



by M  YFLOWER



Enterprise app. development with Ajax & XUL

XTECH 2006 | 14.05.2006 | Sebastian Schürmann



What you're gonna hear now !



- Why Sixt adopted XUL
- Why we use AJAX (-X +J)
- What dev. Tools you can use for it
- Which components the framework consists of
- What kind of widgets we use and how they are constructed
- What Application(s) have we build
- Team Structure at Sixt
- Lessons we learned on XUL

„Titel der Präsentation“

What is Mayflower/ Thinkphp



- PHP service provider
- over 30 employees
- distributed on 2 sites: Munich and Würzburg
- 4 associates: Johann-Peter Hartmann, Albrecht Günther, Björn Schotte, Gregor Streng
- deep-rooted with the PHP-Community
- developer driven company

- PHP projects for various Enterprises as Sixt, Hypovereinsbank, Vaillant
- LAMP-Stack experts

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Presenter



- developer since 1999
- Mayflower team member since 2005
- jack of all trades: Development to QA
- working in the XUL Project for over a Year
- part of various opensource projects (Mainly as QA)
 - Postnuke (cms)
 - PnCommerce (ecommerce)

- Email me: schuermann@mayflower.de

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What is XUL ?

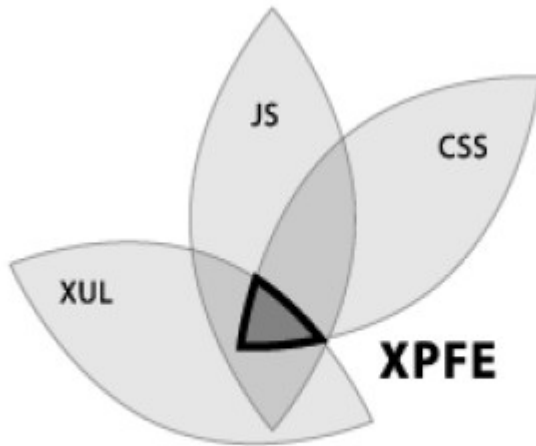


fig. B

- XUL is XML GUI Markup
- Own widgets like `<tree />`
- XUL runs in the Gecko Engine (Mozilla/Firefox)
- Styling via CSS
- Events and so on with DOM-Javascript

Could speak of it as a „*pimped XHTML*“

XUL development tools



The screenshot displays a development environment for XUL. On the left, the DOM Inspector shows a tree view of the document structure with nodes like 'window', 'script', and 'statusbar'. The central Mozilla browser window shows a web application with a sidebar menu and a main content area containing a table of items. The JavaScript Debugger on the right shows the source code and an interactive session with a welcome message and usage instructions.

El...	Programm	Bezeichnung	Funktion	Element
1	0144	Leasing Abwicklung	1500	
2	0144	Anzeige neue Kunden	1501	
3	0144	Angebot	1502	
4	0144	Vertragspflege	1503	
5	0144	Fuhrpark	1600	
6	0144	Fahrzeugbestellung	1601	
7	0144	Fahrzeuguanlage	1602	
8	0144	Rechnungen	2500	
9	0144	Rechnung/Reklamation	2501	
10	0144	Auftragsfassung	2502	
11	0144	Schadencenter	2700	
12	0144	Schadencfassung	2701	
13	0144	Vorgangsbearbeitung		
14	0144	BTN	2703	
15	0144	FELD	2704	
16	0144	FUNC	2705	
17	0144	LIST	2706	
18	0144	MENU	2707	
19	0144	PROG	2708	
20	0144	Schaden löschen	2709	
21	0144	Schadenprojekt - DOKU	2799	
22	0144	Tank- und Servicekarten	2800	
23	0144	Kartenbestellung	2801	
24	0144	Kartenregistrierung	2802	
25	0144	Kartenornierung	2803	
26	0144	Tankkartenanlage	2804	
27	0144	Kartenhistorie	2820	
28	0144	Man. Tankbelegerfassung	2830	
29	0144	Pricing und Yield	3000	
30	0144	Dedblatt	3001	
31	0144	Preise	3002	
32	0144	Parameter Charges	3004	
33	0144	Parameter System	3005	
34	0144	Fahrzeuggruppen	3030	
35	0144	Parameter Mietwagenbuchung	3700	

Dive into XUL



- The Browser supports the most important dev. Tools as browser ext.
 - Firebug as debug console
 - Debugger (Step Debugging – avail. as ext.)
 - DOM Explorer for XML Structures
 - Paranoid javascript.options.strict
- Eclipse and JSEclipse + XMLBuddy as dev. Plattform
- Happy vi users reported

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May I XUL ?



