



Grow Your Own Application!

Ffenics 1.53: A Finer Developer Experience

With 1.53, we focus on improving life for the developer, with enhancements to help you really reduce the time to create your documents.

Whether you are writing ad-hoc reports, or building an application from scratch.

Some are small changes; others more substantial. Taken collectively, we believe they will provide an even more robust and satisfying experience for all users of our products.

And this is just the start. We will continue developer enhancements over coming versions.

NOTE: 1.53 is not backwards-compatible with 1.52. A 1.52 app can be opened in 1.53, but any documents created or modified in 1.53 cannot be then opened in 1.52.

Key Changes

- **Improved Auto-Layout to speed document creation**
- **Style Sheets made easier and more thorough**
- **More logical double-click defaults**
- **'Document Changed' flag**
- **Button and Field Accelerators to speed user data-entry**
- **Multiline and labels now have centred and right justification**
- **Set a default image behind all documents for consistent app-wide branding!**
- **Plus many tidy-ups and 'consistency' changes, cosmetic surgery, some bug fixes, and even an undocumented feature!**

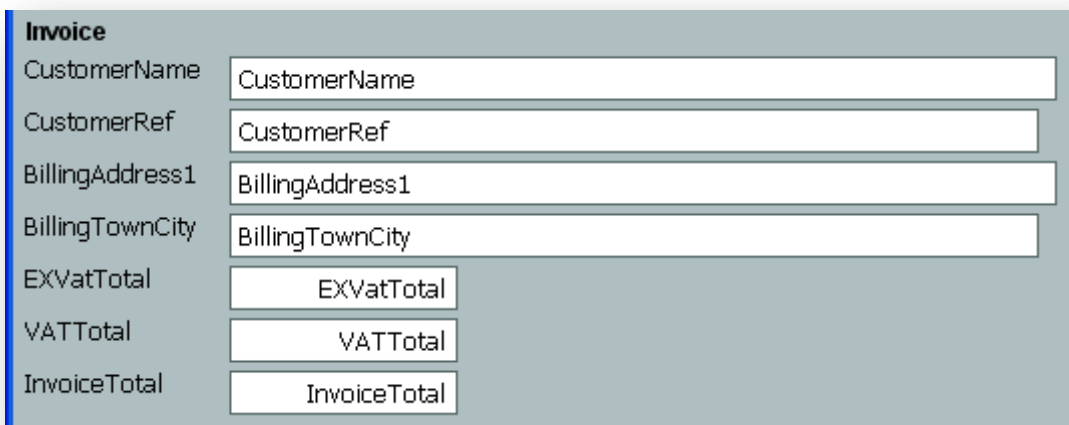
Improved Auto-Layout Results

The auto-layout dialog creates a document based on a number of templates, optionally adding labels and titles. Now when you use it, you'll get:

- 'English' auto-labels derived from camel-case and other styled field names
 - E.g. a field called DateFirstEntered can auto-generate a label "Date First Entered:"
- Special style names for main form and sub form titles
- Vertically centred labels for better alignment with their corresponding field.

These three changes will drastically reduce the number of post-generation tweaks you previously needed to make. With a little practise, you can shave minutes off each report or aspect you build.

Auto-Layout. Was:



Invoice	
CustomerName	CustomerName
CustomerRef	CustomerRef
BillingAddress1	BillingAddress1
BillingTownCity	BillingTownCity
EXVatTotal	EXVatTotal
VATTotal	VATTotal
InvoiceTotal	InvoiceTotal

NOW:

Invoice

Customer Name:

Customer Ref:

Billing Address 1:

Billing Town City:

EX Vat Total:

VAT Total:

Invoice Total:

Labels centred on their fields, field labels auto-generated with spaces and trailing colon, and the title automatically given a style, will save a lot of tedious tweaking.

Auto-Labels

Reserved words? Ffenics isn't really bothered! But it is still good design practice to create single word field names, perhaps using TheCamelCaseNamingConvention, or joining Multiple_Words_With_An_Underscore.

