Ten years of Web development

Where were you?

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Ten years of developerWorks has created a vast amount of material. It's interesting to pore back through the technology that we've explored and see how much things have changed. I'll be looking at our colorful past along with what was going on in our popular culture at the time to get a sense of perspective. Join the ride.

Where were you?

Can you believe that it has been a full ten years since the beginning of developerWorks? Can you imagine trying to pore through all of that history to get a perspective on what has happened in Web development over that time? That's exactly what I set out to do.

The problem with doing a retrospective on something as vast as developerWorks, even within a section like Web development, is that things reach across time. Some information seems instantly ancient as technology that appeared futuristic was quickly overtaken by the next evolution. Other information seems immortal, an idea that people come to again and again because it remains relevant even though it was first published years ago.

I thought of trying to give my own reflections on technologies and how developerWorks affected me, but I realized that my memories won't mean much to you. You were in whatever job you had then, worried about whatever burdens you carried at that time. Your stories will be as wide and varied as... well... developerWorks itself. So, I wandered through a sea of other retrospectives. They are easy to find. Simply type "top ten" and a year into your favorite search engine and you'll be treated to a flood of music, films, and other items.

I decided that, rather than try to assimilate this information for you, it would be fun to start you on your own walk through the history of developerWorks. To give each year a perspective in time, I took three elements from each one: music, films, and news items. Admittedly, it is a rather shallow view of the world at that time, but my goal was not to evaluate events. I wanted to find memory keys to help place you there. Then, from the Web development zone, I looked to see what was popular at that time.
One interesting thing I observed was that no matter what year it was, content was being sought and read from every previous year of publication. I liked that, because it meant the information didn't lose its value after the first week of reading. People continued to refer to those articles and to point others to the information.

**Time traveling**

In the classic science fiction film, *The Time Machine*, starring Rod Taylor, the protagonist sits in his wonderful device and begins to move forward in time. All around him things evolve at a frightening pace, moving from a Victorian city to a modern age filled with cars and people, then far, far beyond; buildings rise and fall; fashions change; nothing stays still. It's a great moment of film which overwhelms the viewer with the idea of time.

The Internet was my time machine. I used a few resources combined with some back-end information I was able to retrieve from the secret developerWorks vaults to put all of this together.

The first tool that I used was the Wayback Machine (see [Resources](#)). This really is a sort of time machine. It is a gigantic cache of Internet data at various points in time. I've used the Wayback Machine before to find data that had disappeared from a favorite Web site. For my retrospective, I pointed it to http://ibm.com/developerworks and was instantly rewarded with a view of the developerWorks Web site for each year around the time of our anniversary. All the views are somewhat incomplete, as they contain links to graphics which were not saved as part of the archive. However, it was all enough to get a feel for what developerWorks was like at each stage. The 1999 version was crude by our current standards, even though it was state of the art at the time. Each successive year brought some level of refinement until it became the developerWorks that we know and love. Give it a try and see for yourself.

The popular culture information I pulled from a few sites, which I've listed in the [Resources](#). The references I chose were all things that made sense to me and that I hoped everyone could associate with in one way or another. In general, I used the Billboard listing for rock music singles, because that was what I probably had on the radio. Films were taken from the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) listing of top grossing films for the year. The news items were pulled from the CNN.com Year In Review specials.

I know that I probably missed some references that are stronger for you. My choices are not intended to make a judgment of the importance of one artistic work or news event over another, but simply to provide some context. I hope that they will make you think of your own personal references.

**The journey**

This should be a fun journey, and you may want to do it a little bit at a time. For each year, I'll give a little bit of context about what was going on at the time along with several articles that were popular at that time. If you really want to get into the spirit of things you'll pull out some of the old music and movies and allow yourself to drift back as you browse through the articles. Some of them you may remember reading. Some of them will make you laugh as you are reminded of how...
difficult some ideas seemed to be when they were first introduced. Some of them will grab you and you'll find yourself taking notes and wanting to dig deeper into gold that you overlooked. You may want to set an alarm to bring you back in case you get lost in time.

1999

The world was busily working to protect itself from the consequences of the Y2K bug with a lot of coding and a lot of hardware. Lenny Kravitz was playing "Fly Away" on the radio. Some people were trying not to spoil the secret at the end of the film "The Sixth Sense," while others went to see the long awaited "Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace" or wandered the office quoting "Yeah, baby!" from the first Austin Powers film. Still others followed the white rabbit into "The Matrix."

