

# Building RCP Apps with MPS

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**Abstract.**

## 1 Introduction

The term RCP is borrowed from the Eclipse ecosystem and stands for Rich Client Application. It refers to a stripped down version of the IDE that only contains those artifacts that are necessary for a given business purpose. In the MPS world it refers to a stripped down version of MPS that only contains those artifacts that are necessary to use a small domain-specific set of languages. Various aspects of MPS can be removed or customized to deliver a custom user experience for a given group of users. This article describes how. In particular, the following aspects of MPS can be customized:

- various icons, slogans, splash screens and images
- the help URL
- the set of languages available to the users
- the set of plugins available in MPS

## 2 Process Overview

To build a custom RCP version of MPS, you have to create a solution that contains a so-called *build script*. A build script is written in MPS' build language which is optimized for building RCP applications (as well as IntelliJ plugins and in the future, Eclipse plugins). When running the generator for this build script, MPS generates an `ant` file that creates the actual RCP distribution.

## 3 Building an example RCP build

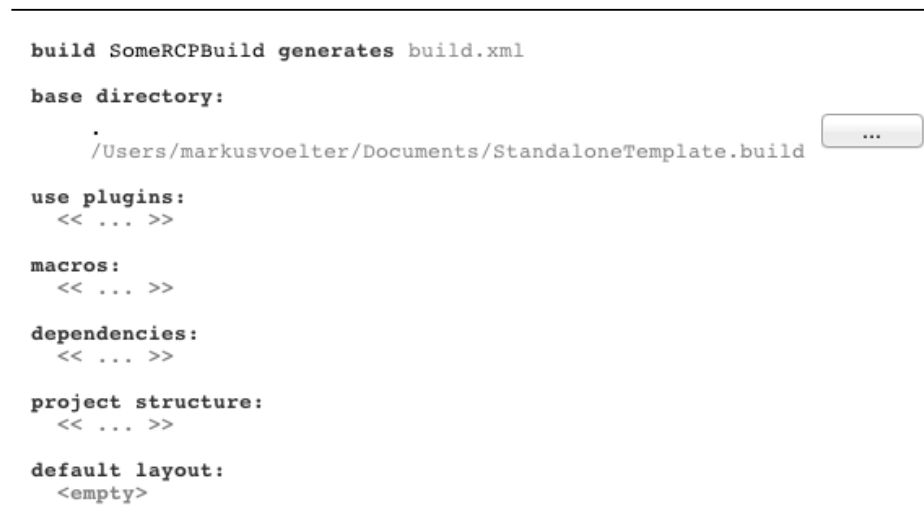
In this document we describe the development of an RCP build script for the mbeddr project. mbeddr is a set of languages for embedded software development based on MPS. The project is available at <http://mbeddr.com>. It is Open Source, so all the code, including the RCP build script is available from the repository at <https://github.com/mbeddr/mbeddr.core/>. The project that contains the build script can be found in `/code/rcp-build/MPSIDE-build.mpr`.

### 3.1 Creating the Solution and the Build Script

In an arbitrary project create a new solution with a new model inside. In the model, configure as used languages

- `jetbrains.mps.build`
- `jetbrains.mps.build.mps`

Also import the `jetbrains.mps.ide.build` model. You can now create a new **build project** in the model (the name is confusing: it is not actually a new build *project*, just a build script). Fig. 1 shows the resulting, empty build script.



**Fig. 1.** An empty build script after directly after creation.

Let us look at the various sections of a build script:

**base directory** The base directory defines an absolute path relative to which all other paths are specified. By default, this is the directory in which the resulting **ant** file will be generated, and in which it will be executed.

**use plugins** The build language itself can be extended via plugins<sup>1</sup>. These plugins contribute additional build language syntax. Typically, the **java** and **mps** plugins are required. We will use syntax contributed by these plugins below.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that these are *not* the plugins that make up MPS itself; those will be configured later.

**macros** Macros are essentially name-value pairs (similar to `${something}` in `ant`). In the Macros section, these names are defined and values are assigned. In the remainder of the build script these macro variables will be used. MPS supports two kinds of Macros: **var** macros are strings and can be assigned any value. **folder** represents paths, relative to the base directory defined above. Note that MPS provides code completion for the path components in **folder** macros.

**dependencies** This section defines dependencies to other build scripts. MPS bundles a set of build scripts (e.g. `buildStandalone`, `buildWorkbench` or `buildMPS`). By establishing a dependency to any one of them, the structures defined in that referenced build script can be used in the referencing build script. For example, the macros defined in the referenced build scripts can be used.

**project structure** This section defines the actual contents of the to-be-built RCP application. Such contents may be JAR files, plugins, branding or MPS languages.

