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# **SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design**

## **Introduction**

The world of computer-user interaction has come a long way since the beginning of the Graphical User Interface, but still most application interfaces are not easily customizable by the people who use them. On most systems, to change the layout or fields on a screen still requires intrusive intervention at the programming level and recompilation, even for small changes.

A common complaint from business users is that user interfaces are not customizable enough. Screens either have too much information or too little, or information is not shown in a position that is intuitive or useful to the user. Whichever the case, this situation is known to have a negative impact on product usability and hence user productivity.

It stands to reason that, when an 'out-the-box' interface closely matches a business' requirements, there is less customization work to do. However, most system implementations include a task to map, match and customize interfaces to the needs of a specific business. The amount of customization has varying degrees and may significantly impact on implementation costs. For this reason, it is common for the design, layout and flexibility of a particular system's user interface to be one of the key criteria for motivating selection of one system over another.

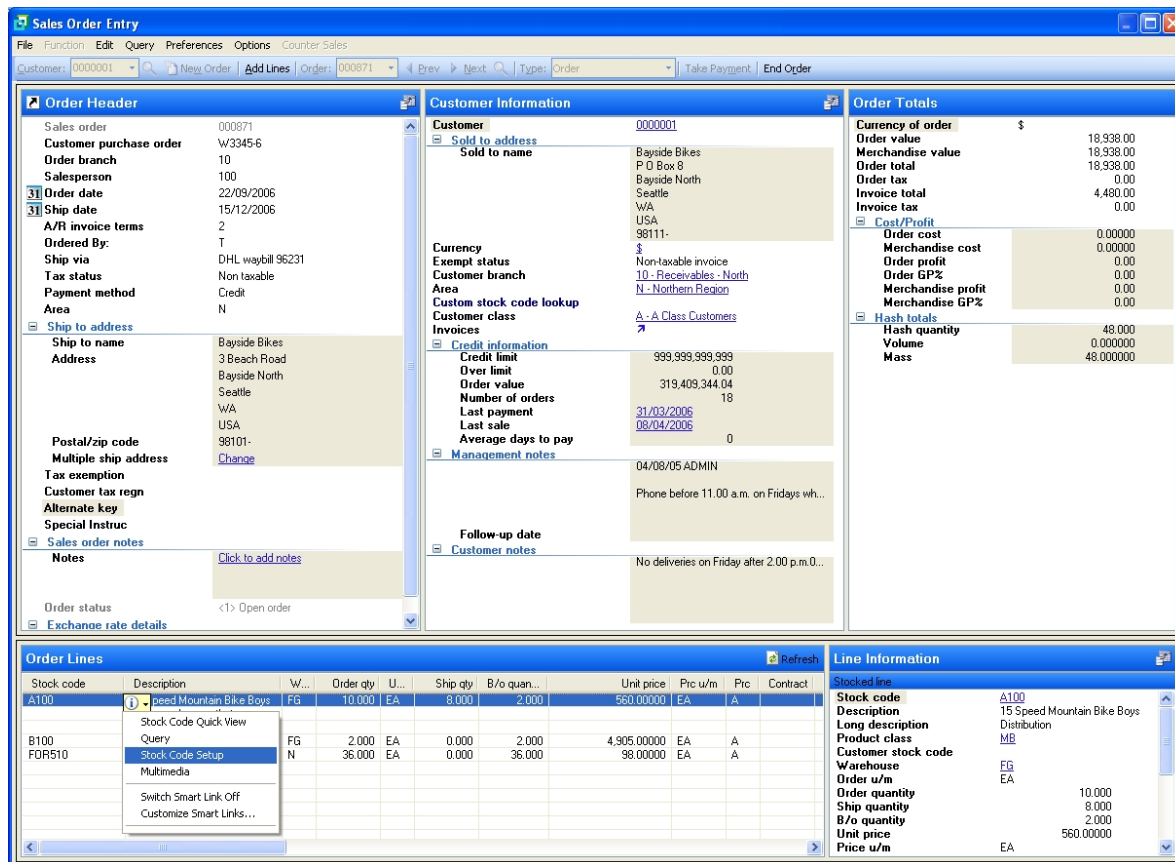
The problem then, for interface designers, is to design an interface that will perfectly match any user's expectations by displaying forms and fields in a way that closely matches the individual's perspective of the world. Expectations are usually influenced by the role a person plays within a business and personal preferences. Obviously, the number of possible permutations for a single screen may be endless. It would be near impossible or uneconomical, perhaps impractical for software developers and the interface design team to make every possible layout or arrangement available for every screen in a system. So what is the solution?

