Tipical Charlie
Hidden Gems in ColdFusion 8
by Charlie Arehart

ColdFusion 8 has been out for a while and has been talked about for months. You probably could name five to ten top features. As with each release, there are product Top 10 lists, marketing materials, and user group/conference talks that focus on those features. They help sell the new release. But there are also always little hidden gems which don't get as much press. Sometimes these may be the answer to a long-nagging problem.

Now, if you read all the blogs and the documentation (the CFML Reference, or better yet the Developer's Guide that many miss), as well as the Release Notes, the "What's New" documents and pages on the Adobe site, you may well come across many such hidden gems. Sadly, developers don't often have the time to do that, so about June, I started giving a Hidden Gems talk for ColdFusion 8, pointing out all those that I or others had found. It grew to over 75 items!

I can't possibly list them all here, but these are just a few that I think are of value to most developers (in no particular order):

- ArrayIsDefined(), to test for existence of a potentially empty element in an array.
- CFINPUT has a new input="datefield" that offers a nifty calendar popup in HTML.
- Indeed, there is now a purely HTML CFGRID with lots of power and ease of use.
- CFLOOP can loop over arrays, as well as files by line or by character.
- CFDUMP has new show, hide, keys, output, format, and metainfo attributes.
- AttributeCollection attribute lets you dynamically pass in attributes to most tags.
- CFDBINFO gives you info on tables, columns, SPs, indexes, keys, and more.
- There are attributes and functions for securing Ajax calls (VerifyClient, SecureJSON).
- There are dozens of things you can do with PDFs using CFPDF that may surprise you.
- The CF8 Server Monitor has many features that impose no overhead at all.
- CFIMAGE can create captchas.
- All tags and functions work in CF 8 Standard. Those that were formerly Enterprise-only now run but may be single-threaded through the Enterprise Feature Router (EFR) feature.
- ColdFusion now includes an embedded cross-platform, open-source database, called Derby.
- You can now force a refresh of ColdFusion's cached web service info when invoking the service.
- An Admin can prevent use of the ServiceFactory and other internal ColdFusion Java objects without disabling access to all Java objects.
- CFMAIL and the Admin mail settings now support SSL and TLS.
- You can now have multiple user accounts for the Admin and for RDS, and RDS sandboxing.
- Admin API method runtime.cleartrustedcache() can take a list of file(s) to flush from the template cache.
- There is a dramatic performance improvement related to memory use when uploading files to ColdFusion.

- Adobe offers an enhanced set of Eclipse extensions, including the debugger, a log viewer, and an Ajax application generation wizard–on top of things released for Eclipse in 7.02.
- Adobe has offered ColdFusion 8 tag updates for Dreamweaver and HomeSite/HomeSite+/CF Studio.
- While the ColdFusion 8 Getting Started Experience wasn't in the download, it is available online, including the code snippets explorer offering live demos/source code for using most new tags/functions.
- There is already a Cumulative HotFix 1, for those who like to wait for an update to a new release.

Some may ask, "What about things like implicit array creation, the nifty JavaScript-style operators, the ability to use CFQUERYPARAM in cached queries, per application settings, CFZIP, and so much more?" Well, I said I couldn't list all 75 here! To see the complete list, check out my user group presentation, which is available online at http://carehart.org/presentations/#cf8gems. To give you a sense of the wealth of changes in ColdFusion 8, I've grouped my talk into the following sections:

(Part 1) Coding Gems, Query-related Gems, CFC Gems, Miscellaneous Tag Enhancements, Miscellaneous New Tags You Might Have Missed, Miscellaneous Function Enhancements);

(Part 2) Performance Gems, Editor Gems, Gems Related to Ajax Features, PDF Features, Gems Within Other New Features, Admin Console Gems; and

(Part 3) Doc Change Gems, Platform Support, Enterprise vs. Standard, CF8 Hotfixes, and Resources for Learning More.

With so much information, I've found I can no longer fit it into an hour-long user group talk, so I've decided to change it into a class, likely half-day, adding much more detail, code examples, live demos, and more. The user group presentation will still remain on the site (in its abbreviated form) listing all the items and what detail I can present in a typical, hour-long CFUG talk. If you might be interested in the class, please drop me a note at charlie@carehart.org. That will help me gauge the level of interest.

A veteran ColdFusion developer since 1997, Charlie Arehart is a longtime contributor to the community and a recognized Adobe Community Expert. He's a certified Advanced CF Developer and Instructor for CF 4/5/6/7 who served as tech editor of the ColdFusion Developers Journal until 2003. Now an independent contractor living in Alpharetta GA, Charlie provides high-level troubleshooting/tuning assistance and training/mentoring for CF teams (carehart.org/consulting). He helps run the Online ColdFusion Meetup (coldfusionmeetup.com), an online CF user group), is a contributor to the *CF8 WACK* books by Ben Forta, and is frequently invited to speak to developer conferences and user groups worldwide.