Deliver rich user experience to your Web application using Intersoft WebGrid.NET Enterprise® 5.0

Introduction

It's inevitable that user experience has become more and more important these days. With the release of Windows Vista™ and Office System 2007™, end users are getting intimate with rich user interface and new experiences which significantly enhances their productivity and makes their tasks done in less time. The same thing goes to Web, as Web developers are hunted to come up with rich Web user experience that their end users expect.

This white paper will briefly look into WebGrid.NET Enterprise® 5.0 and discuss how this latest high-end Grid component from Intersoft Solutions Corporation improve user experiences with its comprehensive, out-of-the-box feature-sets.
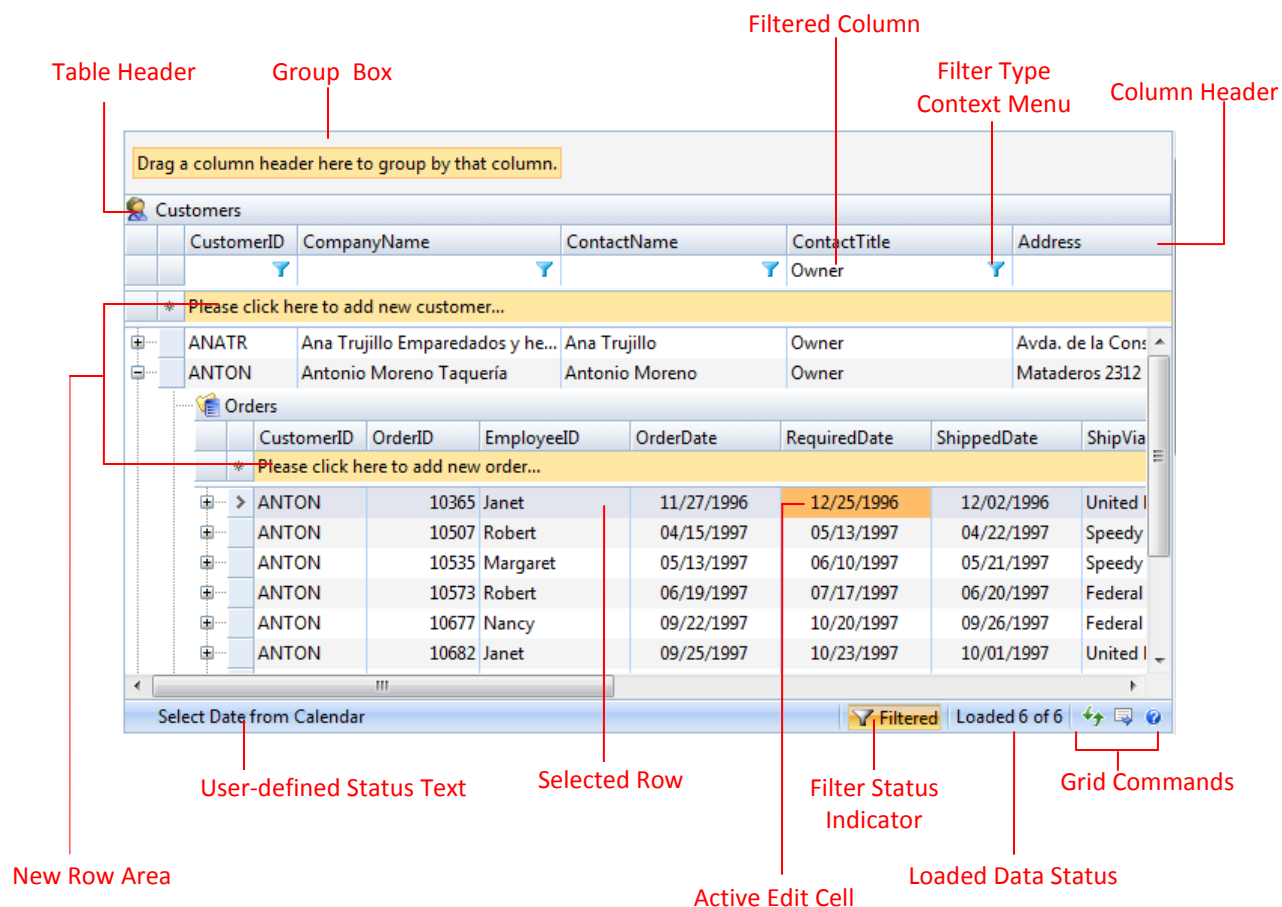
User Experience Does Matter

User experience is more than *looks*. It is about the *feels* and *behaviors* and how user can conveniently interact with the user interface elements. Intersoft Solutions Corporation – a leading component provider in the industry – has heavily invested on user interface development in its latest WebUI Studio.NET 2007 R1. One of the significant user interface improvement was made to its flagship Grid product, WebGrid.NET Enterprise® 5.0.

