

In this interview I speak with Jon Montgomery, Vice President Illinois Grade School Music Association. Jon has used FileMaker web publishing to do some amazing things for his school.

1. Hi Jon, tell us about yourself and your profession

First off I must say I have been happily married for 30 years to my wife Jane. She is very supportive in all that I undertake, even if she does refer to my laptop as my girlfriend. We have 3 children ages 27, 24 and 16.

I have been teaching in the public school system for 30 years in the field of instrumental music; teaching children grades 5 through 12, how to play wind and percussion instruments. Because of my involvement in music education, I am also the vice president of the Illinois Grade School Music Association - Southern Division which includes around 200 member schools in the southern half of Illinois. That organization organizes music contests for our students to display their music education and help us as music educators to better our teaching skills and make us more effective teachers.

2. Besides work and family, what do you enjoy doing in your spare time

Well.... We are quite active in our church where I serve as a deacon, chair the audio - visual committee, play bass guitar in the contemporary service, and sing in the Sanctuary Choir in the traditional service. Lots of fun there, of course most areas there are MUSIC oriented, including the sound.

All areas have been quite rewarding. However, I have been working on learning to say NO when asked to add something else to my "spare time." I also enjoy model railroading in N scale, but that is pretty much on hold until I retire. I enjoy the outdoors. Some day I will start duck hunting again and I do golf at least once a year. I have dabbled in photography for several years.

3. How did you get started working with FileMaker?

Our school district hired a new high school band director who was a Mac person. I was still working with AppleWorks databases. He showed me FileMaker Pro 3 and told me that once I used it, I would not want to use anything else. He was correct!

4. How long have you been using FileMaker?

Oh, I cannot say how many years, they are all a blur as they go by so fast, but I think it was version 3.0 that was my first and currently I am using 8.0. When time and mostly update money becomes available, I will make the move to 9.0.

5. What got you interested in Web publishing with FileMaker?

In working with the Illinois Grade School Music Association and hosting many of their music contests, it became clear that directors and contest hosts were being redundant with all of the paper work. Information, as it was typed and retyped for all of the forms and schedules, could easily get lost or changed and would take hours to fix if you made a mistake. Do you know what a stencil is? Not easy to correct. So FileMaker was the perfect answer, enter the data in once and then move it around as needed for all of the paper work. It remained the same as the original director entered it.

Oh, yeah, how was the director going to enter it? I looked at all the options way back on version 4.0 (unlimited). It soon became clear that Instant Web Publishing was not going to be able to do what we needed to do.

Then, after struggling with sending text files (both TAB and MERGE) via email with varying degrees of success, I saw that custom web publishing would be the most viable solution. I really didn't think I could learn the code needed to make it happen, besides, I got into music so I could express my thoughts and feelings through music, NOT writing papers or for that matter LINES OF CODE!

6. Did you have any previous web experience?

The only experience with the web was being webmaster of the Illinois Grade School Music Association's web site, which I convinced them was the thing to do some 12 years or so ago. Even at that, I didn't want to learn HTML so I got a program that would allow me to Drag and Drop. I started with PageMill, (hey it was free with the first Mac I purchased) then went to GoLive and finally to DreamWeaver. I love Drag and Drop, but through the use of it, I have learned some HTML just by looking at what was created after the Drag and Drop.

7. What made you start using FMStudio?

In the summer of 2006, I read and went through the examples in the book PHP in 8 hours and started creating my own web solution for the music contests in which I was involved. My very first page that successfully submitted the information that was needed, took me 11 hours to create! I only left the dining room table that I was working at to eat (at the kitchen table).

At that rate the project would not have been completed until long after all of the contests would be over. I received an email about FMStudio when it was about to be released, in approximately the fall of 2006, discussed the purchase with my wife to save time, and purchased it. The only problem was it empowered me to create much much more than I thought I would be able to do. It saved me so much time that it would make your head spin. I created a whole new site in a fraction of the time that it took me to create the first page when I was hand coding.

8. How have you used FMStudio?

For two different music organizations, I have used FMStudio to create an online music contest registration system, which includes the maps module to show the location of the contest sites. In addition to those web solutions, I have created an online searchable music repertoire database for our music organization's music contest, and an online searchable membership database.

9. What do you think are some of the benefits of using FMStudio?

The greatest benefit of using FMStudio would have to be how fast it can create a function for you. The wizards are a great help and very fast. No code to write yourself, (unless you want to customize it a bit) and it is all so very organized and much more efficient.

10. What advice would you give someone just starting with FileMaker web publishing?

It is not as hard as it might seem, open up your mind to think differently. I had this problem at first. I was thinking in FileMaker design mode but the web publishing is just a bit different. Not hard, just different.

11. How do you see yourself using FMStudio in the future? Do you have any big plans?

With retirement from public school teaching not too far off, I could see myself branching out using FMStudio to create other web solutions for new clients besides my music buddies. FMStudio is really fun to use and I find myself thinking of increasingly new ways to use it.

Jon Montgomery, Vice President
Illinois Grade School Music Association