**default layout** This section creates the directory, file and JAR structure of the new RCP distribution. It references and includes the artifacts defined in the project structure section.

### 3.2 Building the script for mbeddr

**Macros** We start by defining a couple of macros. The first two represent string variables we will use in the build, the set of folders represent the directory for MPS itself as well as the two root directories where mbeddr languages are stored. These languages will become part of the RCP distribution. Note how all of these folders are relative to the base directory.

---

```
macros:
  var date = date 20120601
  var build.number = 1.0
  folder mps_home = ../../../../tools/MPS2.5.app
  folder mbeddr.core.home = ../../languages/com.mbeddr.core
  folder mbeddr.mpsutil.home = ../../languages/com.mbeddr.mpsutil
```

---

**Dependencies** Next, we define the dependencies. We need dependencies to `buildStandalone` (it represents the minimal set of a standalone MPS installation), `buildDebuggerPlugin` (because mbeddr requires debugger integration) and `buildExecutionPlugin` (because one of the mbeddr languages uses the execution framework to run an external executable). Most RCPs will likely just use `buildStandalone`.

---

```
dependencies:
  buildStandalone (artifacts location $mps_home)
  buildDebuggerPlugin (artifacts location $mps_home)
  buildExecutionPlugin (artifacts location $mps_home)
```

---

---

The `artifacts location` specifies from where the artifacts will be copied. The build scripts work by copying code from an existing MPS installation, so you don't have to check out the MPS sources. The `artifacts location` should hence be pointing to the MPS home directory.

**Project Structure** In the project structure we start with the branding. The `idea branding` section supports the definition of all kinds of icons, splash screens and the like. It is a good idea to take those from the MPS distribution and modify the pictures to suit your needs, while retaining the sizes and transparency values. You can also specify a help file and an update website.

**TODO**(*Explain how to hook in a help file; not clear what the three arguments mean*)

---

```
idea branding MBEDDR
  codename MBEDDR
  version 1.0, eap false
  full name mbeddr-IDE
  build number ${build.number}, date ${date}
  icons
    16x16 ./icons/MPS_16.png
    32x32 ./icons/MPS_32.png
    32x32 opaque ./icons/MPS_32.png
  splash screen ./icons/splash.png textcolor 002387
  about screen ./icons/mpsAbout.png
  dialog image ./icons/mpsNewProject.png
  welcome screen
    caption ./icons/mpsWelcomeCaption.png
    slogan ./icons/mpsSlogan.png
  <no updateWebsite>
  <no help>
```

---

In the `mbeddr` case we have copied the MPS icons into the `./icons` folder and changed them accordingly without changing the names — this is why most of them start with `mps`.

Next we define an `idea plugin` that contains the `mbeddr` languages. An `idea plugin` is a plugin to the IDEA platform on which MPS is built.

---

```
idea plugin MBEDDRStuff
  name mbeddr
  short (folder) name mbeddr
  version 1.0
  content:
    mbeddr.core
    mpsutil
  dependencies:
    jetbrains.mps.core
```

---

You can define a name and a version, dependencies to other plugins **TODO**(*why do we need the mps.core thing here?*) as well as the actual contents. The `mbeddr.core` and `mpsutil` entries in the contents are referneces to `mps groups` defined below. An `mps groups` is a group of MPS artifacts. Since we have included the `mps` plugin (at the very top of the build script) we can use MPS-specific language constructs. `mps groups` are an example.

Let us look at the `mpsutil` group. It references a set of languages. A `language` reference points to a language defined in an MPS project. A language reference in a group consists of the name (which must be the same as the name of the actual language) and a pointer to the respective `mpl` file. The simplest way to enter it is to start with the path to the `mpl` file and then use the `load required information from file` intention to adjust the name of the reference.

---

```
mps group mpsutil
  language com.mbeddr.mpsutil.bldoc
    load from $mbeddr.mpsutil.home/languages/com.mbeddr.mpsutil.bldoc/bldoc.mpl

  language com.mbeddr.mpsutil.blutil
    load from $mbeddr.mpsutil.home/languages/com.mbeddr.mpsutil.blutil/blutil.mpl

  ...
```

---

Note that a group has to contain the transitive closure of all languages. For example, if you have references a language A which references another language B, then B must also be included in the group. This makes sense, because otherwise the resulting RCP application would not run because dependencies could not be resolved. If a language is missing, then an error will be reported in the build script (red squiggly line)<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to languages, you can also reference solutions with the `solution` construct and devkits with the `devkit` construct.

## Default Layout

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<sup>2</sup> After adding the required languages you may have to rerun the `load required information from file` intention on the language with the error to make it "notice" that something has changed.