

The Journal

A publication for users of SquareSum's DREAM Corporate Accounting System **f** Issue 5 **e** August 1998

Dream takes off at BAe



**MAP
and
Servers**

**Planning
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Editorial—Emerging Trends in the Dream User Community

When you examine the growing list of new Dream users which we publish in each issue of *The Journal*, a number of trends can be identified.

Vertical markets

Firstly, whilst Dream is a horizontal application suitable for a wide variety of organisations from manufacturing, distribution and retail, to banking and business services, Dream is also enjoying particular success in vertical markets such as education (more than a dozen colleges and TECs) and the hotel/leisure industry.

You shouldn't read anything into this trend, other than it's to SquareSum's advantage to have a growing list of users in a particular vertical market. It makes it progressively easier for SquareSum to make new sales into that area as they can provide an impressive list of similar organisations already using Dream. It also encourages developers of specialist applications within that market to consider integration with Dream.

International sales

A second trend is the growing number of overseas installations (not counting the one in Northern Ireland and two in the Isle of Man). There are currently installations in Netherlands and Switzerland, and existing users are expanding their licences to cover South Africa, USA, Australia and Belgium.

In addition to the Inchcape sales mentioned elsewhere in this issue, Inchcape Shipping plans to install up to 300 client licences of Dream in some 40 countries. This involves some enhancements to Dream to

meet differing national statutory requirements. This is not as difficult as it first sounds as many of the additional requirements will be the same for a group of countries—for example, most South American countries have

similar statutory needs.

The major advantage of international statutory compliance is not so much the ability for



SquareSum to make individual sales in other countries, but the fact that Dream becomes an 'enterprise' solution suitable for organisations operating across several continents.

Serial implementers

Then there's an interesting third trend—the serial implementer. There have already been several cases of users changing jobs and choosing to implement Dream in their new organisation. Now that's a sign of satisfaction!

Tim Cullis, INFAR

New Users

The following companies have become of Dream since the last issue of *The Journal* was published. We extend a warm welcome and look forward to meeting them at the next User Group meeting.

Irene Cullis

- Internet Technology Group, London
- Walsall TEC, Walsall
- Clinton Cards, Loughton
- Langside College, Glasgow
- Cardonald College, Glasgow
- Hammersmith and West London College, London
- Richer Sounds, London
- Servo and Electronic Spares, Lydd (Romney Marsh)
- Local Enterprise Development, Belfast
- CMS Computers, Liverpool
- Gardline Surveys, Great Yarmouth
- Inchcape Motors International, Dover
- Inchcape Liner Services, USA

May AGM

Full minutes of the Dream User Group Annual General Meeting at the Electricity Association in London were distributed to members shortly afterwards.

The meeting adopted the audited accounts for the year to 31 December 1997 and agreed changes to the constitution. The constitutional changes are intended to make it easier to hold AGMs alongside normal user group meetings by

- rescinding the policy of only holding AGMs in the London area,
- reducing the AGM notice period to 21 days, and
- removing the need for Officers Report and Accounts to be circulated with the AGM notification.

The current members of the committee were willing to restand and were unanimously reelected.

For information on meetings or how to join the Dream User Group, telephone Irene Cullis on **01323 422051** or email irene.cullis@dial.pipex.com

Diary Date

The next User Group meeting is to be held on September 22nd at the Chicago Room (a 240-seat auditorium) at Microsoft's offices in Reading.

A full agenda is planned with plenty of interest to users both new and old. By the time of the meeting we plan to have collated the replies from the user group enhancement survey (going out at the end of August), and SquareSum should be able to give preliminary feedback on the prioritised list.

As always, attendance and lunch is **free** to user group members.

Terminal Server

SquareSum's Richard Pierce recently presented at Microsoft's new Thames Valley Park headquarters on the subject of how Dream is able to operate in the new Windows Terminal Server environment. The proper name is Microsoft Windows NT Server 4.0 Terminal Edition, but you may also have heard about it under its *Hydra* codename, or as Citrix—the company that originally developed the core software.

