Introducing Ajax Frameworks

By now, you may have noticed that a fair amount of plumbing is involved in programming with Ajax. If you have to support multiple browsers (and who doesn't these days?), you will inevitably run into incompatibilities. Just look at the simple act of creating an instance of the XMLHttpRequest object—it requires a browser test. As soon as you start experimenting with Ajax techniques, you will quickly notice that you are performing the same tasks repeatedly. Of course, you'll probably put together some libraries of common code, or maybe you'll even create your own framework. Before you do, though, you may want to take a look at what's already available.

Like any good technology, Ajax has already spawned a number of frameworks to make life easier for mere mortals. We want to stress that Ajax is new and dynamic—so too is the framework landscape. New entrants appear seemingly daily, and right now none is a clear winner. Few of the frameworks existed before mid-2003, so expect to see significant changes in the coming months.

Some frameworks are based on the client side, and some are based on the server side. Some are designed for specific languages, and others are language agnostic. The majority have open-source implementations, but a few are proprietary. We won't cover every framework, and we certainly won't go into a great deal of depth on the ones we do touch on; still, we wanted to give you a flavor of what is available. By the time you read this appendix, some of the toolkits mentioned will be dormant, and others will have been created. Which framework is right for you? Only you can say; however, you may want to take a conservative stance until the framework area solidifies. An effort is even underway to merge the various frameworks together—it'll be interesting to see how this plays out! By the time you read this, the picture should be clearer, but you will want to keep a close eye on this space.

Browser-Side Frameworks

The following sections cover the browser-based frameworks.

Dojo

Dojo is one of the oldest frameworks, having begun development in September 2004. The project's goal is to build a DHTML toolkit that leverages XHR while focusing on usability issues. Dojo involves only a couple of files, and rather than deal with the setup for XHR, you simply call a bind method and pass in the URL you want to call and the callback method. That's it. You can also use the bind method to submit entire forms.