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Pro Visual Studio LightSwitch 2011 Development

*CREATE BUSINESS APPLICATIONS EASILY,
QUICKLY, AND EFFECTIVELY*

Tim Leung and Yann Duran

Apress®

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Contents at a Glance

■ About the Authors	xxi
■ About the Technical Reviewers	xxii
■ Acknowledgments	xxiii
■ Foreword	xxiv
■ Introduction	xxv
■ Part 1: Introducing Office 365 to LightSwitch Concepts.....	1
■ Chapter 1: Forms Over Data and Beyond	3
■ Chapter 2: Working in Visual Studio	23
■ Part 2: Working With Data	51
■ Chapter 3: Working with Data.....	53
■ Chapter 4: Accessing Data from Code	89
■ Chapter 5: Validating Data	123
■ Chapter 6: Querying Data.....	147
■ Part 3: Interacting With Data	197
■ Chapter 7: Creating and Using RIA Services	199
■ Chapter 8: Creating and Using Screens	225
■ Chapter 9: Creating and Using Custom Controls.....	337
■ Chapter 10: Creating and Using Extensions.....	365
■ Part 4: Getting Data Out.....	473
■ Chapter 11: Creating and Displaying Reports.....	475

■ Chapter 12: Creating and Sending Emails	525
■ Part 5: Securing Your Application	549
■ Chapter 13: Authenticating Your Users	551
■ Chapter 14: Authorization.....	565
■ Chapter 15: Auditing What Your Users Do	595
■ Part 6: Deployment	613
■ Chapter 16: Deploying Your Application	615
■ Chapter 17: When Things Don't Go Quite Right.....	663
■ Appendix A: Culture Names	679
■ Appendix B: LINQ Query Operators	687
■ Index	689

Contents

■ About the Authors	xxi
■ About the Technical Reviewers	xxii
■ Acknowledgments	xxiii
■ Foreword	xxiv
■ Introduction	xxv
■ Part 1: Introducing Office 365 to LightSwitch Concepts.....	1
■ Chapter 1: Forms Over Data and Beyond	3
Who Is LightSwitch For?	3
The 10,000-Foot View.....	4
Model-Centric Architecture	6
The Data Tier	7
The Logic Tier	8
The Presentation Tier	11
Model-View-ViewModel (MVVM).....	16
MVVM Applied to LightSwitch.....	17
The LightSwitch Application Lifecycle	19
Summary	21
■ Chapter 2: Working in Visual Studio	23
Switching to File View	23
Root Folder Contents	25
_pvt_extensions Folder	25

Silverlight.js.....	25
Default.htm	25
ServiceConfiguration.cscfg.....	25
ServiceDefinition.csdef.....	26
GeneratedArtifacts Folder.....	28
ApplicationDefinition.Isml File	28
Creating Nested Navigation Groups.....	30
Server Project	32
ServerGenerated Project.....	33
Client Project	34
ClientGenerated Project	35
Common Project	36
SQL Server	36
Where Is the Intrinsic Database?.....	36
Why Do I Need SQL Express?	36
What Is a SQL Server User Instance?	37
Attaching the SQL Server Intrinsic Database by Using Server Explorer	37
Profiling the Intrinsic Database by Using SQL Server Profiler	40
Debugging LightSwitch Code.....	42
Debugging Concepts	42
Attaching to the Debugger.....	45
Debugging Queries	46
Debugging Threading Issues	47
Compacting LS Solutions for Backup	48
Summary	49

■ Part 2: Working With Data	51
■ Chapter 3: Working with Data	53
Understanding Entities and Properties	53
Attaching to Existing Data	53
Attaching to an Existing Database	54
Attaching to SharePoint Data	58
Attaching to WCF RIA Services Data	58
Deleting a Data Source	59
Creating a Table in the Intrinsic Database	59
Modifying Table Properties	59
Moving Intrinsic Tables to an External Data Source	60
Working with LightSwitch Data Types	60
Changing Data Types	69
Choosing Field Names	69
Ensuring Unique Values	69
Creating Choice Lists	70
Choice List vs. Related Tables	71
Setting Relationships	72
Using Computed Properties	78
Formatting Data with Computed Properties	81
Arithmetic Calculations Using Computed Properties	82
Date Calculations Using Computed Properties	83
Rounding and Truncating Numbers	84
Returning Images with Computed Properties	86
Sorting and Filtering on Computed Properties	86
Summary	88