In the following sections, I will discuss in-depth on the new features and enhancements related to user interface and experience that available in the latest version of WebGrid.NET Enterprise®.

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User Interface Overview

The following image shows the complete user interface elements provided by WebGrid. The WebGrid in the following used the new *Elegant DefaultStyle* that introduced in version 5.0.
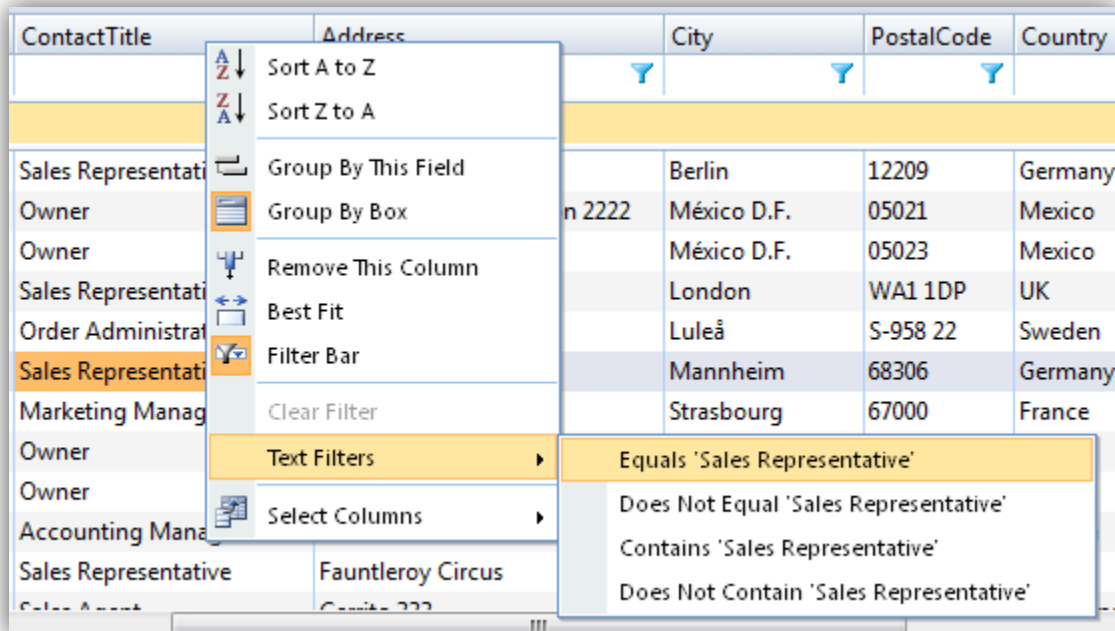

As you can see in above image, WebGrid.NET Enterprise® offers comprehensive user interface elements which significantly enhance user experience in overall while interacting with information. The above image also shows *Hierarchical Drill Down* feature which allows you to easily show drill-down reports. The best part is that all the user interface elements are provided out-of-the-box. You can easily enable or disable certain features by simply setting a property.

Some common user interactions include drag and drop feature, where you can drag a column header to the Group Box area, or drag a column to move its position as well as column resizing.
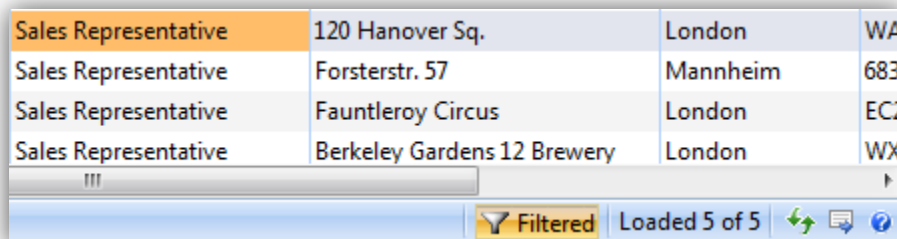
New User Experiences

In the previous section, you have learnt the user interface elements that provided by WebGrid in overall. In this section, I will cover top five new user experiences that introduced in the latest version of WebGrid.NET Enterprise®.

