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A number of clients are using helper companies that require the client's inventory to be uploaded to the helper company's servers. These helper companies could be web site, financial sites, and who knows what other functions that may exist. In this document I will refer to them as Cloud Servers.

Up till now, I have been writing individual programs to format and upload this data. The data needs to be formatted specifically for each company, because heaven forbid, that two companies would use the same format even if the data itself is identical.

I have now consolidated all this into one Feed program, named FeedGen. It is located in the Auto/bin/tools folder. A configuration file tells it what to do, and who to do it to.

This program will:
Upload pictures to the Premium web site (and maybe others in the future).
Generate and upload content for the Premium and other web sites.
Generate and upload content for Credit Acceptance and other financial sites.

The web sites that we currently support are
Premium
Credit Acceptance
Westlake
CarsForSale
V12
Go
CarsDotCom
Homenet
Kalispel Tribe
Dealers Link
Dealer Car Search
(And maybe AutoTrader)

The program can be easily extended to other sites as long as I am given the format of the uploaded feed information, and the URL, user name and Password for the site.

When the web site gets this file of information, it adds any new vehicles to their database that are not already there, updates any information that got modified, and deletes any vehicles that are in their database that is not in this file. Presumably those are vehicles that got sold.

This process can occur whenever the client decides that something has changed enough (he bought new cars, sold old ones) so that the web site needs changing.

It turns out that some dealers do not want to put all their inventory on their web site. So we have provided a way to dynamically select the cars that are selected for upload. In the Inventory program 2nd tab, you will see an entry for Auction Minimum Bids. Since most of my clients do not run an auction, you can put any positive number into this field, and that will prevent the data from being uploaded to the Cloud Server. 0 will allow it to be uploaded. (For Version 2.11, change the field named FeedFiddle).

The Configuration file

The program figures out what to do by reading in a configuration file. This file can be placed anywhere and named anything, but it is best to be in the \auto folder, and named with a ".txt" filetype. I will give more information on this below.

Here is a sample config file (with line numbers added on the right):

PREMIUM	1
302	2
c:\temp\K1.txt	3
Z1.txt	4
premiumautosites.net	5
dennis	6
dolly	7
0	8
51.65.198.136	9
dennis	10
Z4	11
1	12

Line 1 is the keyword to tell me what Cloud site's feed needs to be generated and uploaded.
Line 2 is that Cloud company's user id for a particular client.
Line 3 is where the generated file should be written locally.
Line 4 is what that file should be named when uploaded to the cloud server.
Line 5 is the URL of where the feed file should go.
Line 6 is the user name for that URL.
Line 7 is the password for that URL.
Line 8 is 0 for active or 1 for passive mode FTP (site dependant).
Line 9 is the URL for where the pictures and videos go.
Line 10 is the user name for the picture URL.
Line 11 is the password for the picture URL.
Line 12 is the active or passive mode flag for the picture URL

I would expect that more configuration lines will be added in the future as the need arises and more feed types get developed.

Note that if you do not have pictures to upload, lines 9-12 have to be there, but they can be blank. I like to put a 0 in line 12, just so you know that these lines are actually there.

Setup

Setting up the program for a particular feed is quite simple.
The program that does all this (FeedGenPj) is found in the local \auto\bin\tools folder.

Using the File Manager/explorer/whatever program,
find the FeedGenPj file name, right click on it, and select Copy.
Then right click anywhere on the desktop where there is not already an icon, and select "Paste Shortcut". That will create an icon on the desktop.

Next, find the config file (created in the above section), find its path and name.
Then right click on the icon just created, and select Properties.
A screen will pop up, with several entry boxes.
The first one of those is named Target, and should have the path and name of the FeedGenPj program. Enter the path and name of the Config file in that box, to the right after that FeedGenPj name. Be sure there is at least one blank between the two items.

