Dave Baldwin's HTML Display Components 8.03
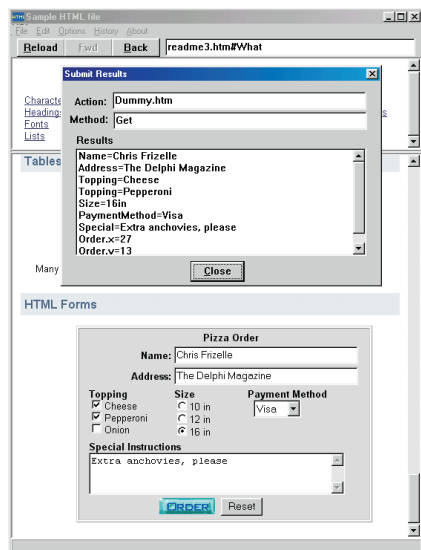
Reviewed by Chris Frizelle

When you want to display information to your users, nicely formatted and with hyper-text linking, HTML can be just what's needed. It's simpler than rich text and very flexible.

Dave Baldwin has been creating HTML display components for some years now: as you can see from the version number (8.03) this is mature technology, tried and tested. His package includes three components: `ThtmlViewer` for simple no-frames documents, `TFrameViewer` which adds frames support and is designed for local use, and `TFrameBrowser` which is primarily designed for use over the internet. The HTML version supported is 3.2 (plus some v4 enhancements) and a number of cascading style sheet properties have been added in version 8 of the components.

Various image types are supported: BMP, GIF and JPEG, including animated GIFs. However, you need to be aware of the thorny patent issues surrounding GIFs: you are probably better off using JPEG. An optional graphics DLL gives support for PNG files too.
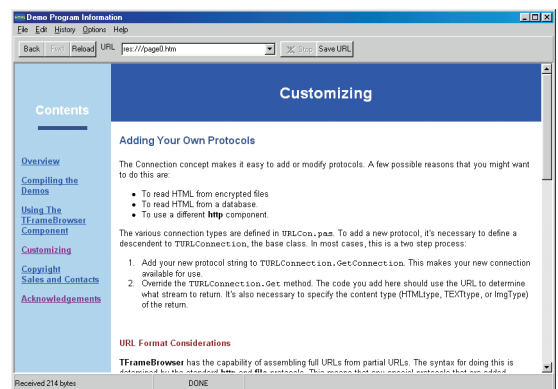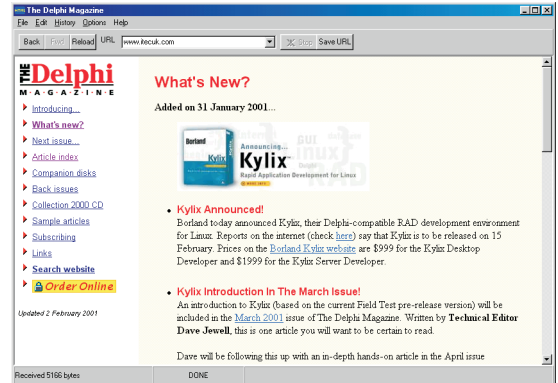
➤ *Figure 3: Form processing.*

The list of features is long (and ever-growing), so it's easier to say what these components won't do: scripting. Most things that you want to do with HTML are fine, but if you want to process JavaScript or VBScript then you will need to plug in a script processing engine and be prepared for a good deal of extra work (the components do provide an `OnScript` event). But then you would be re-inventing Internet Explorer.

If you'd like more info on the features, how's this for starters: transparent and floating images, image caching, client-side image maps, support for huge files and huge tables, form processing (Figure 3), font styling, printing and print preview, text search, clipboard support and more.

One of the useful things you can do is respond to your own custom hyperlinks. For example, when linking to a zipfile, you could call an unzip routine, when linking to an Acrobat document you could call the Acrobat Reader. This is exactly the kind of thing we do ourselves, with our CD-ROM browsers and the Collection 2000 software.

You can now take customisation even further by using the connection concept. One disadvantage of using HTML is that it's plain for all to see; but you can now read your HTML from encrypted files, zip-files, or a database (Figure 2).

As you can see from Figure 1, you can use `TFrameBrowser` to browse websites over the internet (making use of Frank Piette's excellent freeware internet components). However, the lack of scripting means this is going to be fraught

➤ *Top, Figure 1: Browse the internet if you like.*

➤ *Above, Figure 2: There are many customisation options.*

with problems, except for special-ised use and over intranets.

There is good documentation in both HTML and WinHelp form, along with example projects. Support is via email, the website and by phone. If you'd like a taster, there is a free `THtmlLite` component, supporting HTML viewing only, no frames or printing, as well as evaluation versions and demos.

The HTML Viewer Components cost $129 to purchase direct at www.pbear.com and this includes full source code plus all updates until the next major version. Highly recommended.

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