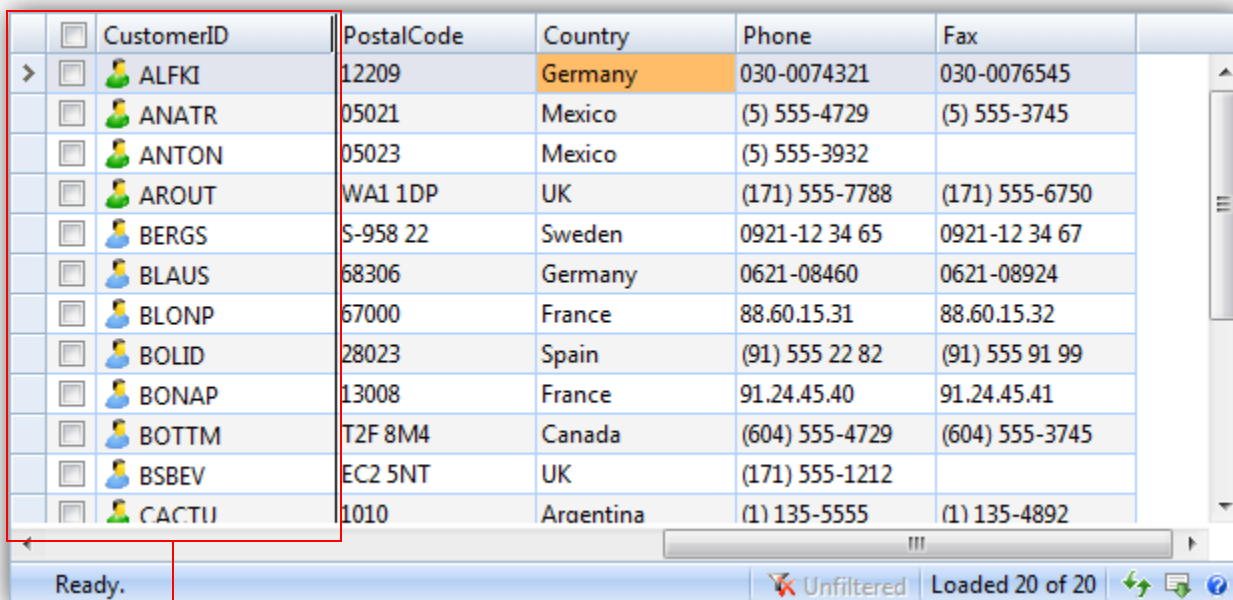### Automatic Filter Suggestion

Automatic Filter Suggestion is an innovative feature that improve user experience in the way user perform data filtering. As seen in the above image, you can simply right click on a cell which data you wish to filter, then conveniently point your mouse to Text Filters and select one of the filter type that available to the selected cell's data type. With this feature, users can perform data filtering faster and more convenient than ever before.

Filter Status Indicator

When filtered, the *Filter Status Indicator* will be shown as active style. You can click on the Filter Status Indicator to temporary disable the filters, and click it again to view last filtered data. This feature enhances user experience by allowing them to understand the current state of data and ability to easily toggle the filter status.

Column Freezing

Three first columns are frozen.

Column freezing feature is probably the most wanted feature in every data presentation application. It is useful to keep important information visible when the Grid's view is scrolled to the right end. In the above image, you can see that the *checkbox* and *CustomerID* column are always visible regardless of the horizontal scrollbar position.
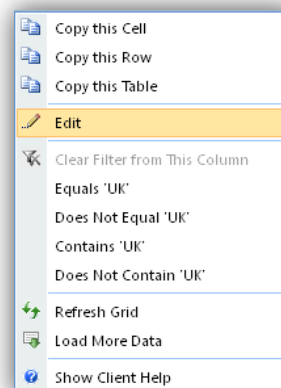
The unique column freezing implementation in WebGrid.NET Enterprise ® 5.0 – called *LiveFreeze™* – dramatically improves user experience in the way user discovering and analyzing information. It reduces the needs to scroll back and forth by having important information always visible in the view.

LiveFreeze™ redefines a new standard in user experience by introducing Microsoft® Office Excel® column freezing behavior, which is called as Absolute Scrolling. LiveFreeze™ also allow users to perform freezing and unfreezing at runtime without the need of postback or callback.

Improved Context Menu Engine

The Context Menu engine in version 5.0 is rewritten from scratch to support more advanced contextual menu system in the WebGrid's user interface. The context menu engine is now based on Hybrid Menu System™ which is the company's proprietary high performance menu system.

With dozens of new commands addition, you can now find the new context menu more intuitive and faster than ever before.

Enhanced Editing Environment

WebGrid.NET Enterprise® has been famous with its sophisticated in-cell editing environment since the first released version. In its fifth generation, WebGrid includes tremendous enhancements to the editing environment. This section will list what those enhancements are, and how it can improve user experiences during editing.