You should end up with something that looks like this:
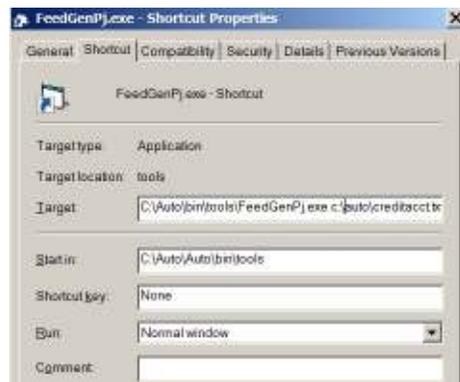
Picture Setup

If you are going to upload pictures, videos, descriptions, options, or other information, all that has to go in a subfolder of the server file Dealscans. Dealscans is located right under the Auto folder on the server, and it has a subfolder for every stock number that you will be keeping pictures, etc for. So, if you are going to deal with stock number 1234, your server data structure will look like

      \Auto
          \bin
          \DB
          \DealScans
               \1234
               \1235
               Etc

You can put information directly into these folders, which you will have to create.

Or you can use a program named DealScanPJ.
Every Carousel workstation expects to have a \temp folder. DealscanPJ expects a Deals folder under that \temp folder. So you would expect to see (on your workstation)

      \temp
          \deals

If you run DealScanPJ (located in your \auto\bin\tools folder) you will get the following dialog box:
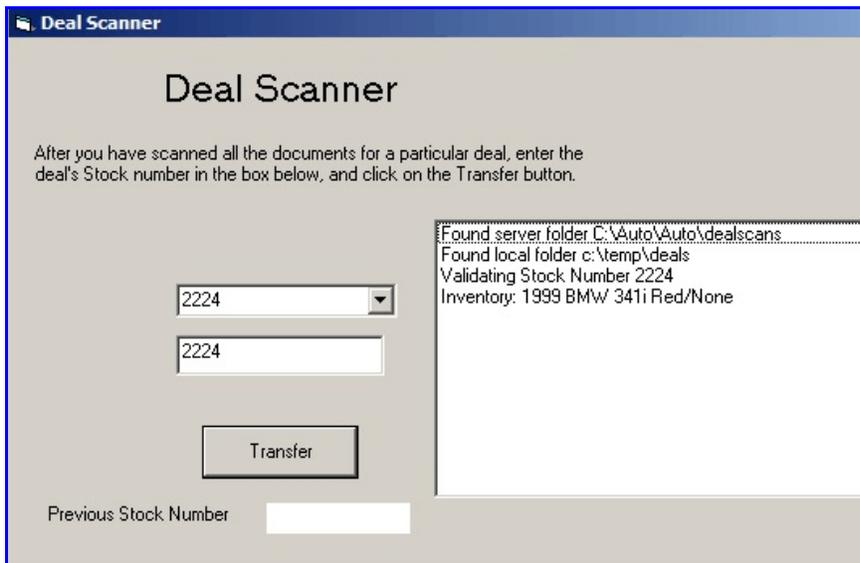
Select the stock number from the dropdown box on the left, tab to the second entry box and that stock number will be copied there, then click the Transfer button. All the data in \temp\deals will be Moved to the server \auto\dealscans\xxxx folder, where xxxx is the stock number. It will be created for you if it does not exist. You will see a list of what is happening in the box on the right.

Other Information Files

Most vehicle web sites provide the ability for you to add marketing information, and sometimes Options information, to your web feed file.

The Carousel Feed program will recognize two different files in the Dealscans\stocknumber folder: O.txt and D.txt. These are files that you can create with a text editor, eg Notepad or better yet, Notepad++ (free download).

The D.txt file contains your descriptive text, or marketing spiel. You can put anything you want in there, except double quotes (").

The O.txt file contains options that this vehicle has. It is a string of keywords, separated by the Or symble ("|"). This is generally right above the Enter key on your keyboard. This would look like

stereo radio | air conditioning | power seats

These files will be recognized when the feed file is being built and the data will be included in the feed.

Someday, we hope to provid Vin Decoding that will generate the O.txt file for you.