In addition, you'll often add a colon to the end of the label, or even prefix labels with an asterisk to emphasis they're required.

Well, you can now do all these. set how you want your labels to appear via a new tab in Application Preferences, and see the results after each new auto-layout. It will save a huge amount of tedious adjustment.

Field Names from Labels

And before you ask, yes, it works the other way round. Type in a field label, press F10 for a new field, and the generated name will reverse the rules – a label of "Customer first name:" becomes a field name of 'CustomerFirstName', saving time as well as enforcing a consistent naming convention.

This is my field label:

Field Definition

Field Name Object Name

Select panel:

Type Deriyation Range C

Data Type Text Options

Label-formatting rules reversed to auto-generate consistent field names.

Title Style Names

Add a title to a main form via the Auto-Layout dialog and it will now have a 'Form Title' style applied, if one exists.

The same applies to sub form titles, if you have a style called 'Subform Title'.

Vertical Centre

There's a new option to vertically centre a label against its corresponding field. This usually gives the best aesthetic result, and save you having to adjust each label after auto-layout.

You can set up the vertical centring as a default for each document type (form, aspect, report or procedure), or implement it on a document-by-document basis via document properties. The centring will apply to any auto-generation of an existing field per line or Movies Credit layout.

You'll need to make sure that the grid is not set to snap for best effect.

Style Sheet Improvements

- Some items on the display properties dialog previously omitted have been added to the style sheets
- The tab object (the individual tab on a tab control) will now get a default style
- Styling on titles and subtitles in auto-layout (as mentioned above)
- Ability to update current style directly from the display attributes dialog.

The first two items tidy up some inconsistencies.

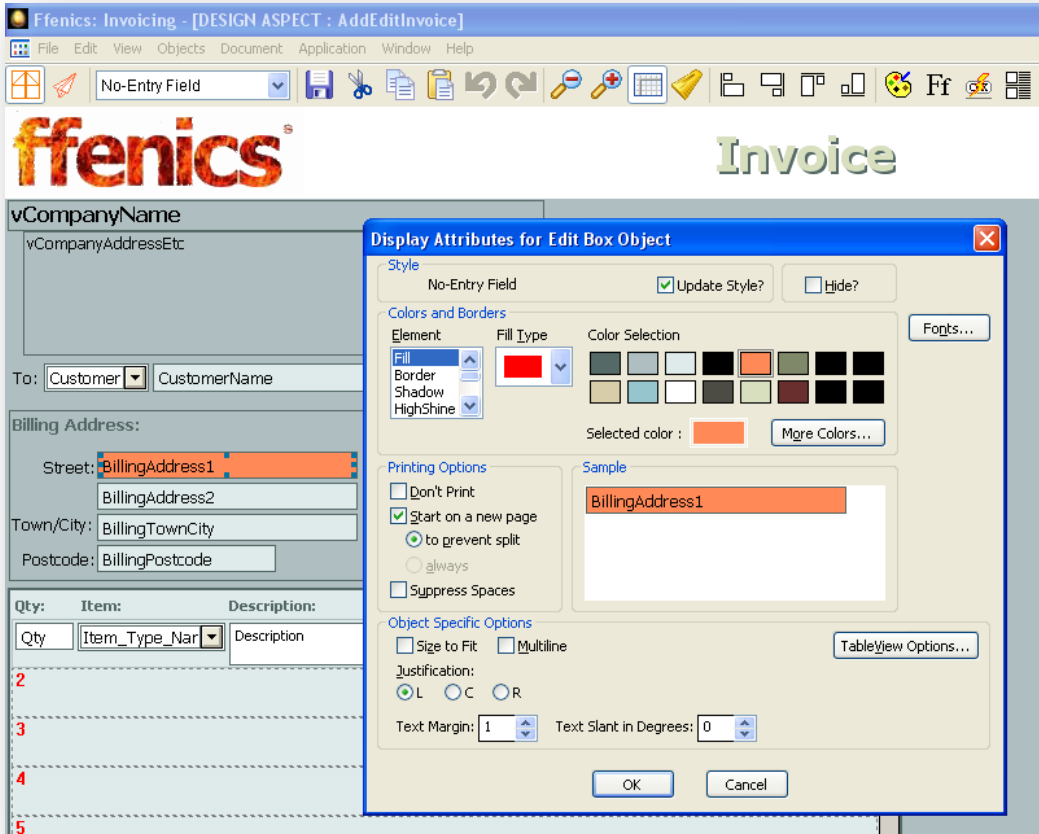
We've already mentioned the defaults on titles.

