Displaying Images with the ASP.NET Repeater Control

Images are often an integral part of an application. Many businesses use image cataloguing as part of their everyday business process, from Insurance companies to automotive sales. Images are also sometimes tricky to handle within ASP.NET applications.

Although there are quite a few methods and controls for managing images and thumbnails the process can be a little obfuscated for developers who are not quite sure where to start, or which controls to employ to accomplish the task. You really have to get creative sometimes and often what will happen is a particular development strategy that will start out with a good concept but, as it develops, it becomes more and more unorganized and you wind up with quite a mess in the end.

The purpose of this tutorial is to look at one particular approach for displaying a series of thumbnail images and provide a link to a popup window which will handle displaying the full original image. The goal of this sample application will be to accomplish this requirement in the most simplistic way possible, using the least amount of code to keep things organized and tidy.

The control we will use to implement this sample application will be the Repeater control. For those who are familiar with classic ASP style programming the Repeater control will be quite familiar. We will use the basic principles behind the Repeater control to implement HTML template chunks which can handle the display of a series of thumbnails contained within a folder.

We will also build a DataTable object that we can directly bind to the Repeater control, since the Repeater can only be used with a data source. During the binding process we will manually manipulate the items in the control so that we can popup a new window when a certain item is clicked and display the original full image.

> Note: Visual Studio .NET 2002/2003 running ASP.NET version 1.x is required for this tutorial. Both VB.NET and C# code samples will be provided

Preparing

First we need a sample ASP.NET project to work with. Being by starting up Visual Studio .NET and creating a new web project in either VB.NET named Repeater, or in C# named RepeaterCs. We will use the default WebForm1.aspx that is created with the project to implement our Repeater control.

Before we can get started we will need some images to work with. You can either use the images provided in the sample source code for this tutorial or you can use your own. You will need 2 folders in the project, one to hold the thumbnails and one to hold the full images. Once you've found the series of images to work with create the 2 folders by right clicking on the project in the solution explorer and selecting Add->New Folder... Name the folders "thumbnails" and "images".

Ensure the thumbnails have the exact same names as the full images so that they are displayed in the exact same alphabetical order in the folder, otherwise the thumbnails will point to the wrong full images.

Creating the Repeater

A Repeater control is basically a way of repeating chunks of HTML code for each item that is contained within the data source that you bind to the control. In classic ASP you used to do this right on the asp page by using for count and for each loops and then writing a set of HTML to be repeated for each item in your recordset.

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