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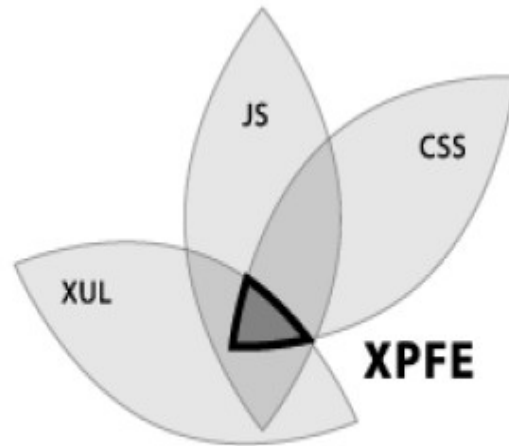


fig. B

- Do you XHTML ?
- Do you CSS ?
- Do you Javascript ?

- Do you C++, python .. ?



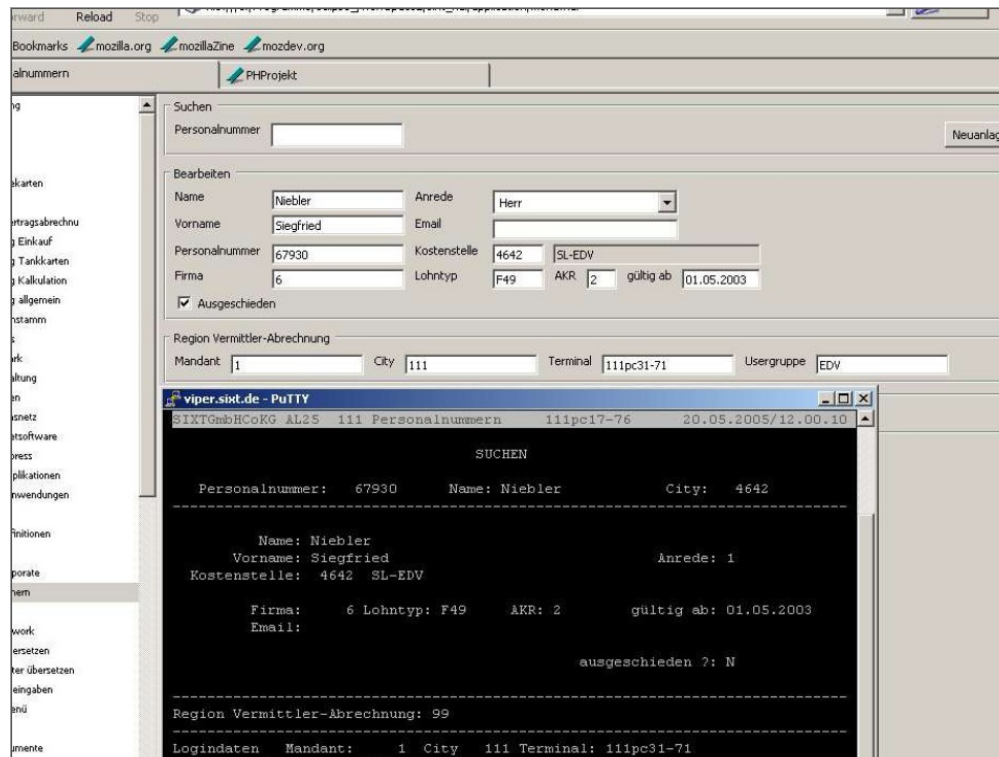
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The Requirements



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- Find a way to implement modern GUI applications on top of a COBOL based enterprise architecture without rewriting from scratch and be fast with it.