■ Chapter 4: Accessing Data from Code	89
Introducing Data Access	89
Using LightSwitch Data Access Objects	90
Application Object.....	90
Data Workspace	93
Data Source Object.....	93
Entity Sets	94
Entities.....	95
Properties and Nullable Data Types	96
Working with Screen Data	98
Setting Text Box Values	99
Accessing Grid and List Values.....	99
Setting AutoCompleteBox Values	101
Working with Change Sets	102
Discarding Changes.....	103
Getting Items That Have Changed	104
Retrieving Original Values	105
Working with the Save Pipeline.....	105
Calling Server-Side Code from the Client.....	109
Using the <i>EntityFunctions</i> Class	109
Managing Transactions in LightSwitch.....	110
Understanding Transactions.....	110
Understanding ACID Principles	110
Reading Data in LightSwitch	111
Implementing Transactions in .NET	111
Implementing Transactions in the Save Pipeline	111
Creating an Ambient Transaction	112
Rolling Back Transactions—A Demonstration	114

Understanding Concurrency	116
Displaying a Data Conflict Screen	116
Handling Conflicts in Code.....	118
Working with User Data	121
Summary	121
■ Chapter 5: Validating Data	123
Where Is Validation Performed?	123
Predefined Validation.....	124
Data Length Validation	126
Range Validation.....	126
Required Field Validation.....	126
Custom Validation.....	126
How to Write Client/Server/Common Validation Code	126
Creating Validation Rules and Warnings	127
The Validation Engine	129
Properties Tracked by the Dependency Engine.....	129
Silverlight Implementation	130
Accessing Validation Results in Code	130
Custom Validation Examples	131
Required Validation Based on Other Conditions	132
Enforcing Uniqueness and Preventing Duplicates.....	132
Compare Validation	134
Regular Expression Validation	135
Validating File Sizes.....	136
Checking Against Child Collections	137
Performing Screen Validation	139
Validating Deletions	140

Validating Deletions on the Server	141
Database Validation	144
Summary	145
■ Chapter 6: Querying Data	147
Understanding Query Features	147
The Data Returned from a Query	148
Default Queries Created by LightSwitch	149
Screen Queries	150
Entity Set Queries	151
Filtering and Sorting Data by Using the Designer	154
Filtering Query Data	154
Comparing Values	157
Sorting Query Data	163
Using LINQ	164
Why LINQ?	164
LINQ Syntax	164
Lambda Expressions	168
Where Is the Query Executed?	173
Query Pipeline	174
Executing Queries on the Client	176
Executing Queries on the Server	180
Exploring Query Examples	181
Filtering by Related Child Items	182
Creating Exists/In Queries	183
Creating Not Exists/Not In Queries	184
Filtering by Date Elements	185
Top <i>N</i> Records	186

Using Advanced Sorting Techniques	188
Sorting the Data Shown in Grids	188
Sorting by Related Parent Records.....	190
Sorting by Related Child Records	190
Creating User-Defined Global Values.....	191
Editing the LSML.....	192
Creating the Class	192
Summary	194
■ Part 3: Interacting With Data	197
■ Chapter 7: Creating and Using RIA Services	199
Why Would I Need a RIA Service?.....	199
To Aggregate Data.....	199
To Simulate a SQL View.....	199
To Attach to an External Data Source.....	200
Creating a RIA Service	201
Step 1: Add a Class Library to the Solution	201
Step 2: Add Some References.....	201
Step 3: Add a Domain Service Class.....	201
Step 4: Connect to the Data.....	203
Writing the RIA Service Code	204
Creating a RIA Service to Aggregate Data	205
Creating a RIA Service to Update Data	211
Using a RIA Service.....	220
Summary	223
■ Chapter 8: Creating and Using Screens	225
Designing Screens.....	226
Adding a Screen	226

