

This tutorial is part of a set. Find out more about data access with ASP.NET in the Working with Data in ASP.NET 2.0 section of the ASP.NET site at <http://www.asp.net/learn/dataaccess/default.aspx>.

# Working with Data in ASP.NET 2.0 :: Customizing the Data Modification Interface

## Introduction

The BoundFields and CheckBoxFields used by the GridView and DetailsView controls simplify the process of modifying data due to their ability to render read-only, editable, and insertable interfaces. These interfaces can be rendered without the need for adding any additional declarative markup or code. However, the BoundField and CheckBoxField's interfaces lack the customizability often needed in real-world scenarios. In order to customize the editable or insertable interface in a GridView or DetailsView we need to instead use a TemplateField.

In the [preceding tutorial](#) we saw how to customize the data modification interfaces by adding validation Web controls. In this tutorial we'll look at how to customize the actual data collection Web controls, replacing the BoundField and CheckBoxField's standard TextBox and CheckBox controls with alternative input Web controls. In particular, we'll build an editable GridView that allows a product's name, category, supplier, and discontinued status to be updated. When editing a particular row, the category and supplier fields will render as DropDownLists, containing the set of available categories and suppliers to choose from. Furthermore, we'll replace the CheckBoxField's default CheckBox with a RadioButtonList control that offers two options: "Active" and "Discontinued".

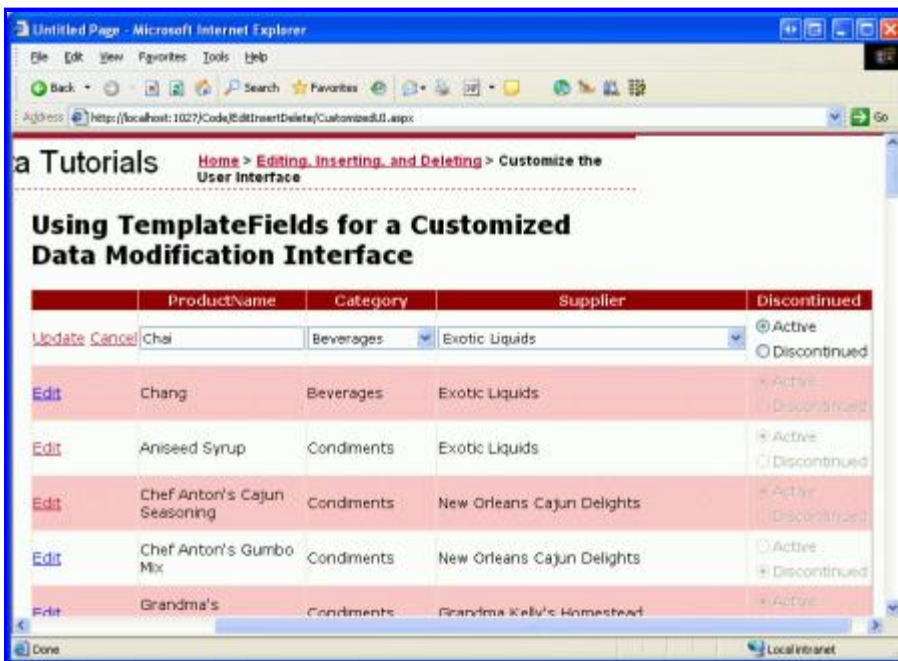


Figure 1: The GridView's Editing Interface Includes DropDownLists and RadioButtons

### Step 1: Creating the Appropriate UpdateProduct Overload

In this tutorial we will build an editable GridView that permits editing of a product's name, category, supplier, and discontinued status. Therefore, we need an UpdateProduct overload that accepts five input parameters –

these four product values plus the `ProductID`. Like in our previous overloads, this one will:

1. Retrieve the product information from the database for the specified `ProductID`,
2. Update the `ProductName`, `CategoryID`, `SupplierID`, and `Discontinued` fields, and
3. Send the update request to the DAL through the `TableAdapter`'s `Update()` method.

For brevity, for this particular overload I've omitted the business rule check that ensures a product being marked as discontinued isn't the only product offered by its supplier. Feel free to add it in if you prefer, or, ideally, refactor out the logic to a separate method.

The following code shows the new `UpdateProduct` overload in the `ProductsBLL` class:

```
[System.ComponentModel.DataAnnotations.DataObjectMethodAttribute
    (System.ComponentModel.DataAnnotations.DataObjectMethodType.Update, false)]
public bool UpdateProduct(string productName, int? categoryID,
    int? supplierID, bool discontinued, int productID)
{
    Northwind.ProductsDataTable products = Adapter.GetProductByProductID(productID);
    if (products.Count == 0)
        // no matching record found, return false
        return false;

    Northwind.ProductsRow product = products[0];

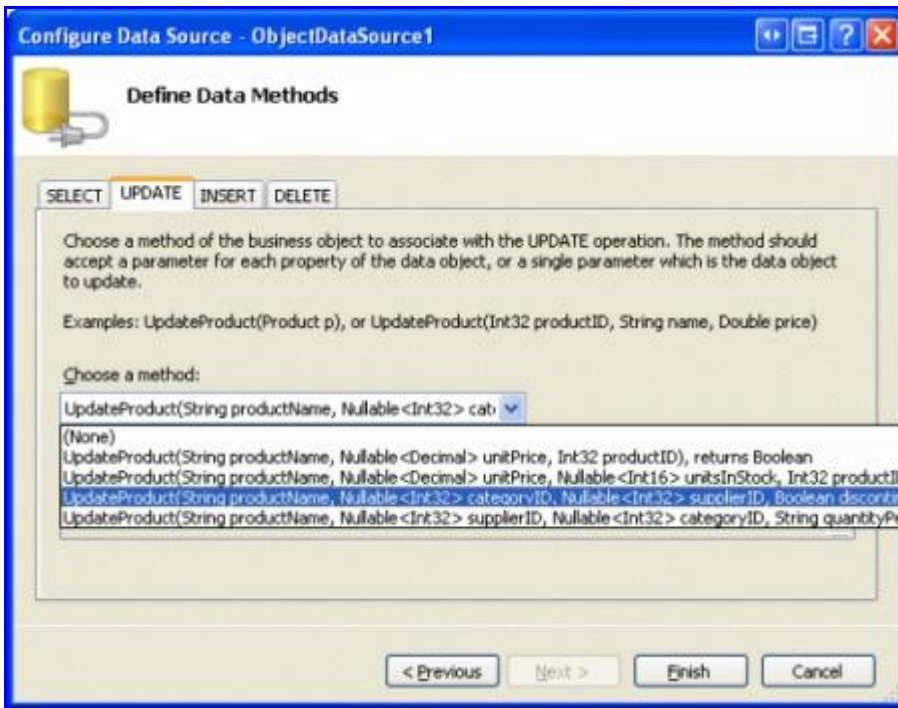
    product.ProductName = productName;
    if (supplierID == null) product.SetSupplierIDNull();
    else product.SupplierID = supplierID.Value;
    if (categoryID == null) product.SetCategoryIDNull();
    else product.CategoryID = categoryID.Value;
    product.Discontinued = discontinued;

    // Update the product record
    int rowsAffected = Adapter.Update(product);

    // Return true if precisely one row was updated, otherwise false
    return rowsAffected == 1;
}
```

