

# Visual Studio Installer vs. InstallShield LE vs. WiX

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One of the things I've been thinking about the ennf Solution I'm working on right now, is how to deliver it to users. I'm a great believer in starting with the build project and the installation project before doing much of the other development things.

The standard delivery method on Windows is MSI. If you snoop around what kind of projects Visual Studio 2010 offers on this you run into three basic options

1. Visual Studio Installer
2. InstallShield LE
3. WiX – Windows Installer XML

All options have trade-offs and the big question is which one to use. Personally, I've worked with Visual Studio Installer and WiX before – I haven't used InstallShield LE. Here a decision help:

1. Visual Studio Installer

this is the easiest way to create MSI Packages. The down-side is big though. For one, the Installer is really, really limited in what can be done with it. For anything more than just a simple deployment scenario, you do not want to use this. For another, Microsoft has announced that they will discontinue it and provide it for backward compatibly. Find the article at the [Deployment Group Blog](#)

2. InstallShield LE

this one is still easy to work with and unlike the Visual Studio Installer actually works with MS Build, which is important if you want to setup a good build process. Having never used this one myself, I can't really say much on the pros and cons on this. I suggest checking out the comparison provided by Microsoft on [MSDN](#).

3. WiX – Windows Installer XML

originally scheduled to be included in the Visual Studio 2010 package, it was dropped from the delivery build sometime in the beta phase. (Check out the article from [Rob Mensching](#)) From my experience, the learning curve for this is pretty high. Because it offers the full possibilities of MSI, the complexity is accordingly high. On top of this, it doesn't have a nice designer interface. Nonetheless, if you want to take full control, this seems like the best product from my point of view. On the other hand, I'm a perfectionist, I like using the best product regardless of how easy it is to use. For a comparison check out the [MSDN](#) article I mentioned before.

One way or another, before you go ahead with creating your setup solution, you should read what Microsoft tells you about the [placement of binaries](#) as part of the build process. Lastly, find the WiX Toolset at <http://wix.codeplex.com/>