

WARNER BROTHERS



Distribution of film, video and general ledger benefits from faster extracts in European operations with the use of MBF-UDALink

In a deadline-intensive industry like motion pictures, keeping track of inventory and finances demands up-to-date answers. Keeping the information flowing quickly in IT operations at Warner Bros. is a matter of making core systems' data available to desktops and reporting systems. It's a task that has led Warner Bros. to employ MBF-UDALink (formerly DataExpress) throughout Europe and the Far East, moving information between HP systems and other servers and desktops.

Working from a headquarters IT datacenter based in London, the company's staff services information needs outside of North America for both theatrical and video distribution, ticketing and concession systems for Warner's cinemas in Europe, theme park management in Germany as well as general ledger activities throughout Warner's European and Far East operations. The data inside the company's transactional computer systems is vital to managers analyzing it on desktops and through Oracle NT databases. MBF-UDALink (formerly DataExpress) links those managers with the information.

Simon Chandler, project director at the London IT headquarters, said that the company's 30 HP 3000s in Europe and elsewhere feed information to outside systems. Databases in the group have been serving Warner's users for 14 years, Chandler said. This transactional data wasn't designed for easy user access, but Chandler's group bridges the gap. The most common operation performed by MBF-UDALink (formerly DataExpress) on these databases is an extract, selecting information based on user requests and delivering it in a useful format. Chandler said the operation lets the Warner Bros. core systems update desktops and Oracle reporting databases frequently. The MBF-UDALink (formerly DataExpress) capability to deliver information ready for Excel and Access has led to greater use of this corporate asset.

"As people realize what we can do, they request more," Chandler said. "People have learned that instead of re-keying the data, they can do an extract for themselves, or we can do it for them. It's very useful for us. It loads straight into a spreadsheet or an Access database."

While Warner Bros. uses MBF-UDALink (formerly DataExpress) for some reporting, its primary function is speeding up data flow to desktops, every night or once a week. "Most of what we write isn't reports, it's file extracts for people to load into their spreadsheets," Chandler said. "They're not one-off things - we use them all the time, on a monthly basis, for example."

Having a simpler way to extract data has led to more extensive use of it, he added. "They're quite likely to contact us and ask us to do it - whereas in the past, they wouldn't have even bothered to request it." MBF-UDALink (formerly DataExpress) makes it easier to extract data from the HP 3000 databases - data which is then loaded in the Oracle NT data marts. Those data marts work with the powerful end-user query tool Business Objects on NT and Unix servers.

"Within our system there was always basic reporting," Chandler said, "but now people are looking for a real flexible access to the data, using a tool like Business Objects where they select fields and run their own queries. That can be very difficult to do out of a transactional database, because the database isn't structured for it."

"In a report we want to combine all that information," Chandler explained. "Sometimes we have to write programs, because of the nature of way we want to extract the data. More often than not, we can use MBF-UDALink (formerly DataExpress)." Skipping the writing of a COBOL program for extracts can save several days, he added. There's also a savings of time in executing the extract. "The writing of it goes a lot faster, but also the extract itself tends to be a lot faster," Chandler said.

From a single site eight years ago, MBF-UDALink (formerly DataExpress) has established itself as a common tool among the 30 HP systems in Europe and the Far East. "We like it," he said. "From that one site, we now buy it as a standard for the HP 3000s."

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