Common Screen Elements	227
Choosing a Screen Template Type	230
Understanding the Screen Designer	235
Designing Screens at Runtime	265
User Interface Settings	266
Screen Navigation	268
Writing Screen Code	270
Working with Screen Events.....	270
Displaying Messages.....	273
Setting the Screen Title in Code	276
Changing the Save Behavior of New Data Screens	277
Opening Screens from Code.....	278
Passing Argument Values into Screens.....	278
Setting Control Values in Code	279
Finding Controls Using <i>FindControl</i>	280
Reference the Underlying Silverlight Control.....	283
Reacting to Data Changes Using Property Changed	286
Working with Built-In Data Controls	292
Introducing the Modal Window Control	292
Creating a Modal Window Helper Class.....	294
Using the <i>AutoCompleteBox</i> Control.....	305
Custom Screens and Scenarios.....	309
Adding a Home Page	309
Creating a Custom Search Screen.....	316
Designing an Add/Edit Screen	318
Many-to-Many Screen	320
Creating a Multiselect Data Grid.....	324
Working with Files	327

How to Upload a File.....	328
How to Download a File.....	330
Opening Files in Their Application	331
Summary	334
■ Chapter 9: Creating and Using Custom Controls.....	337
Using Custom Controls vs. Control Extensions	337
Directly Using Silverlight Controls	337
The <i>PasswordBox</i> Control.....	338
The <i>ComboBox</i> Control	343
The <i>HyperLinkButton</i> Control.....	344
Creating a Custom Silverlight Class.....	348
Creating a New Class and Control	349
Data Binding in XAML	349
Consuming the Control	349
Understanding Dependency Properties	350
Binding Dependency Properties to the Data Context.....	355
Using Dependency Properties to Call Methods.....	356
Calling Screen Code from a Custom Control.....	359
Summary	362
■ Chapter 10: Creating and Using Extensions.....	365
Understanding the Need for Extensions	365
Enhanced Look and Feel	366
Advanced Data Entry	366
External Data Access.....	367
Finding Extensions.....	367
Visual Studio Gallery.....	367
Visual Studio Extension Manager	368

LightSwitch Community Extensions	372
Third-Party Vendors.....	374
Installing Extensions.....	376
Creating Extensions	377
What You'll Need	378
Installing the Extensibility Toolkit.....	379
Creating the Extension Library Project	380
The <i>Client</i> Project	382
The <i>Client.Design</i> Project	383
The <i>Common</i> Project	384
The <i>Design</i> Project.....	386
The <i>Server</i> Project	387
The <i>Lspkg</i> Project.....	387
The <i>VSIX</i> Project	388
Understanding Extensions	396
Understanding Theme Extensions	396
Creating a Theme Extension.....	397
Using Theme Extension Attributes.....	398
Using Theme Extension Interfaces	399
Theme Extension Implementation	400
Activating LightSwitch's "Hidden" Theme	417
Renaming a Theme.....	419
Microsoft's Theme Extension Sample	420
Understanding Shell Extensions	420
Creating a Shell Extension.....	420
Using Shell Extension Attributes.....	421
Using the Shell Extension Interface	422
Shell Extension Implementation	422