Running the Feed Program

Double click the icon for the feed you want to generate.
This brings up the following dialog box:
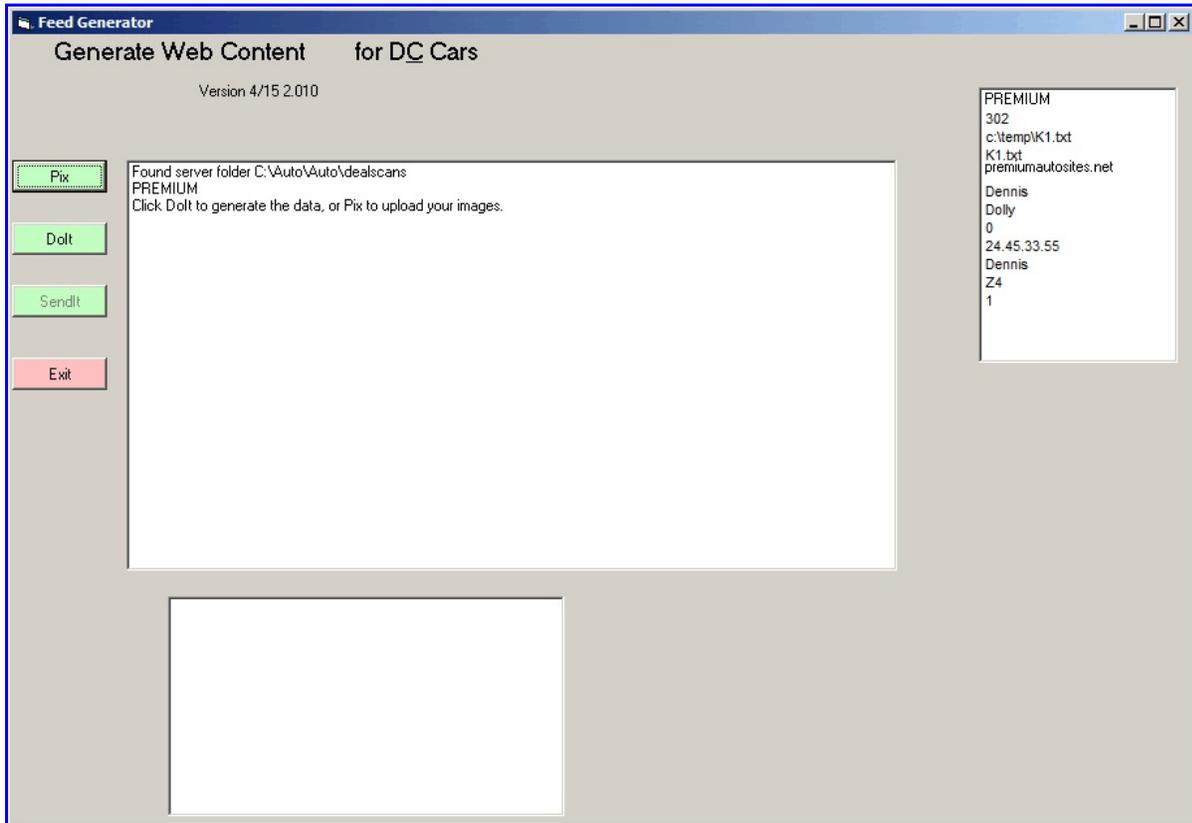
On the right you will see the contents of the configuration file you have selected. If you did not select one, or it could not be found, you will get a pop up error message.

In the middle, you will see an area that tries to keep you updated as to what is happening. The bottom area is generally for error messages, or diagnostic content.

There are a possible four buttons on the left. I say possible because if the picture URL data is not included in the config file, the first button will not be seen.

Pictures

Assuming that you are going to upload pictures (or videos), click the Pix button. The system will first determine that the folder \auto\dealscans exists on the server. It then looks through all the stock numbers currently in inventory, sees if there is a corresponding folder under \dealscans, and if in that folder there are jpeg or mp4 files, and checks their archive bits to see if they have

already been uploaded. (There is no reason to spend the bandwidth to upload the same thing twice.) For all files that make the cut, they are uploaded to the Picture URL. File names are modified to attach the stock number to the file name. So xxx.jpeg would end up being renamed on the server as 1234_xxx.jpeg. You will get a running commentary in the big box in the center. Note that some of these files, especially video files, can take a very long time, depending on your internet speed.

Note that for now, we only support uploading to the Premium cloud site.

Feed information

Before the feed information can be uploaded to the cloud server, it must be generated. The information needed by the different providers is, naturally, different, and even if the same, is generally in a different format. So a formatting routine has to be written (by Carousel) to meet the cloud provider's requirements. That information is written to a temporary file, generally in your local c:\temp folder, with a name as defined in line 3 of the config file. Note that if this file name already exists in the temp folder, it will be renamed, and not overwritten.

