

Acucorp's Data Access Solution Gets Rave Reviews at The Big Party!

Industry: Retail Party Supplies
Current Environment: IBM RS/6000
Application: Retail inventory, merchandising and sales reports
Acucorp Products Used: AcuODBC®, AcuServer™, AcuBench™, ACUCOBOL™-GT
Previous Environment: IBM RS/6000
Previous COBOL: ACUCOBOL-GT



PARTNERS IN SUCCESS

Paula Rosenblum, CIO of The Big Party!, extended the life of an off-the-shelf software package with Acucorp's data access solution.

By B.K. Davis

The Big Party!, with 54 party supply superstores along the East Coast, needed to be able to create custom reports accessing their data files.

They thought they were facing a large investment of money or manpower, but thanks to Acucorp's data access solution, the Big Party was able to extend the functionality of their existing software quickly and inexpensively, without knowing what went on behind the scenes in their COBOL software!

Invitation to the Party

The Big Party headquarters, located in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, uses an ACUCOBOL-GT-based software package, purchased from an independent software vendor, to manage their merchandising inventory and sales. Their COBOL data files are

located on an IBM RS/6000 server accessed by several Windows clients.

When Paula Rosenblum, CIO, joined the Big Party, she needed to be able to create custom reports and analyze sales trends using their COBOL data, but management-level reporting was "sparse, bordering on non-existent." The software package didn't have a feature allowing ad hoc queries, and the cost of having the vendor create new reports was prohibitive. Rosenblum says, "It was very expensive for us to have custom code writ-

ten every time we needed a sales report."

The Big Party felt that their options were limited. They could start all over with a new off-the-shelf package, but as Rosenblum says, "You never like your old system more than the day after you replace it with something else." Or, they could hire an in-house COBOL programmer, even though they preferred not to, since the Big Party is "about selling party supplies," not programming COBOL code.

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Paula Rosenblum, The Big Party!

Planning the Event

"We were all set to hire a COBOL programmer," says Rosenblum, "because the software vendor had mistakenly told us that ODBC technology wouldn't work with their products." Since they knew the software was Acucorp-based, the Big Party called Acucorp for a referral to a COBOL programmer. The Acucorp representative they spoke to recommended the data access solution instead.

Acucorp's data access solution for the Big Party combines two powerful products, AcuODBC and AcuServer. AcuODBC allows users to organize and manipulate COBOL data with SQL commands

and functions, and to read that data directly into popular applications, such as Microsoft Excel, to produce graphs and reports. AcuServer allows remote file access to ACUCOBOL-GT data on various remote machines. For example, data on a UNIX server can be accessed by Windows terminals without changes to existing application code. End users get instant data sharing and improved network performance. Best of all, this solution can be implemented and tested in a matter of days. The Big Party was excited about this opportunity to save time and money, while gaining total control over ad hoc queries and reports.

The Party Begins

Before the Big Party found out about Acucorp's Data Access Solution, they were spending hours preparing data and running it through a separate

application that turns report files into databases and spreadsheets. Rosenblum noted that, "It was torturous. You had to run six different reports to get to one piece of information." It used to take them eighteen to twenty hours to do what they can now do with AcuServer and AcuODBC in about twenty minutes. "This," says Rosenblum, "extended the life of the product by at least three years. It was a huge thing to be able to control our own destiny. We saved a ton of money, because you

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The Big Party performed setup and installation themselves with telephone support from Acucorp. They were up and running in about a week. "The challenge was just learning what was in the source files," said Rosenblum, "Once we understood that, and got it configured, it was quick. Very quick!" They didn't need any training on the new system either, "We turned it on, and away we went." Rosenblum says, "It was an ingenious idea to build this, absolutely what you need to extend the product!"

The Big Party also found the Data Access Solution to be low maintenance. Rosenblum says, "It's working and it's stable. We get everything we want through AcuServer."

Finally, the Big Party feels that they are getting the information they need to do business, without the cost of custom query coding.

Party Central

Rosenblum says that one reason she is a fan of Acucorp's data access solution is the familiarity of using ODBC tools. She says, "AcuODBC enables me to get data out rapidly and put it into standard PC tools to do with as I will. It was a revelation for us; it was absolutely fabulous that we were able to do that."

The Data Access Solution made it relatively inexpensive to access desired report features with no training, fast implementation and minimal expense, a great way to extend the life of an off-the-shelf product. Rosenblum even suggested to their vendor that they should be selling AcuODBC and AcuServer with their products. She says, "This is something they need to have—accessibility to the data is what people want! It extends the product, and extends a customer's ability to use it."

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