

session_start problems among other things?

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- *From:* Peter R. Vermilye <pvermilye@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
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I am involved on a web application that is using a third party set of APIs for remote database access (middleware). I've been brought in because of my background in programming, thus I'm new to this web development process so forgive my ignorance.

The third party has a shopping cart which must be saved in the session.

When navigating from page to page we experience some odd behavior on the hosted server that we do not see on our internal development server. The hosted server is a Windows 2003 Server while our internal server was a Windows 2000 Server. I implemented a Global property to save and restore the cart to the session so as to concentrate the access to the shopping cart to a central location. This project started out using plain ASP under the (patently false) assumption that ASP.NET APIs could be called from ASP pages but the development was far enough along that a total rewrite was not done of the existing ASP pages. Thus, only those pages that use the API are ASP.NET pages and the rest are ASP pages. Even more troubling to me (due to my lack of experience in this) is that the web guy uses intermediate ASP pages sometimes to pass session state information to the ASP side. Things like how many items are in the cart, the total \$ in the cart, etc. This is not to say that ever page transition goes through an ASP page, but whenever a page that could change a relevant session variable is navigated away from it typically is done by way of an ASP page using a request string.

One odd behavior that is exhibited in this site. A page will be built that contains items available to be placed in the shopping cart. The links are created with a request string that contains the ID of the item. When hovering over the link I can see the destination URL in the status line of the web browser, i.e.

<http://test.mywebpage.com/details.aspx?ID=62>

But, when the link is clicked, the destination web page does not always get the request string. When I view the source code in my web browser for the initial page (the one that displays the list of items)

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I can see the correctly formed URL as part of the href= so I know it's there. Also, we are frequently losing the cart out of the session for no apparent reason.

In an attempt to trace some of these problems I wrote a method that will log a string to an auxiliary Access database table we are using on our system. The information logged is the date/time, the string passed to the method, and the value of the HttpContext.Current.Session.SessionID property. Then, I stuck a line in the Global.Session_Start subroutine that logs a string to indicate that Session_Start was executed. I was quite surprised to discover that Session_Start is executed almost every time that an ASP page is navigated to. As further information, the session state is InProc and cookieless is false. I've tried to use a state server but have problems with an object from the third party not being serializable. Said object isn't being saved in the session (at least not by our code) and I'm trying to track down where it is coming from. I am going to try changing the cookieless value in web.config to true to see what effect that has but I'm afraid it will generate other problems because the web guy uses Response.Redirect() a lot in the code and doesn't that lose the cookie information embedded in the URL?

I know this is a long winded explanation but the boss has said if these problems are not resolved by the end of the week he's gonna have to refund the client's money and may lay off several people (hopefully not me but who knows). Any thoughts on things to try? I've tried what I thought were the obvious things but I feel like a fish out of water sometimes with this stuff right now.

Thanks for any assistance.

Peter R. Vermilye
Sr. Systems Engineer
Desoto Systems, Inc.
Memphis, TN

pvermilye@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

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