

SENSORMATIC ELECTRONICS CORP.



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While the name Sensormatic may not ring a bell with many people, most are familiar with the little white tags retailers put on clothing to prevent shoplifting. As the world's leader in electronic security, Sensormatic Electronics Corporation not only provides these tags to 96 of the top 100 retailers worldwide, but also provides a variety of innovative solutions that address the problems of loss prevention and security for diverse areas of business and industry.

Sensormatic manufactures and supplies a host of security products, systems and services to protect assets, information and people throughout hundreds of thousands of installations worldwide. The company's products are sold and serviced in more than 80 countries around the world – from department and specialty stores to discount stores and supermarkets; from commercial offices and government facilities to Atlanta's 1996 Olympic Games, for which Sensormatic served as the official electronic security supplier.

HP 3000s Drive Decision Support

At the company's headquarters in Boca Raton, Florida, 900 employees handle North American operations -- entering orders, handling accounts payable and receivable, manufacturing, entering service calls and tracking its systems -- all on two HP 3000s.

For 12 years, these HP 3000s, a 977 and 995 have worked behind-the-scenes without fail, driving the company's decision support, helping it generate \$1.25 billion (U.S.) in revenues last year. However, the company's real wealth comes from mining its information strategically. For Sensormatic, that information is located on an Image database.

Major Challenge: Information Access

One of the company's biggest computing challenges was getting information from those databases into the hands of its field engineers, and then back from the field engineers to the database with invoice and problem-solving information. Part of the engineers' job is to service and repair loss-prevention equipment such as the electronic pedestals that guard a retailer's entrance and blare out a warning when tags are left on goods. "Our customer engineers needed the database to download calls, identify problems, find resolutions, billing and check inventories," explained Richard Ruggiere, Sensormatic's manager of Web Development. "Until three years ago, we didn't have a reliable, real-time system for effective field reporting."

MB Foster's MBF-UDALink (formerly DataExpress)

About that time, Ruggiere discovered that MB Foster, an integration software developer for the HP 3000, had just added an ODBC driver to its end user computing tool, MBF-UDALink (formerly DataExpress). That link provides an ODBC driver that extends database access to desktop and portable PCs. "We were looking for a solution to get reliable information to our customer sites. The HP 3000s had TCP/IP links, so we were able to try this option," Ruggiere said. After experimenting with the driver, Ruggiere found he could connect applications on both the front-end and back-end with VisualBasic. Eventually, he also chose several products from Microsoft to complete this link: Microsoft's Internet Information Service; Microsoft's Active Server Pages; and Microsoft's Common Object Model.

Unique Features

Ruggiere is quick to sing MB Foster's praises. "Before MBF-UDALink, we had no way to communicate with our HP 3000 databases using SQL syntax. Because of MB Foster, we can take different tables from different databases and do a single join against multiple tables in one network interaction. We didn't have to put our databases under Allbase/SQL. This feature, along with the modem capabilities, gave us our two biggest payoffs from the start," he added.

Seamless Link for Customers and Engineers

In the past year, Sensormatic used MB Foster's MBF-UDALink (formerly DataExpress) to connect to its LAN. This has enabled Sensormatic engineers to retrieve data while replicating their service calls for the day on both databases. It also has enabled customers connected to a web host to download information and look at the status of their orders. K-Mart, one of Sensormatic's biggest customers, can run budgets for themselves and log their own calls. "They used to call us 25 times a day to check on orders," said Ruggiere. "Now they only call us when there's a real problem. Customer access has made them more productive and has given our engineers more time to work on real issues." With MB Foster's MBF-UDALink, Sensormatic can seamlessly link its field engineers and its customers to the databases residing on the HP 3000s. In less than two hours, the company can get any HP database table onto the company's Intranet.

MB Foster's ODBC driver has extended the flexibility of a time-honored workhorse, the HP 3000. Together, these computing tools are boosting the productivity of a leading security firm and allowing them to better serve its customers.