The Web development zone as we know it today didn't really exist yet, but the press was praising the technical content that was already bubbling forth on developerWorks. My view of the page in the Wayback Machine still had a beta notice on it!

2000

As we laughed about what a breeze Y2K had been, Metalica formed part of the soundtrack for the new millennium with "No Leaf Clover" and "I Disappear," while Creed offered us "Higher" and "With Arms Wide Open." At the movies, Tom Hanks was building a close personal relationship with a volleyball in "Cast Away," while Ron Howard was sharing his vision of "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," and Russell Crowe was showing off his legs in "Gladiator." (Ironically, Mel Gibson was also showing off his legs in "What Women Want" so it was a leggy year at the movies.) Researchers had mapped the human blueprint, people were contemplating the tragic loss of 118 Russian submariners as the Kursk sank in the Barents Sea; we were discussing the dot.com implosion. Oh! And the United States was trying to figure out who it had elected as President. In Web development people were reading these articles:

- Using WSDL in SOAP applications
- An introduction to RDF
- Web Services architecture overview
- The user experience
- PHP by example, Part I

2001

On the radio "Awake" by Godsmack played, along with "It's Been Awhile" by Staind. In movie theaters audiences were introduced to the wonders of a young wizard in "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone," and a very old wizard in "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring," as well as a certain ogre named "Shrek." It seems hard to believe that some people had spent their time around the water cooler debating the merits and dangers of cloning earlier that year when in September we all experienced the tragedy of 9/11. Yet, technology continued to move forward, and developerWorks was serving up Web development articles like these:

- XPCOM Part 1: An introduction to XPCOM
• Remote scripting using a servlet
• A cross-browser DHTML table
• Web-based data mining
• The gentoo.org redesign, Part 1: A site reborn

2002

2002 was greeted by the sounds of Puddle of Mudd singing "Blurry" and Godsmack with "I Stand Alone." Movie goers got their escape with adventure films such as "Spider-Man," "The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers," "Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones," and "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets." War was beginning to rage in Afghanistan and Iraq, while economies began to slip, with little help from corporate scandals such as Enron. However, on developerWorks we were enjoying more evolution into service-oriented thinking and Web 2.0:

• Introduction to Xindice
• Finding your way through Web service standards, Part 1: Will my Web service work with your client?
• The Web's future: XHTML 2.0
• Business Process with BPEL4WS: Understanding BPEL4WS, Part 1
• The Web services (r)evolution: Part 1

2003

The radio blared "Headstrong" by Trapt and "Seven Nation Army" by White Stripes. At the movies we sent the Hobbits home with "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King," kids were "Finding Nemo," we met Captain Jack Sparrow in "Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl," and we went back into the virtual world with "Matrix Reloaded." We continued to fight wars in the Middle East, we saluted the fallen astronauts of the space shuttle Columbia, and infrastructure took on a whole new level of concern when people in the U.S. and Canada suffered a massive electrical blackout. On developerWorks, users looked into ways to optimize and expand what a Web application can do:

• Strike a balance: Users' expertise on interface design
• The cranky user: What can users do?
• Take Web data analysis to the next level with PHP
• Build and implement a single sign-on solution
• Speed Web delivery with HTTP compression

2004

Films gave us many sequels as "Shrek 2" and "Spider-Man 2" showed us how creative and poetic titles can be. Other film-goers experienced "The Passion of the Christ," cheered on "The Incredibles," and continued the boy wizard's adventures with "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban." This all seemed like a good escape from the news of the day as we wrapped up another U.S. presidential election, faced a number of natural disasters, and bid farewell to world leaders Ronald Reagan and Yasser Arafat. Thousands read and discussed the findings of the 9/11 Commission. Meanwhile the beat went on with "Megalomaniac" by Incubus and "Numb" by Linkin Park. In the Web application world, however, many things were taking shape:
• Create easy-to-view tables
• Web app security using Struts, servlet filters, and custom taglibs
• Data structures: Make the right choice
• Best practices for Struts development
• Prevent a cross-site scripting attack

2005

The world seemed to be out to get us as more disasters occurred throughout the globe, such as Hurricane Katrina, the Indian Ocean Tsunami, and a damaging earthquake in Pakistan. We said goodbye to Johnny Carson and Pope John Paul II. The Foo Fighters sang us through our days with "Best Of You," as Green Day gave us "Boulevard Of Broken Dreams." At the movies we saw "Batman Begins," "King Kong" was resurrected through Peter Jackson's eyes, we wrapped up the saga in "Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith," and entered another new world with "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe." We also met some articles that were to be important in the Web development zone history, which I will mention further in the Conclusion:

• Migrate apps from Internet Explorer to Mozilla
• The Spring series, Part 1: Introduction to the Spring framework
• The Spring series, Part 2: When Hibernate meets Spring
• The cranky user: But does it come in purple?
• Ruby on Rails and J2EE: Is there room for both?

