

# First Free Merchandising SaaS App Developed using Microsoft Visual Studio LightSwitch and ComponentOne LightSwitch Extensions

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In the retail merchandising software and software as a service (SaaS) industry, one company has taken a radical approach by providing a free Retail Merchandising SaaS. Skemaz is a relatively new entrant



into the market and they have developed a system that is optimized for modern mobile devices by using Microsoft Visual Studio LightSwitch and ComponentOne's Studio for LightSwitch extensions.

## Business Needs

Skemaz identified the market potential for building a modern SaaS that would challenge the more tenured software being used in the industry. "We made the decision to build our SaaS from the ground up to minimize costs and to design it to be as easy as paint-by-numbers to use," said Mark Runge, CEO at Skemaz.

To create this new immersive system, Skemaz evaluated the latest development platforms and tools to determine what would meet their requirements and development needs. "For users to design, manage and report in-store merchandising audit projects, we opted for Microsoft's Visual Studio LightSwitch for its desktop browser-based Silverlight client," said Runge. When it came to how to best generate interactive Silverlight reports, Skemaz turned to ComponentOne, a third-party control vendor in the Microsoft Visual Studio industry, and their Studio for LightSwitch product. Studio for LightSwitch is a collection of extensions designed to be used in conjunction with Microsoft Visual Studio LightSwitch, a simplified, self-service development tool that enables users to build business applications quickly and easily for the desktop and cloud.

Runge shared that "Microsoft Visual Studio LightSwitch has no intrinsic report generation capabilities and the whole idea behind LightSwitch is that it aims to not only support professional developers by allowing them to tackle their application back-log." Runge continued, "According to Beth Massi, Senior Program Manager on the Visual Studio team and LightSwitch champion, LightSwitch also targets people 'who do not write code for a living.'"

“We consider ourselves fortunate that there’s an elegant solution that holds true to the LightSwitch mantra of ‘As easy as switching on a light’- enter Studio for LightSwitch by ComponentOne,” said Runge.

“Developing our report capabilities using ComponentOne FlexGrid, OLAP and Chart screens was as straightforward as any other aspect of LightSwitch and our published app required not one single line of code,” said Runge.

“With the legendary ComponentOne FlexGrid available as a LightSwitch extension, we utilized the flexible Grid screens to provide contextual filtering and searches in most of the screens used in the Skemaz ‘Designer App,’” said Runge. In addition, Skemaz used ComponentOne’s LightSwitch chart and OLAP reports for analyzing merchandising data as it is created in the field by the mobile app users.

Report users are able to quickly drill into data using conditional filtering on column headers, view signatures, view photos and automatically escalate issues. “A common scenario would be a user looking for a view of all product items that are out of stock and not rectified because the stock has yet to be delivered,” said Runge.

“Great performance with very large data sets is a true highlight of Studio for LightSwitch,” said Runge. “I thank ComponentOne for extending their reporting tools to support the LightSwitch community and for saving our company the hassle of having to dig into SQL Reporting Services. I shudder to think how much time it would have taken us as opposed to the few days it took us to get running and be productive with Studio for LightSwitch.”

## Solution

Manufacturers of Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) rely on merchandising reports to identify and rectify merchandising issues. They need the ability to drill into a problem and have real-time field reporting data so they are able to take action. With Skemaz, the manufactures receive real-time data from mobile field merchandisers who simply log

