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Performance in the Infragistics® xamWebGrid™ for Microsoft® Silverlight™

An Infragistics Whitepaper

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Performance and User Experience

Everyone talks about user experience today – it is a key differentiator in the new economy. When most people talk about the user experience of their application, the conversation is generally focused on the aesthetic design of their application, which while important is merely one aspect of the overall user experience. Often people neglect to think about an area of user experience that can have just as strong of an impact on the overall experience of their application as the application’s aesthetics – **application performance!**

At Infragistics, we take the user experience of your application very seriously, which means we not only focus on helping you provide a world class visual experience, but also the performance experience of our products in your application. In this whitepaper, you will learn how we approach the architecture and testing of our Silverlight xamWebGrid so we can deliver the fastest grid on the market.

Why does performance matter so much in the overall user experience?

- Higher Customer Satisfaction
- Improved End User Productivity
- Resource Efficiency in Hardware and Bandwidth

The customer does not want to be, nor should they be bothered with the details of how an application is developed; they just care about their experience when they use an application. They want an application that simply “makes sense”, which translates to an application that provides an intuitive user interface, and performs as the customer would expect – in other words – they shouldn’t notice or think about how it performs. When you choose the Infragistics xamWebGrid, you get a control that allows you to provide that “makes sense” experience to your end users, including the best performance on the market. And this is not at the cost of implementing a custom ORM (object relational mapper) solution or some custom data provider – this is out of the box Silverlight data binding. No changes to your data access strategies.

Exceptional Performance Best Practices

During our product life cycle, we test our controls at various stages as new features are added or use cases updated. We follow a series of best practices in the **Planning, Configuration, Implementation** and **Review** of our performance tests to ensure the controls are tested in the correct scenarios and that the results we generate are accurate.

- Planning – During planning we determine what we are testing against (a previous build, a competitor, etc) and consider the options and tools available for performance testing on the specific platform. We also identify the specific scenarios that we want to test, and how we can create competitive tests that use as equal a configuration as possible.
- Configuration – In this phase we configure a testing environment that simulates as close as possible what customers are using based on the scenarios that describe the product requirements
- Implementation – We implement the tests outlined in the test plan and execute them many times to generate the performance statistics
- Review – During review, we evaluate the test results for consistency, looking for anomalies that can indicate a problem in the testing environment that could be affecting test results

Based on the above described best practices we implement and execute automated performance tests against each nightly builds of our products. During the testing, performance results are automatically stored and reports are generated. This enables the development team to constantly monitor the performance through the development process.

Testing the xamWebGrid

For NetAdvantage® for Web Client: Silverlight, the majority of our performance testing was focused on the xamWebGrid, primarily because of its use in many data intensive applications and the large number of features it includes. Because we regularly talk to customers whose applications require grid controls that can load very large volumes of data at very high refresh rates, when setting our performance goals and designing our tests we are able to consider those real-world use scenarios to help guide us. To begin testing the xamWebGrid, the following test environment was created to execute the performance tests:

- Two physical machines (non-virtual), one server and one client – which would simulate a real life scenario.
- Both server and client are running Microsoft Windows Vista® Enterprise SP1, CPU 2.13GHz, 4 GB of RAM.

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- The server machine is running Microsoft SQL Server® 2005 as the backing data store.
- The client is running Internet Explorer® 7 for its default browser.
- Both server and client are using the same network switch, which is isolated from other corporate network traffic to help us focus on the performance of the grid apart from other performance-inhibiting factors that would be outside of our control.
- Both server and client are configured with a static IP address.
- Both server and client have Windows Update disabled.

To run the tests, we wrote code which ran all of the test scenarios 100 times. The scenarios ranged from simulated user clicks, to complete CRUD (Create, Read, Update, and Delete) operations with SQL Server 2005. Each run used our latest nightly build and the most recent build of competitor controls available. To determine test results, we recorded the time and memory consumption of each operation, and then calculated the differences. Memory consumption was calculated using the GC.GetTotalMemory function, and time was calculated using normal TimeSpan functions.

Performance Results

The primary scenarios for the xamWebGrid identified the following areas as critical to the overall userexperience of using a grid for data display and editing:

- Flat data binding
- Scrolling (real time, deferred)
- Sorting (string, numeric)

In this whitepaper, unless otherwise specified, we are showing the results of tests executing those scenarios using a data set that includes 10 columns and 1,000,000 rows of data.

Data Binding

To test the performance of basic data binding we created tests that measure the amount of time needed to bind the xamWebGrid to different ItemSources and render up to the

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LayoutUpdated event (or similar event). We believe this most accurately represents what and end user experiences when waiting for data to load.