Microsoft's Shell Extension Sample	427
Understanding Screen Template Extensions	427
Creating a Screen Template Extension.....	427
Using Screen Template Extension Attributes	428
Using Screen Template Interfaces.....	429
Screen Template Extension Implementation.....	431
Microsoft's Screen Template Sample.....	439
Understanding Control Extensions.....	439
Creating a Control Extension	440
Using Control Extension Attributes	441
Using Control Extension Interfaces.....	443
Control Extension Implementation.....	443
Control Extension Element Mapping.....	451
Microsoft's Control Extension Samples	452
Understanding Business Type Extensions	452
Creating a Business Type Extension.....	454
Using Business Type Extension Attributes	455
Using Business Type Extension Interfaces	456
Business Type Extension Implementation	457
Understanding Data Source Extensions.....	465
Creating a Data Source Extension	466
Data Source Extension Implementation.....	467
Debugging Extensions	468
Distributing Extensions.....	468
Sharing the Setup File	469
Publishing to the Visual Studio Gallery	470
Summary	470

■ Part 4: Getting Data Out	473
■ Chapter 11: Creating and Displaying Reports	475
Using ASP.NET to Create Reports	475
Creating an ASP.NET Project	476
Creating a New Page	477
Creating Charts.....	481
Securing Reports	483
Using Microsoft Reporting Services.....	485
Installing Reporting Services	486
Creating Reports.....	486
Linking Reports to LightSwitch.....	492
Opening Reports in a New Browser Window.....	492
Displaying Reports Inside a LightSwitch Screen	500
Creating Reports with Microsoft Word.....	504
Performing Simple Automation	504
Performing Mail Merges with Word.....	510
Creating Adobe PDF Documents.....	519
Using Other Third-Party Solutions	523
DevExpress XtraReports	523
Infragistics NetAdvantage	524
Summary	524
■ Chapter 12: Creating and Sending Emails	525
Sending Email by Using Server-Side Code	525
Sending Email When Data Changes	527
Writing an Email Helper Class	528
Setting SMTP <i>MailMessage</i> Object Properties	532
Triggering Server Email from an Onscreen Button on the Client.....	532

Including Email Attachments	535
Creating Mail in a Pickup Folder	539
Sending Mail via Outlook by Using COM Automation	539
Creating <i>mailto</i> Hyperlinks	544
Using <i>mailto</i> in a Screen Button	544
Summary	546
■ Part 5: Securing Your Application	549
■ Chapter 13: Authenticating Your Users	551
Choosing an Authentication Method	551
Using No Authentication	553
Using Windows Authentication—Allow Any Authenticated Windows User	553
Using Windows Authentication—Allow Specified Users	555
Using Forms Authentication	556
Membership Provider Settings	557
Changing Password-Complexity Rules	558
Changing Password-Encryption Settings	560
Sharing Forms Authentication Data with ASP.NET	560
Summary	563
■ Chapter 14: Authorization	565
Understanding Authorization	565
Setting Permissions	565
Defining Permissions	566
Setting the Security Administration Permission	568
Debugging Permissions	568
Setting Entity Set (Table) Permissions	568
Setting Screen Permissions	574

Setting Query Permissions	577
Specifying the Application Administrator	578
Creating Roles	578
Adding Users.....	579
Filtering Data Based on User	580
Helper Methods	581
The Table	583
The Query	584
Creating a Log Out Option.....	587
Adding an ASPX Page	587
Including the ASPX Page in the Project's Build Output.....	588
Exposing the <i>LogOut</i> Functionality	589
Summary	594
■ Chapter 15: Auditing What Your Users Do	595
Basic Table Properties.....	597
The General Approach	603
General Approach Pros	603
General Approach Cons	603
The General Changes Table	603
The General Changes Code.....	604
The Specific Approach.....	607
Specific Approach Pros	607
Specific Approach Cons.....	607
The Specific Changes Table	608
The Specific Changes Code	609
Summary	611

