

GRACELAND UNIVERSITY



*University Data Migration follows course. MB Foster's
UDALink™ eases move away from 3000 applications.*

A private university at the leading edge of marketing learned several lessons while moving away from its home-grown HP 3000 applications. Graceland University was founded in 1895 in southern Iowa, and the school has overcome a remote location by branching out into distance learning in recent years. Outreach programs let students earn degrees in areas such as nursing with online or independent study, but that leading edge market also makes Graceland a unique academic computing customer.

When a faculty committee voted to move away from HP 3000 applications written in-house, Director of Information David Debarthe didn't have to do much studying to find a tool to migrate his data to HP's Unix systems. Graceland was already using DataExpress™, the MB Foster product known as MBF-UDALink™.

"We used it for almost everything for reporting" Debarthe said. Tied to the HP 3000 data dictionary, DataExpress let Graceland's users do their own report writing. The users at the University of 4,000-plus students had been involved in the design of Graceland's application databases, "so they had a huge leg up on their report writing." But when the University looked at enhancing its systems, it chose to purchase software rather than revamp its in-house written systems on the HP 3000. Graceland had been using the Uniface 4GL on the HP 3000, and that tool vendor started to phase out support for MPE/IX. Faced with moving away from a platform with years of data, Debarthe and his staff turned to DataExpress to smooth the move to a packaged solution.

The Jenzabar CX total campus solution uses IBM's Informix database, a repository whose data structure was far different from the TurboIMAGE database at the heart of the University's HP 3000 applications. The application's vendor didn't even want Graceland to use its existing data. "When we started the conversion, the software vendor felt like we shouldn't try to convert any data at all," Debarthe said.

But the extensive data mining features the University had enjoyed with its HP 3000 system wouldn't survive such a conversion, so the University turned to DataExpress. "We didn't want to lose our historical data," Debarthe said. "We used DataExpress to extract the historical data to import into the [Informix] tables. We did a lot of transfer that they said

couldn't be done, and were able to extract it in whatever format we needed."

DataExpress made extractions quickly enough to let the IT group use a test process on the conversions. A training database was set up, and then the group would populate it, "and then we'd go examine tables [in it] and see what changed." Debarthe said. "Once we knew what had changed in the data, we knew what we had to do on our imports. Once we knew the format we had to go to, DataExpress made it very simple for us to get our data formatted that way."

The project took three years to finish, working a module at a time. The last piece, the payroll module, was moved this January. Both Jenzabar and the HP 3000 systems are designed as integrated modules, so the University had to run two systems in sync for many months.

Increases in Jenzabar's support fees will make Graceland move its applications once more. The school's executive officers have changed since the migration project, and the new leaders are leaning toward an in-house written system again. "We were much better off with our home-grown system," Debarthe said. "They want to know what it's going to take to get back to that. MPE is no longer a viable platform, so we've got to go ahead, and we'll be looking at tools over the next five years."

Choosing an application supplier was a difficult process for Graceland, which has an aggressive admissions marketing approach based on outreach learning. Established packages couldn't be easily adapted. Debarthe said his advice for such entrepreneurial organizations would be to stick with in-house code. "If you already have a home-grown system that's working reasonably well, beef up your staff and make it work," he said. "You'll be ahead in the long run, because it will do what you want it to do, not what somebody else tells you it has to do."

"We're proud of the fact that they said it couldn't be done, and we did it anyway." Debarthe said. "MBF-UDALink allowed us to format and extract our data."

