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How to keep data humming

Clients use dbaDirect to head off bugs and crashes

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FLORENCE - When you go through the checkout line at just about any store, you probably are using a database.

In fact, with every transaction - especially with big companies - the database tells the cash register how much an item costs, tells the warehouse the item has been sold, tracks the hours of the employee ringing the sale and even checks your credit-card or bank account to make sure there is money to cover the item bought. And that's just one item, sold once.

Considering the number of transactions made every day, the potential for things to go wrong is high. And if they do go wrong a big corporation could grind to a halt. No sales, no paychecks, no inventory and major chaos.

Avoiding that chaos is the job of Florence-based dbaDirect Inc., a 70-person firm whose duty is to watch over databases all around the world to catch problems before they happen or fix them quickly if problems do arise. It's all done via the Internet from a 10,000-square-foot central command center staffed every hour, every day.

Most companies have "dbas" or "database administrators," but having someone dispatched via pager on the weekend is far less desirable



ZOOM

The Enquirer/Steven M. Herppich

John Bostick in the operations center of dbaDirect in Florence. He's the CEO of a company that manages databases for clients on several continents. The company's focus is on monitoring a database to head off problems.

DBADIRECT AT A GLANCE

Founded: 1999

President, CEO: John Bostick

Employees: 70

Headquarters: Florence

Annual revenue: \$10 million

Some local (and bigger) clients:

Best Buy, Big Lots, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Cinergy, Warner Brothers, Western Southern Life

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and cost-efficient than hiring someone to monitor for problems before they happen, said John Bostick, president and chief executive of dbaDirect.

"Frankly, it's the boring part of information technology," Bostick said. "But when a database goes down, the (client's) CEO is the one starting to ask questions."

Global service

Boring or not, businesses are signing up for the service, and revenues for dbaDirect are topping \$10 million a year, compared to about \$1 million about six years ago. Dbadirect boasts clients in 48 states, Latin America and Europe.

About 15 people work for the company at a site in India.

The University of Cincinnati has used dbaDirect to help launch features and increase the size and abilities in the databases on more than 450 servers around campus. UC tracks volumes of data including grades, class schedules, library books and financial and human resources information.

UC turns to dbaDirect when its 230 computer techs cannot handle the complexity of a job or don't have the time, said Fred Siff, vice president and chief information officer at UC.

"There are times when you need some bench strength, you need to bring in people," he said. "That's when we use them."

Niche experts

Jerry McElhatton, former president of global technology for New York-based MasterCard International, said companies could benefit from outsourcing such services.

"They (dba) have carved out a niche that is very focused," said McElhatton, who retired from the credit-card company last year and now is a consultant. "You can free up other resources, and you don't have to incrementally add new resources."

Bostick sees his business continuing to grow because he manages only a fraction of the databases used by companies. He's added about 15 employees in the past 12 months and plans to continue adding one to two more a month.



ZOOM

Database administrator Mike Camp works with the company's immediate response team. Dbadirect is staffed around the clock every day of the year.

He realizes his company's specialty is starting to be recognized around the industry. With databases everywhere, dbaDirect won't need to broaden too much into other IT areas; thus his motto: "No database left behind."

"Most companies are an inch deep and a mile wide," he said. "We're an inch wide and a mile deep."

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