



The new face of COBOL®

ACUCORP®

Tower Records Doesn't Miss a Beat with Acucorp Productivity Tools

"With Acucorp's tools, we were able to manage our COBOL code much more effectively than ever before. We not only made our project deadline, but we beat it by a couple of weeks."

*—Paul Grant, Director of Application Development,
Retail Systems, Tower Records*

Fast Facts:

- Music and DVD retailer
- Headquartered in West Sacramento, California
- 89 U.S. retail outlets; franchises worldwide
- 3,000 employees
- More than \$500 million in annual revenue
- Approximately 40,000 Internet and in-store transactions daily
- www.towerrecords.com

Application:

- Point-of-sale, receiving, stock transfer, inventory management

Business Needs:

- Platform consolidation
- Programmer productivity
- Data access

New Environment:

- IBM pSeries (RS/6000) AIX 5L
- ACUCOBOL-GT® Version 6.1
- AcuBench® Version 6.1
- Acu4GL® Version 6.1
- Informix Version 7.2.6 UC3

Previous Environment:

- IBM pSeries (RS/6000) AIX 4.1.5 and 4.2.1
- Apple Network Servers
- ACUCOBOL-GT Version 2.4
- Acu4GL Version 1.2
- Informix Version 7.3.1 UD7

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Business Issue

In the mid-1990s, Tower Records bought an in-store processing (ISP) system to manage all point-of-sale transactions for its retail stores. The company then purchased the source code, written in Acucorp's ACUCOBOL-GT, and customized it—adding credit and debit card functionality, providing stock transfer and automated inventory features, and implementing a stored value card program. The development of additional industry-leading enhancements, however, was hindered by the hardware platform. Tower's 89 retail outlets were running ISP on a combination of IBM and Apple network servers, while the company's West Sacramento headquarters was running it exclusively on IBM's RS/6000 with AIX 4.1.5 and 4.2.1. In order to move forward with its technology plans and have its retail stores and headquarters on the same platform, Tower Records needed a complete application, database and operating system upgrade.

Solution

The information technology (IT) team at Tower chose to phase out the Apple terminal servers and replace them with RS/6000 servers running AIX 5L accessing the Informix database. In addition to recompiling all 200 of the ISP applications, Tower had to make modifications to the Informix database as well as the COBOL code. "It was a major undertaking," explains Paul Grant, Tower's Director of Application Development.

After purchasing several servers and loading the ISP applications, Tower's developers examined the underlying system source code using Acucorp's integrated development environment, AcuBench. With AcuBench,

it was much easier to manage and structure the code than it was with the VI editor that they were using. "It was like getting another programmer," says Grant.

Once internal testing was complete, Tower introduced the new system to one retail outlet. The initial transition proved successful, and the system upgrade was rolled out regionally first, then nationally. The entire process took only three months.

Benefits

Using AcuBench made it possible for Tower to meet, and exceed, its original project deadline. "We were able to fly through the COBOL programs and recompile them on a PC, instead of a big server—so we didn't have to move the code back and forth. Our developers could also perform unit testing on their own PCs using the same environment," Grant says. Furthermore, the global search tool in AcuBench dramatically reduced the time it took to identify and update function calls that were shared by multiple applications. Prior to AcuBench, Tower's developers had to write a small program every time they wanted to make updates to the system calls. Enhancements to the database and program structure also improved the applications' response times.

Future Plans

Tower plans to take advantage of AcuBench's GUI capabilities to transform its existing character-based applications into graphical applications. The company also intends to enable its ISP system to interoperate with other databases and programs via Web services, better facilitating their customers' growing needs.