■ Part 6: Deployment	613
■ Chapter 16: Deploying Your Application	615
Deployment Fundamentals	617
Application Topologies	619
Publishing vs. Packaging.....	621
Client Requirements	621
Setting Up Your Web Server	621
Setting Up IIS7	622
Setting Up IIS6.....	624
Setting Up IIS Application Pools	626
Configuring SQL Server Windows Authentication.....	627
Configuring Secure Sockets Layer	629
ASP.NET Configuration	630
LightSwitch Prerequisites.....	630
Deployment Wizard.....	634
Database Connections Page.....	636
Database Configuration Page	637
Prerequisites Page.....	638
Authentication Page	639
Certificate Page	640
Installing the Packages.....	642
Two-Tier Desktop Installation.....	642
Three-Tier Desktop.....	645
Three-Tier Browser Application.....	648
Three-Tier Manual Deployment	648
Deploying ASP.Net Web Site.....	648
SQL Server Connection String	649
IIS7 ZIP File Deployment.....	649

Deploying Data.....	650
Updating an Application.....	650
Deploying to Azure.....	650
Setting Up Azure in the Web Portal	651
Publishing Steps.....	655
Summary	660
■ Chapter 17: When Things Don't Go Quite Right.....	663
Troubleshooting Installations.....	663
Troubleshooting the SQL Server	664
Failed to Generate a User Instance of SQL Server.....	664
SQL Express Instances That Are Not Named SQLEXPRESS	665
Errors Relating to Non-English Versions of SQL Express at Design Time.....	666
Errors Relating to User Instances	666
SQL Server Log File	666
Tracing LightSwitch Applications	667
Creating Trace Messages	667
Viewing Trace Messages at Debug Time.....	668
Tracing a Deployed Application	669
Fiddler	671
SQL Server Connection Problems	673
Resolving SQL Server Connection Issues	673
ASP.NET Settings (Three-Tier Setup).....	675
Troubleshooting Publishing	676
Summary	676
■ Appendix A: Culture Names	679
■ Appendix B: LINQ Query Operators	687
■ Index	689

About the Authors



■ **Tim Leung** is a professional software developer based in England. For the past 12 years, he has specialized in enterprise application development using products from the Microsoft technology stack. In particular, he possesses deep knowledge of the Microsoft .NET Framework and SQL Server. He is an active member of the UK developer community and often delivers presentations on technical topics. He is also a chartered member of the British Computer Society. Tim is passionate about the concept of rapid application development and was awarded the Microsoft Community Contributor Award in 2011 for contributions to the LightSwitch community.



■ **Yann Duran** is a self-employed, self-taught software developer, based in Australia, who has been involved in writing software, in one form or another, for over 25 years. He started with hand-assembling Z80 assembly code on his Tandy Model 16 computer (dual 8-inch disk drives, 64KB RAM) in the early 80s, and then taught himself a raft of software technologies in the following years. These included Turbo Pascal, MS Access (VBA), SQL Server (T-SQL), VB.NET, WinForms, Entity Framework (EF), Windows Presentation Foundation (WPF), and finally LightSwitch. Yann has been passionate about programming since he was in high school, in the days before the PC arrived, when “computers” were actually programmable calculators with punch cards and magnetic strips, and huge mainframes. He has also worked in computer sales, delivering software seminars and IT support, but programming has always remained his passion. Yann has been active in the

LightSwitch community since Beta 1, and was awarded the Microsoft Community Contributor Award in 2011 for his contributions to that community.

About the Technical Reviewers

■ **John Rivard** is a software design engineer for Microsoft Visual Studio. Over his career, he has worked on a variety of developer tools including Visual FoxPro, Visual Basic .NET, the .NET Framework, and Silverlight. John is the architect for Visual Studio LightSwitch, a model-based development tool for creating business applications quickly and easily for the desktop and the cloud. John started at Microsoft Corporation in 1991 and is a graduate of the University of Washington in computer engineering.

■ **Jeff Sanders** is a published author, technical editor, and accomplished technologist. He is currently a group manager/senior architect at Avanade.

Jeff has years of professional experience in the field of IT and strategic business consulting, leading both sales and delivery efforts. He regularly contributes to certification and product roadmap development with Microsoft, and speaks publicly on Microsoft enterprise technologies. With his roots in software development, Jeff's areas of expertise include collaboration and content management solutions, operational intelligence, digital marketing, distributed component-based application architectures, object-oriented analysis and design, and enterprise integration patterns and designs.