## **Fluid Interface Design**

SYSPRO, a leading provider of enterprise business solutions, has taken a unique and innovative approach to this problem. The solution, loosely termed "Fluid Interface Design" is one of the main features topping a list of many product improvements that are available in SYSPRO 6.0 Issue 10, the software vendor's latest major release.

SYSPRO Fluid Interface Design is a complete transformation from the traditional look-and-feel of SYSPRO. It enables the level of customization that answers customer needs for non-intrusive customization and personalization of business system interfaces. SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design places the control of layout, design and functional attributes for system interface design directly in the hands of the enterprise. Starting from an elegantly designed default layout that is well suited to the needs of most organizations, forms can be easily tailored, without the need for compilation.

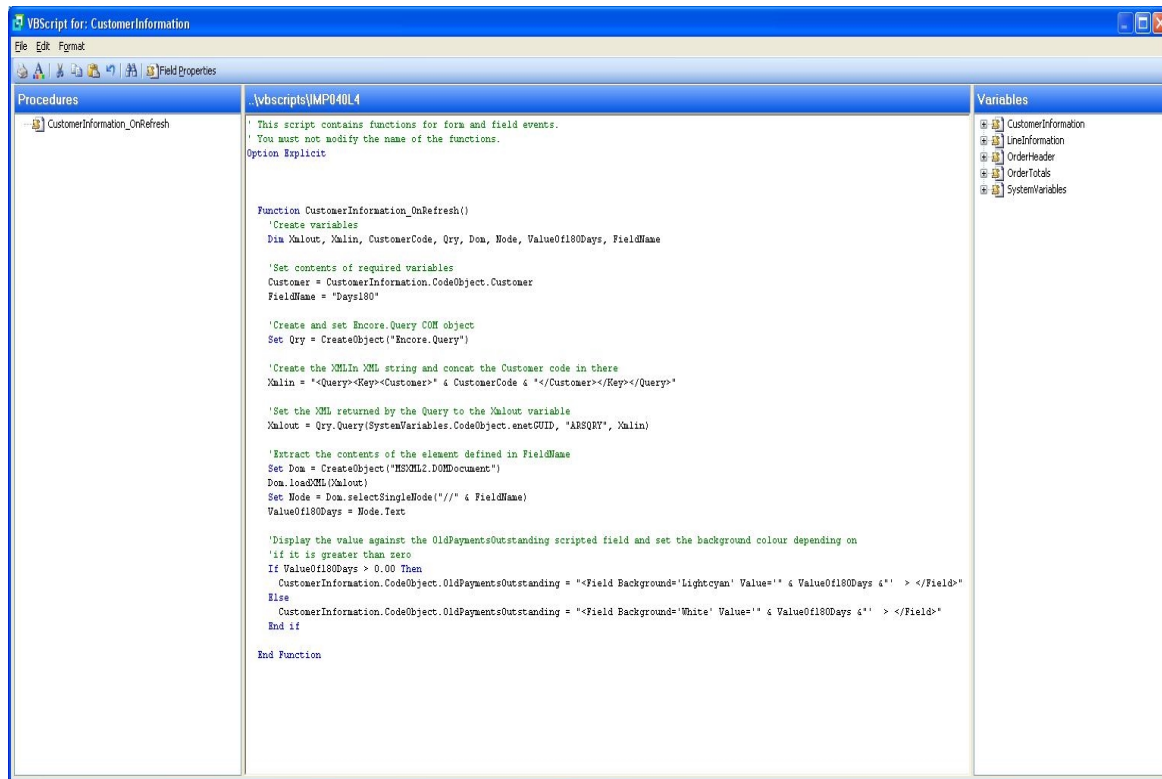
Figure 1. Sales order entry screen



A key aspect of the solution is the simplicity with which any user, with the appropriate system permissions, can use basic actions like drag-and-drop, to move fields from one position to another, or delete and restore, to make fields visible or invisible. Without any programming knowledge users can even create custom fields.

