

Experts in Action

Harnessing the Web with AppleScript

Many organizations want to tap the power of the Internet for sharing information, but then find out how complicated and time-consuming it can be to design, update, and maintain a data-driven website. They might even need to learn HTML or other programming languages — a daunting task for many professionals whose first job isn't web development. Link-Net, Inc., a member of the Apple Solution Experts program, helps organizations use the Internet to save money, increase sales, and improve responsiveness to their customers. Link-Net does it by creating and managing dynamic, data-driven websites using technologies such as Power Mac G4 computers, AppleScript, and FileMaker Pro. For Link-Net clients, there's no hand-coding or technical complexity involved.

Evans Butler Realty, a client of Link-Net, has operated its commercial real estate business using a Macintosh network for years. While the company had automated some tasks, others remained inefficient and manually intensive. One such task was the process of creating a property brief — a document containing all of the information a buyer or renter needs, from square footage and occupancy rates to purchase price and detailed photographs.

Assembling the information into one document for a property brief required gathering hard-copy documents from a central file cabinet or individual brokers' files. It might have also meant finding a specific document in Microsoft Excel or Word on a broker's computer. After amassing the right pieces of information, brokers manually cut and pasted photos and documents together and created the final brief using a copy machine — a labor-intensive, time-consuming process. It could take Evans Butler more than an hour to respond to an inquiry about a property, and that could mean lost sales.

“There's no doubt that the Apple Solution Experts program has increased our visibility and helped our business grow.”

— Gerard Beutler, Vice President of Engineering, Link-Net, Inc.

From One Hour to One Click

To take the company to the next level of professionalism and efficiency, Link-Net took advantage of the full power of Evans Butler's existing Macintosh network. Using FileMaker Pro and AppleScript — Apple's powerful scripting language for workflow automation — Link-Net designed a system that includes a digital archive of all of Evans Butler's real estate data. With this system, brokers can quickly and automatically generate property briefs, brochures, and other documents, and property briefs are automatically posted to the Evans Butler Realty website.



The Facts

The Company

Link-Net, Inc.

Solution Expert Type

Consultant

Website

<http://www.l-n.com>

Description of Services

Designs, redesigns, and hosts effective websites. Develops custom, automated office solutions based on AppleScript and FileMaker Pro. Designs and installs complete networks for small businesses and government agencies.

Areas of Specialty

Website Development
Automated Web Publishing
Workflow Automation using AppleScript
FileMaker Pro Database Development

LINKNET

As listings for new properties come in or information is updated, employees at Evans Butler enter the data into the FileMaker Pro database. With comprehensive property information in their database, Evans Butler brokers can respond to customer requests within seconds. If a customer calls in asking about a specific property, a quick database search lets Evans Butler respond rapidly and professionally with detailed, up-to-date, and precise information. A property brief or brochure can be generated in a single mouse-click.

Link-Net wrote a series of AppleScripts to automate the process. AppleScript commands extract pertinent information from the FileMaker Pro database and generate a Microsoft Word document complete with all the necessary information, ready for printing. "AppleScript is so intuitive, yet it is so powerful," says Gerard Beutler, vice president of engineering for Link-Net, Inc. "It is the ideal scripting language for automating complex tasks."

“AppleScript is so **intuitive**, yet it is so **powerful**. It is the ideal scripting language for automating complex tasks.”

— Gerard Beutler

Hands-Free Web Publishing

Link-Net also automated the process of publishing select property briefs to the Evans Butler Realty website. Each morning at 4:00 a.m., an AppleScript activates on an AppleShare IP Power Macintosh server located at Evans Butler Realty. The server extracts all of the updated property information from the FileMaker Pro database and generates an HTML file and an index file for all of the current properties. Then, the server connects to the web sever by Sprint Broadband Direct and sends the updated information via File Transfer Protocol (FTP) to the Link-Net, Inc. web server located at Digital Forest, Link-Net's Internet Service Provider. As a result of this process, Evans Butler never has to worry about updating the content on their website. It happens automatically, without human intervention.

Continuous Improvement

Evans Butler and Link-Net are continuously working to make the process even more streamlined. As a next step, Link-Net is implementing a Canto Cumulus image database that will house digital assets such as property photographs, digital video, and schematic drawings of buildings. When it is fully implemented, brokers and customers will have access to a richer variety of detailed visual information about each property.



Gerard Beutler with Dan Evans, President, Evans Butler Realty

Link-Net also is using AppleScript, Adobe Photoshop, and PhotoScripter, a Photoshop plug-in that allows Photoshop to accept AppleScript commands, to create a graphical image of the properties listed on the Internet. Visitors to the Evans Butler Realty site will see a map of the area. An icon will showcase where each property is located, making it easier for potential buyers to find any property listed on the website.

Ease and Elegance

In tackling a wide variety of Internet-related projects, Link-Net relies on training and other resources of the Apple Solution Experts program to keep their skills honed. The Apple Solution Experts program also enables Link-Net to meet other experts and share experience and knowledge, increasing the company's market exposure. "There's no doubt that the Apple Solution Experts program has increased our visibility and helped our business grow," says Beutler.

As an all-Macintosh consultant, Beutler appreciates the simplicity and power that all Apple technologies offer. According to Beutler, Apple solutions are easier to set up and troubleshoot and much more elegant overall. "Apple offers the best in terms of hardware and the best in terms of the automation tools that make solutions work — AppleScript," says Beutler. "That's one big reason why Link-Net has been a success."

 www.apple.com/experts