

Detroit Diesel Gets Up to Speed with ACUCOBOL™-GT

Industry: Engine Manufacturer
Current Environment: UNIX
Application: Manufacturing & Distribution
Acucorp Products: ACUCOBOL™-GT
Previous Environment: WANG VS10000
Previous COBOL: VS COBOL



PARTNERS IN SUCCESS

The team that moved Detroit Diesel to UNIX: Gerry Cullen, Director of Special Projects at DDABC; Laurie Hall, Manager, Accounting and Computer Departments; and Shelley Sahaydak, Programmer/Analyst.

By James Harding

When an aging operating system began to affect the performance of 120 users sharing a remote Wang VS10000, Detroit Diesel-Allison British Columbia was determined to modernize operations while preserving their trusted COBOL applications and leveraging the knowledge of a seasoned programming staff. Here's how they made that happen while maintaining production at high levels.

Detroit Diesel-Allison British Columbia can trace its heritage back to the 1920's when Hoffar's Ltd. was one of the first General Motors diesel distributors in North America. Robert J. Cullen joined the company as a marine engine salesman in 1954. Through a succession of promotions, he became President in 1968. In 1974 he purchased the company from the Hoffar family and, with the help of a second generation of

Cullen's, has grown the operation to six locations throughout British Columbia.

DDABC's product line includes its own Detroit Diesel engines, the mainstay of its operation. These popular engines are used in marine, industrial, truck and bus applications. The Series 60 engine, one of its new electronically controlled diesels, is one of the most popular heavy-duty highway truck engines in North America today. DDABC also distributes engines from Perkins, Volvo Penta, Mercedes Benz Industrial and MTU. As a

distributor of Detroit Diesel Corporation and allied manufacturer's products, DDABC provides a complete range of product support services including parts, service, remanufacture, overhaul and training.

Changing Gear

DDABC's systems applications contained 1,300,000 lines of VS COBOL and resided on a Wang VS10000. DDABC's satellite offices were connected to it using VS5's and VS5000's and 9.6K dedicated lines. The system was serving 120 concurrent users. According to Gerry Cullen, Director of Special

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Gerry Cullen, Director of Special Projects at DDABC

Projects at DDABC, the Wang hardware was not only starting to show its age, but was also beginning to affect the ability of the company to operate efficiently. Add concerns for Year 2000 compliance, and Cullen was tasked with identifying and implementing a new operating system.

DDABC had invested a lot of time and money over the years customizing the VS COBOL applications to perform very specific tasks, and finding an "off-the-shelf" package to fit their needs was problematic. "We evaluated several software packages and found that the initial purchase price and yearly maintenance charges were excessive. Our main worry, therefore, became finding a solution that wouldn't cripple us financially. Wang wanted to charge nearly a million dollars for completely abandoning our existing system and choosing new Y2K compliant hardware and software. We were simply not able to cost justify the purchase as they didn't offer any significant benefit over our existing software." Cullen elaborates, "our concerns were not only with the applications themselves, but with our programming staff. Add an additional \$500,000 for staff retraining, and the cost quickly became prohibitive. Besides, it was imperative that we reduce the learning curve and training on the new software to avoid any negative impact on production."

After exhaustive research into the possible solutions available to DDABC, Cullen chose Unicon Conversion Technologies, Inc., to provide its turnkey migration solution to Open Systems and further conversion to full millennium compliance. "We chose Unicon because they were able to convert our code to a pure ACUCOBOL-GT environment." This allowed DDABC to migrate to a true native Open Systems environment without any proprietary inclusion.

A Smooth Transition

Cullen chose to use Unicon's optional UNIconX Migration Environment. This stand-alone suite of utilities facilitated the move to UNIX where the fully automated conversion process to Open Systems COBOL took place. For the target COBOL, DDABC selected ACUCOBOL-GT from Acucorp, Inc. With its ability to migrate to the cutting edge of 'Open Systems' architecture, ACUCOBOL-GT enabled DDABC to experience exceptional portability, ease-of-use and functionality. As a result, ACUCOBOL-GT provided DDABC with the solid computing language it required to take it into the 21st Century.

In the Fast Lane

DDABC's user staff performed the detailed user testing. It was their task to put the code through a rigorous testing process to ensure that the programs operated as desired. Once user testing was complete and the system was declared ready, DDABC threw the switch and went live. The increase in performance was immediately apparent. The entire conversion to ACUCOBOL-GT occurred smoothly without any unforeseen maintenance costs or disruptions to the organization's end users. DDABC has also realized increased performance levels and programmer productivity as a result of Internet access, enhanced client/server functions, and database access.

"We are absolutely thrilled with the new system," declares Cullen. "Not only are we now using a more stable UNIX platform, but everything runs so much faster—before, some jobs took six hours, and they now take only 20 minutes. We have also installed a 56K frame relay network to increase response time in our

remote offices. With our old system, the WANG VS10000, we would randomly lose one or more days in downtime—now we just run much more efficiently."

DDABC's programming staff are able to continue to develop the applications, making full use of the rich features and functionality offered by Acucorp's ACUCOBOL-GT. "Our users are extremely happy with the system," adds Cullen, "not only is it faster, but they don't need any training to use it!"

Has Gerry Cullen heard of any complaints? "Just one—from our programmers...they can no longer put their feet up with a nice cup of coffee waiting for programs to compile!"

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Phone: 800 262 6585 (U.S. only) OR
+1 858 689 4500 or
Fax: +1 858 689 4550
E-mail: info@acucorp.com
Web: www.acucorp.com

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For a complete listing, check our
website: www.acucorp.com/locations**