For the more technical user, the functionality of default fields can be extended with the aid of simple VB Scripting. With scripting abilities enabled within the desktop interface it is additionally possible to leverage the power of the SYSPRO e.net solutions business object architecture. This includes interfaces defined by data sources and systems outside of the SYSPRO environment.

**Figure 2. The Script Editor**



SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design capabilities transform the SYSPRO user interface into 'flexible screen real-estate', that can be optimized through centralized or distributed policies at various levels within the user hierarchy.

## SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design Capabilities

SYSPRO's decision to invest in Fluid Interface Design capabilities is derived from the reality of customer needs. Having performed many thousands of implementations, SYSPRO identified that there is a very real need to change the screen interface to better suit the business requirements. This thinking is closely aligned with SYSPRO's commitment to 'Service Oriented Architecture' which aims to provide a blue-print methodology that enables better alignment of IT with the current business environment requirements of a business.

SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design encapsulates the needs of customers while setting the stage for a new level of front-end 'Service Oriented' flexibility and agility in screen real-estate management.

Incorporating Fluid Interface Design capabilities into the SYSPRO desktop also increases the flexibility of the overall SYSPRO technology stack. SYSPRO customers now have the capability to align their business system with business at a greater number of touch-points than was previously possible.

While products such as SYSPRO e.net solutions give SYSPRO customers Service Oriented capabilities that are mostly focused on enterprise application and business process integration, SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design features give system administrators unprecedented customization and control abilities over virtually every aspect of the desktop user interface. Capabilities such as:

- Reconfiguring any module in the system through setup options.
- Protecting business processes and data with security rules.

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- Displaying information based on access rights according to operator, group or company level customization settings.
  - Displaying SYSPRO information according to user group, using queries and listviews with organizational rearrangement functionality.
  - Customizing key data views from within any Smart Link or Quick View, anywhere in SYSPRO.
  - Controlling deployment of customization changes.

All the administrative capabilities discussed so far, are easily implemented using common point-and-click, drag-and-drop workflows or keyboard strokes. Additional freedom to extend and enhance interfaces with new features or functionality is made possible using a simple scripting editor.

The degree of flexibility afforded to any user at the desktop level is completely controlled by the administrator. Most importantly, all changes are virtually instant, requiring no compilation or system downtime. Changes applied to an interface are automatically inherited on all desktop stations the next time a user performs a login to the system.

The degree to which a user can customize is therefore totally dependent on the options extended by the administrator. Below is a list of the typical actions available at desktop level.

- Position fields on the screen in any user preferred sequence, or to remove them if they are not required.
- Use pin-up windows to prominently display information for easy viewing.
- Create user-specific menu systems and workspaces.
- Navigate related information items or start SYSPRO programs using hyperlinks.

This list can be extended to include features and actions listed for the administrator who can, on a feature-by-feature or user-by-user case, decide to allow or disallow customization at the desktop level. In this way it is possible for successful customizations evolving within an organization to be developed at the user, department or company level on condition that the relevant permissions have been attributed to the user account from which the customization originated.

At the overall business level a number of SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design capabilities enable rapid adaptation of the system interfaces so that they may cater for emerging needs, without the need for expert consultation or programming. The ability to perform actions such as:

- Extending data capture by adding new fields.
- Adding custom form fields to a form, or another form field to display information that promotes informed decisions.
- Improving user support with reference information and useful instructions through customizable tool tips.

## **SYSPRO and SOBA**

SYSPRO's Fluid Interface capabilities serve to better align the user interface with the business needs of users. In so doing, the SYSPRO desktop extends SYSPRO's already robust support for 'Service Oriented Architecture' and positions the company as a leader in the emerging space of 'Service Oriented Business Applications' (SOBA). The benefit of SYSPRO's Fluid Interface starts with increased data entry speeds and a reduction in data capture errors, but extends capabilities to embrace methodologies enshrined in the ideas of 'Service Oriented Architecture' at the desktop level of the SYSPRO system.

