeff at the beginning of his keynote, which I thought was a nice nod to the guy who helped give him direction in his career. Douglas ran us through a brief history of hypertext, the evolution of the web, JavaScript, and the browser wars, before touching on the future of the web, some of the things in the new JavaScript specs being worked on through **ECMA**, and the fact that none of it would matter for years until the browser manufacturers would implement it. He did give props to Flash, AIR and SilverLight for trying to further the web experience where it has lagged so much over the years. He also spoke about the pitfalls of security in Web 2.0 applications, and the primary culprits of those issues (the browser manufacturers).

Before I go a whole lot further, let me tell you that the conference center, and their service to us, is fantastic. Held at the **Ritz-Carlton Orlando**, the location is beautiful with it's palm lined drives, a well groomed golf course winding around several 'water traps', and a huge pool with several fountains. The food has been exceptional, with an incredible meal at lunch, complete with salad, brazed chicken, and desert with complete table service (this as part of the conference). No buffet sandwiches here, though a breakfast buffet would have been nice before that 830 session this morning. My room is about half the size of the one I had at the **Hotel Rouge** last year for WebManiacs, but it is very comfortable and service keeps it nice. The shower did flood the entire bathroom this morning and the in-room coffee is horribly weak (and small), but everything can't be perfect. I've also carried on my conference tradition of bringing a sinus infection with me, which is keeping me from the after-session activities this evening, but the concierge was able to get me covered with some NyQuil for the evening to try to knock this stuff out of me.

Aaron Conran, fellow **ColdFusion** developer and one of the original contributors to **ColdBox**, delivered the session covering what has changed and what's new within the 3.0 release, which is officially released tomorrow by Jack Slocum during his keynote. A great deal of work has been spent to make the upgrade fairly painless, with attention payed to backwards compatability, improvements to overall memory management (always important), and an eye towards keeping the code lean and mean, doing what is necessary to keep code size to a minimum and eliminate any unnecessary bloat. Menus and Toolbars have been converted into true Container objects, and the only significant markup changes appear to be to the Button objects.

There are several new visual components, maintaining the professional feel and consistency that has made Ext JS so compelling. Two that attracted a great deal of attention were the ListView and the Buffered Grid View. Sometimes you want the basic view afforded by a Grid, without having the need for (or the overhead of) things like drag and drop column ordering, sorting, and the like. The ListView gives you a basic grid style layout without all of that overhead, and a very trim DOM footprint as well, providing your view without unnecessary code bloat and browser memory overhead. The Buffered Grid View is a full Grid implementation that allows the browser to only render DOM for records in actual view, plus a few extra to make smooth transitions on scrolling, that automatically adds and removes DOM items when scrolling through your recordsets. The memory management improvements with this, and other changes, are very nice to see. Like the new `.mon()`, or 'managed on', methods that allow you to bind events in a temporary fashion, getting a proper cleanup from browser memory when that component gets destroyed. This was actually a method of Ext prior to its 1.0 release, and has been heavily requested for this return.

Being the server-side guy that I've been for the last decade, the important new components came to the Ext.data package, with the addition of the Ext.data.Direct and Ext.data.DataWriter classes. Direct provides the ability to marshall your remote service call definitions into one container, calling your Ajax data requests from a centralized location with the ability to make multiple commands through a single Ajax request as well as call listeners on specific actions performed by Direct. Chris Scott did a presentation on Direct this afternoon, explaining how the developer has to create a server side Router to which Direct can attach its requests, and showing us all a nice and very simple example (even if it was written in Ruby). The Ext Team provides a Reference for development of Routers in a number of server-side languages, including ColdFusion, PHP, Ruby, and .NET. The DataWriter class, covered in more depth in a future session, does for POST requests what the DataReader does for your GET requests, allowing a developer to define your routing of requests to send data back to the server. The combination of these classes with the existing classes of the Ext.data package really improves upon the power of using Ext with any server-side technology.

I was able to see the presentation on the Direct class because of a snafu with a scheduling change of the presentation of the Ext.air package. Originally these two sessions were the one conflict in my schedule, but they moved the Ext.air presentation session up a time slot (a change I didn't know of until after the fact) which allowed me the opportunity to sit in on Chris's session. Luckily the presentations are being recorded and are supposed to be available online after the conference. I'm glad they're doing this, since I had to leave during my final session of the day, on Ext.Core, due to the sinus issues that progressively worsened through the day. The Ext.air session is one I am very looking forward to watching.

The members of the Ext Team are a great group of guys. Abe, again, congratulated me on the book, and invited me to sit in on the Industry Experts panel tomorrow. I've had several people say they wished they had brought their copies of the **book** so Shea and I could have signed them for them. One attendee asked why **PackT** didn't have a booth setup somewhere, which is when I first noticed that their don't appear to be any outside sponsors for the conference. Ext appears to have financed the conference solely through the registration of the 200+ attending, which is pretty impressive considering the facility and it's services. On another note, ColdFusion has been publicly mentioned in several presentations, and with so many different server-side programmers represented here it is refreshing to hear so many comment that they should give ColdFusion a hard look.

And with that, I'm going to pack it in for the evening and pray that the NyQuil does it's job to kick the junk out of my head. Tomorrow looks to be an exciting day, with Jack's keynote releasing Ext 3.0, sessions on User Experience Design, Theming, and Performance Optimization. I'll be posting updates to **Twitter** and my Facebook profile throughout the day. If you're here, make sure to come up and say hi.