

Tip/Trick: How to Register User Controls and Custom Controls in Web.config

I've been including this technique in my [ASP.NET Tips/Tricks talks](#) the last year, but given how many people are always surprised by its existence I thought it was worth a dedicated tip/trick post to raise the visibility of it ([click here](#) to read other posts in my ASP.NET Tips/Tricks series).

Problem:

In previous versions of ASP.NET developers imported and used both custom server controls and user controls on a page by adding `<%@ Register %>` directives to the top of pages like so:

```
<%@ Register TagPrefix="scott" TagName="header" Src="Controls/Header.ascx" %>
<%@ Register TagPrefix="scott" TagName="footer" Src="Controls/Footer.ascx" %>
<%@ Register TagPrefix="ControlVendor" Assembly="ControlVendor" %>

<html>
<body>
  <form id="form1" runat="server">
    <scott:header ID="MyHeader" runat="server" />
  </form>
</body>
</html>
```

Note that the first two register directives above are for user-controls (implemented in .ascx files), while the last is for a custom control compiled into an assembly .dll file. Once registered developers could then declare these controls anywhere on the page using the tagprefix and tagnames configured.

This works fine, but can be a pain to manage when you want to have controls used across lots of pages within your site (especially if you ever move your .ascx files and need to update all of the registration declarations).

Solution:

ASP.NET 2.0 makes control declarations much cleaner and easier to manage. Instead of duplicating them on all your pages, just declare them once within the new `pages->controls` section with the web.config file of your application:

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<configuration>
  <system.web>
    <pages>
      <controls>
        <add tagPrefix="scottgu" src="~/Controls/Header.ascx" tagName="header"/>
        <add tagPrefix="scottgu" src="~/Controls/Footer.ascx" tagName="footer"/>
        <add tagPrefix="ControlVendor" assembly="ControlVendorAssembly"/>
      </controls>
    </pages>
  </system.web>
</configuration>
```

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