

DATABASE

TRENDS AND APPLICATIONS

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Advantage Database Server Assists Law Enforcement

Records Management System Keeps Cops on the Street

This scene is familiar to everybody who watches police dramas on television. After officers arrest a suspect, they troop to the police station to laboriously fill out the paperwork, a complicated, tedious process. Information has to be filed with a range of agencies and police officers are trained to protect the public and apprehend the bad guys, not to fill in forms.

Management Data Systems Inc., a Georgia-based software development company provides law enforcement agencies with computer information systems. Their product, psiTrack Records Management Software Suite, handles the full range of interactions police have with the public. These include incident reports, accident reports, arrests and bookings, court and probation management, and warrants. The company also offers a jail management system that handles bookings, medication tracking and medical referrals, visitation, property inventory and other aspects of holding prisoners. And, it developed administrative programs for officer training, equipment and maintenance.

psiTrack is used in approximately 100 Georgia police and sheriff departments and the company plans to expand its market reach over the next several years.

Product Development

Established in 1988 as a provider of accounting software for municipalities, the company moved into the law enforcement arena about half a dozen years ago, according to Ray Long, director of software development. After consulting with several of its clients with court management systems to determine the features for its new offerings, he opted to use the Delphi development environment. "There were more tools and more flexibility than the alternatives," Long said.

Originally developed for the Paradox database, as the program matured, problems with scalabili-

ty and performance began to emerge. About two years later, Long began to explore alternatives. After considering a wide range of options, he selected the Advantage Database Server.

Advantage's Benefits

The Advantage Database Server offered several benefits, Long noted. It is a very stable product and requires no administration from the end user. "Those were our two main criteria and Advantage was the only one that met them," he said.

In fact, many of the police departments in which the Management Data Systems solutions are installed do not have dedicated computer support personnel. "We have had customers run the system for over a year and it has never stopped," he said.

Although stability and ease of use were the primary criteria, Long has found that the Advantage Database Server has several other significant attributes as well. "The program runs faster," Long noted.

Moreover, Long pointed out, the Advantage Database Server has robust encryption for the data. "It is totally secure," Long said. "We don't even give out the encryption key." While systems administrators and authorized personnel can access the data and tables they need, the encryption takes place behind the scenes.

Long's development team was also able to make use of the Advantage Database Server's flexibility in combining powerful SQL statements with navigational commands. "We use SQL for our reporting," he said. "But we use the navigational technology to develop our data screens, which are fully bi-directional."

The layout and ease of use of the data screens, Long added, represent one of Management Data System's key competitive advantages. "Our solution is very easy to use," he said. The screens make use of drop boxes and minimize the number of keystrokes needed to create a record.

Finally, the migration from Paradox to Advantage was very easy. In one case, Long and

his team moved the application to the new platform in two days. The reasons to migrate are obvious, as well. "We tell the clients that we are going to change the back-end to make it faster and more secure," he said.

Easy to Use

Once Long decided to migrate to Advantage, it was relatively simple to acquire the needed technical skills. "I went out for a training session," he said. In addition to calling on the Extended Systems' technical support team from time to time, he participates in Extended Systems' newsgroups and other support activities. "They have methods for 24/7 technical support and I have never had a situation which was not resolved," he said. "They are very helpful."

Good Choice

Because the Advantage Database Server works with an array of application development environments, Long believes it can be a good option in many situations. Just as important, he added, Extended Systems is an excellent partner. "They are really interested in their developers' success," he said.

Advantage Database Server is a full-featured, high performance client/server data management system for stand-alone, networked, Internet, and mobile database applications. Advantage is specifically designed for the needs of business application developers and allows developers to easily deploy robust applications with complete control of data integrity, multi-user concurrency and data security.

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