Smoother and sleeker edit style

The new edit style helps user to perform data entry more conveniently and with more confident. Its spacious box allows the edit text to have exactly the same boundary as the original cell, making a better data editing experience.

Required Input

The new built-in *Required Input* feature in version 5.0 makes it very easy for you to add data validation process during editing.

When the cell is empty, the update to the row will be blocked. Next, the error indicator will appear in the right end of the cells which require user input. A warning indicator will also appear in the status bar area enabling user to easily understand the current state of the data input.

Verbose Editing Text

This feature improves data editing experience by displaying verbose information associated to the selected cell in the status bar area. Displaying related information during editing helps user to provide accurate information and therefore reducing the chance of data input errors.

Resizable TextBox

This brand-new edit type dramatically improve editing experience by allowing users to conveniently resize the size of the edit box. Say good bye to limited editing space and the need to scroll your edit text back and forth.

What about AJAX?

In today's Web era, rich user experiences can't be separated from *AJAX*. Intersoft Solutions is proud to be the first component vendor in the industry that come up with AJAX approach since year 2003, while others come later in year 2005. With the company's vast experience in Web technology and AJAX, it is no surprise that WebGrid.NET Enterprise® has the most advanced and comprehensive high-end features that built on the top of AJAX, such as load-on-demand hierarchical view, virtual load paging, and more.

Intersoft's proprietary AJAX Framework called OnTheFly-Postback™ is an unique architecture that the company brought to life in its first WebGrid release back in year 2003. Today, OnTheFly-Postback™ has been remodeled and enhanced with flexible callback options and advanced ClientAction engine.

In addition to the built-in AJAX capability, WebGrid.NET Enterprise® 5.0 also supports third party AJAX Framework such as ASP.NET AJAX. WebGrid is also tightly integrated with the company's own AJAX Manager called WebFlyPostbackManager which built on the top of same architecture – but with more advanced features and high-end capability.

To learn more about using WebGrid with external AJAX Framework, please refer to References section.

Wrapping Up

Intersoft WebGrid.NET Enterprise® 5.0 is the major version of the company's flagship Grid component that strongly focused on user experiences and out-of-the-box features. In the previous section, you have learnt some of the revolutionary innovations unique to WebGrid.NET Enterprise®.

By incorporating WebGrid.NET Enterprise® to your Web application, you can now deliver rich user experiences that your end users expected in a consistent fashion across different type of browsers, such as Internet Explorer® 6.0 and 7.0, FireFox 2.0 and other Mozilla-based browsers.

At a glance, WebGrid.NET Enterprise® 5.0 gives you many benefits such as:

- Increases key values of your Web application by delivering richer user experiences which improve user's productivity.
- Achieves faster time to market using out-of-the-box features, therefore eliminating the need to write your own codes to achieve similar functionality.
- Lower total costs of ownership with the rich features and capability available in WebGrid such as built-in Exporting feature. That means you no longer need to purchase separate reporting or exporting components license.
- Greater return of investment. WebGrid.NET Enterprise® reduces deployment complexity through new SmartWebResources™ technology and cut codes to half. That means you can finish more projects in less time.

To test drive WebGrid.NET Enterprise® 5.0 to your Web application, please download the free 30 days evaluation today.

What's Next

Due to limited space, I have exposed just the top five new user experiences that enabled in WebGrid.NET Enterprise® 5.0. There are still hundreds of other new exciting features in this revolutionary release of the company's flagship product, such as the comprehensive support for declarative data binding, tight integration with ISDataSource.NET for true hierarchical declarative data binding, tight integration with WebCombo.NET® 4.0 and WebInput.NET® 3.0 for rich editing experience, new Wizard and Component Designer, and much more.

For your convenience, I have listed several key references in the following section that may help you to understand the key concepts and features of WebGrid.NET Enterprise® 5.0, and how it can help you to gain significant productivity improvement during development for delivering richer user experiences that today's end users expect to see.

References

WebGrid.NET Enterprise® Overview
What's new in WebGrid.NET Enterprise® 5.0
WebGrid.NET Enterprise® 5.0 Complete Feature List
Getting started with WebGrid.NET Enterprise® 5.0
System Requirements
Using WebGrid with external AJAX Framework
Walkthrough: Using WebGrid with ASP.NET AJAX RTM
Walkthrough: Using WebGrid with WebFlyPostBackManager
Live Demo: WebGrid.NET Enterprise® 5.0 First Experience
Live Demo: Column Freezing