Table 1: Binding to IList - 10 columns and 1,000,000 rows of data.

	IG xamWebGrid™	Competitor I		Competitor II	
Time duration in ms	1,881	2,964	57% Slower	5,541	194% Slower
Memory Usage Before in KB	91,958	91,809	0.1% Less	92,279	0.3% More
Memory Usage After in KB	99,100	222,233	124% More	109,552	10% More

Table 2: Binding to ObservableCollection - 10 columns and 1,000,000 rows of data.

	IG xamWebGrid™	Competitor I		Competitor II	
Time duration in ms	1,949	2,878	47% Slower	5,463	180% Slower
Memory Usage Before in KB	91,756	90,183	1% Less	89,891	2% Less
Memory Usage After in KB	95,726	232,346	142% More	109,603	14% More

Vertical Scrolling

The xamWebGrid offers two options when it comes to scrolling with the scrollbar thumb - Deferred or Real Time (Immediate). When you have hundreds of thousands of rows, deferred scrolling lets your users preview the record's value as they scroll (for example, in a tool tip) without having to populate all of the cells until the user has reached the point in the data grid where they want to go. We created tests to measure the performance of both options.

Deferred Scrolling

We could only test one competing grid with deferred scrolling, as it was the only one that offered this feature.

Table 3: Deferred scrolling with 91 columns and 600 rows of data.

	IG xamWebGrid™	Competitor I	
Time duration in ms	874	14,160	1,519% Slower
Memory Usage Before in KB	16,431	45,265	175% More
Memory Usage After in KB	16,615	80,926	387% More

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Real Time Scrolling

As you will see in the performance results in table 4, real time (or immediate) scrolling is a big problem in Silverlight. Most vendor samples you see will load limited amounts of data because the scrolling performance of the control is very poor.

Table 4: Real-time scrolling with 91 columns and 600 rows of data.

	IG xamWebGrid™	Competitor I		Competitor II	
Time duration in ms	1,267	29,845	2,256% Slower	4615	264% Slower
Memory Usage Before in KB	21,601	52,242	141% More	122,090	465% More
Memory Usage After in KB	22,781	106,722	368% More	125,268	449% More

Sorting

Sorting performance can vary based on the data type that is being sorted but based on feedback from customers; we test numeric and string sorts against an IList and ObservableCollection data source.

Table 5: Sorting numeric column values bound using an IList - 10 columns and 1,000,000 rows of data.

	IG xamWebGrid™	Competitor I		Competitor II	
Time duration in ms	2116	11,249	431% Slower	407,194	19,140% Slower
Memory Usage Before in KB	92,552	203,758	120% More	104,120	12% More
Memory Usage After in KB	129,162	340,155	163% More	112,316	13% Less

Table 6: Sorting string column values bound using an IList - 10 columns and 1,000,000 rows of data.

	IG xamWebGrid™	Competitor I		Competitor II	
Time duration in ms	10,124	15,715	55% Slower	277,044	2,636% Slower
Memory Usage Before in KB	95,652	222,433	132% More	109,680	14% More
Memory Usage After in KB	113,918	284,077	149% More	114,848	0.8% More

Table 7: Sorting numeric column values bound using an ObservableCollection - 10 columns and 1,000,000 rows of data

	IG xamWebGrid™	Competitor I		Competitor II	
Time duration in ms	2,116	12,880	508% Slower	414,199	19,470% Slower
Memory Usage Before in KB	92,649	210,409	127% More	106,842	15% More
Memory Usage After in KB	129,435	332,408	156% More	112,010	13% Less

Table 8: Sorting numeric column values bound using an ObservableCollection - 10 columns and 1,000,000 rows of data..

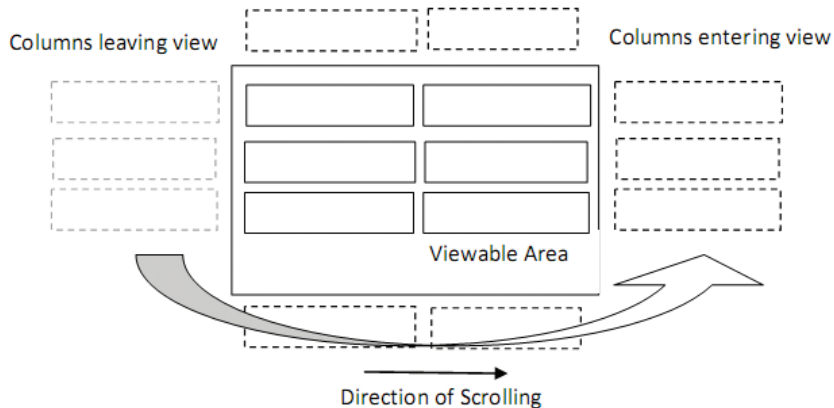
	IG xamWebGrid™	Competitor I		Competitor II	
Time duration in ms	10,107	17,568	73% Slower	278,919	2,659% Slower
Memory Usage Before in KB	93,058	233,002	150% More	109,660	17% More
Memory Usage After in KB	117,847	269,464	128% More	114,676	2% Less

