ACRODIALOGS USE CASE

By Shawn Altorio

For several years, I have been developing a freely-distributed interactive PDF character sheet for keeping track of character information and stats in the Dungeons & Dragons tabletop role playing game. As work progressed on this SSA-X2 D&D Character Sheet, it became more complex, offering more user customization and interactivity. Due to the restrictions with Adobe Acrobat's JavaScript capabilities, I found I was more and more often having to create work-arounds to implement new features.

The most significant such limitation was the inability to get on-the-fly user input. Acrobat's default *app.alert* dialog method was incredibly limiting, as there was minimal ability to customize the look of the resulting dialog, with only 4 dialog icons, and no text formatting or button naming options. Acrobat form fields in combination with JavaScript could be used to simulate a more customizable dialog, but this resulted in incredibly slow performance.

A recent decision to release my product for use with Acrobat 6 or newer (dropping support for Acrobat 5) proved to be of great benefit, when I discovered the JavaScript Adobe Dialog Manager (ADM) capability with Acrobat 6 and newer. However, I was soon met with great frustration when I began attempting to implement ADM dialogs into my PDF's JavaScript code. The JavaScript ADM was poorly documented within Adobe's help files and manuals, and user support on the internet was virtually non-existent. It seemed no one was using the JavaScript ADM within Acrobat, and I could understand why. When I finally did get enough figured out to have a functioning dialog, I found editing my dialog to be a time-consuming process. I had to delve into my code, change values, and then return to the PDF and execute the dialog, only to see that my changes weren't quite what I had in mind, and do it all again. Editing the look of something like a dialog through nothing but text values is a trying process for a graphic designer such as myself. I found myself longing for a visual dialog editor that would offer me the WYSIWYG editing experience I was used to in other programs.

Luckily, it wasn't long before I was introduced to AcroDialogs by WindJack Solutions. I downloaded the evaluation version and gave it a try. It was just what I was looking for. The interface is clean and simple: I just drag the elements I want into the dialog, adjust basic properties like alignment and font styles, and I can then test the dialog immediately. The options are there for adding your own code to buttons and other dialog elements, and when the dialog is as you want it, AcroDialogs will output the JavaScript code so you can implement it into your PDF.

One feature of AcroDialogs that completely amazed me was the ability to import and add your own images to dialogs. This was something I was never able to do through code, and it made AcroDialogs perfect for creating a splash screen for my PDF.

Since acquiring AcroDialogs, I have been busy making extensive use of it in my SSA-X2 D&D Character Sheet. I was able to create a 12-field dialog for entering a breakdown of data, which previously was only possible through an archaic (and slow) form-field generated virtual-dialog.

This has increased the speed and responsiveness of my PDF immensely, which will appease the greatest user criticism of my product. And I will now be able to implement features I had before only wished I could add, such as "wizards" to step users through entering data, and a "Preferences" dialog for storing user options.

Could I have added dialogs to my PDF without AcroDialogs? Yes, I had already done so. But it was an incredibly tedious and time consuming process. If I was getting paid for my work, it would've cost my employer a significant amount of money, assuming they didn't simply give up on the idea. AcroDialogs makes adding dialogs to my PDFs incredibly fast and easy. I've already implemented 10 dialogs into my product in less time than it took me to manually create one simple dialog on my own. This is an absolutely fantastic product.

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