The Expert's Opinion

Jack Baker has worked with database software for 10 years. In 1985 he helped pioneer the efforts bringing data modelling and DB2 to Boeing Computer Services in Wichita, Kansas. Later he became the first DBA at Cessna Aircraft and set up a survival guide for the DBAs that followed. Mr. Baker has also assisted in the installation of Oracle on a UNIX system in Oregon and on a VAX system in Oklahoma. For the past year, serving as a Data Base Administrator for Pizza Hut, Inc., he is again working with DB2 on an IBM 3090-600E.

Interview by Mohammad Dadashzadeh

JDA: What is the role and what are the major responsibilities of the Database Administrator at Pizza Hut?

Baker: The Systems Administrator is a better name for the Database Administrators at Pizza Hut. We are working to establish a decentralized DBA function. This means that the applications analysts will carry more responsibility for doing their own database work with the DBA providing help and direction for the best way to build the database.

The DBA is still responsible for making sure that the databases in production are quality products. The DBA also has responsibility for the performance of the Production system. This includes both application performance and system performance.

JDA: What do you consider to be the most important contributions of the DBA to an organization?

Baker: It will vary with each organization, but at Pizza Hut I think the most important contributions are direction and stability. I say direction because the DBA must be an expert in all areas of database. We provide stability by tying multiple applications systems into a coherent framework.

I think a DBA has to be slightly schizophrenic to be good. They have to be able to talk intelligently with technical support, applications analysts, users, and vendors. They need to be able to speak the language of the group they are addressing and they need to be able to communicate the value of new ways of doing things.

The stability comes from being able to see what multiple applications development teams are doing and tying it together. There is a certain amount of gestalt involved in database. A good set of applications databases becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

JDA: What is the computing environment at Pizza Hut?

Baker: Pizza Hut has become highly centralized. We were decentralized with each of our divisions having their own minicomputer, but we are getting rid of those machines and tying the divisions directly to the mainframe at the headquarters.

PCs are becoming more important. We are working very hard to put Macintoshes out into the users’ hands. The type of tools that are available for the Mac are so powerful and so easy for a non-computer literate user to exploit that they are leading the MIS department into workstation usage. One of our real challenges is making the mainframe data available to the Mac users. We want the power of the Macs to enhance the power available on the mainframe. The Macintoshes should do more than just word processing and spreadsheets. The mainframe should do more than flash up CICS screens.

JDA: What are some of the major computer-based information systems at Pizza Hut?

Baker: Pizza Hut’s major systems are your typical bread and butter systems: General Ledger, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable. They are all purchased packages that are CICS/VSAM based. Some of the groups are starting to look at upgrading to DB2 versions, but nothing definitive has been planned.

JDA: How does the DBA function provide input to the strategic planning function for MIS at Pizza Hut?

Baker: Right now MIS is not really doing strategic planning. Pizza Hut’s main focus has been tactical systems.
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