## Step 2: Crafting the Editable GridView

With the `UpdateProduct` overload added, we're ready to create our editable `GridView`. Open the `CustomizedUI.aspx` page in the `EditInsertDelete` folder and add a `GridView` control to the Designer. Next, create a new `ObjectDataSource` from the `GridView`'s smart tag. Configure the `ObjectDataSource` to retrieve product information via the `ProductBLL` class's `GetProducts()` method and to update product data using the `UpdateProduct` overload we just created. From the `INSERT` and `DELETE` tabs, select (None) from the drop-down lists.



**Figure 2: Configure the ObjectDataSource to Use the UpdateProduct Overload Just Created**

As we've seen throughout the data modification tutorials, the declarative syntax for the ObjectDataSource created by Visual Studio assigns the `OldValuesParameterFormatString` property to `original_{0}`. This, of course, won't work with our Business Logic Layer since our methods don't expect the original `ProductID` value to be passed in. Therefore, as we've done in previous tutorials, take a moment to remove this property assignment from the declarative syntax or, instead, set this property's value to `{0}`.

After this change, the ObjectDataSource's declarative markup should look like the following:

```
<asp:ObjectDataSource ID="ObjectDataSource1" runat="server"
  SelectMethod="GetProducts" TypeName="ProductsBLL"
  UpdateMethod="UpdateProduct">
  <UpdateParameters>
    <asp:Parameter Name="productName" Type="String" />
    <asp:Parameter Name="categoryID" Type="Int32" />
    <asp:Parameter Name="supplierID" Type="Int32" />
    <asp:Parameter Name="discontinued" Type="Boolean" />
    <asp:Parameter Name="productID" Type="Int32" />
  </UpdateParameters>
</asp:ObjectDataSource>
```

Note that the `OldValuesParameterFormatString` property has been removed and that there is a `Parameter` in the `UpdateParameters` collection for each of the input parameters expected by our `UpdateProduct` overload.

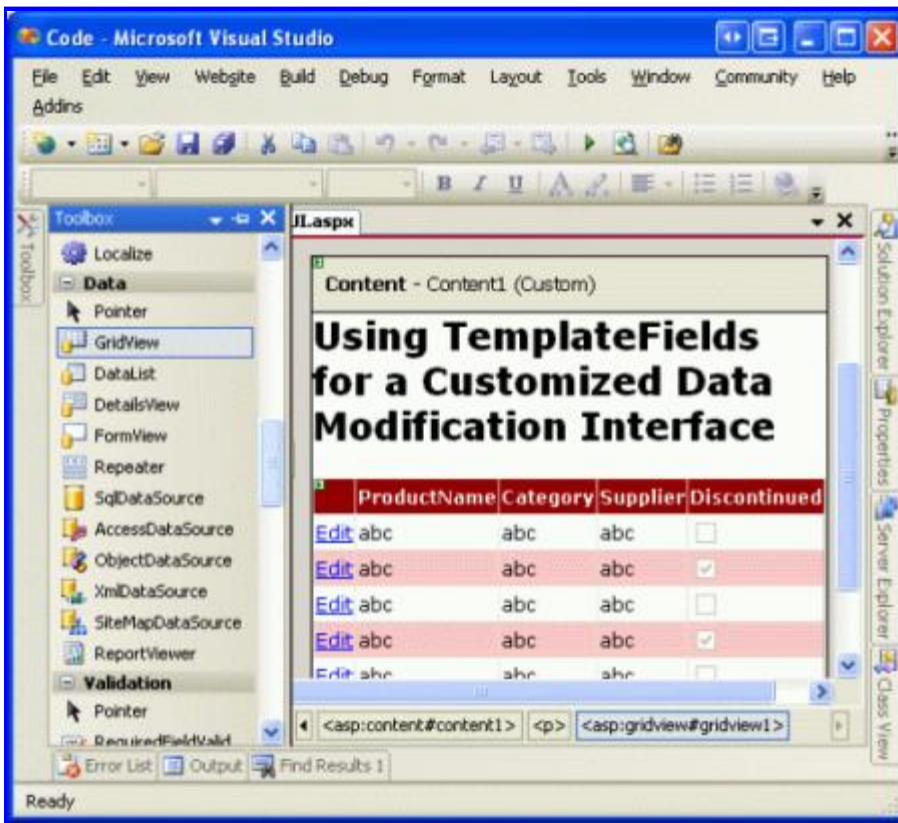
While the ObjectDataSource is configured to update only a subset of product values, the GridView currently shows *all* of the product fields. Take a moment to edit the GridView so that:

- It only includes the `ProductName`, `SupplierName`, `CategoryName` `BoundFields` and the `Discontinued` `CheckBoxField`
- The `CategoryName` and `SupplierName` fields to appear before (to the left of) the `Discontinued` `CheckBoxField`
- The `CategoryName` and `SupplierName` `BoundFields`' `HeaderText` property is set to "Category" and

"Supplier", respectively

- Editing support is enabled (check the Enable Editing checkbox in the GridView's smart tag)

After these changes, the Designer will look similar to Figure 3, with the GridView's declarative syntax shown below.



**Figure 3: Remove the Unneeded Fields from the GridView**

```
<asp:GridView ID="GridView1" runat="server" AutoGenerateColumns="False"
  DataKeyNames="ProductID" DataSourceID="ObjectDataSource1">
  <Columns>
    <asp:BoundField DataField="ProductName"
      HeaderText="ProductName" SortExpression="ProductName" />
    <asp:BoundField DataField="CategoryName" HeaderText="Category"
      ReadOnly="True"
      SortExpression="CategoryName" />
    <asp:BoundField DataField="SupplierName" HeaderText="Supplier"
      ReadOnly="True"
      SortExpression="SupplierName" />
    <asp:CheckBoxField DataField="Discontinued"
      HeaderText="Discontinued" SortExpression="Discontinued" />
  </Columns>
</asp:GridView>
```

At this point the GridView's read-only behavior is complete. When viewing the data, each product is rendered as a row in the GridView, showing the product's name, category, supplier, and discontinued status.

