Eclipse vs Netbeans

By Roger Keays, 9 January 2007

I've been a big fan of vim pretty much since I left high school. I'll admit that it isn't the most welcoming of text editors, but after having grown accustomed to its UI and key bindings I thought I'd never have to look for another editor again. Vim is lightweight, fast, allows you to work without reaching for the mouse, has syntax highlighting for about a billion different languages and can do practically anything you can imagine if you care to check the manual.

When I started programming in Java, vim did just fine. But as the complexity of my work grew and the number of artifacts to maintain increased I found that vim let me down in two ways:

- Vim has no file manager / speedbar to quickly locate and load files on the disk.
- Vim doesn't help you build your project, and I was getting tired of maintaining ant scripts and lib directories.

I figured there couldn't be any harm in trying some of those IDEs that everybody was ranting about. I mean, when have the masses ever been wrong? It turns out that they weren't wrong, but not for the reasons I expected.

Here's the comparison table I made of the IDE's which I evaluated. Its dated July 2005, so it's not supposed to be current but I think it is still interesting nevertheless. For some stupid reason I didn't record what versions I was evaluating. I know it was Netbeans 4.1 and Eclipse 3.1 though.

	Eclipse	Netbeans	JDeveloper	Java Studio Creator
Product				
Vendor	Eclipse Foundation	Sun	Oracle	Sun
Maturity	still quite young	still quite young	mature	built on netbeans
Stability	crashed several times	no crashes	no crashes	no crashes
Licensing/cost	OSS/Free	OSS/Free	ADF license for runtime/$100 per end user of app.	proprietary, USD99
Technology Support				
J2SE	yes	yes	yes	yes, but meant for JEE apps
J2EE	various plugins	yes	yes	yes
JSF	various plugins -	no	yes	yes

	MyEclipse, Exadel			
JDO	plugins	no	no.. toplink only	no
Ant	optional	all builds based on ant	?	all builds based on ant
Code Editor Features				
Autocomplete	yes	yes	?	yes
Hyperlink code	no	yes	?	yes
WYSIWG HTML editor	plugins	no	yes	yes
WYSIWG JSP editor	plugins	no	yes	yes
WYSIWG JSF editor	plugins	no	yes	yes
CSS editor	?	yes	?	yes
XML editor	yes	yes	yes	yes
GUI Editor Features				
GUI Editor	Visual Editor plugin	yes	yes	JSF only
Round-tripping	yes	no	?	?
Data binding	?	no	ADF binding (JSR 227)	JSF only
Modelling Features				
UML modelling	plugins, e.g. Omondo	no	yes	no
UML class round-tripping	yes, with Omondo	-	yes	-
Flowcharts	plugin (GFE)	no	?	no
Tools				
Profiler	?	plugin	?	no
Debugger	yes	yes	yes	yes
Database inspector	plugins	yes, read only	yes	yes, read/write
Subversion integration	plugin	generic SCM support	?	generic

I also looked at IBM's WSAD, Borland JBuilder and Sun Java Studio Enterprise, but they didn't make it into the table. The results above don't show any clear winner but my final evaluation comments were as follows (/me braces for a backlash from the Eclipse community):

> *My first impression of Eclipse is that it is a hackers tool. It seems to be a bit unstable and the large volume of plugins available makes it difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff.*
>
> *Netbeans seems like a neat little package, although it seems to have a smaller user and developer base and probably lacks some of the features of Eclipse.*
>
> *JDeveloper looks very useful, but has a scary licensing scheme. Sun's Java Studio Enterprise looks to be more than it's equal and has a sensible licensing scheme.*
>
> *I'm going to go with Netbeans because its a no-nonsense product and provides a nice upgrade path to Studio Creater or Studio Enterprise if I decide I need the extra features.*

So there you have it. I use Netbeans because it's neat and it's stable.

The story doesn't quite end there though. In the next episode, find out which of the world's problems Netbeans *hasn't* solved and find out if vim and I will ever get back together!

To be continued...

About Roger Keays



Roger Keays is an artist, an engineer, and a student of life. He has no fixed addressand has leftfootprints on 40-something different countries around the world. Roger is addicted to surfing. His other interests are music, psychology, languages, the proper use of semicolons, and finding good food.