Jeff is also the CTO of DynamicShift, a client-focused organization specializing in Microsoft technologies, specifically Office365/BPOS, SharePoint Server, StreamInsight, Windows Azure, AppFabric, Business Activity Monitoring, BizTalk Server, and .NET. He is a Microsoft Certified Trainer and leads DynamicShift in both training and consulting efforts.

He enjoys non-work-related travel, spending time with his wife and daughter, and wishes he had more time for both. He may be reached at jeff.sanders@dynamicshift.com.

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Writing a book is an enormous task. It can easily take over your whole life and suck up every waking minute of your time. It really ought to come with a health warning! Putting this book together wouldn't have been possible without the help of many people, to whom we are very grateful.

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Finally, we'd like to thank friends and family for all their patience and for putting up with us during the project.

Foreword

All businesses use software to automate their business functions. At their heart, such applications are about gathering, storing, and processing data, and so could perform tasks that we typically consider under the rubric of *business applications*—for example, tracking finances or assets (as in ERP software). But it also includes the process of software development, systems management, or anything else involving data. There is a lot of this business software out there, a lot more being written, and even more that people wish they had the time, budget, and skill to write.

Building such software involves two concerns: the business problem to be solved (the domain) and the technology into which a solution is rendered. First you have to have one person who understands both the domain and the technology necessary to render it into software, or you have to have a team with a mix of skills. That's enough to kill many small projects.

Assuming you can get the right people together, the technologist then spends a great deal of time on issues that have nothing to do with the business problem being solved, including UI, protocols, business logic mechanisms, security, integration with Microsoft Office, and much, much more. One needs a good deal of skill, time, inclination, and budget to get a project accomplished.

To help people write business applications faster, we wrote Microsoft Visual Studio LightSwitch, the simplest way for developers of all skill levels to develop business applications for the desktop and cloud. Using LightSwitch, the core technical problems are solved, and a lot of projects—which without LightSwitch would have never seen the light of day—are now in production.

Pro Visual Studio LightSwitch 2011 Development provides a conceptual and practical introduction to many core LightSwitch building blocks, including importing and defining data schema, designing queries and screens, validating data, authenticating and authorizing application users, and deploying the final product.

However, the challenge with rapid application development environments is that they're great at solving the problems they anticipated, but what if you need to do more? Happily, LightSwitch was designed without the glass ceiling that constrains the tools of the 4GL generation, so the full power of Visual Studio is available to you if you want it—the limit is your imagination.

Tim and Yann have a lot of imagination, and they have explored many ways to supplement LightSwitch in this book. They offer solutions for a number of problems that LightSwitch does not address but that you may encounter as you write your applications. There's a cookbook. Some recipes won't have ingredients you like, some you'll season to fit your taste, some will open possibilities you hadn't even considered, and some you'll use as is. A sampling includes sending email, creating reports, and implementing auditing.

They share a passion with the LightSwitch team and with their readers: to build great business applications, fast. Together we can make businesses more successful through software.

Steve Anonsen, Distinguished Engineer, Microsoft Visual Studio
John Rivard, Partner Software Design Engineer, Microsoft Visual Studio

Introduction

We've designed this book to show you how to write professional applications using Microsoft LightSwitch.

As software developers, we understand how difficult it is to develop software in real life. End users expect their applications to be reliable, functional, and polished. They'll also have preferences in terms of how they want their application to look and feel.

To help you meet these real-life expectations, we've focused this book on many of the typical scenarios that customers or clients will ask of you. For example, we'll show you how to perform various tasks that are not natively supported. These include creating reports, sending email, and working with data in nonstandard ways.