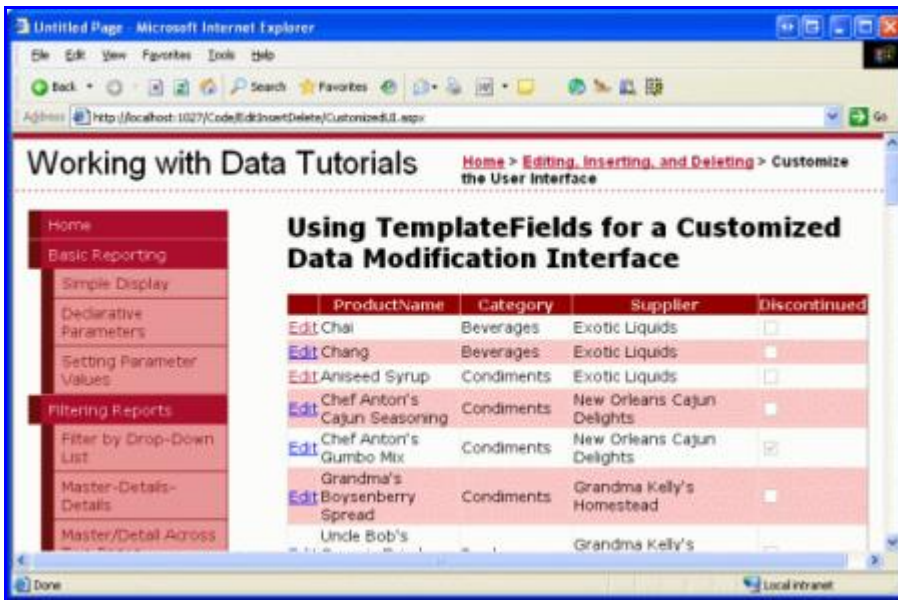


Figure 4: The GridView's Read-Only Interface is Complete

**Note:** As discussed in [An Overview of Inserting, Updating, and Deleting Data tutorial](#), it is vitally important that the GridView's view state be enabled (the default behavior). If you set the GridView's `EnableViewState` property to `false`, you run the risk of having concurrent users unintentionally deleting or editing records. See [WARNING: Concurrency Issue with ASP.NET 2.0 GridViews/DetailsView/FormViews that Support Editing and/or Deleting and Whose View State is Disabled](#) for more information.

## Step 3: Using a DropDownList for the Category and Supplier Editing Interfaces

Recall that the `ProductsRow` object contains `CategoryID`, `CategoryName`, `SupplierID`, and `SupplierName` properties, which provide the actual foreign-key ID values in the `Products` database table and the corresponding `Name` values in the `Categories` and `Suppliers` tables. The `ProductRow`'s `CategoryID` and `SupplierID` can both be read from and written to, while the `CategoryName` and `SupplierName` properties are marked read-only.

Due to the read-only status of the `CategoryName` and `SupplierName` properties, the corresponding `BoundFields` have had their `ReadOnly` property set to `true`, preventing these values from being modified when a row is edited. While we can set the `ReadOnly` property to `false`, rendering the `CategoryName` and `SupplierName` `BoundFields` as `TextBoxes` during editing, such an approach will result in an exception when the user attempts to update the product since there is no `UpdateProduct` overload that takes in `CategoryName` and `SupplierName` inputs. In fact, we don't want to create such an overload for two reasons:

- The `Products` table doesn't have `SupplierName` or `CategoryName` fields, but `SupplierID` and `CategoryID`. Therefore, we want our method to be passed these particular ID values, not their lookup tables' values.
- Requiring the user to type in the name of the supplier or category is less than ideal, as it requires the user to know the available categories and suppliers and their correct spellings.

The supplier and category fields should display the category and suppliers' names when in read-only mode (as it



does now) and a drop-down list of applicable options when being edited. Using a drop-down list, the end user can quickly see what categories and suppliers are available to choose among and can more easily make their selection.

To provide this behavior, we need to convert the `SupplierName` and `CategoryName` `BoundFields` into `TemplateFields` whose `ItemTemplate` emits the `SupplierName` and `CategoryName` values and whose `EditItemTemplate` uses a `DropDownList` control to list the available categories and suppliers.

### Adding the Categories and Suppliers DropDownLists

Start by converting the `SupplierName` and `CategoryName` `BoundFields` into `TemplateFields` by: clicking on the `Edit Columns` link from the `GridView`'s smart tag; selecting the `BoundField` from the list in the lower left; and clicking the "Convert this field into a `TemplateField`" link. The conversion process will create a `TemplateField` with both an `ItemTemplate` and an `EditItemTemplate`, as shown in the declarative syntax below:

```
<asp:TemplateField HeaderText="Category" SortExpression="CategoryName">
  <EditItemTemplate>
    <asp:Label ID="Label1" runat="server"
      Text='<%# Eval("CategoryName") %>'></asp:Label>
  </EditItemTemplate>
  <ItemTemplate>
    <asp:Label ID="Label1" runat="server"
      Text='<%# Bind("CategoryName") %>'></asp:Label>
  </ItemTemplate>
</asp:TemplateField>
```

Since the `BoundField` was marked as read-only, both the `ItemTemplate` and `EditItemTemplate` contain a `Label` Web control whose `Text` property is bound to the applicable data field (`CategoryName`, in the syntax above). We need to modify the `EditItemTemplate`, replacing the `Label` Web control with a `DropDownList` control.

As we've seen in previous tutorials, the template can be edited through the Designer or directly from the declarative syntax. To edit it through the Designer, click on the `Edit Templates` link from the `GridView`'s smart tag and choose to work with the `Category` field's `EditItemTemplate`. Remove the `Label` Web control and replace it with a `DropDownList` control, setting the `DropDownList`'s `ID` property to `Categories`.