The key change is that you can now update the style attached to the current object directly from the display dialog.

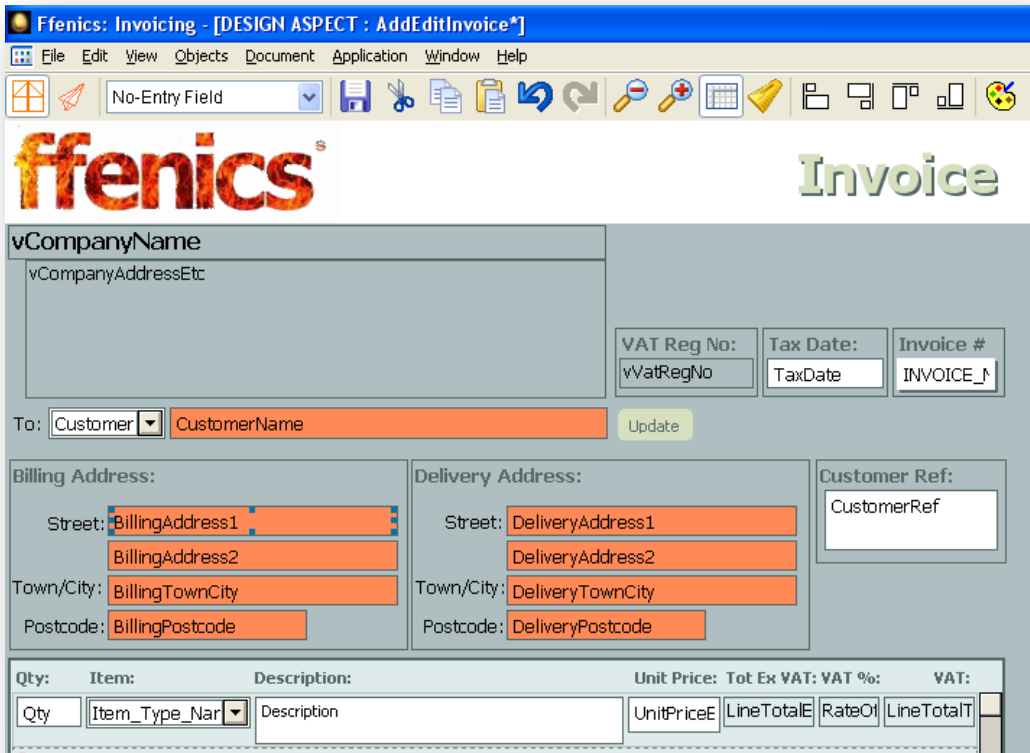
Previously, if you wanted to update a style, you had to get an object looking as you wanted, OK the display dialog, choose Object → Style → Update and then find the style name in question in the pick list. Tedious, or what!

You can now do all that from the one display dialog.

And optionally, if you are having a style-update session, you can ask to have this new option stay checked as you update the appearance of all your objects:



New checkbox lets you update styles from the Display Dialog. All fields with the same style name will be updated in one go:



