intervals to ensure that the information is up-to-date. The stock tracker retrieves its data from a Web Service whose WSDL is located at www.swanandmokashi.com/HomePage/WebServices/StockQuotes.asmx?WSDL.

The news window is a simple window that displays the current top news stories supplied by Yahoo!. Instead of using a Web service, Yahoo! provides the news as an RSS feed. RSS is a simple XML-based format for distributing newslike items. RSS is simpler to work with than Web services. Like the weather forecast and stock ticker windows, the news window automatically refreshes itself periodically to provide the latest headline news. Clicking an item in the news window opens the article in a separate browser window.

The last window on the Ajax Dashboard is a Yahoo! search component. This component is similar to the Yahoo! search example from Chapter 4. The big difference is that in this application, the search results display in a drop-down list box under the text box, which is updated as the user is typing the search time. This is really a combination of the Yahoo! search and autocomplete examples from Chapter 4. Clicking an item in the drop-down list opens the resource in a new browser window.

Together these four components make up the Ajax Dashboard example. The components are all good candidates for Ajax techniques because they represent data that can change rapidly, and the ability to seamlessly update the data in one window without needing to refresh the entire page is a big plus.

Introducing the Design Features

The Ajax Dashboard includes a few nice touches that set it apart from a traditional browser-based application. Each of the four components is rendered in an absolutely positioned div tag, and with the help of the DOM-Drag library, you can drag each component with the mouse to any position on the screen.

The DOM-Drag library, available at www.youngpup.net/2001/domdrag, is described by its author as a lightweight, easy-to-use, dragging API for modern DHTML browsers (see Figure 8-8). The setup requires only a couple of lines of JavaScript for each component, minimizing the hassle of using DOM-Drag. The single JavaScript file is only 121 lines long and roughly 8KB in size. The colored title bar of each Ajax Dashboard component is the “handle” for dragging the component. To move a component, simply click and hold anywhere in the colored title bar area, drag the component to the desired location, and then release the mouse button. DOM-Drag allows users to place the components wherever they choose. This enhancement, while seemingly small, gives Ajax Dashboard a feel more akin to a multiple document interface (MDI) client application than a Web page.

You may have also noticed the small plus and minus signs on the right side of the title bar for the weather forecast, stock ticker, and news stories components. These plus and minus signs, respectively, maximize and minimize the content of the component. Minimizing the component’s content collapses the data so that only the title bar is visible, saving valuable screen real estate (see Figure 8-9). This may not seem like an important feature here, since Ajax Dashboard has only four components, but imagine if the application was enhanced to include several more components. A screen full of components may seem busy and hard to read, and minimizing the less frequently used components can simplify the application’s appearance while still keeping the minimized components’ data a single mouse click away.