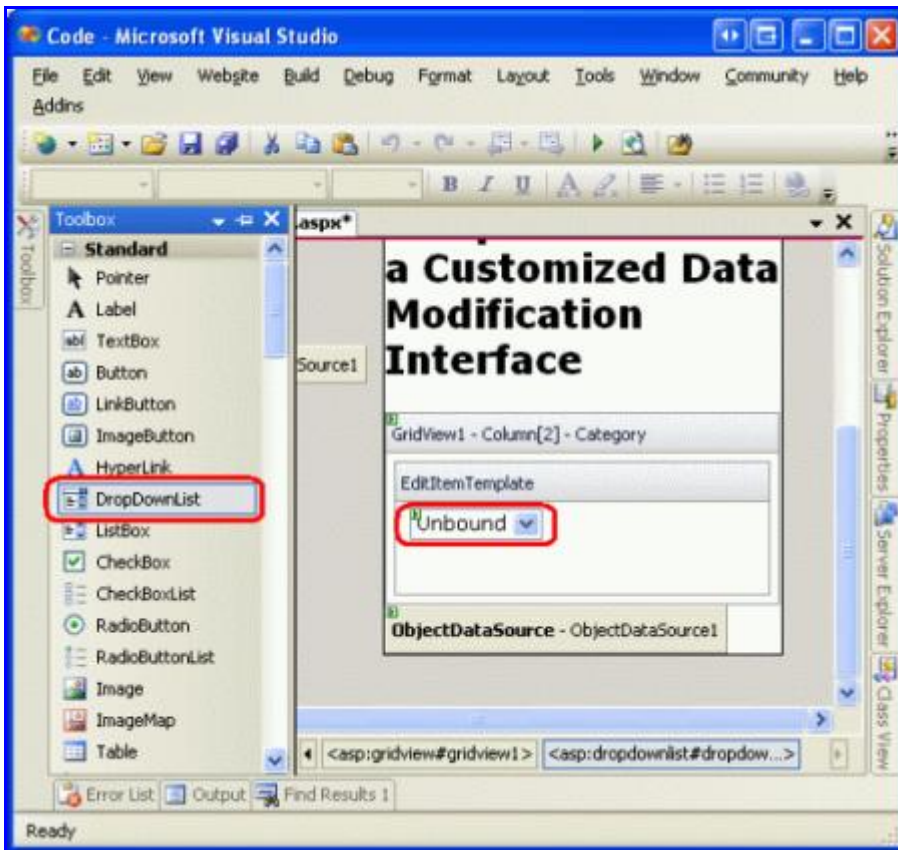


Figure 5: Remove the TextBox and Add a DropDownList to the EditItemTemplate

We next need to populate the DropDownList with the available categories. Click on the Choose Data Source link from the DropDownList's smart tag and opt to create a new ObjectDataSource named CategoriesDataSource.

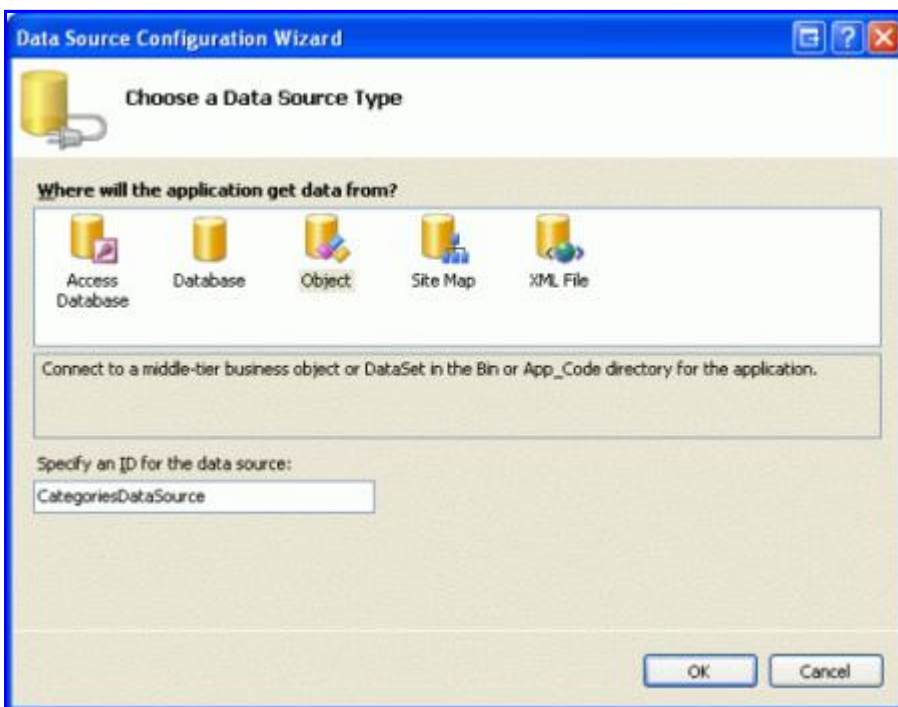
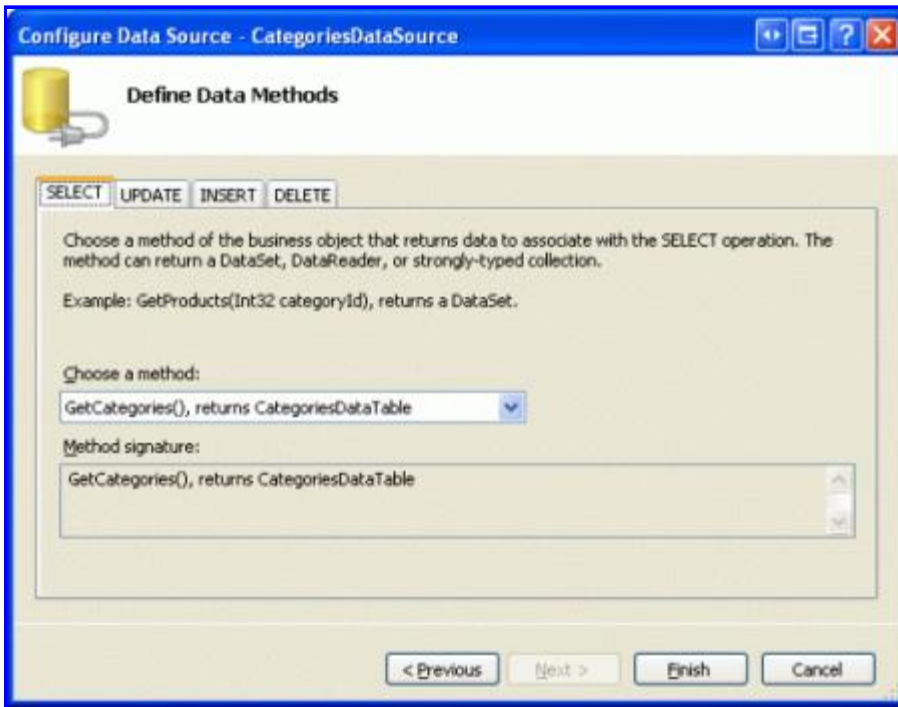