Double-Click Defaults

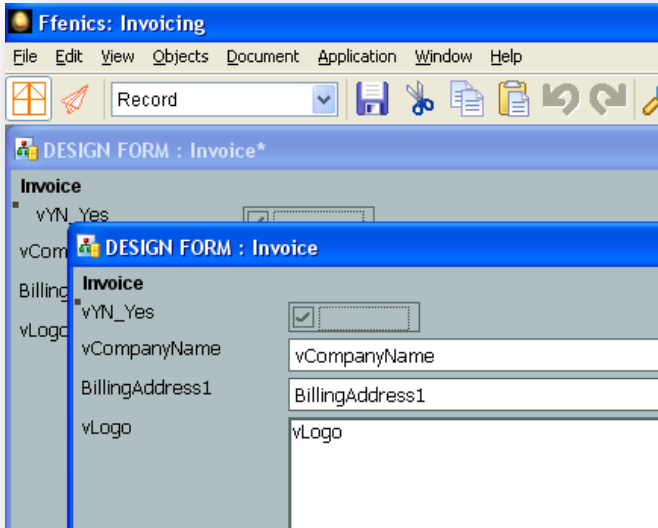
To speed up work when in document design mode, see what happens now when certain objects are double clicked:

- Text (Label) and Button go straight to editing the text
- Line, Rectangle and Ellipse go to the Presentation (display) dialog
- The more logical auto-layout dialog appears when you double-click a form or sub form.

Document Changed Flag

Do you find yourself working with several versions of the same document open at once, perhaps comparing the saved version to the one you are currently editing. Remembering which is the changed window is tricky!

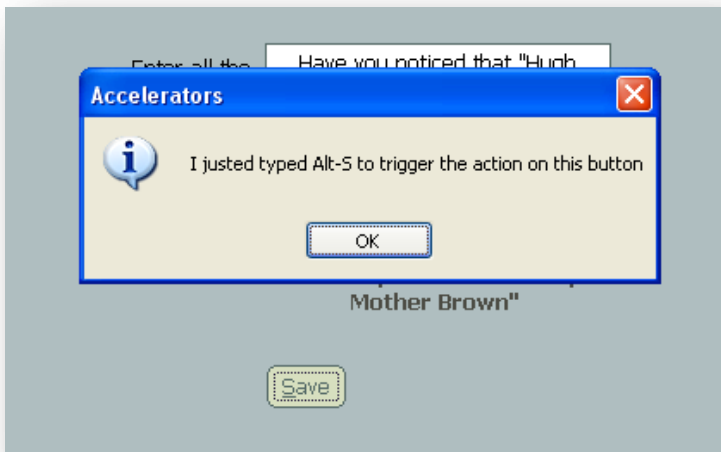
Now, you are reminded of any document with unsaved changes by an asterisk to the right of the document name in the window title.



Now you can clearly see which is the edited version, and which is the original.

Button and Field Accelerators

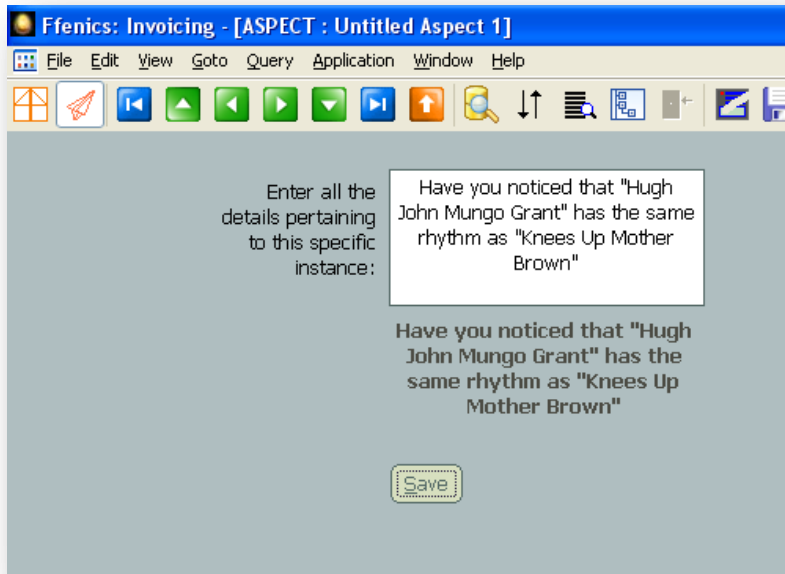
You can now customise documents with Alt-key shortcuts to jump to data-entry in a field, and to trigger button actions. This should reduce mouse use and increase productivity in heads-down data-entry scenarios.



