

IntraWeb Server Manager

product review (retail version) by Steve Ball

“Do you need to profile and benchmark your web application? Would you like to remotely configure and control your web application? Would you like to better understand your users and how they use your application? Now with a simple drop of a component, you can do all of that.” <http://www.arcanatech.com>

Well, if that is enough to get you interested, it sure was for me. Just recently Arcana technologies have launched a new website and a few new components to boot. This article is going to look at the benefits of one of these components, the IntraWeb Server Manager.

Background

Coming originally from a Client/Server background, I have been using AtoZed's IntraWeb for about a year now. Having hardly ever written a line of HTML I was amazed at how easy it was to get a website up and running. I now have a number of projects running that use IntraWeb and it's given me the confidence to expand beyond my winform apps to learn more about web stuff. (For more about IntraWeb see www.atozed.com or <http://bdn.borland.com/article/0,1410,29650,00.html>.)

When I started using IntraWeb, after DCon 2003, I was inspired by the session that Cary Jensen did on “10 really cool things to do with IntraWeb”. One of the things I really liked was the session tracking and the idea for logging where someone was within your website and recording this for analysis. Although this was a little bit of code on each page, it was quite simple to implement and logged out to the database when the session closed. I have a couple of projects that use a similar technique and manage this with code inheritance from a blank TIWform from which all others inherit (to save me writing the code on each form). This approach works really well for a limited amount of detail but recently, as I've been deploying several applications, I've wanted to know more detail. As a result, I've been faced with rewriting this code; this is why this component, and the strap line, caught my eye.

The IWServer Manager – let's examine the claims.

“Now with a simple drop of a component, you can do all of that.”

The “IntraWeb Server Manager” (or Server Manager) is a non-visual component (TArcIWServerManager) that is added to the ServerController module of the IntraWeb application. Once added, this component will track and profile application usage and allow remote administration of the application via a built in interface that it generates on the specified port number (default port is 8889)

Adding the TArcIWServerManager was simple enough. By looking at the demo supplied, I saw I needed to drop the component into the ServerController module and copy three lines of code (to do with the licensing) and recompile.

```
procedure TIWServerController.IWServerControllerBaseCreate(Sender: TObject);
begin
  ServerMan.RegistrationName := 'Joe Smith';
  ServerMan.RegistrationEmail := 'joesmith@smithinc.com';
  ServerMan.RegistrationCode := 'B2EA77FB8D7771F9';
  ....
end;
```

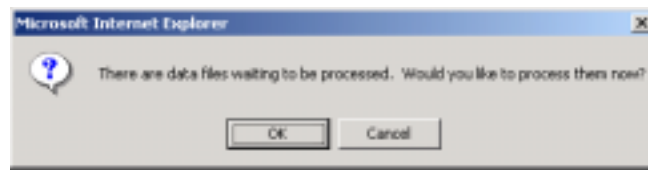
I found out that, even if you forget this code, Server Manager works and tracks data, however it will be in evaluation mode at runtime. Anyway, doing well so far.... It's been almost as simple as they suggested. Ok, this is a little more than the drop of a component, but it's not far away. All in all I have the new component in and running (including looking at the demo to see what I was doing) in under five minutes.

“Do you need to profile and benchmark your web application?”

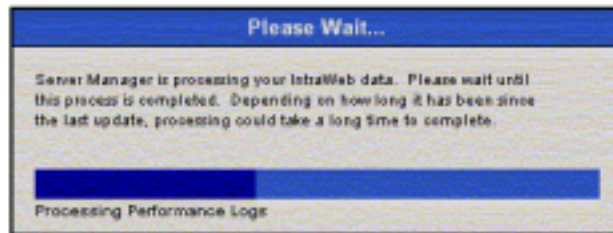
This is a new requirement for me. I currently have a friendly techie that has hosted a number of apps on a standalone web server while we investigate what we need (server wise) as the demand on his small Internet pipe is reaching the point of needing to deploy to a proper-hosted solution. <http://uk2.net/> is doing some really cheap servers and I want to see what kind of memory use and CPU usage I actually need. I currently have them deployed as a mix of ISAPI applications and standalone web server applications with a port redirect running to connect to the IntraWeb Standalone Server Application. (This article was written looking at one of the Standalone Web Server applications.)

For profiling, I want to see what's happening over time; what memory / CPU use is like; I want to see how much data we are transferring and so on. From a first play and glance on the test server it seems quite good at providing this data.

When connecting to the server manager interface (this is the built in visual part of the component eg. <http://127.0.0.1:8889>) you are first asked to log in from a standard dialog, once this is done you get asked to process waiting files. (These are the visit log files etc, I'll get to these in a minute)



Processing the data can take a few minutes, but shows the progress as it goes.



On one website this took about three minutes after a night of heavy work, so only time will tell how long this takes on a large commercial site. However, once into the system, it was quite easy to work my way around.