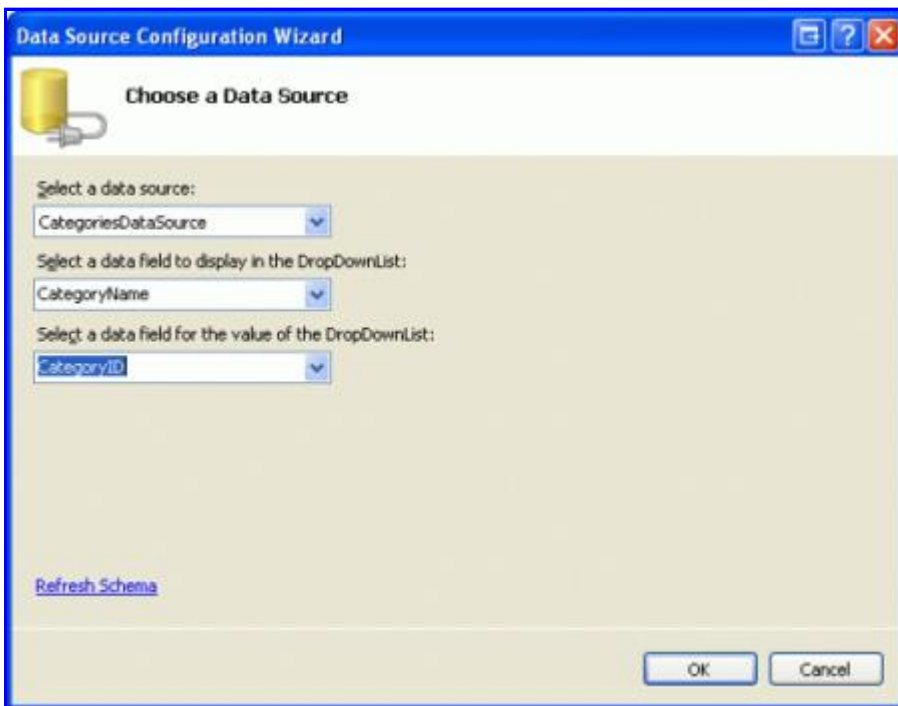
Figure 6: Create a New ObjectDataSource Control Named CategoriesDataSource

To have this ObjectDataSource return all of the categories, bind it to the CategoriesBLL class's GetCategories() method.



**Figure 7: Bind the ObjectDataSource to the CategoriesBLL's GetCategories() Method**

Finally, configure the DropDownList's settings such that the CategoryName field is displayed in each DropDownList ListItem with the CategoryID field used as the value.



**Figure 8: Have the CategoryName Field Displayed and the CategoryID Used as the Value**

After making these changes the declarative markup for the EditItemTemplate in the CategoryName



TemplateField will include both a DropDownList and an ObjectDataSource:

```
<asp:TemplateField HeaderText="Category" SortExpression="CategoryName">
  <EditItemTemplate>
    <asp:DropDownList ID="Categories" runat="server"
      DataSourceID="CategoriesDataSource"
      DataTextField="CategoryName" DataValueField="CategoryID">
    </asp:DropDownList>
    <asp:ObjectDataSource ID="CategoriesDataSource" runat="server"
      OldValuesParameterFormatString="original_{0}"
      SelectMethod="GetCategories" TypeName="CategoriesBLL">
    </asp:ObjectDataSource>
  </EditItemTemplate>
</ItemTemplate>
</asp:TemplateField>
```

**Note:** The DropDownList in the EditItemTemplate must have its view state enabled. We will soon add databinding syntax to the DropDownList's declarative syntax and databinding commands like Eval() and Bind() can only appear in controls whose view state is enabled.

Repeat these steps to add a DropDownList named Suppliers to the SupplierName TemplateField's EditItemTemplate. This will involve adding a DropDownList to the EditItemTemplate and creating another ObjectDataSource. The Suppliers DropDownList's ObjectDataSource, however, should be configured to invoke the SuppliersBLL class's GetSuppliers() method. Additionally, configure the Suppliers DropDownList to display the CompanyName field and use the SupplierID field as the value for its ListItems.

After adding the DropDownLists to the two EditItemTemplates, load the page in a browser and click the Edit button for the Chef Anton's Cajun Seasoning product. As Figure 9 shows, the product's category and supplier columns are rendered as drop-down lists containing the available categories and suppliers to choose from. However, note that the *first* items in both drop-down lists are selected by default (Beverages for the category and Exotic Liquids as the supplier), even though Chef Anton's Cajun Seasoning is a Condiment supplied by New Orleans Cajun Delights.

