Chapter 3.21
Containers and Connectors as Elements in a Portal Design Framework

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ABSTRACT
This article defines the standardized elements used in the building blocks portal design framework in detail, as the second in a series of articles on a Portal Design Framework. This article explains the (simple) rules and relationships for combining Containers and Connectors into portal structures. This article shares best practices, examples, and guidelines for effectively using the building blocks framework during portal design efforts.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTAINER BLOCKS
The building block system includes seven types of Containers, beginning with the Tile at the lowest level of the stacking hierarchy, and increasing (conceptual) size and complexity to include a collection of interconnected Dashboards or Portals, called a Dashboard or Portal Suite. From smallest to largest, the Container blocks are:

- Tile
- Tile Group
- View
- Page
- Section
- Dashboard or Portal
- Dashboard or Portal Suite

Like musicians in a band, the different kinds of Container blocks in the system play different roles in the overall effort to construct dashboards or portals. The smaller (lower in the stacking hierarchy) blocks - Tiles, Tile Groups, and Views—enable the display of content, and support users’ interactions with content. Sections, Dashboards or Portals, and Dashboard or Portal Suites—the larger blocks, that are higher in the stacking hierarchy—enable the navigation, organization, and management of collections of content. Pages
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straddle the middle of the size continuum; they
are the largest block whose role is primarily to
provide a framework for display of and interaction
with dashboard or portal content, and the smallest
Container which plays an important navigational
/ organization role in the system.
The Connectors (described later in this article)
‘hold things together’; thereby creating navigation
paths amongst destinations, establishing a tangible
architecture or structure, providing referential
cues for orientation with the environment, and
allowing movement into and out of the environ-
ment. The different kinds of Containers work in
concert with Connectors to enable the creation of
scalable, navigable, and easily maintainable in-
formation architectures that support high-quality
user experiences.

Each Container definition includes:

- Mandatory components
- Optional components
- Stacking size
- Detailed description
- Example rendering (for illustrative purposes only)
- Rendering description

Tile

- Mandatory Components: Tile Header, Tile Body
- Optional Components: Tile Footer
- Stacking Size: 1

Description

Tiles are the fundamental building block of the
dashboard or portal framework. Tiles locate con-
tent and functionality within the coherent infor-
mation and navigation structure of the dashboard
or portal environment. Tiles clearly identify the
sources and broader contexts of the information
or tools they contain (very important in situations
where terminology is ambiguous, conflicting or
overlapping, or when differing data sources pro-
vide differing values for the same metrics), and
offer consistent access to convenience functionality
such as printing and emailing the Tile contents
for use outside the dashboard.

Tiles consist of two required components—a
Tile Header and Tile Body—and one optional
component—the Tile Footer. Tiles may include
multiple Control Bars (note: adding multiple
Control Bars can quickly increase development
complexity and lower usability levels). The Tile
Header contains a mandatory Title, optional Sub-
title, mandatory source indicator identifying the
origins of the content, and may include buttons or
links for Convenience Functionality (described in
detail in a subsequent part of this series).

The mandatory Tile Body can contain nearly
any form of content. Tiles commonly contain
text, charts, tables, interactive maps, scrolling
news feeds, RSS consoles, video, slideshows,
syndicated XML structured documents, links
to documents and resources, and complex trans-
actional functionality. Of course, this is only
a small subset of the tremendous diversity of
Tile-delivered content available in the rapidly
growing libraries of widgets published for Apple's
OSX desktop, Yahoo's widget platform, Google
Gadgets, web desktops such as NetVibes, and
the many social networking platforms including
FaceBook and MySpace. In the end, the range of
content that can appear within a Tile is limited
only by imagination and ingenuity.

The optional Tile Footer is a structurally con-
sistent location for contextual links, pointers to
related destinations and content. The Tile Footer
commonly offers links to additional resources
or source data in another format (tab delimited,.pdf, etc.), links to other Tiles, Pages or areas
of the Dashboard that provide related content
or functionality, links to other applications and
environments offering comprehensive functional-
ity or information out of scope for the Tile, etc.
20 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the product's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/containers-connectors-elements-portal-design/43986?camid=4v1


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