SYSPRO's Fluid Interface, not only enables customization of the user interface around standard SYSPRO programs, but enables the inclusion of external non-SYSPRO programs using XML-based Web Services. Information from

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external systems that expose themselves as Web Services can therefore be seamlessly displayed alongside information from within the SYSPRO system and processed directly on the SYSPRO desktop. This not only eliminates the need to open separate programs for each data source, but presents companies with the ability to process information in a single place from external systems with information from the SYSPRO system.

From the perspective of a 'Service Oriented Business Application', SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design accelerates integration between external 'Service Oriented' systems at the desktop level, a capability that has long been possible in the SYSPRO backend. The result for SYSPRO customers is a fluid design process that enables businesses to create composite applications with the SYSPRO desktop. Using an incremental approach with rapid deployment, testing and highly iterative design cycles, SYSPRO's Fluid interface means the benefits of interface changes can be realized more immediately, in terms of days or weeks, as opposed to months or years. The benefits of this approach directly translate into a reduction in the risks and costs associated with desktop customization projects.

## Easy Upgrade Path

With most systems, one of the main concerns of any type of customization has always been that they will complicate future upgrades to core systems. Before a customer could perform an upgrade to a core system the impact of the upgrade on all customizations would need to be considered. This consideration was required in order to ensure that customizations would continue to work and that data integrity within the database was preserved after the upgrade.

To ensure customizations are not locked into a single version of the core system, SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design is designed to be version independent from the core system. This creates a level of abstraction which provides the indirection needed for customizations to work across versions. Customizations and composite applications written using a specific version of SYSPRO will continue to work on future version upgrades. This ability to detach product customizations from product versions is also featured in SYSPRO e.net solutions which has now been in the market long enough to have demonstrated that businesses enjoy the significant benefit of being able to upgrade core technologies without having to incur additional costs traditionally experienced.

## No Additional License Costs

Typically, businesses using the SYSPRO e.net solutions business object architecture are required to license the business objects they wish to run. In the case of SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design, a business is not required to purchase additional SYSPRO e.net solutions licenses in order to use e.net business objects in conjunction with SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design capabilities.

Even when not running SYSPRO e.net solutions in other areas of the system, SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design capabilities can access the full extent of business logic inherent to the SYSPRO system by way of the SYSPRO e.net solutions business object architecture.

## Conclusion

SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design is a unique advancement in graphical interface design capabilities, particularly in the enterprise business solutions space. SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design capabilities are so intuitive and easy to use that businesses running the SYSPRO system can organically evolve their system interfaces as new requirements or better methods of data capture are discovered in the course of daily work.

SYSPRO's Fluid Interface Design is a quantum leap forward, marking a major departure from the once inflexible graphical user interfaces of earlier software. With the power to model screen real-estate in a non-intrusive manner, SYSPRO administrators and users can rapidly prototype, test and deploy major or minor interface enhancements within a matter of hours or minutes. The overall benefit of such flexibility and agility will most certainly reflect in the ability of a business to continuously adapt the SYSPRO interface for closer alignment with the ever-changing business environment. Just one more way that SYSPRO is innovating to "Simplify Your Success."

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## About SYSPRO

SYSPRO, an internationally recognized, leading provider of enterprise business solutions, was an early adopter of the concepts and technologies required to enable and support business process management in SOA-enabled environments. Formed in 1978, SYSPRO was also one of the first software vendors to develop an enterprise resource planning solution. Today, SYSPRO is a global business solutions vendor with offices on six continents and over 1500 channel and support partners. Over 12,000 licensed companies across a broad spectrum of industries in more than 60 countries trust SYSPRO as the platform on which to manage their business processes.

By focusing on people and building lasting relationships with customers and partners, SYSPRO consistently excels at guiding customers through all aspects of their implementation. Tried, tested and reliable, SYSPRO has stood the test of time as a company and as a software solution.

Drawing on its heritage, SYSPRO's vision is focused on delivering customer needs today and in the future. The company's mission is to continually develop remarkable software that simplifies operational effectiveness and keeps customers in control of their businesses.

As a customer-centric company, SYSPRO aims to deliver world-class software that gives customers the control, insight and agility they need for competitive advantage in a global economy. Customer focus is a core component of the corporate culture and continues to be one of the key reasons why SYSPRO maintains a strong leadership position in the enterprise application market.