

Report Builder Limitations and CFR files

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We are all aware that the report builder application is a template generation tool. It's quite useful with a number of nifty features. One of the cool things about it is that you can define a report template using *dummy data* that can be replaced at run time. This allows you to run and test the display attributes and charts of your report using something simple like CFQUERYNEW() which you then replace with the actual query by passing it into the CFREPORT tag.

What I was hoping for however, was a template that produced a file format that we could unpack and examine. Our goal would not be to become report writers for our clients (isn't that really a content editors job?). Our goal is to produce tools where they can mine and access the data themselves. I would love to be able to allow a web based user to generate their own reports from a wizard. Indeed we have a system very much like this for Ms SQL that makes use of the various stored procs for data type introspection and allows a user to build 1 or more queries to use in a report.

The biggest flaw in our system is the rather limited template system we have. I was hoping to be able to replace "front-end" template with an auto-generated CFR file. However, Macromedia in a disappointing move, has chosen to encrypt the CFR files. effectively making them useless except as a limited time-saver for developers faced with handling report content. I suppose a DBA or Access programmer could pretty easily get up to speed on the report builder. But as far as I can see there is no way to make use of this file format programmatically.