To make life easy for you, LightSwitch hides away much of what it does. This is great when you're a beginner. But if you need to create some advanced applications or if you just happen to be curious, this can soon become a hindrance. To help you as much as possible, we've tried to focus on the following:

- Describing what LightSwitch does beneath the surface
- Showing you where and how to write code in LightSwitch

If you come from the following background, you'll be sure to get the most out of this book:

- You have some programming experience, either with .NET or some other programming language environment.
- You have a basic understanding of database concepts such as tables, columns, and data types.
- You've installed LightSwitch and have spent some time familiarizing yourself with the development environment.

However, don't worry if you don't meet the exact profile that we've just described. We'll now guide you through a few of the basics to get you started.

Understanding the Basics

Although we've targeted this book at those with some development experience, don't worry if you're only just starting out. The book explains everything that you need to know.

But if you want to ground yourself a bit more in the basics, we recommend that you visit the LightSwitch Developer Center at the following URL:

<http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/lightswitch/ff796201>

Through the developer center, you'll find the latest news on LightSwitch as well as links to the MSDN help and forums. You'll also find links to a series of *how to* videos that we highly recommend. The star behind these videos is Beth Massi, and she has kindly spoken to us about her role as the LightSwitch community manager.

A Word from the LightSwitch Community Manager

My name is Beth Massi and I'm currently the community manager for the Visual Studio LightSwitch Team at Microsoft. My professional programming career started in the 1990s using Clipper and FoxPro to build information systems for the health-care industry. I remember back then, just out of college, how these rapid application development (RAD) languages and tools made it so much easier to build database applications for businesses, especially over the alternatives at the time. I also remember how helpful the community was for newbies like me. There was always a feeling of "no question is a stupid question" on the forums, and almost everyone was excited and welcoming to me. Because of my passion for these RAD tools and the closeness of that community, I built many valuable relationships that took my career to the next level. I started to give back by writing and building free application frameworks and then eventually speaking at user groups and conferences. As the years flew by, I moved to VB.NET and Visual Studio and brought the same passion for the developer community with me, which helped me get my first Solutions Architect MVP award in 2005.

After being an MVP for a few years, Microsoft approached me to help them with the Visual Basic developer community. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to be a part of the community as an official Microsoft employee. I produced hundreds of articles and videos and delivered presentations all over the world. I've met many types of developers doing many interesting things and have helped people troubleshoot many interesting problems. Microsoft has given me the ability to reach the entire world, and I will always appreciate that. Even before the first beta of Visual Studio LightSwitch was available, internally I was begging to be part of the LightSwitch team. I wanted to use the successes I had with the Visual Basic community to help kick-start a new community on one of the most RAD development environments I had seen come from Microsoft in a very long time—especially one that focused on building business applications. I felt the nostalgia of the old dBase community I started from and wanted to foster a similar vibe. So when the first beta for Visual Studio LightSwitch was released at the end of 2010, I had the opportunity to become the community manager for the team and I jumped on it.

First order of business was to create a slew of training content and erect a web site on MSDN called the LightSwitch Developer Center (<http://msdn.com/LightSwitch>). This is your one-stop-shop for videos, articles, samples, starter kits, and much more to get you productive quickly. The site continues to grow as we build more content every week. If you are new to LightSwitch, I encourage you to visit the learning center Getting Started section (<http://bit.ly/LearnLightSwitch>) as well as the How Do I videos (<http://bit.ly/LightSwitchVideos>). From the LightSwitch Developer Center, you can easily get to our forums (<http://bit.ly/LightSwitchForums>), where we have an active community helping answer questions with LightSwitch team members. You can also see the latest blogs on the home page from our LightSwitch bloggers, including the LightSwitch Team (<http://blogs.msdn.com/LightSwitch>) and myself (www.BethMassi.com). Finally, I encourage you to join the conversation on Twitter (@VSLightSwitch) as well as our Facebook page (facebook.com/VSLightSwitch) and let us know what you think!

I am confident that the LightSwitch community will continue to grow and that I will see newbies become MVPs just as I did so many years ago. I couldn't be happier to help nurture the community in the goodness that is Visual Studio LightSwitch. Enjoy!

