RealTimeDesigner.com – Tutorials

EXTERNAL VARIABLES

Do you need more control over your users?
You need something to track "who's who" in your own system?
You want to apply discounts/surcharges only to some defined customer?
Then this is the section for you!

STEP 1: DEFINE EXTERNAL VARIABLES AND THEIR RULES

The first step is to define your "library" of accepted variables.
To do this, go into the "PRODUCT CONFIGURATOR OPTIONS => Manage/Define External Variables"
area of your admin panel.
You will see two main areas here: "Manage/Define External Variables" and "Manage/Define External
Variables Rules"

Let's start with the "Manage/Define External Variables" area.
Here is where you set the variable names that will be accepted by your RTD.
For example, let's suppose you want to accept something that defines the customer and a product ID from
your system.
You would then need to accept 2 variables. Let's say you will name them "customer_id" and "product_id".
So, simply add them. In this first area you can set just the name, and nothing else.

Next let 's switch to the "Manage/Define External Variables Rules" area.
You will find a brief technical description of how it works in that page too.
In this area you can select rules that will be valid if a given match with the passed variable value is
satisfied.
The possible fields are:

Rule Name: a name for the rule, that will be seen only into admin panel
Rule Desc (max 255 chars): an optional description that will be shown also to users in case they are
"positives" to the rule
Source Variable: the external variable of which the value is to be checked for matching
Checkvalue: a string that will be used for matching. It can be a regular Perl expression
Modifier: a fixed numerical modifier that will be applied to the fields using this rule
% Modifier: a percentual modifier that will be applied to the fields using this rule

A detailed description of regular expressions is beyond the scope of this document, but let's imagine a
simple example.
Suppose you want a 15% discount rule if the passed "customer_id" is 227.
You would then just need to set:

Rule Name: discount for user 227
Rule Desc (max 255 chars): hi 227, you and only you have a discount!
Source Variable: customer_id
Checkvalue: 227
Modifier: 0
% Modifier: -15

More details about how to apply rules can be found on STEP 3 of this chapter

STEP 2: PASSING VAUES TO RTD AND RETRIEVING THEM ON SUBMITTAL

One of the most interesting uses of external variables is to give you a way to "connect" you own system with RTD.
Let's suppose you do have your own ecommerce site, and you link RTD just to create the design.
When the design is submitted from RTD, you can use the "External Notification on Submittal" to lead your customer back to your site but... how do you know what he ordered into RTD?

Here's a simple example. Let's say you have a product in your own site, and this product has "120" as ID.
You would need to link RTD passing this product_id value from your site, and you'd also need RTD to pass this value back to your site with the external notification.

As for the example in STEP 1, suppose you have created a "product_id" external variable.
To pass an external variable to RTD, you will need to add the prefix "extvar_" to you variable name.
Depending if you are calling RTD using a link (URL METHOD) or a form (FORM METHOD), you would need to pass the variable(s) this way:

URL METHOD: add *&extvar_product_id=120* to the url
FORM METHOD: add *<input type="hidden" name="extvar_product_id" value="120">* to your form to RTD

When RTD is called this way, and if the variable is in the list of the ones to be accepted (in this case, "product_id"), the passed variable name and value will be stored in the RTD session.
This means that, until the customer ends his session or closes his browser, the variable name/value will be remembered by RTD

Now: in the "ORDERS => External Notification on Submittal" area of the admin panel, you will see something new.
Not only the usual fields you generally have there, but also a new "EXTERNAL VARIABLES FIELDS" section.
It's simply what it seems: you can set a variable name for the external notification, and RTD will return that name with the value of the passed variable, if any.
As for our examples, external notification would now return 120 as the "product_id" external variable value.

Note that RTD will keep passing "120" for any submission performed by your customer. External variables are stored in sessions, and their values can be changed only with another call.

So:
- if you called RTD by addin *&extvar_product_id=120* to the url, 120 will be returned as "product_id" value
- if you call again RTD by addin *&extvar_product_id=130* to the url, 120 will be discarded and 130 will be returned as "product_id" value
- if you call again RTD by addin *&extvar_product_id=* to the url, "product_id" value will simply be nullifyed

STEP 3: USING AND APPLYING RULES TO THE PRICING MATRIX

And finally, how to see external variables rules in action!
Go into the "PRODUCT OPTIONS =>Configure Products" area of your admin panel, and select the product you want to apply rules to.
Once there, click the "Configure Pricing Structure" link to launch the pricing matrix tool.

The button you have to look for is "Apply External Variables Rules", that appears only if you have defined rules (as explained in STEP 1): click it.
In this area you will see a collapsed view of all of your matrices for the selected product.
Click the "Expand/Collapse fullview" button for the matrix you want to apply rules to.
Depending on how complex your setup is, you may see tons of checkboxes now: don't be scared, it's all easy!

Basically, you can enable/disable each of your rules for each of your pricing matrix fields.
Let's turn back to the example of STEP 1, with a 15% discount if the passed "customer_id" is 227.
We do already have a rule, but it's not actually applyed anywhere yet.

This is the area where you can apply it: just check the "discount for user 227" checkbox for all the fields you want the discount to be applied.
If you want the discount to be applied to the global price, just check it for all of the pricing matrix fields.
But if, for example, you want to apply the most aspects of the product but NOT to a particular addon, you just need not to check the rule for the addon.
Sounds complicated, but at the end it isn't!

Result from user point of view is now obvious: if he is positive to the rule, all affected pricing fileds will be 15% discounted.
If you set also a Rule Desc, then he will also see the "hi 227, you and only you have a discount!" note