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The Contenders/Inhouse GUI Technologies



■ COBOL

- Only terminal based applications
- Limited developer resources avail.
- hundreds of Applications avail. @ Sixt

■ Powerbuilder

- Not open source, long development cycles
- Island applications as result

■ Java

- Very limited number of deployed apps. @ Sixt
- High development costs

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The Solution



- Use XUL/XML/Javascript as **GUI layer** – aka develop a **browser based application (view & controller)**
- **Re-USE** the **stable in house COBOL architecture** via **AJAX based access.** (model)
- Develop a framework to provide advanced GUI components (**grids, trees**)
- Establish **simple Deployment Processes** as the **Sixt company** is used to them.
- As far as possible: Give **Sixt the complete control** over the resulting product

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The first Project - Incident Handling



- Companywide use: from callcenter to the legal department (different kind of users!)
- ~ 40 GUIs to enter and process data
- Connected to various serverside systems
 - PDF document generation server
 - E-Mail services
 - DTAUS bank file generation service
- Plattform: Mozilla on Cytrix dektop to minimize deployment issues.

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Technical Elements of Sixt XUL Apps.



- Ajax Cobol/PHP/SQL connector object
- Excel like datagrid for serial data
- Treewidget
- Data dictionary with length and fieldtype definitions for clientside validation
- Enumerations (e.g. country lists)
- Helper API (data formats, comparisons etc.)
- Page controller API (DOM events and operations)

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- Data serialization with **JSON**
- Serverside **JSON C Module** for performant (de-) serialization
- **N Cobol-method calls in one http-request (batching)**
- Easy handling of dependent **AJAX-Requests**
- Large amounts of data transferred with no performance headaches.
- Simple **PHP backend architecture**
- **COBOL, SQL and PHP methods usable**
- **Cobol and SQL Calls mixable into one request**

N-method calls in one request ?



- Data retrieval of ~ 30 Cobol Methods on initial loading of a incident case
- Special dependencies (car-contractor-credit cards) make use of dependant calls
- Optimal Re-use of the CRUD and other Cobol Methods in Data-Grids

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An Example



Request Batching - Why ?



- Save request instantiation and authentication
- Reduce concurrency Problems
- Use database transactions in AJAX-SQL
- Simplify errorhandling issues
- Better performance in high latency situations
- Delivers data of multiple function calls at once

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Pagecontroller and helper API



- Objects that live in every XUL Page
- Events already bound in there, no need for DOM-attributes like onClick
- Allows clean partitioning of XML View and event dispatching
- Data validation with one line of Javascript code
- Form data-delta checks to avoid useless AJAX Requests
- eases routine developer works

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Data grid



Element ID	Programm	Bezeichnung	Funktion	Element	Typ
1	O144	Leasing Abwicklung	1500		MENU
2	O144	Anzeige neue Kunden	1501		MENU
3	O144	Angebot	1502		MENU
4	O144	Vertragspflege	1503		MENU
5	O144	Fuhrpark	1600		MENU
6	O144	Fahrzeugbestellung	1601		MENU
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11	O144	Schadencenter	2700		MENU
12	O144	Schadenerfassung	2701		MENU
13	O144	Vorgangsbearbeitung	2702		MENU
14	O144	Druck Barcode	2703		MENU
15	O144	Listen	2704		MENU
16	O144	VHV	2705		MENU
17	O144	Reparaturauftrag	2706		MENU
18	O144	Zahlvorschlag	2707		MENU
19	O144	Mahnlauf bearbeiten	2708		MENU
20	O144	Schaden löschen	2709		MENU
21	O144	Schadenprojekt - DOKU	2799		MENU
22	O144	Tank- und Servicekarten	2800		MENU
23	O144	Kartenbestellung	2801		MENU
24	O144	Kartenregistrierung	2802		MENU

Speichern

Tabular Data - The Datagrid



- Allows to edit data in a Excel like spreadsheet style
- Allows textfields and selectboxes
- Field based validation when data is changed without a request to the server
- Optimal usability for large amounts of data
- Automatic determination of changed data (deltas) and control over resulting storage operations

