

Reviewed For You

CodeCharge Studio 1.0

By Arbi Arzoumani



Let me start by confessing to the fact that this was *not* an easy review. To fully appreciate this product, you must sit down and actually use it for a practical purpose. It's a great learning experience. In a nutshell, CodeCharge is a powerful code generating software for the web. Some of you might think "Oh no, another code generator—run for the hills!". However, I would like to put CodeCharge in its own category, rather than just call it a code generator. To fully explore this application, I would have to include at least 30 screen shots of its intuitive interface to configure, manage, modify, and publish your project. I suggest that, once you read this review, go to their website and download the trial copy and start using it.

Let's start by covering the basic grounds. The installation was straightforward. If you don't have a license, you can use the program for 30 days. It supports code generation for the following programming languages: ASP.NET (C#), ASP 3.0, PHP 4.0, Java Servlets 2.2, JSP 1.1, ColdFusion 4.01, and Perl 5. How? It uses an XSL engine using XML file formats. If you think this is another Visual Studio, think again—this baby can generate code and let you manage it with ease.

CodeCharge comes with a list of code generating wizards called 'Component Builders'. Some of the 'Component Builders' are:

Grid Builder - Lets you quickly create database

The Cost:

CodeCharge: \$149
CodeCharge Studio: \$279.95



Requirements:

Windows '95/'98/ME/NT4/2000/XP
64MB RAM
20MB Hard Drive Space
File Size 16.7MB

Download Page:

CodeCharge

Download limitations:

The CodeCharge download is a fully functioning 30-day trial

CodeCharge Home Page:

CodeCharge

Company Background:

YesSoftware Inc. develops and markets RAD (Rapid Application Development) tools. They are based in Delaware and are a self-funded and privately held company. They begin developing the code generation technology in 1999. It was completed in 2001.

grids on your pages. This is great for those back end management tools.

Record Builder - Rapidly create data maintenance forms. This is handy for both front-end and back-end pages (ie. registrations forms).

Login Builder - What's a back-end without a proper security login page. Or, have your users login to their accounts.

On top of these code generating wizards, sits the Application Template Library, a set of built-in templates for common web solutions that can be configured and launched in no time. The version of CodeCharge that I had came with the following solutions: Employee Directory, Bug Tracking, Task Manager, Portal, Registration Form, Forum, and a Book Store.

Naturally when creating a project, you are asked if you want one of the above solutions or a blank project. A blank project is not actually 'blank'—there are at least 6 common files that are always included in the source of every page. These common files can be regarded as the framework behind the IDE.

For those of you using MS FrontPage, here's the good news. You can get an add-in and convert your MS FrontPage into a powerful code-generating monster. Take a look at Figure 1 for the added CodeCharge tool-bars.

CodeCharge comes with a complete IDE interface. Before publishing any of the pages generated with the Application Builder, the developer can modify anything from the HTML to the code. There are 5 different views of a certain page:

Design - A WYSIWYG editor for manipulating your page. You can drag and drop different components right into your page. For example, an input box, or a

submit button.

HTML - Here you can edit the HTML directly. Since the HTML code is kept separate from the actual server side code, it's easier to modify any visual elements of a page.

Code - As expected, this is a fully syntax highlighted editor. It is less colorful compared to the built-in PHP show_source() function, but it does the job.