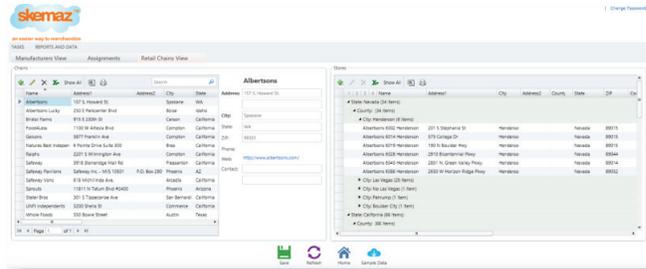


Figure 1: FlexGrid Stores

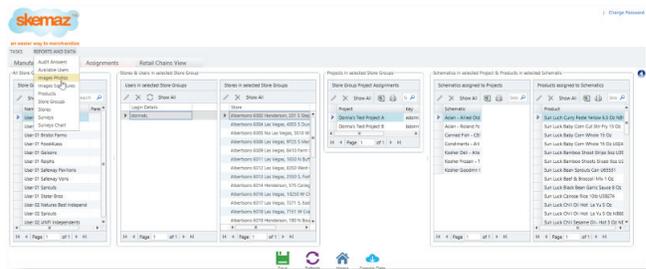


Figure 2: FlexGrid Assessments and Menu

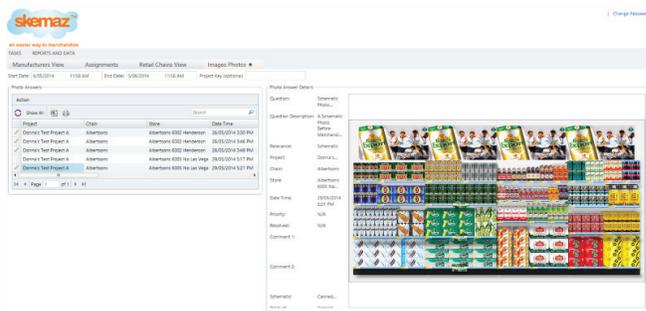


Figure 3: Schematic

in from their mobile browser on any modern smart phone. “By using the LightSwitch desktop client (Silverlight), administrators can design merchandising projects, assign merchandising project work to field workers and make real time reporting available to their clients,” said Runge.

## Benefits

The introduction of Skemaz to the marketplace has given visibility to companies that may not have before been able to afford merchandising software or didn't have the workforce to support this detailed level of management.

“Next time you see merchandisers auditing consumer packaged goods in a supermarket, the chances are they will be using a mobile device to scan and record information about the placement, price and many other factors regarding the status of items in the store,” said Runge.

**“The bottom line is that our time taken to deliver attractive and functional reporting capabilities took us days or weeks, not the months we would have faced without Studio for LightSwitch.”**

**Mark Runge**  
CEO, Skemaz

The data then is available via online reports that the manufacturers of these goods analyze in terms of the performance of their products at the point of retail. This is what the Skemaz application does, it provides an HTML client for mobile users and a Silverlight client for setting up project data and for serving up reports (using Studio for LightSwitch).

“By developing in Microsoft Visual Studio LightSwitch and incorporating ComponentOne Studio for LightSwitch extensions into Skemaz, we were able to expand the available merchandising workforce and enable organizations to immediately take advantage of their local knowledge to expand the reach of their service offerings,” said Runge. “The bottom line is that our time taken to deliver attractive and functional reporting capabilities took us days or weeks, not the months we would have faced without Studio for LightSwitch.”

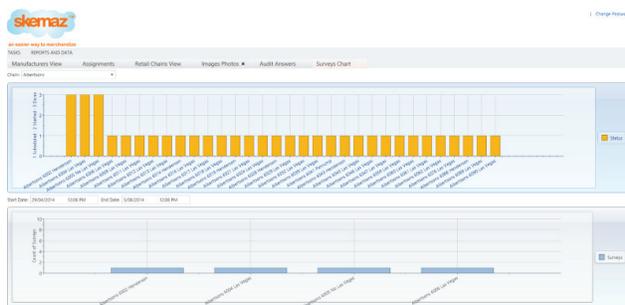


Figure 4: Monitoring store visits against scheduled visits

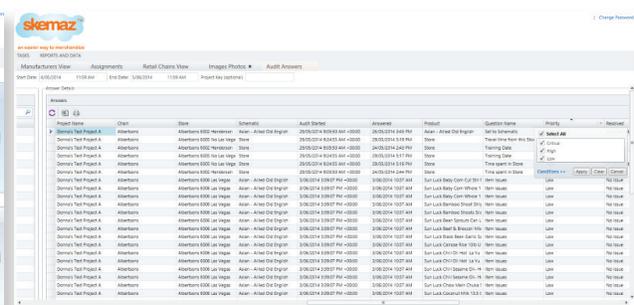


Figure 5: Drilling into FlexGrid Reports