Where to Download LightSwitch

To get started, you'll need to download and install LightSwitch. You can download a free 90-day trial by following the link at the developer center. On the download page, you'll have a choice of downloading a web installer (3.7MB) or the full LightSwitch CD in ISO format (577MB). The web installer detects the components that are installed on your machine and installs only the additional components that are needed.

The full ISO download is ideal if you want to install LightSwitch on multiple machines, or if you suspect that you'll need to reinstall LightSwitch at some point in the future.

If Visual Studio 2010 is already installed on your computer, LightSwitch integrates itself into your existing Visual Studio 2010 installation. If not, LightSwitch installs itself as a stand-alone product.

When you're ready to purchase LightSwitch, you can do so by clicking Help → Register Visual Studio 2011 from within LightSwitch. This opens a dialog box displaying a button that takes you to the Microsoft Store, enabling you to purchase LightSwitch. You'll receive a product key at the end of the process.



You can then convert your trial version into the full version by entering your product key.

System Requirements

To create applications by using LightSwitch, your development computer needs to meet the following specifications.

The operating system requirements are as follows:

- Windows 7 (x86 and x64)
- Windows Vista (x86 and x64) with Service Pack 2—all editions except Starter Edition
- Windows XP (x86) with Service Pack 3—all editions except Starter Edition
- Windows Server 2008 R2 (x64)—all editions
- Windows Server 2008 (x86 and x64) with Service Pack 2—all editions
- Windows Server 2003 R2 (x86 and x64)—all editions
- Windows Server 2003 (x86 and x64) with Service Pack 2 (Users will need to install MSXML 6, if it is not already present.)

The hardware requirements are as follows:

- Computer with a 1.6GHz or faster processor
- 1024MB RAM (1.5GB if running in a virtual machine)
- 3GB of available hard-disk space
- 5400RPM hard drive
- DirectX 9–capable video card running at 1024×768 or higher-resolution display

How This Book Is Structured

The book is divided into six main parts:

- Part 1: LightSwitch Concepts
- Part 2: Working with Data
- Part 3: Interacting with Data
- Part 4: Getting Data Out
- Part 5: Securing Your Application
- Part 6: Deployment

In the first part, we describe the architecture behind LightSwitch and explain the parts that make up a LightSwitch application.

Part 2 focuses on data. We show you how to design tables, write queries, access data via code, and how to validate your data.

Part 3 shows you how to use RIA Services to perform more-sophisticated tasks using data. It also introduces the screen designer and explains that you're not just limited to the controls that LightSwitch provides. The custom controls chapter shows you how to go beyond the controls that are natively provided. We also show you how to reuse code by creating extensions.

In part 4, we show you how to create reports and how to send emails.

Part 5 explains how to restrict what your users can or can't do in your application. We also show you how to audit the activity that takes place in your application.

Part 6 shows you how to deploy your application. It also includes a troubleshooting section that shows you what to do when things go wrong.

Conventions

The following sections describe conventions used throughout this book.

Examples

To give this book a bit of real-life feel, we've based many of our examples on a fictional company. This company specializes in selling healthy organic snacks through the Web.

The snacks are delivered by mail, and the business model works by means of subscription. There are three types of subscription (bronze, silver, gold), and these are priced on a monthly basis. Each subscription type entitles you to a number of free snacks per month, and higher-level subscriptions entitle you to receive more food packages and a greater variety of food.

The company has embraced LightSwitch and has started using it throughout all parts of the business.

The office workers use an application called *OfficeCentral*. This application supports the activities that take place in the office and includes features such as the following:

- Timesheet
- Expenses
- Project codes
- Holiday request tracking
- Purchase order tracking
- Invoice tracking
- Asset tracking
- Accident report book
- Staff home contact details

The staff responsible for shipping the deliveries works from a warehouse and uses an application called *ShipperCentral*. This application enables workers to view and amend orders, delivery details, and customer details.

The management uses an application called *AdminCentral*. This application supports the managerial side of the business and allows managers to keep an eye on *churn* rates, subscription