9.6   What We Just Did

In this iteration we added AJAX support to our cart.

- We moved the shopping cart into the sidebar. We then arranged for the add_to_cart action to redisplay the catalog page.

- We used form_remote_tag to invoke the add_to_cart action using AJAX.

- We then used an .rjs template to update the page with just the cart's HTML.

- To help the user see changes to the cart, we added a highlight effect, again using the .rjs template.

- We wrote a helper method that hides the cart when it is empty and used the .rjs template to reveal it when an item is added.

- Finally, we made our application work if the user's browser has Java-Script disabled by reverting to the behavior we implemented before starting on the AJAX journey.

The key point to take away is the incremental style of AJAX development. Start with a conventional application, and then add AJAX features, one by one. AJAX can be hard to debug: by adding it slowly to an application, you make it easier to track down what changed if your application stops working. And, as we saw, starting with a conventional application makes it easier to support both AJAX and non-AJAX behavior in the same codebase.

Finally, a couple of hints. First, if you plan to do a lot of AJAX development, you'll probably need to get familiar with your browser's JavaScript debugging facilities and with its DOM inspectors. Chapter 8 of *Pragmatic Ajax: A Web 2.0 Primer* [JG06] has a lot of useful tips. And, second, I find it useful to run two different browsers when I'm developing (I personally use Firefox and Safari on my Mac). I have JavaScript enabled in one, disabled in the other. Then, as I add some new feature, I poke at it with both browsers to make sure it works regardless of the state of JavaScript.

Playtime

Here's some stuff to try on your own.

- The cart is currently hidden when the user empties it by redrawing the entire catalog. Can you change the application to use the Script.aculo.us blind_up instead?

- Does the change you made work if the browser has JavaScript disabled?

- Experiment with other visual effects for new cart items. For example, can you set their initial state to hidden and then have them grow into place?