



Professional Visual Studio Extensibility

Keyvan Nayyeri

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Visual Studio is a development IDE created by Microsoft to enable easier development for Microsoft programming languages as well as development technologies. It has been the most popular IDE for working with Microsoft development products for the past 10 years.

Extensibility is a key feature of Visual Studio. There have not been many books written on this aspect of Visual Studio. Visual Studio Extensibility (VSX) can be considered a hard topic to learn for many developers in comparison with most .NET related topics. Also, its APIs are very complex and not very well written. Some may refer to these APIs as “dirty” because they do not have good structure, naming convention, or consistency.

Visual Studio is now 10 years old. It was created during the COM days for COM programming but later migrated to .NET. However, Visual Studio still relies heavily on COM programming. It was revamped when moving to the .NET platform but still contains its COM nature; this fact is what makes it harder for .NET developers to work with VSX. Because it is an older product built on two technologies, it has produced inconsistency in code. Although there are problems with the current version of VSX, the future looks bright for it. The many different teams working on the software have been moved into one umbrella group known as the Visual Studio Ecosystem team.

Throughout the past 10 years Visual Studio has continued to grow and new extensibility features have been added. Learning all of the options with their different purposes and implementations is not easy. Many extensibility features are broad topics such as add-ins, macros, and the new domain-specific language tools in Visual Studio. Learning these topics can be difficult because they are not closely related to general .NET programming topics.

This book is for .NET developers who are interested in extending Visual Studio as their development tool. In order to understand the book you must know the following material well: Object-oriented programming (OOP), the .NET Framework and .NET programming, C# or Visual Basic languages, some familiarity with C++, some familiarity with XML and its related topics, and Visual Studio structure and usage. A familiarity with COM programming and different .NET technologies is helpful.

The aims of this book are to:

- Provide an overview of all aspects of VSX
- Enable readers to know where/when to use extensibility
- Familiarize readers with VS Extensibility in detail
- Show readers the first steps and let them learn through their own experiences
- Use examples, sample code, and case studies to demonstrate things in such a way that helps readers understand the concepts
- Avoid bothering readers with long discussions and useless code samples

In order to use this book, and get the most out of it, there are some technical requirements. You must have the following two packages installed on your machine to be able to read/understand the chapters and test code samples:

- Visual Studio 2008 Team System Edition (or other commercial editions)
- Visual Studio 2008 SDK 1.0 (or its newer versions)

You will need to buy Visual Studio 2008 to register for an evaluation version. The Free Express editions of Visual Studio do not support the extensibility options. The Visual Studio SDK is needed in order to read some of the chapters in the book and can be downloaded as a free package. The operating system doesn't matter for the content of the book, but all code was written with Visual Studio 2008 Team System Edition in Windows Vista x86.

Chapters 1, 2, and 3 will give you an introduction to the basic concepts you need to understand before you can move on to the rest of the book. Chapter 4 discusses the automation model, which is an important prerequisite for many



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