Multiline and Label Justification

Previously, if you selected a field as multiline, you could only have left-justified text. Well, now you can have those multiple lines aligning to the right or centre. Perfect for conference badges, better invoices and other client-targeted documents, and management reports.

We've also applied the same changes to labels. No longer will you have to stack several label objects on top of each other to achieve the centred address requirement from the graphic designer.



A right-justified label, a centred multi-line field.

Adjustments and other Changes

We've also made a suite of minor changes, some functional, some cosmetic:

Functional changes

- Addition of 'Show Start Here Dialog' to the opening File menu to allow you to redisplay the Start Here dialog
- New date fields default to four-digit years
- Able to set a document to 'Continuous Refresh' on open, handy for "Doctor's Waiting Room"-type displays. Previously could only be set via either the user, or complicated scripting.
- Changed to standard Windows shortcuts for Search (Ctrl-F), Search and Replace (Ctrl-H) and Select All (Ctrl-A).
 - Latter change means that previous 'Save As' shortcut of Ctrl-A has been removed. Instead, type Alt-FA.

Application Preferences

Both to accommodate some new features, and to make other older features easier to implement, we've made the following changes (some of these are mentioned above):

Document Defaults Tab

- Set Labels to centre against their fields on each document type
- Set a default background image behind each document type.

Design Time Tab (New Option)

- Remember the last used 'Update Styles' setting
 - So if you check this new display dialog setting, it will be checked the next time you show the display dialog.
- Label from Field Name formatting:

- A string to prefix each label
- A string to add to the end of each label
- A set of characters to swap (e.g. an underscore with a space)
- Option to always change CamelCase lettering to single words separated by spaces.

New Document Dialog

The new document dialog is used for creating any type of new document, whether you select Form, Report, Aspect or Procedure from the File – New menu.

The following changes have been made:

New Form

The '<New Form>' option has been removed. Instead, just type a new form name in the edit box at the top of the list.

The second 'New Form Document' dialog that used to unnecessarily appear has been removed, and you will immediately start to create your new form.

If you want a new form whose name is similar to an existing one, you can the name from the list. A warning message will prevent you from creating two forms of the same name.

New Aspect and New Report

The Query button is the default button and will be triggered if you hit return after selecting a base form.

This will bring up the Query By Model dialog. This dialog represents the data model, the fundamental thing behind just about all your work in Ffenics.

Cosmetic Changes

Dialogs	
Start Here opening menu:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed tab order oddities • Some changes to wording
Workstation Ffenics Preferences:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some changes to wording to make consistent with Start Here dialog • Width of dialog enlarged to accommodate wording changes
Import Dialog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moved browse button and accommodated in width • Changed option buttons to two-state • Corrected typos
App Preferences User Interface Tab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wording changed from 'Statusbar' to 'status bar'
App Preferences Database Admin Tab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corrected spelling mistakes • Modest increase in dialog depth and rearranged items
Field Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sequenced ID: Added a spin control to the right of the edit box, as the right-hand edges was not appearing (looked odd).

Custom Toolbar	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enlarged width of 'Starts Group' button so that it did not clip text; made all buttons above and below same size and aligned.
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Bug Fixes

1. Sometimes Ffenics would crash when going straight into table view from a design time session.
2. If you had set the print option 'to file' and your default print filename was longer than 79 characters, it would corrupt the document definition.
This is fixed. Note that a file name of longer than 79 characters now simply won't work, but it also won't do any damage.
3. No longer loses focus after carrying out an auto layout.
4. We discovered that the locking strategy options were not being correctly set via the Application Preferences dialog. This is now corrected!

Undocumented Features

And finally, we discovered something that must have been silently added for the benefit of DOS-migrated applications.

DOS-users are used to typing the menu 'number' to quickly drill down through the menus. Well, if you have an aspect with only buttons and no fields, and you label the buttons "&1: First", "&2: Second", etc, then you can trigger the button by only typing the character preceded by the ampersand. Try it and see!

Team Ffenics, November 2011