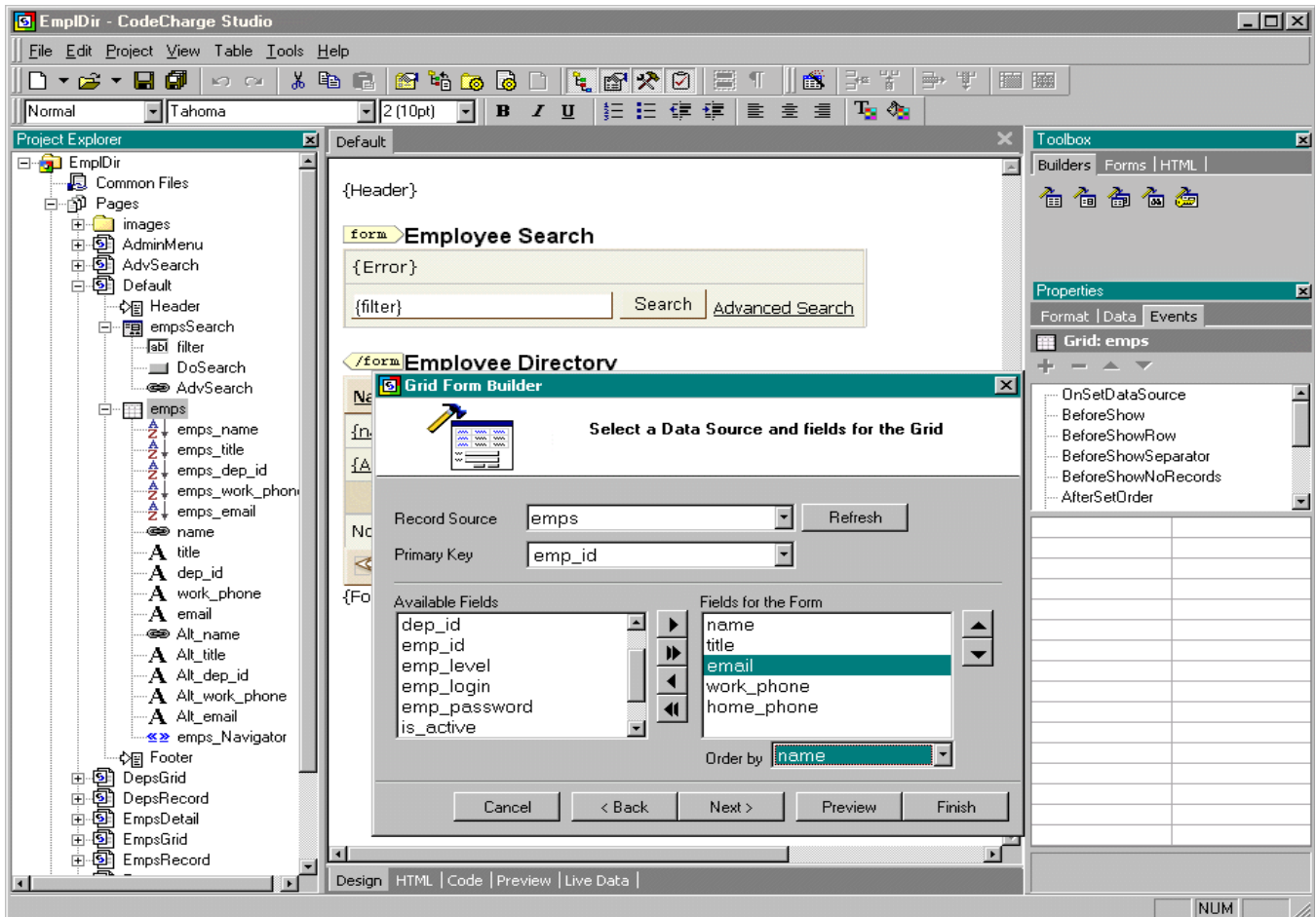
Preview - This mode will display the HTML code without any special tags (seen in the design mode).

Live Page - By providing the URL to the live site, the page is displayed live from the server.

It's possible to define multiple database connections in the same project. This can be useful to pull data from different sources—for example, user data stored in a MySQL server, and product catalogue data stored in a different location on Oracle. The code generator includes support for the following database libraries: JET, ODBC, JDBC, ADO, DBI, and PHPLib.

The database connection properties was a little confusing to setup. I had some trouble setting up a connection string to a MySQL server. (the product kept on asking me for a ODBC driver).

One of great features of CodeCharge lies in its flexibility: the user can modify any generated code prior to publication. All modifications are locked and are not



overwritten during any subsequent code generation.

Some of you are probably wondering how good is this generated code actually is. Lets not forget that it comes from templates written by other developers—other than the common files discussed earlier, the rest of the code is fairly well commented. It can be easily understood and modified by an intermediate developer—as long as that person understands the language that the code was generated in. The code language can be changed at anytime during the development process. Here's a tip for all of you generating PHP code: Make sure you define your session.save_path in your php.ini file prior to previewing your code on the live server. The PHP code uses session_start() in its common files. Another thing I noticed is that any modifications made to the common files will be overwritten—I guess you can't change the framework.

What CodeCharge does not provide is a debugging tool. However, the folks at YesSoftware have come up with some nifty XSL templates to generate code. In the near future, users will be able to generate their own templates, themes, components and even wizards using an SDK that is currently in the works.

Also, version 2.0 of CodeCharge will be released

shortly, and some of the new features being planned include:

- Integration with source control and versioning systems
- VB.NET support
- NT and LDAP authentication
- Generation of site diagrams and test scripts
- Additional components and builders
- Enterprise CRM, CMS and team collaboration solutions built with CodeCharge Studio

Conclusion

As I suggested before, anyone interested in this application should download the trial version and check it out—there are a lot of other features that I did not have time to cover in this review. From what I heard version 2.0 is going to be a big upgrade. For its price tag this code generation application is well worth it. One great application that I can see this being used for is creating prototypes of web applications in very short periods of time. In other words, last minute proposals.

php|a

Figure 1

