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Accelerating the deployment of web applications to mobile devices

Background

Customers are now asking for technologies that will enable mobile users to access tools beyond well-established e-mail and text messaging. However, simply loading mobile applications which allow the use of spreadsheets, documents, and other files generated by desktop applications has some serious issues.

These include:

- How do you overcome the significant limitations in presentation and navigation inherent in a mobile device?
- How do you ensure there is no critical data or intellectual property residing on handhelds?
- How do you avoid version control issues (with many users of a critical spreadsheet, for example)?
- How do you ensure an audit trail of who used which application and when?

"In some ways the BlackBerry can be more powerful than a laptop because it's always connected to the firm's VPN. You're always on, which is important to bankers' mobility and the agility of getting access to data and information at any point, anywhere. We want to take the next step outside of E-mail, outside of standard applications, and we want to see how we can make people more productive."

Ira Lehrman, Chief Technology Officer of Global Investment Banking, Merrill Lynch.

EASA

EASA (Enterprise Accessible Software Applications) is an established technology in use at companies as diverse as GE, HP, Canon, and Procter & Gamble. EASA enables our customers to rapidly create and deploy web-enabled applications tailored to specific needs. This allows them to derive dramatically greater value from existing software tools – making them easier to use, easier to access, and easier to control. The concept of creating a custom, web-based application to act as an interface to almost any underlying software has enormous potential to overcome the four issues outlined above. EASA has therefore been extended in version 4.2 to allow its use by companies who wish to deploy a variety of mobile applications.



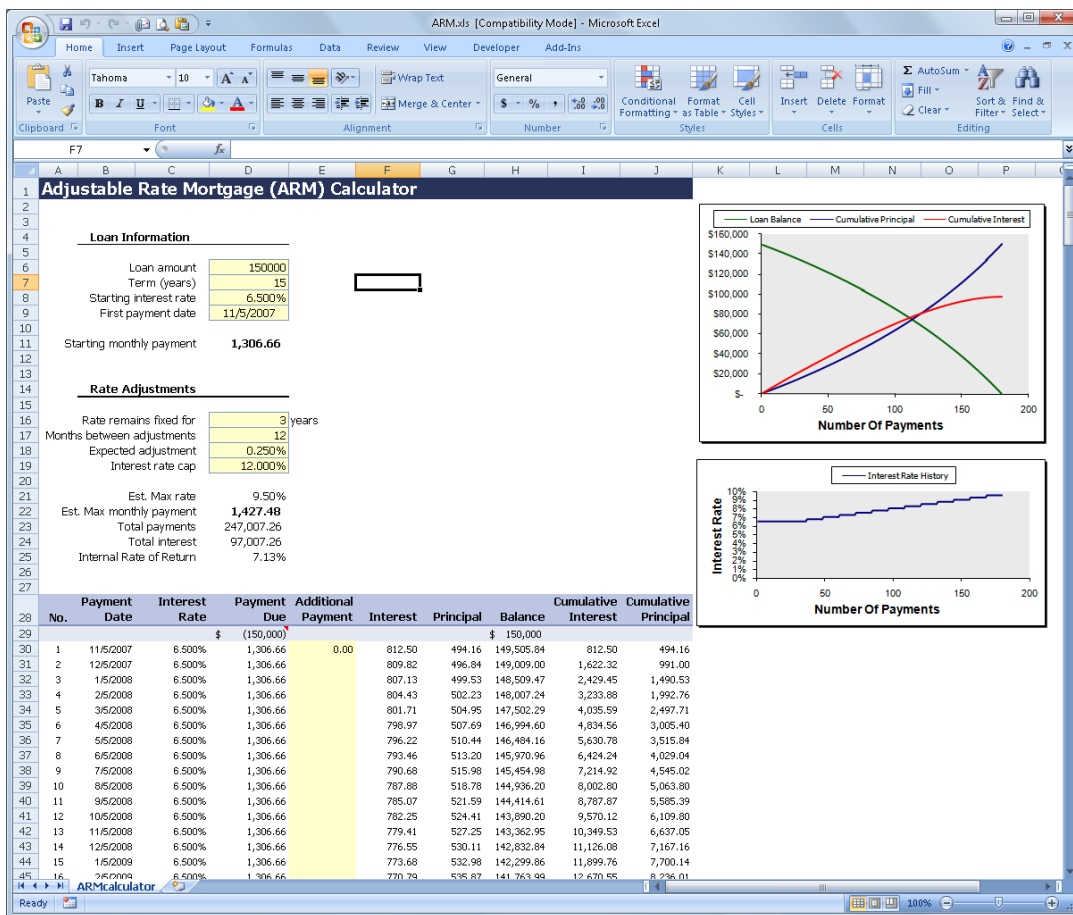
An Example of a Mobile EASA Application

In the following, a typical example case is presented - the need for mobile users to access and use a spreadsheet originally developed for desktop users. Note that applications created with EASA are not limited to driving spreadsheets – EASA customers have used EASA to create custom web-applications driving databases, legacy codes, and other commercial applications.