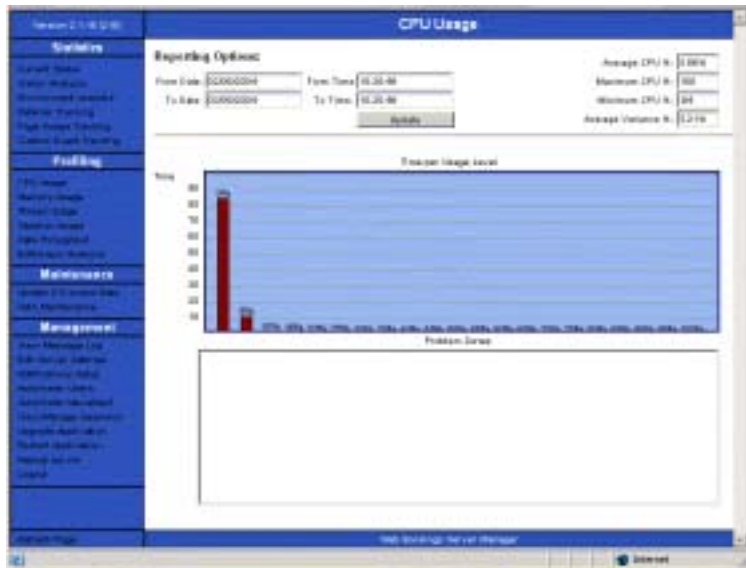
The reason for this request and process time is seen in the two-stage approach to logging data. Firstly, data is logged out to disk files and then later these are imported into a Server Manager database. This seems a good idea as it doesn't add any database overhead to the application or require the ownership of a specific database component. (Saying that the TArCIWServerManager component uses DBISAM 3.x database internally – this is built into the component, so you don't need to worry about this or even have to own a copy of DMISAM.) This is especially important when it might cost more on the hosting server as well for a DB connection. This is also good if you have limited DB connections and or are data pooling, as it's one less task that requires a DB connection constantly.

I can see why they have done this rather than offering a portal to a DB storage connection, as this is advantageous to minimize the hit to the application's scalability, but the downside is that the more log files you have accumulated, the longer it will take to process.

There are two main types of log files. Hit log files accumulate only as there are hits to your site. A busy site will have more log files. There is a component property (MemCacheHitLog) that will determine how many hit records are accumulated before a file is written. If the site will be a busy site, then you should configure the component to accumulate more records in memory before writing the file. Remember though that the more records you store in memory, the more potential you will lose records if your site crashes.

Second, are Pro log files which track profiling information about your application and machine. These files will accumulate no matter what activity your application receives. If you are concerned about the processing time of your log files, then you should consider upping the number of records in the property MemCacheProLog. If your application is very stable and rarely (if ever) crashes, this is completely safe to do.





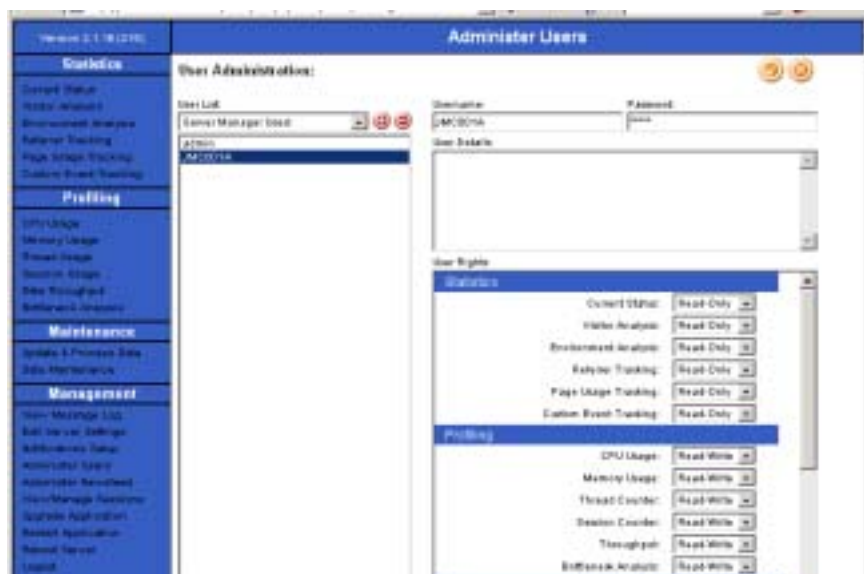
“Would you like to remotely configure and control your web application?”

I tested this almost as soon as I got home after uploading a copy of the website that had the Server Manager into the test server. IT WAS GREAT. I logged into the Server Manager as before, choose the section to Upgrade the latest copy of the exe (I changed the name for the print screen) and selected Send File. Not long after that the website was updated.



There is a warning on the Upgrade Application screen, as it will execute the file after you have uploaded it. However you can protect this section from other users of the server manager as we are about to see and this is only as week as your password to access you log on to the server manager.

I set up a new account for the IT Director to log on and see what is happening (minus certain sections).