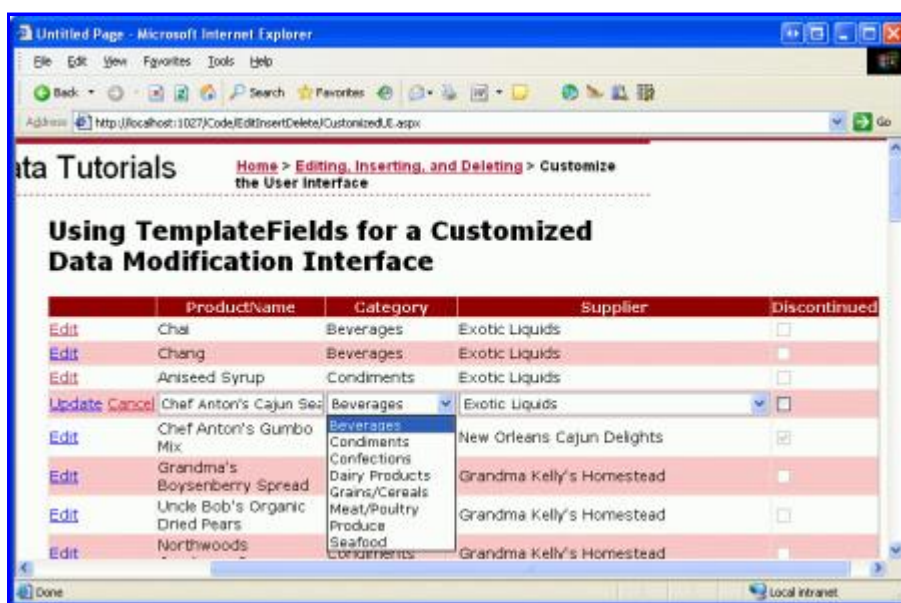


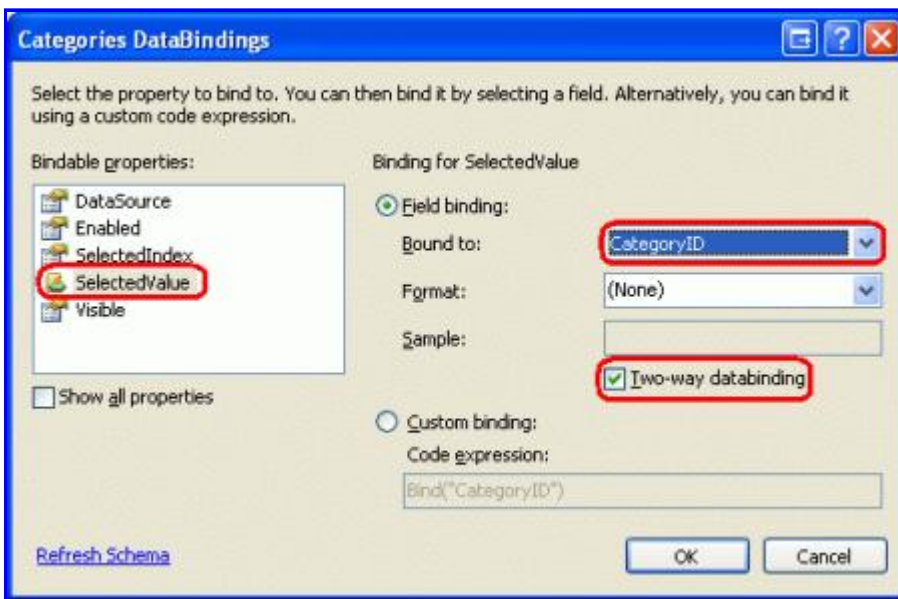
Figure 9: The First Item in the Drop-Down Lists is Selected by Default

Furthermore, if you click Update, you'll find that the product's `CategoryID` and `SupplierID` values are set to `NULL`. Both of these undesired behaviors are caused because the `DropDownLists` in the `EditItemTemplates` are not bound to any data fields from the underlying product data.

## Binding the `DropDownLists` to the `CategoryID` and `SupplierID` Data Fields

In order to have the edited product's category and supplier drop-down lists set to the appropriate values and to have these values sent back to the BLL's `UpdateProduct` method upon clicking Update, we need to bind the `DropDownLists`' `SelectedValue` properties to the `CategoryID` and `SupplierID` data fields using two-way databinding. To accomplish this with the `Categories` `DropDownList`, you can add `SelectedValue='<%# Bind("CategoryID") %>'` directly to the declarative syntax.

Alternatively, you can set the `DropDownList`'s databindings by editing the template through the Designer and clicking the `Edit DataBindings` link from the `DropDownList`'s smart tag. Next, indicate that the `SelectedValue` property should be bound to the `CategoryID` field using two-way databinding (see Figure 10). Repeat either the declarative or Designer process to bind the `SupplierID` data field to the `Suppliers` `DropDownList`.



**Figure 10: Bind the `CategoryID` to the `DropDownList`'s `SelectedValue` Property Using Two-Way Databinding**

Once the bindings have been applied to the `SelectedValue` properties of the two `DropDownLists`, the edited product's category and supplier columns will default to the current product's values. Upon clicking Update, the `CategoryID` and `SupplierID` values of the selected drop-down list item will be passed to the `UpdateProduct` method. Figure 11 shows the tutorial after the databinding statements have been added; note how the selected drop-down list items for Chef Anton's Cajun Seasoning are correctly Condiment and New Orleans Cajun Delights.

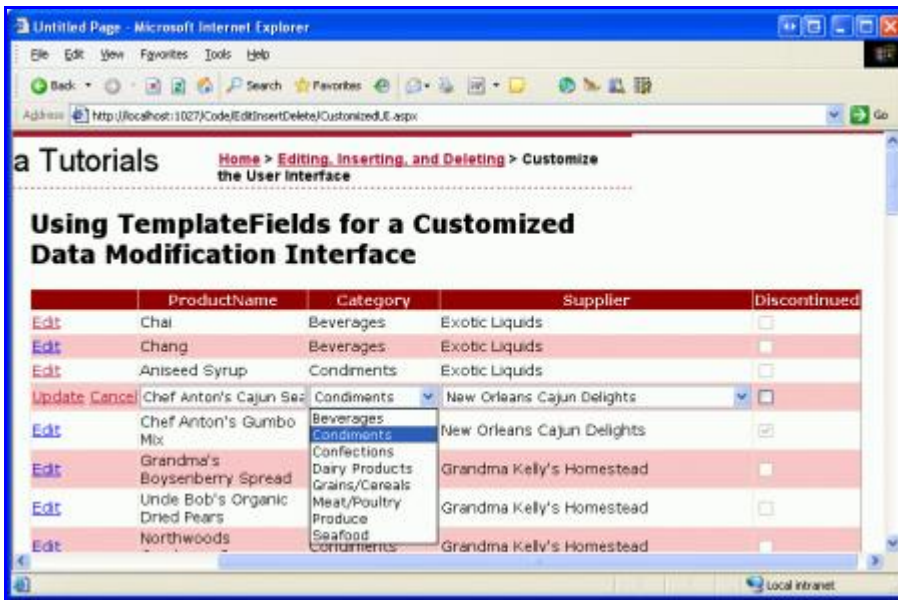


Figure 11: The Edited Product's Current Category and Supplier Values are Selected by Default

## Handling NULL Values

The `CategoryID` and `SupplierID` columns in the `Products` table can be `NULL`, yet the `DropDownLists` in the `EditItemTemplates` don't include a list item to represent a `NULL` value. This has two consequences:

- User cannot use our interface to change a product's category or supplier from a non-`NULL` value to a `NULL` one
- If a product has a `NULL` `CategoryID` or `SupplierID`, clicking the `Edit` button will result in an exception. This is because the `NULL` value returned by `CategoryID` (or `SupplierID`) in the `Bind()` statement does not map to a value in the `DropDownList` (the `DropDownList` throws an exception when its `SelectedValue` property is set to a value *not* in its collection of list items).

In order to support `NULL` `CategoryID` and `SupplierID` values, we need to add another `ListItem` to each `DropDownList` to represent the `NULL` value. In the [Master/Detail Filtering With a DropDownList](#) tutorial, we saw how to add an additional `ListItem` to a databound `DropDownList`, which involved setting the `DropDownList`'s `AppendDataBoundItems` property to `true` and manually adding the additional `ListItem`. In that previous tutorial, however, we added a `ListItem` with a `Value` of `-1`. The databinding logic in ASP.NET, however, will automatically convert a blank string to a `NULL` value and vice-a-versa. Therefore, for this tutorial we want the `ListItem`'s `Value` to be an empty string.

