

INTEGRATING SYSTEM 2000^(R) DBMS AND THE SAS^(R) SYSTEM IN THE INFORMATION CENTER

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ABSTRACT

Integrating the diversity of software and databases located on mainframe and personal computers is a major problem confronting many companies as they attempt to implement a successful Information Center (IC). The IC concept consists of a department which provides education, technical support, consistent and transparent access to data, micro to mainframe and mainframe to micro links, user computing tools and accessibility to computer systems. The single greatest challenge facing the IC depends on its ability to provide responsive user support while integrating the diversity of software and databases. This paper illustrates a strategy for integrating SYSTEM 2000^(R) DBMS and SAS^(R) software to assist in the task of managing the company resource, information.

INTRODUCTION

The IC has traditionally been the place that stimulates and promotes user computing and communication by issuing monthly newsletters, hosting user group sessions or maintaining active indexes of corporate data bases (1). Many companies have created some form of IC to assist with the computing needs of users and/or

management on a daily basis. These needs may consist of providing technical support, formal or informal classroom instruction, access to data, micro-to-mainframe and mainframe-to-micro links, user computing tools, and accessibility to computer systems. Whatever the need, the IC exists to help.

The IC manages the use of information as a corporate asset and a competitive tool. A great strategic potential is available for those able to plan and schedule events. For the others, the outcome is often not as bright. The IC that fails to look beyond today is wounded from the start. Long hours plagued with countless user problems stagnate any signs of progress to a standstill. A question often asked by non-IC people is whether the IC concept will exist tomorrow. One can only speculate on what tomorrow will bring. But one thing seems certain, that the IC failing to look at the needs of tomorrow will experience a significant loss of momentum and possibly failure in meeting the needs of the organization (2).

CONTROL OF DATA

An area dear to the hearts of every IC and user is the issue of Centralizing data versus the micro-mainframe communication link. Historically, Management Information Systems (MIS) took control of user applications. Now users want control back. Consequently, personal computers have represented a shift in the power of the computer from MIS to users. The micro-mainframe link may present the greatest threat of all time to MIS. Additionally the IC helps users gain computer understanding. The problem often mentioned by MIS is that whatever data users can download, they can also change. This leaves MIS and IC open to a host of problems, namely one of security. Without adequate security precautions an organization could be confronted with the following scenario, see Figure 1 (3).

MAIN MENU

1. Access Sensitive Data
2. Destroy Corporate Records
3. Modify Executive Salaries
4. All of the Above

Select Option ==>

Figure 1.

With the introduction of micro-mainframe links some feel that there will be a mainframe capacity overload reduction leaving MIS with greater use of the computer. But many companies who have installed links are finding the opposite to be true. That is, the availability of a link can so increase demand for access to centralized data that it increases the load on the mainframe rather than decreases it (4).

POWER TO THE USERS

Users want the capability to select specific data and the ability to analyze it on their own (5). Consequently they want minimal support from MIS people.

IC PROBLEMS

Historically, several problems have plagued IC organizations. Information has not been widely available to users for their use in solving business problems. Too much technical support is needed. Inadequate controls are implemented to manage corporate information. Issues of compatibility, connectability, and integration are not sufficiently addressed. Lack of trends have caused IC operational plans to become antiquated within short periods of time (6). Major changes in

user computing are posing challenges to the traditional IC concept. It is no longer feasible to operate in a *Reactive Mode* of operation. Too much time is spent answering questions and providing technical services to a growing number of users.

IC STRATEGIES

For the IC to meet the needs of the dynamic business environment it must rechannel its efforts while following these basic strategies. The first requires evolving from a *Reactive*, technology-based organization to a *Proactive*, business-oriented organization directly supporting corporate information goals (7). Second, determine how the organization can make better use of information to improve its efficiency and competitive ability. Third, promote marketing of information technology to targeted users. Fourth, learn the users problems. Fifth, develop high productivity user tools that provide an integrated solution while addressing compatibility and data transfer problems. Sixth, enlist the aid of high-level executives.

BENEFITS FROM STRATEGIES

Two categories of benefits are derived from implementing the new IC strategies. Users have greater latitude in accessing and processing corporate databases locally. The corporation benefits through labor savings, material savings, productivity gains, and improved decision-making.

CONCLUSION

Integrating SYSTEM 2000 DBMS^R and SAS^R software in the IC requires a defined strategy. It consists of evolving from a *Reactive*, technology-based organization toward a *Proactive*, business-oriented organization. One important objective derived from this transition is the ability to make better use of information to improve efficiency and competitive ability.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The authors welcome inquiries concerning the subject matter of this paper. Individuals interested in obtaining further information or a copy of the full manuscript are invited to contact us at the following address:

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