Sneak Preview: EasyPaidMembers plugin

nlstart,

Are you a starting entrepreneur (or even a well-established one), offering a service which involves invoicing customers and collecting payments on a regular basis? And are you interested in doing this using your e107 Content Management Service (CMS)?

Since PayPal started offering support for subscriptions on its payment gateway (somewhere around 2004), implementing this kind of services should be relatively easy. Although a bit of code hooking with PayPal's API, and then integrate it into e107 is not as easy as it seems!

That's why I created EasyPaid members plugin, that will do all the work for you! This article will show you how easy it is to integrate your online e107 CMS website with PayPal's Subscriptions and Recurring Payments feature and start accepting recurring payments from your customers, with some help of the EasyPaidMembers (EPM) plugin.

NOTE: the EPM plugin is licensed & copyright protected software; NOT open source!
UPDATE: the EPM plugin has been released since July 17, 2011.

Recurring payments case study

In order to explain the PayPal IPN feature that is implemented in the EPM plugin, consider a simple case study. Suppose you manage an online website that offers visitors a monthly VIP subscription for $2.55 per week. In exchange for that they get VIP member access to exclusive news articles, access to certain downloads that are not available for the public and are granted rights to enter posts in exclusive forum areas. Visitors and existing members may sign up for the service through the e107 CMS website.

In the past with such a service, you would have to invoice your subscribers on a monthly basis. Besides that it would involve some extensive administration: keeping track of who started when, when they paid, when to remove the user class when their membership ends. Working with the EPM plugin would enable you to have the following process flow:

Image: http://e107.webstartinternet.com/images/newspost_images/epm_01.jpg1. The user (let's name him Mr. Sam Subscriber) arrives at the e107 website to sign up. After entering and saving the required profile information, he is signed up as a unique member. This procedure is automatically followed by a subscriber's membership overview. Sam can then use the website as is (if free content is available) or immediately sign up for one of the paid services offered. The latter is accomplished by hitting a clearly-visible Subscribe button. With EPM plugin an unlimited amount of subscriptions can be easily created; even the Subscription button is customizable. Supported recurring payment periods: day, week, fortnight (14 days), month, bi-monthly, quarter, half year, year. Making a payment once (non-recurring) is

also possible as an payment period option. Administrators can define up to two optional trial periods, where the length and the amount of the trial period is completely to be defined as you like.

Image: http://e107.webstartinternet.com/images/newspost_images/epm_04.jpg

2. The Subscribe button is actually an entry point into the PayPal system. On confirming the choice, Sam is redirected to the PayPal Web site, where he can either log in to an existing account or create a new one. Account signup with PayPal is free. For some countries PayPal does not even require to have a PayPal account and transactions can be done with a (major) credit card.

The service provider (you, as being the subscription collector) is obliged to have a Premier or Business account with PayPal in order to receive payments.

Image: http://e107.webstartinternet.com/images/newspost_images/epm_02.jpg

The subscribe button transfers certain important information; the service provider's account details on PayPal, the billing cycle and amount, and the currency in which the payment is to be billed. This tells the PayPal system how much money is to be billed, how often, and where to send it. Also details are passed to PayPal to simplify reconciliation later.

3. Once Sam authorizes the PayPal payment, a message is send to the EPM plugin PayPal IPN validation program, which logs in, checks that the correct payment information has been received, and activates paid service for Sam. It puts Sam in the right user class(es) and sends Sam and the website owner a confirmation e-mail.

4. Because the first payment took place through PayPal's Subscriptions and Recurring Payments, PayPal automatically keeps track of the billing cycle stated at the time of first payment, and rebills Sam on a periodically basis (that is defined by the administrator (you!): per day, week, month, year etc.) until Sam manually cancels his subscription. The service provider receives an e-mail notification of payment from PayPal on a periodically basis, and thus keeps Sam's service alive until a cancellation notice arrives from PayPal. The EPM plugin PayPal IPN validation program keeps track of this when Sam cancels his subscription on PayPal. At Sam's profile subscription overview page there is even a unsubscribe button that helps Sam to go directly to the unsubscribe functionality in PayPal to cancel his membership.

Image: http://e107.webstartinternet.com/images/newspost_images/epm_03.jpgThis EPM plugin validation process and the recurring payment process is completely automatic, and requires no intervention from either Sam or the service provider (read: you!).

Extensive logging is available for the administrator of the EPM plugin, just in case. Also in the administrative section can be seen which subscribers are active; when their next renewal date is and what their cancellation date is. Of course paid subscriptions that are not continued stay active until the date the subscriber did pay for. A daily run determines which describers are not active anymore and their user class membership will be removed automatically.

So there you have it! After installing the EPM plugin, fill in the settings, create one or more subscriptions, have some good exclusive content available for the subscription user class(es) and you're ready to attract

paid subscribers to your e107 CMS website.

Hint: subscribe to the free NLSTART Update newsletter (from the menu on the left) so you will be informed with the latest NLSTART development news.

Visit the EPM plugin order page!