2006

The Red Hot Chili Peppers sang to me of "Dani California" after Three Days Grace sang about "Animal I Have Become." This distracted me a little from the news about the Sago Mine disaster and the dangers of getting tainted spinach. Meanwhile North Korea was analyzing its nuclear test, the news pundits analyzed the Saddam Hussein verdict, many mourned the victims of train blasts in Mumbai, and Steve "Crocodile Hunter" Erwin met his end. At the movies I got to know a dancing penguin in "Happy Feet," a new James Bond in "Casino Royale," a new Man of Steel in "Superman Returns," and old Captain Jack Sparrow in "Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest." In Web development the word was Ajax, with a multi-part series to get everyone up to speed:

• Mastering Ajax, Part 1: Introduction to Ajax
• Get free stuff for Web design
• Provide key features in a Web-based application
• Crossing borders: What's the secret sauce in Ruby on Rails?
• Considering Ajax, Part 1: Cut through the hype

2007

I noticed for the first time that Shrek should be a super-villain as "Shrek 3" and "Spider-Man 3" did battle in movie theaters. In other films, "Transformers" descended from space, pirates rose
from the bottom of the sea in "Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End," and "Ratatouille" made you believe that a rat can cook. Pakistan entered a state of emergency, California was in flames, and an astronaut was arrested with a tale that proves that even scientists can have soap opera lives. As Al Gore read the fine print on his Nobel Prize, I read the fine print within the last book of the Harry Potter series. On the Web development zone things were speeding ahead into a rich, mashed-up Internet world:

- **The cranky user: What ever happened to Web engineering?**
- **Web development tips: Ten (or a few more) files every Web site needs**
- **Develop an Ajax-based file upload portlet using DWR**
- **Speed up your Ajax applications while dodging Web services vulnerabilities**
- **Optimize database configuration and dependencies of Project Zero and WebSphere sMash applications**

2008

It's somehow appropriate that Puddle of Mudd sang "Psycho" to me while gas prices went sky high, China suffered a massive earthquake, a cyclone ravaged Myanmar, and Hurricane Gustav hit Texas. Disturbed serenaded my flashes of a Cold War childhood during the Russian-Georgian conflict with "Inside the Fire." The U.S. also elected its first black president. In the darkened theater I was greeted with "The Dark Knight" and "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull," while "WALL-E" cleaned the planet and "Kung Fu Panda" gave my daughter a new reason to break things. In the Web development zone people seemed to be interested in moving desktop-style work closer to the Web:

- **Working with jQuery, Part 1: Bringing desktop applications to the browser**
- **Build Ajax-based Web sites with PHP**
- **Getting started with CodeIgniter**
- **Build a simple WYSIWYG Web page editor**
- **Creating modular interactive user interfaces with JavaScript**

**Conclusion**

That brings us all the way to today, 2009, and ten years of developerWorks. I only shared a small portion of the articles with you. Each year brought an evolution in thought, yet many of the earliest principals were sound enough to carry to today. One of the top-read articles in September 2009 was written in 2002. Remember that I mentioned in 2005 I was going to tell you something special about the articles there? The top articles of all time in the Web development zone are the Spring series articles, written in 2005. They still generate double the number of hits of the next most popular articles. In fact, a comment I received on that series said that it was better documentation for Spring than the project documentation!

That's the real beauty of developerWorks. We have such a diverse group of readers and authors who are all passionate about technology. It's a place for real learning. Technical how-to documentation lives with information about the philosophy of design. As we move forward into the next ten years, the community aspects offered by My developerWorks will allow deeper
connections between people at all levels of technical interest. Just as we've seen an amazing evolution from the sparse beta page of developerWorks 1999, we will see an amazing evolution where all of the concepts that have been growing together over the years bear fruit.

I wouldn't miss it for the world.

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