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Developers Call InstallAware 3 an Easier Windows-Based Installer

By Rebecca Rohan

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MimarSinan International has released InstallAware version 3, a third-generation installation software tool. InstallAware is aimed at Windows Installer, and automates building and deploying packages for ISVs and systems administrators on Microsoft Windows and .NET platforms.

"We removed the dependency on .NET," says InstallAware developer Sinan Karaca. "InstallAware setups themselves never required .NET, but the IDE itself was .NET-based. This bothered some of our customers, because .NET was running a little slower than native Win32 code. We listened, and ported our IDE back to Win32. So the IDE is now lightning-fast and the .NET framework is no longer required to develop installations in InstallAware."

The setup editor includes integrated visual and scripting views, with automatically generating code. "The two-way wizards that are new in InstallAware 3 make it very easy to use for any experience level," explains Jim Gunkel, President of [Nevrona Designs](#), the producer of database reporting software Rave Reports (which is included with Borland's Delphi 2005 installation). "As software developers, we really like the ability to drop down to the InstallAware scripting level, which is still quite easy to use, yet flexible enough for our complex tasks," adds Gunkel.

When the setup is built, the installation script is automatically converted into an MSI (Microsoft Installer) database. No knowledge of Windows Installer is required of the author.

According to Karaca, "MSI is the file extension for Windows Installer databases. Each Windows Installer setup is contained inside an MSI file... the only Microsoft-approved installation technology." Karaca adds, "Applications must have a Windows Installer based setup routine to be able to receive the 'Designed for Windows Certifications/Logos' from Microsoft. Moreover, corporate administrators are standardizing more and more on the MSI platform."

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"InstallAware is the best MSI based installer available at this time," claims Gunkel. "Most MSI-based installers that we looked at, such as Wise for Windows or InstallShield, were difficult to use because of a lack of ability to drop down to a scripting style model. This is something that we've grown accustomed to, using non-MSI based installers in the past. Our applications that are released today and in the future will be dependent upon new Microsoft technologies such as the .NET framework, MDAC, and many others. It's nice to have the benefits of an MSI based installer to make sure these pieces are installed while still providing enough power and flexibility to complete the main job of installing our product," says Gunkel.

InstallAware 3 allows you to split setups into multiple offline and online parts, called Web Media Blocks, that isolate application runtimes and rarely-used features from the main setup. The end user won't download pieces she already has, but she gets a fully self-contained download of the setup.exe for cutoff-free installation.

"We are currently working on an external contract [in which] the application weighs in at just under a 100MB, along with a clipart library approaching the 3GB mark," said Andrew Neillans, Senior Software Developer at [ABCC Computers](#). "It makes use of some of the more interesting features of InstallAware, such as the DLL calls and customized wizards (which allow the user to install two different versions of the application — one skinned, one unskinned — two totally separate binaries). The Web Media Blocks feature saves us hours worth of development time each time we rebuild and update, as we can skip the compression of the clipart (and any other unchanged parts) each time," Neillans concludes.

"We are really looking forward to using the InstallAware Web module feature with our future installers to reduce the download size requirements for our users," says Gunkel. "We're used to downloading hundreds of Megabytes for some applications, and have the bandwidth to do so, but many of our customers are located all around the world and many are also still on dialup. For those users, trimming off even a few Megabytes makes a big difference to the download time and the overall installation experience."

New to version 3 are two new setup themes (for a total of ten), and a new FlashFrame control in the dialog editor. "The full range of interactive Flash programming is now available to setup developers," says Karaca. "They can now truly dazzle their end-users and leave a lasting positive impression while the product is still being installed! Games, movies, demonstrations, tutorials — you name it."

InstallAware 3 uses LZMA/7 compression, which Karaca claims outperforms other compression algorithms. For example, Karaca points out, the .NET Framework installer, compressed with CAB, is 23MB. However, he says, "When you compress the .NET Framework with InstallAware, it goes down to 11MB!"

"The installer has an integrated registration engine that fires when the installation starts," said Neillans. "It verifies customer details and logs the installation in a database. If the user does not have an Internet connection, it prompts for registration over the phone. If the registration fails, the installation is aborted."

InstallAware 3 is available in Express, Professional, and Enterprise editions from \$99.95 to \$799.95 (US). A free limited-time edition is

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