The spreadsheet shown below (on a desktop) is a relatively simple calculation tool. Nevertheless, deploying it to a mobile device poses immediate problems.

"An EASA application connected to a central Excel spreadsheet brings many benefits. For example, it means that everyone uses the same version of the spreadsheet; the IP contained in the spreadsheet is secured; and finally, the ease-of-use is improved."

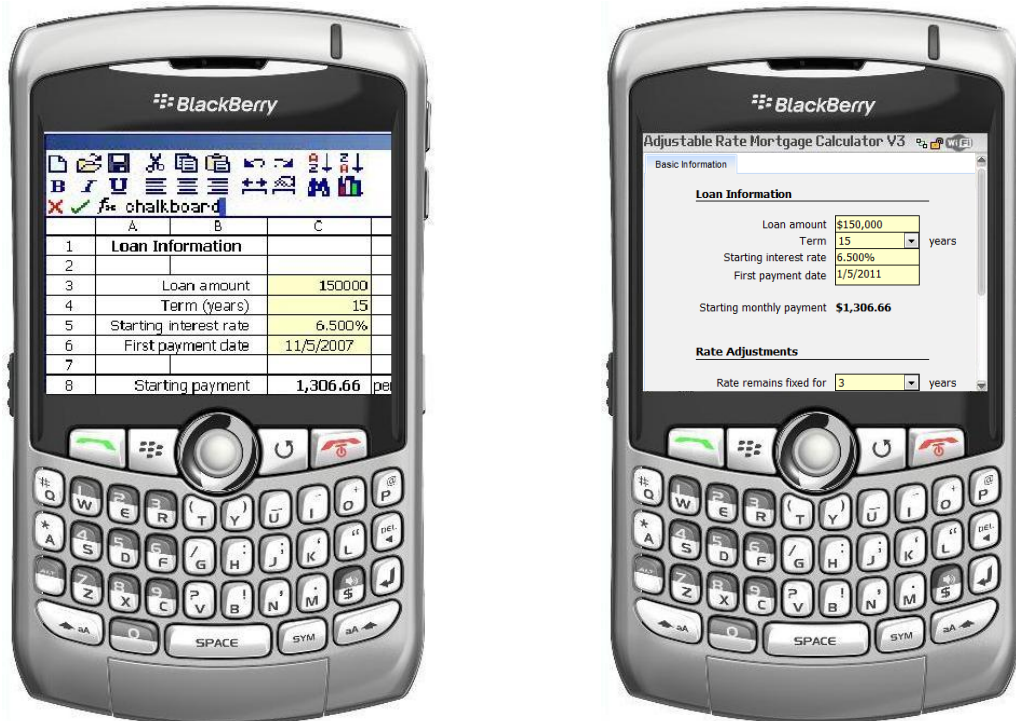
John Clisham, Procter & Gamble.



Typical desktop application – in this case MS Excel



Using one of the many mobile "Excel clone" applications to open the spreadsheet on a mobile device, only a small portion of the sheet is visible (below left). Navigation to the parts of the spreadsheet which require input is not straightforward, and if there happen to be any macros in the spreadsheet, then it will not even open. Not only that, but data resides on the mobile device, which may be a security issue. Finally, there is no version control, and no audit trail of usage.



Left: The same spreadsheet viewed with eOffice. Right: the same spreadsheet accessed via EASA.

In contrast, above right is an EASA application which links to the same spreadsheet. This mobile EASA application (or EASAP) was created without the use of any coding, in about 1 hour. The spreadsheet itself now resides securely on a server, and the interface the user sees is tailored for use on a mobile device.

EASA also automatically tracks usage, facilitating compliance and auditing requirements; finally, version control is assured, allowing applications which require interaction from multiple users to be deployed without any version control issues.

Conclusion

EASA can be used to provide a company's mobile employees with tailored access to key applications, with low set-up costs and minimal use of IT staff.