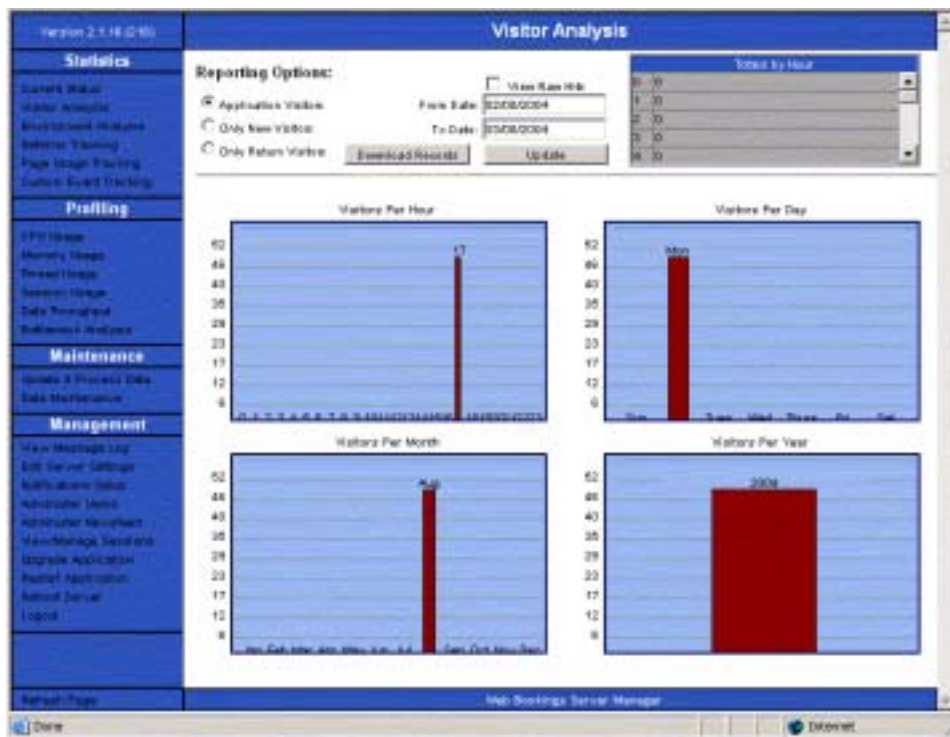


This was simple and easy to do after selecting the Administer Users section from the menu and Server Manager Users from the user list. My only criticism of this section is that, after changing the Options on the right, there is a return trip to the server. I would much prefer to change them all and then save, and have it check and update the status then. However, the flexibility to make visible, disabled, read or read write for all sections was very powerful and a great bonus.

You can also add users via Server Manager and they will automatically be authenticated within the web application. Apparently, you can leverage the Server Manager's rights management within from code via a few methods at runtime to see if the current user has rights to specified areas of your application. I have not tried this out at the time of writing.

“Would you like to better understand your users and how they use your application?”

I was doing this before (but in a limited fashion), but it does have a few nice graphs and more detail that I was storing. It has certainly saved on time to finish off what I was doing and is definitely going to save on future projects. The graphs are good and there are a number of options to help configure this to show the data relevant to your analysis. This data is also downloadable to pass on to the marketing team.



A lot of this stuff is not rocket science, but this component has been well thought out to add the options in that are commonly used.

Product Info

There is a free version of this product that comes with IntraWeb 7.2.x and above. If you have IW7.2.x installed then you need to uninstall the free version before installing a purchased copy. This is easy to do via a few small steps documented with the install package's readme.txt.

There is a full features matrix available at <http://www.arcanatech.com/ServerManagerMatrix.html> that shows the differences and costs of the Free, Lite, Professional, Enterprise and Resale versions (basically \$100 for the lite up to \$500 for retail at time of writing).

As part of the purchase you do get a one-year maintenance (support and updates) contract and for lite version and above the source code to Server Manager Component (which allows you to recompile the component yourself when a new IW version is released). Currently you do not get Source Code to Server Manager Reporting DLL as this is not required to be recompiled when a new IW version is released. The product also comes with a help file that, although I have only browsed in part, seems on the whole to have enough information to work with. This component is currently available for Delphi 5, 6 and 7.

Summary

This is just a quick whirlwind tour of this new component, and we have just about scratched the surface but I can safely say that, if it performs as well as it has so far in two weeks' time, this is probably the best money I've spent since buying IntraWeb itself. It really has been easy to set up and for such a new product on the market, the functionality is excellent. I have a few questions over the speed of loading in the updated data but, looking past that, the flexibility and benefits of administering a website remotely without too much fuss is going to make me a lot of friends in the customer service stakes as I go. Most importantly for me, it looks professional and is something straight from the box you can show a customer and be happy about.



Steve Ball is the owner of www.designer-software.net working during the day for ClubRunner Europe Ltd as the Programming Business Development Manager. Steve has been using IntraWeb since mid 2003.

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