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Tree



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Schäden												
SNR	Sada	Sati	Name	Kennzeichen	Schadenart	Rep	Btl	FIR	Interne	Mietvertrag	Wtlg	Ve
111111659	09.02.2004	00:00	GAGLI NILGÜN	DN -SK 4711	Eigenverschulden	N.00	3	1	11111646	977642916		
			Frontschaden									
			Seitenschaden Beifahr.									
			Kupplung	defekt								
			Heckscheibe	Fahrerseite stark	Kratzer							
111111646	09.02.2004	12:00	GAGLI NILGÜN	DN -SK 4711	Fremdverschulden	N.00	1	1	11111646	977642916		
			Heckschaden									
			Blinker hinten	Fahrerseite Gehäuse	Bruch							
111111790	06.02.2004	00:00	GAP TRANSFERFAHRT	DN -SK 4711	Eigenverschulden	N.00	0	1	11111646	976369662		
111111683	03.02.2004	00:00	PFLEIDERER INFRASTRUKTURTECHNIK	DN -SK 4711	Eigenverschulden	N.00	0	1	11111646	402004791		
			Nebelschlussleuchte	Fahrerseite nur Glas	Bruch							
			Alle Radkappen		fehlt							
			Windschutzscheibe	Beifahrerseite klein	Crash							
			Heckscheibe	Fahrerseite	Riss							
111111658	02.02.2004	12:00	SCHMIDT INES	DN -SK 4711	Eigenverschulden	N.00	1	1	11111646	402004790		
			Totalschaden									
			Wischer vorne	Beifahrerseite	defekt							
			Auspuff		defekt							
			Blinker hinten	Fahrerseite Gehäuse	Bruch							
			Heckscheibe	Beifahrerseite klein	Crash							
			Türverkleidung innen	Fahrerseite nur oberflächlich	Kratzer							
111111657	29.01.2004	12:00	SCHMIDT INES	DN -SK 4711	Eigenverschulden	N.00	1	1	11111646	562400098		
			Seitenschaden Fahrers.									
			Seitenschaden Beifahr.									
Gegner												
SNR	Sada	Sati	Name	Kennzeichen	Schadenart	Rep	Btl	FIR	Interne	Mietvertrag	Wtlg	Ve
111111646	09.02.2004	12:00	Rudolph, Renate	ms-dn 1231ß	Fremdverschulden		0	1	0	0		

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Hierarchic datastructures - Tree



- Simple JS API to
 - Build trees
 - Attach event code to tree-nodes
 - Read tree data
 - Open and close subtrees
- NO Implementation as <XUL/>-tag/XBL
- Several DOM performance optimizations
- Eases complex tasks (list to hierarchy)



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Whats so web 2.0 about all this ?



- Mashup of several services in the Sixt IT Landscape
 - Cobol data services
 - PDF generation
 - DTAUS file generation
 - Mailservices
- Browser based application
- Scripting language for GUI and glue layer (PHP)
- Rapid Development Process (RAD)

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The Second Project: Styleguides and QA



- Straight naming conventions for XML-attributes and Javascript notation rules (BSD-Style !)
- Clear documentation for Project Managers what is possible and what not.
- Review of subprojects and refactoring of code and markup
- Limitation of possibilities over all to streamline the complete sourcecode.
- Guidelines for:
 - XUL markup
 - Javascript code
 - Interface design-guidelines and usability

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The Third Project: Developer Trainings



- New Team was formed Summer 2005 ~ 10 people working on XUL @ Sixt
- Different backgrounds and history of candidates
 - Web + Scripting Langs
 - Cobol
 - Powerbuilder
- One Week of training for the „newbies“
- First productive work started after 2–3 Weeks

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More Projects



- Car leasing application (price calculation etc.)
- Leasing contract systems
- International money transfer via dtazv
- „Connector“ to the datawarehouse
- Extensive security & permission checks, down to the DOM-Level. Different users have different rights in the same application context.

etc, etc, etc

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Lesson 1: Code Issues



- Even if its just Javascript, it needs to be clean and performant.
- NO warnings in any JS Code or CSS
- Markup needs to be clean too
- Use or write Frameworks, dont re-invent the wheel, better fix it ;)
- Use a performant and warning-free framework
- Complex async-AJAX Requests require a bit more complex code. Make Sure every developer knows how to
 - Program functional in Javascript
 - use the .prototype keyword (NOT the framework)

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Lesson 2: Process Issues



- Ajax Apps and the XUL-Framework are very agile, behave like it
 - release early – release often
 - don't do big Prototypes – start to be really productive in a early stage
 - don't fear refactoring
- Scrum as agile management method fits well to this kind of application development
- Use the right tools, instead of the well known ones
- Automated tests help finding side-effects of changes to the codebase

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Lesson 3: Design & Performance Issues



- Serverside Methods, if re-used (optimal situation), might need a additional Layer on the client side (model layer)
- Trade more performance in async requests for complexity in the code
- Do not re-invent the serverside wheel in the client
- Even clients (browsers) might have limited processing power and RAM

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More Infos



- l mayflower.de
- l xulplanet.com
- l developer.mozilla.org



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Thanks for listening ;)

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