

Growing a Business with BlueDragon Server

It's free!

How many times have you heard the question: "Why use CFML when you can use PHP, ASP, or JSP, which are all free?" With BlueDragon Server, one of three editions of BlueDragon from New Atlanta Communications, you can finally answer that question. It's a free – yes, really free – server for CFML.

And if you've wanted to build and distribute CFML applications as products, with a bundled implementation of a CFML server, you can do that with BlueDragon as well, and for far less than the cost of CF5 or CFMX.

In this month's column, I'd like to identify some of the business opportunities in store for those who consider this relatively new alternative.

When Is Free Really Free?

In the December 2002 issue of *CFDJ*, Ben Forta wrote a helpful article, "But It's Free" (www.sys-con.com/coldfusion/article.cfm?id=541), making the case for why the many free alternatives really don't stack up as entirely free when you consider all that CFML brings to the table. I make the point often as well: CFML is more than just a language, it's implemented in both ColdFusion and BlueDragon as a framework, providing features that might otherwise have to be added to those other alternatives.

Still, we all know of projects (or people) who just won't be motivated to ante up the \$1,299 needed to get started with deploying applications on ColdFusion



By Vince Bonfanti

Server. They can be pointed to the free BlueDragon Server edition, available at www.newatlanta.com/bluedragon/.

I am often asked: "So, about this free version of the Server, do you mean free for production?" Yes, BlueDragon Server is available free for production. Go to town! Install it on your server and sell your widgets,

tell folks about your charity, run a blog. Do whatever you'd like (subject to the terms and conditions of the licensing agreement shown when you download it).

Is It 'Crippled' like CF Express Was?

Veteran CFML developers may have a bad taste toward "free CF servers." Allaire once offered CF Express, back in the 4.5 timeframe, which was (sadly) quite limited in terms of the number of tags and functions that you were allowed to use.

The old CF Express didn't even allow such things as CFMAIL, CFLOCK, CFHTTP, CFTRANSACTION, CFSCRIPT, CFMODULE, CFSTOREDPROC, CFFORM, CFERROR, CFFILE, CFDIRECTORY, CFCCONTENT, CFCACHE, and lots more. (You can read more about what CF Express didn't offer by viewing the CFML Language Reference from that edition,

available online at Macromedia's site: www.macromedia.com/v1/documents/cf4/acrobatdocs/40langrefe.pdf. See Chapter 1, page 7.)

BlueDragon Server offers all those tags and lots more, and clients have found that their CFML applications run very effectively in this alternative environment. For more information on our compatibility with CF5 and CFMX, see the BlueDragon Web site.

Indeed, by the time you read this, New Atlanta should have announced substantial increased compatibility, including many (if not most) of the CFMX-level language features people have been looking for.

What's the Catch?

So what's not allowed in the free BlueDragon Server edition that is allowed in the other editions? Have you got a hand free to count along? The free Server edition doesn't support CFEXECUTE, CFGGRAPH, CFOBJECT, CFWDDX, CFSCHEDULE, and CFSERVLET. (By the time you read this and more MX-level language features are announced, it's possible that some of those new features will be held back from the free edition.) Okay, you'd need six fingers to count that, but CFSERVLET is deprecated in CFMX anyway.

Speaking of servlets, the free Server edition also does not offer servlets/JSP integration, nor CFX Java custom tags. Also, the number of included DB drivers is limited, and you can only run it with Apache on Linux and IIS on Windows.

Still, for free, you're getting an awful lot. And the Server JX edition, which adds those features and more, is still at its introductory price of just \$549 (regularly

\$999). The J2EE edition, starting at \$2,499, enables you to deploy your CFML as a standard J2EE Web app on any J2EE server, including WebSphere, WebLogic, Sun ONE, JRun, Oracle, Borland, JBoss, Tomcat, and more.

A complete grid of supported and unsupported tags in the three editions is at www.newatlanta.com/products/bluedragon/product_info/cfml_tag_support.cfm. See also www.newatlanta.com/products/bluedragon/product_info/features.cfm#FCMatrix for other feature comparisons.

Making Money Versus Spending It

What if you're a reseller interested in using the free Server edition for your application? The argument that "another \$1,300 won't kill you in the grand scheme of things" may be valid on custom programming projects (where the cost of development and management of the server far outweighs the cost of that server), but the picture changes if you want to deploy your application on many servers.

Let's say you've built a "packaged" solution written in CFML that you'd like to sell for \$300/server. Guess what? Prior to knowing of BlueDragon Server you'd have to add another \$1,300 to the cost of your product for the CF5/MX license, more than quadrupling the end cost to your customer (minus whatever discounts you might be able to negotiate with Macromedia).

Consider FuseTalk, makers of a leading discussion forum solution written in CFML. Their lowest priced Professional edition sells for \$289. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense to expect their customers to spend \$1,300 for a CFMX license (if they don't already have one) if all they want to do is run a \$289 product. But, FuseTalk Professional runs on the free BlueDragon Server, and is supported by both FuseTalk, Inc., and New Atlanta.

Redistribution: Opening New Doors of Opportunity

Many people are getting excited about the prospect of selling their CFML apps with BlueDragon as the runtime engine. Would you like to bundle BlueDragon Server along with your product, so that one installation implements both the BlueDragon Server and your CFML application (and whatever other configuration information is needed)? Would it be useful that the user doesn't even need to know about an underlying "server," nor have to use the administrator (you can remove it if you'd like)?

Would you like to bundle your CFML application in a binary format that can't be easily decoded (using our BlueDragon archive, or BDA, format)? These aren't features usually available to Server and Server JX customers, but New Atlanta offers many options for vendors wanting to license BlueDragon for redistribution.


The idea of selling your CFML application bundled with BlueDragon is what we call "redistribution" (as opposed to just pointing them to our Web site to download the free Server). If you read the licensing agreement for all of our products (which you agree to before you can download them), it states that redistribution of BlueDragon requires a separate OEM licensing agreement. It's not unusual. MySQL works similarly for commercial use and redistribution.

Offering Your Clients a Solution: Not a Technology

If you have to tell your customer to go download the free BlueDragon Server (or indeed to buy CFMX or one of the other BlueDragon editions), you could be raising a "technology" issue.

What if they have a bias against ColdFusion? Bundling the BlueDragon Server with your CFML application protects against this issue. You're offering a solution, not a technology.

Indeed, if you've got a product that you've created for the CFML community (be it a discussion forum, a content management system, a timesheet system, a help desk app, whatever), and you're currently offering it only to folks who have ColdFusion already, you're missing out on a much larger audience. By redistributing your application with BlueDragon bundled and transparent to them, you can change that.

With the free Server edition and our redistribution options, we're working to make CFML continue to be your Web application language of choice. And we're working to solve key challenges to help you make the most of it. Most of all, we want to help you grow your business and be successful. 

About the Author

Vince Bonfanti is president and co-founder of New Atlanta Communications, developers of Java- and CFML-based server products. A charter member of Sun's Java Servlet API and JavaServer Pages Expert Groups, Vince has been a JavaOne speaker and a contributor to Java trade magazines and online publications. He has also been a featured speaker at Toronto's CFNorth and Washington's CFUN conferences as well as at local ColdFusion User Groups around the country.

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A tutorial on the isDefined function focuses on one of the most used functions in CF applications as a logic switch that enables follow-on application code.

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