Start by setting both `DropDownLists`' `AppendDataBoundItems` property to `true`. Next, add the `NULL` `ListItem` by adding the following `<asp:ListItem>` element to each `DropDownList` so that the declarative markup looks like:

```
<asp:DropDownList ID="Categories" runat="server"
  DataSourceID="CategoriesDataSource" DataTextField="CategoryName"
  DataValueField="CategoryID" SelectedValue='<%= Bind("CategoryID") %>'
  AppendDataBoundItems="True">
  <asp:ListItem Value="">(None)</asp:ListItem>
</asp:DropDownList>
```

I've chosen to use `"(None)"` as the `Text` value for this `ListItem`, but you can change it to also be a blank string if you'd like.

**Note:** As we saw in the *Master/Detail Filtering With a DropDownList* tutorial, `ListItems` can be added to a `DropDownList` through the Designer by clicking on the `DropDownList`'s `Items` property in the Properties window (which will display the `ListItems` Collection Editor). However, be sure to add the `NULL` `ListItems` for this tutorial through the declarative syntax. If you use the `ListItems` Collection Editor, the generated declarative syntax will omit the `Value` setting altogether when assigned a blank string, creating declarative markup like: `<asp:ListItem> (None) </asp:ListItem>`. While this may look harmless, the missing `Value` causes the `DropDownList` to use the `Text` property value in its place. That means that if this `NULL` `ListItems` is selected, the value "(None)" will be attempted to be assigned to the `CategoryID`, which will result in an exception. By explicitly setting `Value=""`, a `NULL` value will be assigned to `CategoryID` when the `NULL` `ListItems` is selected.

Repeat these steps for the Suppliers `DropDownList`.

With this additional `ListItems`, the editing interface can now assign `NULL` values to a Product's `CategoryID` and `SupplierID` fields, as shown in Figure 12.

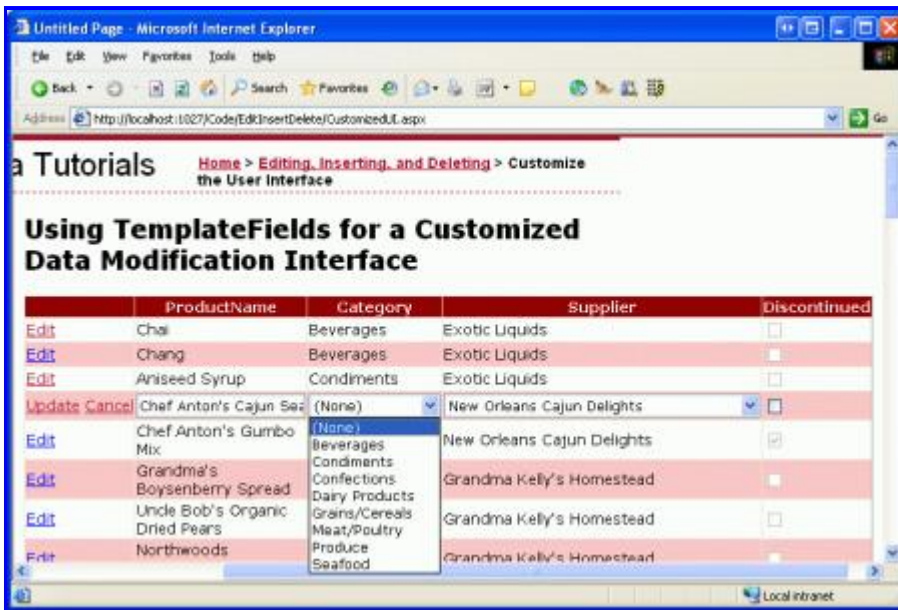


Figure 12: Choose (None) to Assign a `NULL` Value for a Product's Category or Supplier

## Step 4: Using RadioButtons for the Discontinued Status

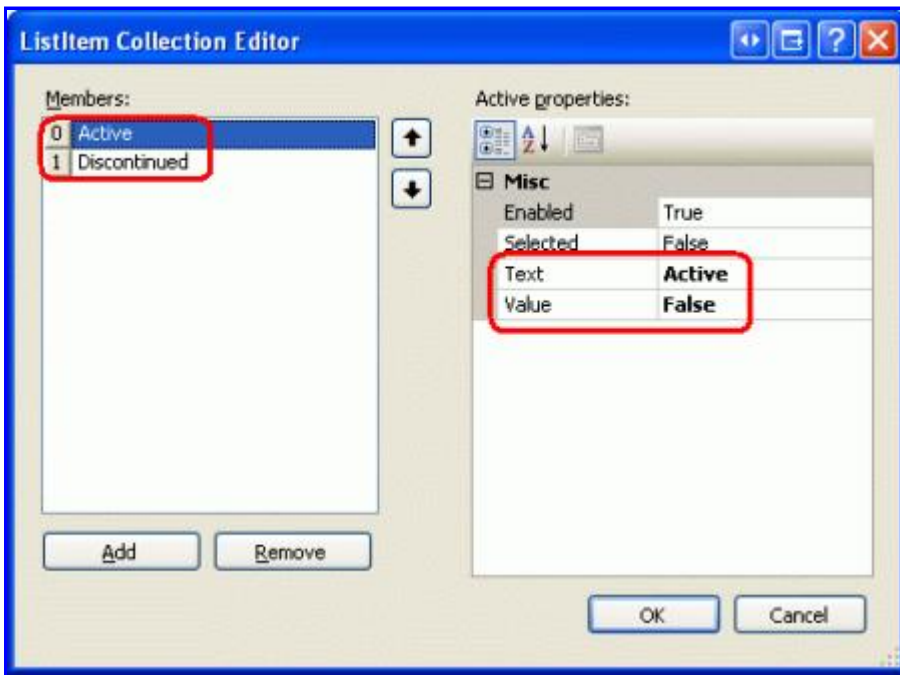
Currently the products' `Discontinued` data field is expressed using a `CheckBoxField`, which renders a disabled checkbox for the read-only rows and an enabled checkbox for the row being edited. While this user interface is often suitable, we can customize it if needed using a `TemplateField`. For this tutorial, let's change the `CheckBoxField` into a `TemplateField` that uses a `RadioButtonList` control with two options – "Active" and "Discontinued" – from which the user can specify the product's `Discontinued` value.

