


Zend Framework: Surviving The Deep End


Zend Framework: Surviving The Deep End

A Zend Framework Example Blog Application From Start To Finish


People have approached me over the months curious about why I don't just write a Zend Framework themed book, get with a publisher, and make mountains of money (or at least a modest hill). After all, most know I have had offers from at least one publisher. Writing a book would provide a great deal of publicity for my own skills, highlight my authority on the subject, increase my ego to dangerous proportions and give my stature in the community and with potential clients a boost. The benefits go beyond mere cash.

I usually start by explaining that writing a book on contract is no easy project. A book takes time, patience, incredible dedication and an all out attack on your preconceptions. No matter how "expert" you'd like to believe you are, writing a book will definitely blow that out of the water. In the words of myself, an expert is someone who consults the manual less, and knows where to find everything they don't know more efficiently 

I know from experience in writing the Zend Framework Example Blog Application Tutorial that explaining the Zend Framework is no easy task. It's impossible to do without plenty of forethought and care, and usually a detailed reading of the manual in conjunction with the actual source code (both what you intend writing, and the Zend Framework source itself). Even then you rewrite everything at least twice, and tweak it a dozen ways after. Why? Because that's the only way to escape one's dependence on ingrained experience and IDE auto completion which easily leads the "expert" to skip over the obvious and take knowledge for granted - not an advisable trait in any reference work.


This, for me, created an arena in which I felt compelled to utilise an old device: a single comprehensive example which tied together every facet of knowledge I wanted to explore. It had to be simple, creative, problematic and real - all at the same time. That's where a "blog" came to mind 

. It can be as simple or as complex as you want it to be which made it a highly flexible example, and everyone (plus their dog) knows how a blog works in theory. It also coincided with the web application framework equivalent of "Hello, World!". The fact I really wanted to write my own customisable blog was mere icing.


Unfortunately the whole initial project had one minor issue - I quickly realised the book I wanted to write was not the book a publisher wanted to print. I went from a loose index of about 15-20 chapters covering up to 400 pages in print, to getting a rearranged edited version for less than 200 pages sent back to me by an editor with an abridged content index. I was then asked to sign the dotted line. I declined. I've heard from them since but the initial experience was sufficient to make me wary of any more surprises. I had figured out what I wanted to write by then, and didn't find the sudden pushback satisfactory. I'm stubborn that way. I tend to rant at length when irritated (as a few would remember ).


Here's why not to write a Zend Framework book then: when the book you must write is not the book you want to write! Writing a 200 page book on the Zend Framework can be done - just not by me. All my readers

understand my writing style by now - I explore topics in detail with a dash of sometimes geeky humour and most importantly, I write at length. Miles of length 


. Cal Evans, formerly over at Zend Devzone, knows how my idea of a 2000 word article usually ends up as 4000+ - half of it smilies 

. I'm a verbose personality who finds it repugnant to summarise knowledge to the point it loses it's heart or only gets half the job done (and heaven knows there's enough of that on the market without me adding to it). From that perspective, a short book would be the ultimate regret, something I wouldn't likely find pride in, and something that I would always feel could have been a lot better. Since I'm not driven by the possibility of a major injection of cash to my bank account (seriously, few once off books are worth writing just for cash) it was an easy decision.

Which brings us full circle to the reason my blog has crashed...twice...this summer. Since the book idea wasn't working out, the only solution worth considering was the one which provided the greatest level of personal satisfaction - a multi part Zend Framework tutorial on my blog! 

