The Expert's Opinion

Interview by Mohammad Dadashzadeh

Our expert this issues is Mr. Roger Giese, the database administrator for the Wichita-based Excel Corporation. A wholly owned subsidiary of Cargill, Inc. (the largest privately held corporation in the United States), Excel is the third largest meat packer in the United States, processing over five million head of cattle per year. During 13 years at Cargill, Inc., Giese has worked as internal auditor, information systems liaison, project leader and database specialist.

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

Giese: At Excel, the role of the database administrator is confined to our AS/400 development where all databases are defined in SYNON.

JDA: What is the computing environment at Excel? Is computing decentralized? Is development decentralized?

Giese: The corporate headquarters in Wichita houses an IBM 4381 mainframe and an AS/400 model 70. Approximately 17 machines, a mix of AS/400s and System 36s, are utilized at the plants and warehouse locations. Application development is centralized at corporate headquarters with some of the PC interface systems designed and programmed by engineers outside of the IS staff.

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

Giese: Purchased packages for accounts receivable and payroll on the mainframe. Accutech’s Food Service Distribution package on the AS/400. And, a number of internally developed systems for order entry/sales reporting, inventory control, sales contracts management, accounts payable, freight system tracking, manufacturing planning and control, and a commodity futures system.

In addition, numerous PC-based data collection and transfer systems of time recording and product scanning variety. All systems operate on-line. And, those developed on the AS/400 are implemented with SYNON.

JDA: What is the reporting structure of the DBA and the MIS function as a whole at Excel?

Giese: At Excel, the DBA reports to the IS manager who reports to the V.P. Controller.

JDA: Does Excel have an integrated database?

Giese: Our systems on the AS/400 are heavily integrated and we have committed to redesign all systems for the AS/400 SYNON environment.

JDA: What do you consider to be the major disadvantages in having separate databases? Any example of these disadvantages at Excel?

Giese: The major disadvantage is redundancy and inability to share information easily. An example at Excel exists in terms of our accounts receivable/credit system on the mainframe and the sales and order entry systems on the AS/400.

JDA: What tools do you expect to employ when migrating your databases and applications?


JDA: What features of your tools do you consider most annoying?

Giese: Because of CASE technology, how you define your database directly affects the code that is generated to access the information, and you may be forced to pick an alternative when you really prefer another.

JDA: Do you consider the concept of an organization-wide integrated database a mirage?

Giese: No, but difficult to achieve in a large corporation with diverse business.
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