Start by converting the `Discontinued` `CheckBoxField` into a `TemplateField`, which will create a `TemplateField` with an `ItemTemplate` and `EditItemTemplate`. Both templates include a `CheckBox` with its `Checked` property bound to the `Discontinued` data field, the only difference between the two being that the `ItemTemplate`'s `CheckBox`'s `Enabled` property is set to `false`.

Replace the `CheckBox` in both the `ItemTemplate` and `EditItemTemplate` with a `RadioButtonList` control,



setting both `RadioButtonLists`' `ID` properties to `DiscontinuedChoice`. Next, indicate that the `RadioButtonLists` should each contain two radio buttons, one labeled "Active" with a value of "False" and one labeled "Discontinued" with a value of "True". To accomplish this you can either enter the `<asp:ListItem>` elements in directly through the declarative syntax or use the `ListItem` Collection Editor from the Designer. Figure 13 shows the `ListItem` Collection Editor after the two radio button options have been specified.



**Figure 13: Add "Active" and "Discontinued" Options to the RadioButtonList**

Since the `RadioButtonList` in the `ItemTemplate` shouldn't be editable, set its `Enabled` property to `false`, leaving the `Enabled` property to `true` (the default) for the `RadioButtonList` in the `EditItemTemplate`. This will make the radio buttons in the non-edited row as read-only, but will allow the user to change the `RadioButton` values for the edited row.

We still need to assign the `RadioButtonList` controls' `SelectedValue` properties so that the appropriate radio button is selected based upon the product's `Discontinued` data field. As with the `DropDownLists` examined earlier in this tutorial, this databinding syntax can either be added directly into the declarative markup or through the `Edit DataBindings` link in the `RadioButtonLists`' smart tags.

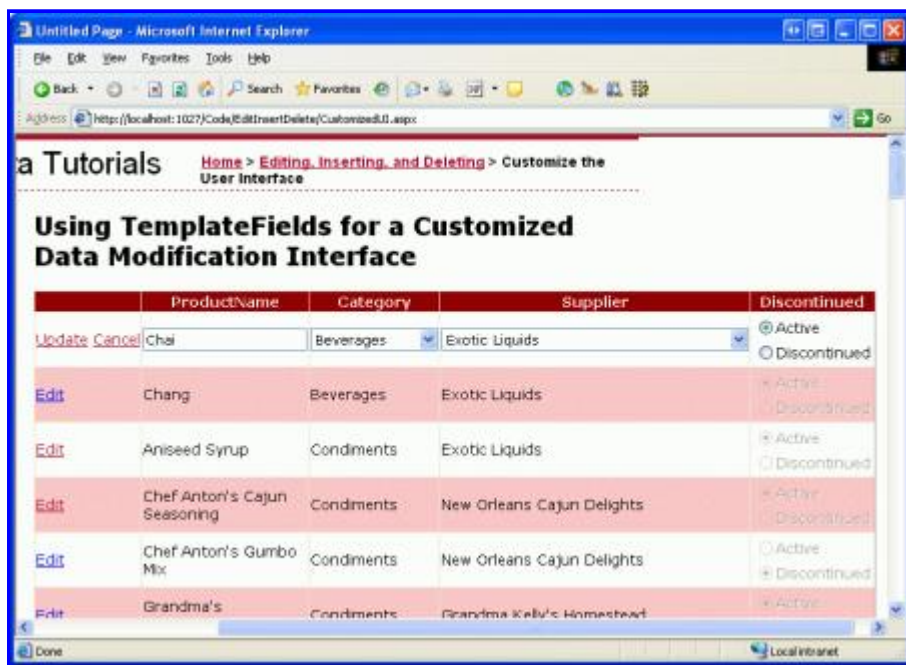
After adding the two `RadioButtonLists` and configuring them, the `Discontinued` `TemplateField`'s declarative markup should look like:

```
<asp:TemplateField HeaderText="Discontinued" SortExpression="Discontinued">
  <ItemTemplate>
    <asp:RadioButtonList ID="DiscontinuedChoice" runat="server"
      Enabled="False" SelectedValue='<%= Bind("Discontinued") %>'>
      <asp:ListItem Value="False">Active</asp:ListItem>
      <asp:ListItem Value="True">Discontinued</asp:ListItem>
    </asp:RadioButtonList>
  </ItemTemplate>
  <EditItemTemplate>
    <asp:RadioButtonList ID="DiscontinuedChoice" runat="server"
      SelectedValue='<%= Bind("Discontinued") %>'>
      <asp:ListItem Value="False">Active</asp:ListItem>
      <asp:ListItem Value="True">Discontinued</asp:ListItem>
    </asp:RadioButtonList>
  </EditItemTemplate>
</asp:TemplateField>
```



```
</EditItemTemplate>  
</asp:TemplateField>
```

With these changes, the `Discontinued` column has been transformed from a list of checkboxes to a list of radio button pairs (see Figure 14). When editing a product, the appropriate radio button is selected and the product's discontinued status can be updated by selecting the other radio button and clicking Update.



**Figure 14: The Discontinued CheckBoxes Have Been Replaced by Radio Button Pairs**

**Note:** Since the `Discontinued` column in the `Products` database cannot have `NULL` values, we do not need to worry about capturing `NULL` information in the interface. If, however, `Discontinued` column could contain `NULL` values we'd want to add a third radio button to the list with its `Value` set to an empty string (`Value=""`), just like with the category and supplier `DropDownLists`.

## Summary

While the `BoundField` and `CheckBoxField` automatically render read-only, editing, and inserting interfaces, they lack the ability for customization. Often, though, we'll need to customize the editing or inserting interface, perhaps adding validation controls (as we saw in the preceding tutorial) or by customizing the data collection user interface (as we saw in this tutorial). Customizing the interface with a `TemplateField` can be summed up in the following steps:

1. Add a `TemplateField` or convert an existing `BoundField` or `CheckBoxField` into a `TemplateField`
2. Augment the interface as needed
3. Bind the appropriate data fields to the newly added Web controls using two-way databinding

In addition to using the built-in ASP.NET Web controls, you can also customize the templates of a `TemplateField` with custom, compiled server controls and User Controls.

Happy Programming!

# About the Author

Scott Mitchell, author of six ASP/ASP.NET books and founder of 4GuysFromRolla.com, has been working with Microsoft Web technologies since 1998. Scott works as an independent consultant, trainer, and writer, recently completing his latest book, [Sams Teach Yourself ASP.NET 2.0 in 24 Hours](#). He can be reached at [mitchell@4guysfromrolla.com](mailto:mitchell@4guysfromrolla.com) or via his blog, which can be found at <http://ScottOnWriting.NET>.