Normally the PC runs the application code and screen display, while the server handles the database. In the Terminal Server environment, the server also runs the application code and the client handles just the display. Larger organisations have identified benefits such as easier PC management and the possibility of extending the PC replacement cycle from three to six years.

The first installation of Dream in Terminal Server mode has taken place at Guylin Care Homes with 486-based clients connected over a 10Base-T network to a 133-MHz Pentium-based system running NT Server Terminal Edition, SQL Server 6.5 plus Dream.

Corporate Bits

SquareSum has formed its first foreign subsidiary, SquareSum Inc., in the state of Delaware to provide the group with a legal footing in North America.

Dream is already a trademark of SquareSum—created by usage—and applications are underway to register Dream as a SquareSum trademark in throughout the European community and in other major countries.

Philip Taylor says the shortage of space in the Wetherby office has been exacerbated by recent recruitment and the company is looking at various local office options, most of which involve conversion or construction. Wetherby is apparently just as convenient a location today as when it was a stagecoach halt on the Great North Road.

New SQS Names

David Belmont has joined the SquareSum Wetherby office and is expected to be appointed company secretary in the autumn. He was previously company secretary of Coda Limited and head of group legal services for Coda Group plc.

Aitch White has joined the SquareSum Uxbridge office with a brief to grow the UK sales team, freeing Richard Pierce and Phil Warner to concentrate on large sales and resellers. He was previously senior sales manager at Sun System's largest UK reseller.

Mike Booty, previously a Dream user at Bell Educational Trust and Marlows, is strengthening Uxbridge's consulting group, along with **Alan Freeman**, whose previous experience was with Sun Systems.

Finally, **Rachid Anis** has joined Wetherby's development group from Kewill plc.

Credit Management

Get Real Systems has launched a DreamSuite Credit Management module that is fully integrated with Dream's sales ledger.

The Credit Management module—especially for users of the Dream accounting application—uses data directly from the Dream sales ledger, provides full analysis and reporting of debtors, and even features its own set of drill-down reports and enquiries.

Get Real says that the strength of the system is in its ease-of-use, which allows Dream users to quickly produce batches of debt-chasing letters that can be easily customised using the familiar Microsoft Word application.

Different criteria may be used to define a batch of accounts, and individual accounts may be singled out for special attention. DreamSuite Credit Management also has a customer diary facility that enables the tracking of all correspondence with customers, automatically logging any letters sent and allowing details of telephone conversations, visits, etc. to be logged.

Credit Management is currently being offered to Dream users at £1,000, which includes licence, installation, and one day's training. Anybody interested in finding out more should contact Get Real on 01904 690777.

HelpDesk

Following an exhaustive search and evaluation, SquareSum is negotiating to purchase Network Associates' SupportMagic help desk software.

This will be used to extend and improve both technical support and customer service.



Dream takes off at BAe

British Aerospace, Europe's leading aerospace and defence company, generates sales of £8.5bn from customers in 72 countries, and employs 42,000 people, 400 of which are based at Head Office.

by Phil Garside and Sejal Jobanputra, British Aerospace

Background to Dream

Dream was first installed at BAe's Farnborough Head Office in 1995. The initial ten-user system has since grown to four separate installations with a total of around 45 users.

It is difficult in retrospect to fully appreciate the step forward that Dream enabled, but some interesting comparisons with the previous system are shown in figure 1.

Current status

The initial implementation of Dream version 1.6 covered ten users in the HO Accounting section. Key functions include

- purchase ledger,
- expenses,
- inter-company recharges,
- overseas payments.

The section also processes imprest accounts for 25 overseas offices. HO Accounting is currently running Dream version 2.2.7, and has

around 650 nominals, 130 department codes, 2500 suppliers, 400 personnel and 600 project codes.

Key processes are the weekly expense payments (usually around 150 payments) and fortnightly purchase ledger payments (around 250 payments). Total annual payments through the system are in the region of £350 million.

The department is split with five people directly involved with the processing and five people involved with reporting/analysis.

Before Dream

Quarterly overhead reporting

Reports available around **six weeks** after quarter end.

Trial balance takes **45 minutes**

Any changes to reports required an **external consultant**

After Dream

Monthly overhead reporting

Reports available **one week** after period end.