Of course I kept it buried about the fact that the series was a shortened version of what I'd write in a book. I wanted to see how the community reacted first - and react it did. Enough to crash the damn blog twice and swarm me with emails when the series was down 

It's weird how things progress once they build up momentum. But with all the fun this series has been, it's near time I made the book idea a reality in some form which is more useful to readers than hard to locate blog posts, and carries an sense of solid permanency. With that notion in mind, I've done bits and pieces over the Summer. The tutorial has been transferred to Docbook XML ready for further editing and an automated process for transferring this to HTML and PDF formats (I'm currently mid way into a tutorial on that whole PHP driven process on the blog) put in place. A strategy of editing, correcting, updating and expanding (where necessary) the original articles is underway as a "Revised" series to start next month. All such Revised versions will arrive in multiple formats - Blog, HTML and PDF - as free Creative Commons licensed downloads alongside a donation driven model for raising cash...for my next Macbook Pro upgrade (and maybe my Porsche?) if nothing else. Most useful perhaps, this all means I can roll out updates and corrections with ease (no massive lead time for printing).

So yes, I am going the self publishing vanity route 

. Let the ego swelling commence! I'm a persistent bugger and hellbent on writing this book if only to appease my appetite for writing something worthwhile and delighting in tracking its success (or epic failure) over time. I'm weird that way. I program weird stuff in my free time because it's an outlet for my creativity, not because I profit from it. I've spent way more on hosting than my weirdo blog and mini-apps/libraries would ever refund, and that's how I like it.

As for the inevitable spiel over why you should consider downloading this new in-progress book once available (and maybe parting with some hard earned pennies in these uncertain economic times), I leave the blogged series as the ultimate testament. It pretty much captures the direction of this book. Instead of bogging you down with detailed parameter lists (there's a reference manual online for that) or treating you like the world's biggest dummy (I'm sure any 200 page book will cover that) I wanted to provide a book which looked at the bigger picture - building a real application and solving the problems any real application may pose. And I wanted to do it at whatever length I needed to get the point across (with smilies - obviously!) while still being an interesting read.


Zend Framework: Surviving The Deep End will kick off during December. The title is a humourous reference to what exists after you know your Zend Framework basics, i.e. how to use the basics and reference manual

to achieve something tangible. Like a Pet Store - if only that were not already exhausted by those folk at BluePrints using J2EE...

Posted by Pádraic Brady in Irishisms, PHP General, Zend Framework at 18:22


Great to hear! Your blog tutorial has been invaluable to the project I am currently working on so I eagerly await the new book. I'll be first in line to deposit some cash into your account. Anonymous on Nov 18 2008, 00:17

Show me the PayPal button and I'll make sure you get it: <http://tinyurl.com/new-porsche>

Thanks for sharing this with us 


Anonymous on Nov 18 2008, 23:50

Excellent news! I am sure that Macbook Pro upgrade will happen fast enough and I will most certainly help out. thanks! Anonymous on Nov 19 2008, 03:00

Does that Porsche have a decent highway MPG? 

Anonymous on Nov 19 2008, 10:02

Keep up the good work, you'll get your just deseerts. You've definitely got it right with the 'Deep end', I always send people to Akrabats getting started guide and then send them this way to get more in the thick of it. Anonymous on Nov 19 2008, 12:42

I am eagerly waitingâ€¦! 

Anonymous on Nov 25 2008, 19:56


Wow - a spam message flashed past Akismet for the first time in months... Deleted. Anonymous on Nov 26 2008, 18:38

As someone relatively new to programming (I'm a systems admin who's taken an interest in application development) after looking at all the available documentation for the frameworks I was still having a pretty hard time making a decision.

Right up until I ran across your blog postings.

Not only is your writing thorough but it's also highly readable and your approach produces tangible results without trying to squeeze the process into a simplified one or two hour tutorial.

As someone who just bought the early access edition of Zend Framework in Action I hope you reconsider publishing. Maybe look at partnering with Zend and let them (with their business team and lawyers) hash out the specifics. Because you literally sold me on the platform, and I'm sure I'm not the only one. Anonymous on Nov 26 2008, 19:40

It's about time someone produced a guide showing "how to use the basics and reference manual to achieve something tangible" 

Credit card at the ready, where's that donation form? Anonymous on Dec 2 2008, 00:17