Achieving Amazing Performance

So how do we achieve such amazing performance in our xamWebGrid? The simple answer – a rock solid architecture that leverages UI Virtualization for almost every user interaction operation. UI Virtualization allows the xamWebGrid to create the minimum set of UI objects necessary to render the grids viewable area. Additionally, our UI Virtualization infrastructure not only reduces the number of UI elements needed by the xamWebGrid, but it also recycles UI objects when the viewable area changes, vastly reducing the number of object instantiation and garbage collection operations the control must perform. For large data sets with hundreds or thousands of rows and tens or hundreds of columns these object operations can have a significant impact on the performance of the application.

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In the figure below you can see how both the xamWebGrid's UI Virtualization infrastructure actually reuses both Row and Column UI elements as they scroll out of the visible area of xamWebGrid.



When working with data sets of any size, UI Virtualization is the key to an exceptional user experience.

Understanding the Visual Tree

Silverlight uses a concept called a Visual Tree to track all of the visual elements in an application. Any object that offers a visual representation (anything that derives from FrameworkElement) must be added to the Visual Tree in order to have Silverlight render it. UI elements can have other UI elements as children, thus forming a tree-like hierarchical structure of elements that Silverlight renders to the screen. As you can imagine for all but the simplest applications the number of nodes (or UI elements) in the Visual Tree can grow very large.

As an example, let's take a look at the main screen of the NetAdvantage for WebClient: Silverlight samples application:

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This single screen loads over 800 individual UI elements into the application's visual tree. As you can imagine, when you start to add data-bound controls that repeat themselves like ListBoxes and DataGrids, it's quite easy to quickly get several thousand UI elements in the applications visual tree.

Allowing the Visual Tree to grow too large, or causing a lot of churn within the tree by adding and removing tree nodes, can cause Silverlight's rendering performance to decline.

The xamWebGrid leverages its UI Virtualization to keep an extremely lightweight UI element footprint, adding only the UI elements that are visible to the end user to the Visual Tree.

The ROI of Choosing the Infragistics xamWebGrid

In order to get an idea of what the overall ROI (return on investment) is for a high performing grid in a typical line of business application, let's take a look at the normal operations an end user might experience during the daily use of the applications you build. Imagine that a call center uses your application and each employee process a customer for 5 minutes. Usually, in order to process a customer, a call center application needs to do following operations:

- Load data (binding)
- Search
- Sorting
- Scrolling
- Add new record
- Modify record
- Filtering of records
- Paging
- Etc ...

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Let's compare the xamWebGrid against "Competitor I" (for "Competitor II" the advantage of xamWebGrid is even greater).

Time duration in ms	IG xamWebGrid™	Competitor I
Binding to Observable Collection	1,949	2,878 47% Slower
Deferred scrolling	874	14,160 1,519% Slower
Number sorting	2,116	12,880 508% Slower
String sorting	10,107	17,568 73% Slower
TOTAL	15,046	47,486 215% Slower

Table 9: ROI of choosing xamWebGrid in a Silverlight line of business application.

Using xamWebGrid **you could save 30 seconds per operation**. At the end of the day the call center will have a minimum of 10% increase in productivity, which could result in tens of thousands of dollars a week and potentially millions of dollars per year in savings.

Summary

You can see that by employing a solid performance testing framework, you can further drive value in terms of actual saved time and perceived experience. We achieve this by using a solid architectural foundation based on a virtualized element behavior. We also follow strict best practices methodology of setting up and running tests - each test is performed on the latest releases of Infragistics and our competitor's latest service releases. Using the xamWebGrid, your applications will not only look better and be easier to use, but they will outperform anything available on the market today. This leads to higher end user satisfaction and actual dollar savings in productivity of the applications that you deploy. To get the Infragistics xamWebGrid today, download the NetAdvantage for Web Client product at <http://www.infragistics.com/downloads>.