

Fluid-uPortal Collaboration 2.0

Summary

The Fluid and uPortal communities have both benefited from nearly two years of successful collaboration on user experience issues. Fluid technology such as the Skinning System and Reorderer have been integrated into uPortal 3.1, and we've got lots more code and resources to share over the next few months. Given the success of our collaboration so far, we'd like to make sure our communities continue to work together into the future. We'd love to continue working with the uPortal community on deliverables that directly add value to upcoming uPortal releases, and to help build reusable components that have been uniquely designed with uPortal's needs in mind.

We're open to ideas and suggestions for specific projects. After talking with a few community members so far, a couple of areas come to mind: improving the out-of-box experience of uPortal's administration tools; and adding robust accessibility support to uPortal. Indeed, these are areas our communities have already started to work on.

A uPortal/Fluid collaboration could help make a significant impact on uPortal's out-of-box experience, particularly for evaluators and new adopters when they first install and configure the application. At the moment, uPortal's administration tools are fairly complex and intimidating for new users, and they may serve as a barrier to adoption and wider usage. If an administrator can't successfully and easily get their uPortal instance up and running, they may be reticent to pass on this experience to their wider user base. Reworking the design and implementation of the administration user experience from the ground up could be very fruitful, making it easier for users to configure portlets, groups, and permissions. Encapsulating reusable functionality in Fluid components would allow other portlet developers to embed shared functionality, such as assigning users to groups, within their own context. Fluid can help throughout the process, from interaction designs and wireframes through implementation and testing.

Ultimately, there's a secondary benefit to refreshing and redesigning the administration tools, especially if we build sharable components during the process. At the moment, there are scarce examples of best practices for portlet authors in terms of design decisions, technology choices, and implementation techniques. New administration tools would provide us with a showcase to share with other portlet developers, providing them with hands-on examples for how to write a great portlet for uPortal.

Another area ripe for Fluid/uPortal collaboration is accessibility. Fluid and uPortal share a common philosophy in terms of personalization, allowing users to customize the information and experience provided by the application. A collaboration on accessibility support for uPortal would allow us to have a more robust system for ensuring compliance with the ADA and other international accessibility standards. Going beyond just compliance, we can apply the personalization philosophy of uPortal to accessibility, giving users the ability to reskin, restyle, and adapt the portal layout and appearance based on their personal needs and preferences. This would involve a number of specific deliverables:

1. Improving the markup, stylesheets, and JavaScript used by the portal to make it conform to modern WCAG 2.0 guidelines
2. Integrating Fluid's TransformAble services into the portal, providing a system for adapting the look and feel of uPortal based on user preferences
3. Providing examples and tutorials for portal developers on how to support accessibility in their own portals

Notes

- Improve the out-of-box experience for uPortal
 - Admin tools: help evaluators, new users, portal administrators; add Web 2.0 richness and ease of use
 - Portal "Chrome:" make it easier and faster for student, staff, and faculty to find the information they need from their university
- Accessibility
 - More than just ADA compliance
 - takes the personalization philosophy of uPortal and apply it to accessibility, giving users the ability to reskin, restyle, and adapt the portal layout and appearance for personal needs
 - ensure that the user interface rendered by the portal are accessible out of the box: WCAG 2 compliance?
- Collaboration:
 - the Fluid and uPortal communities have developed a strong partnership over the past couple of years: let's keep this going
 - the ability to partner on building components that are uniquely designed for the needs of uPortal