

TX Text Control ActiveX Server vs. Microsoft Office Automation

Why TX Text Control is better suited to
server side word processing

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Major Concerns

Summary

This white paper provides an overview of the server-side word processing possibilities and disadvantages using Microsoft Office Automation. It summarizes the official statements from Micro-

soft and offers you alternatives to build stable and reliable server applications and services.

“Microsoft does not currently recommend, and does not support, Automation of Microsoft Office applications from any unattended, non-interactive client application or component (including ASP, DCOM, and NT Services), because Office may exhibit unstable behavior and/or deadlock when run in this environment.”¹

Microsoft

Major Concerns

Microsoft does not officially recommend using Microsoft Office in a server automated environment. This has several explicable and comprehensible reasons which will be discussed in this paper.

Microsoft neither recommend using Microsoft Office in a server environment, nor starting a service on a normal

Windows PC, such as Task Scheduler, which runs Microsoft Office. All versions of Microsoft Office has been designed and tested to run as an end-user applications on a client workstation.

User Identity

Microsoft Office creates toolbars, menus, options, printers and add-ins based on user registry settings. Therefore, Microsoft Office expects a user identity to be running the application. Some services run on accounts that have no user profile (SYSTEM or

IWAM_). This may result in Microsoft Office failing to be initialized. Additionally, some functions of Microsoft Office can not be used without a real user account.

Interactivity with the desktop

Microsoft Office assumes that it is started in an interactive desktop environment and must be visible to work correctly. Unexpected errors or user parameter input may initialize a modal dialog box asking which steps should be taken to rectify the error. This modal dialog box stops the current thread and hangs indefinitely. A stopped thread could stop

IIS completely, so that the server must be restarted in order to work properly again.

*"This fact alone makes running Office Applications from a server-side environment risky and unsupported."*²

Microsoft

Reentrancy and Scalability

Microsoft Office has an unnecessary amount of overhead, such as end user orientated features (GUI) that should not be present in reentrant software. This leads to slow response times and general sluggish performance. It critically important that the response time of reentrant software be kept to an ab-

solute minimum, thus enabling a maximum number of clients to be served in parallel.

Microsoft Office satisfies none of these requirements. Indeed, it is exactly the opposite: It is non-reentrant and uses global resources that seriously limit the number of instances that can be

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Licensing

run on one server. Multiple instances may even result in complete dead-

locks, data corruption or even worse: the blue screen of death.

Resiliency and Stability

Microsoft Office uses the Microsoft Windows Installer (MSI) technology to install and self-repair the application. This is very time and resource intensive in a server side environment. Additionally, modal dialog boxes may be shown, which may cause the application to hang completely. Furthermore,

Microsoft Office has not been tested in a server environment. The usage of Microsoft Office may reduce the stability of the whole server and could cause damage to other applications or services. It is recommended to use a dedicated server upon which only one application is hosted.

Licensing

One of the major advantages of server side applications and services is that the end user need not have Microsoft Office installed on his/her client PC, nor even own a Microsoft Office license, in order to create Microsoft Word documents. Likewise, the creation of PDF files should not demand the client side installation of Adobe Acrobat.

However, in its End User License Agreement (EULA)³, Microsoft categorically forbids the use of Microsoft Office based, server side applications when a client side Microsoft Office license has not been purchased.

TX Text Control ActiveX Server

Microsoft strongly recommend the use of alternatives that have been specifically designed for server side environments. TX Text Control ActiveX Server has been built from scratch to fulfil this requirement.

TX Text Control ActiveX Server is a fully programmable word processing engine for deployment in an ASP or ASP.NET server environment. All interactions

with the engine are from program code and document templates.



Key Benefits

TX Text Control ActiveX Server is the only server side component that enables databases and XML to be seemly integrated into word processing documents:

- Build documents in RTF and Microsoft Word formats from data stored in XML files and databases.
- Programmatically generate documents from scratch with data from disparate data sources.
- Convert word processing documents between all supported formats (e.g. DOC and RTF to PDF).
- Total independence of Microsoft Word, Adobe Acrobat and all other 3rd party software and drivers.
- Only one TX Text Control ActiveX Server license is required per server (not per desktop client).

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TX Text Control

Convert Documents

TX Text Control ActiveX Server supports a wide range of word processing formats (e.g. RTF, DOC, HTML, XML, PDF) and image file formats (e.g. GIF, PNG, JPG). As files can be loaded and

saved to all of these formats, a typical application for TX Text Control ActiveX Server lies in the area of server side, network-based, document conversion.

Modify Documents

Using TX Text Control ActiveX Server, word processing documents can be assembled from disparate data sources, such as end user data, databases and

physical files. Based upon this information, documents can be created and saved to any of TX Text Control ActiveX Servers supported formats.

Create Documents

In a modern corporate environment, business processes demand that information is immediately accessible to employees inside an enterprise network and to workers on the road. Typically,

this information needs to be continually up-to-date and available in a multitude of formats (such as HTML, XML, DOC, RTF, GIF or JPEG).

Bibliography

- 1, 2 INFO: Considerations for Server-Side Automation of Office
<http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;EN-US;q257757>
- 3 End User License Agreements
<http://www.microsoft.com/office/eula/en.msp>

More Information

If you would like to learn more or would like to download a free trial version of TX Text Control ActiveX Server, please visit our website:

<http://www.textcontrol.com/server/>

Do you have technical or licensing questions?

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