The generation of the feed file is done by clicking the DoIt button. I know, lousy name, but it seemed like a good idea at the time.

This information, although cryptic, is in text mode, and can be looked at with any text editor (eg notepad) that you may have on your computer.

Upload

So now, we have uploaded the pictures (if any), we have generated the feed information file, and now we have to upload that feed information file to the cloud serever. This is done with the SendIt button. It knows where to send the data from the config file, and what to send, also from the config file. You will see a progress track of what is being sent on the big center screen. Some other cryptic information will appear on the bottom screen. If an error occurs, you will get an even more cryptic popup screen telling you about this.

And now you are done.

So the whole process is:
1) load the pictures into the local system
2) upload the pictures to the cloud server
3) generate the feed information
4) upload the feed information to the cloud server

If there are no pictures to be dealt with, skip parts 1) and 2).

The Feed Download Program

Recently some of my clients have had reason to Download rather than Upload this inventory information. That is, they have their inventory data already in a spreadsheet or on a web site, and want to create Carousel inventory records from that data. The FeedDownloadPJ program will do that. This program is also found in the c:\auto\bin\tools folder.

The program is told what format to use through the command line. Currently we will accept UGM and SD1. This information is displayed in the Project Type box.
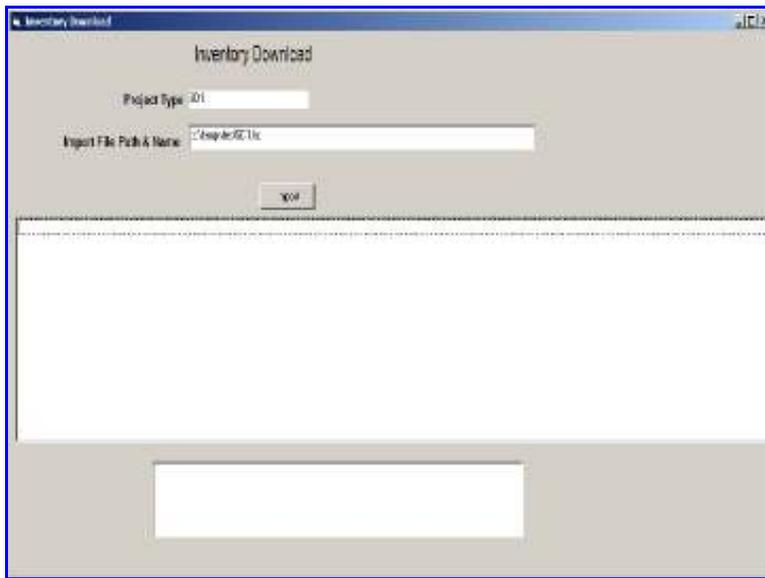
The location of the data is entered into the Import File Path box. This will be remembered for the next time. If you change it, then That path will be remembered. This is stored in the local computer's registry.

To run the program, click the Input buton. The program will read the data file, and present a running display in the big list box. The smaller list box is for errors that are detected.

I am not going to describe the UGM format of the data here, because it is no longer being used.

The SD1 format is presumed to be exported from a spreadsheet, in tab delimited format. The file consists of one header lines, and a variable number of data lines. Those lines are as follows:

Field 1: Car Year
Field 2: Make
Field 3: Model
Field 4: Color 1
Field 5: Color 2
Field 6: bodystyle
Field 7: VIN
Field 8: odometer reading (presumed to be actual)
Field 9: purchase date
Field 10: purchase price (no $, periods or commas or cents)
Field 11: seller record number.

The stock number will be the last 8 characters of the VIN. If a duplicate is found, the original

will be overwritten.
If no odometer reading or purchase price is entered, they will be set to 0.
If no purchase date is entered, the current date will be used.

There MUST be a Seller record number at least in the first data line. This record number can be found in the Inventory program if you look up a record with that seller in it, or you can use the Deal program and look up the seller by name and use the record number you find there. The following lines can be left empty if they are the same seller.

We presume that this will be in a spreadsheet at some point. Different spreadsheets have different ways of exporting their data to a flat file. You can use either txt or csv for the file type. But I do want them tab delimited, rather than comma delimited, since it make my import job much easier. In the case of Open Office, the free clone of MS Office, you would SAVE AS and apply filtering of tab delimited.