Trial balance takes **5 seconds**

New reports easily created as required using **Access**

Benefits

British Aerospace has been going through a corporate change programme over the last few years and this has had a number of effects on the way the department works. The importance of providing the best possible service to our internal and external customers is clearly understood

Figure 1: Before and after installing Dream

and this has meant an increase in workload (around 25 percent year on year) and the provision of better quality business information—all achieved with the same levels of staffing.

Dream's inherent flexibility is a cornerstone in our ability to adapt quickly to new processes and a continually changing organisation.

The ease with which new offices, departments, and nominals can be set up or reorganised is a key element in allowing the members of the department to concentrate on more important business issues.

Automatic data feeds from Amex (business travel) and Overdrive (fuel card) allow us to provide more detailed information with reduced effort. Salaries details are also posted via the import facility.

The ability to sub-total and sort based on different fields allows us to provide more of the basic reports directly from Dream, rather than from any add-on reporting system (Microsoft Access, in our case).

In an environment where delighting our customers is crucial, the most important benefit lies in responding and resolving customer queries in a timely manner using the drill-down function without having to resort to the original paperwork.

As well as Head Office Accounting, we currently have three other separate Dream installations, totalling around 35 users. Each installation is different and operates in isolation.

Treasury Back Office

The Treasury Back Office system is currently running Dream version 2.3.3, and processes about 1000 deals (cash movements) per month. Up to 100 banks and 25 currencies are involved and three separate databases are used to maintain accounts in three different currencies.

The majority of entries are fed via an interface from our Treasury

system which produces a file of entries to import directly to Dream. Our US Treasury Operations uses Dream from Washington D.C. using a remote link to the UK server.

The crucial requirement for Treasury is to maintain all transactions by separate currency within each nominal. Each day we enter the currency rates for the 25 currencies to ensure entries are made at correct daily rates.

In order to maintain all nominals as multi-currency accounts, we have an analysis ledger attached to each nominal. The analysis ledger accounts are the names of each currency. Transactions for each currency are then fed into the appropriate nominal/account (currency) combination. This enables us to obtain an analysis of, for example, investments by each



British Aerospace—the company

The British aircraft industry went through a period of consolidation during the 1950s and 1960s.

The British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) swallowed well-known aviation companies such as Vickers (Vimy), Supermarine (Spitfire), Bristol (Beaufighter) and English Electric (TSR 2), while other pioneering companies such as Hawker (Hurricane), De Havilland (Pup), Gloster (Gladiator) and Avro (Lancaster) became part of either Hawker Siddeley Aviation or Hawker Siddeley Dynamics.

British Aerospace (BAe) was formed as a nationalised corporation in 1977 by the merger of BAC, the Hawker Siddeley companies and Scottish Aviation. It was privatised in 1981 and subsequently acquired other businesses such as Sperry Gyroscope, Royal Ordnance and Heckler & Koch (sub-machine guns).

In addition to its own wide range of commercial and military aviation products, BAe is a key partner in Airbus Industrie responsible for the production of Airbus wing assemblies.

For more information visit <http://www.bae.co.uk>

currency and to revalue each currency balance separately.

Pensions

The Pensions operation of Dream is a high-transaction-value environment. Specific Dream operation is confined to two or three people, with limited access made available to ten other staff. The current version is 2.1.21.

Payments to and on behalf of individual members total around £15m with 2,000 transactions annually.

Information about pension contributions from 35,000 members is extracted from the payrolls across the group and recorded within Dream. The majority of data is imported from primary systems to ensure a seamless interface. Considerable systems effort is being expended on the operational aspects of pensions administration. So far Dream is proving quite flexible, with the key outstanding issue being that it has not been possible to make sufficient detail on cheque payments available.

Group Risk Management

Dream is also used within a wholly-owned captive insurance company based in Douglas, Isle of Man. It is used to identify activity on individual policy accounts across a portfolio of insurance and reinsurance business. Transaction volumes are relatively small, though transaction values can range from a few pounds to several million pounds.

Issues

A significant problem for us is that upgrades are released on a frequent basis. In our environment, where Dream is closely integrated with other key applications and where



the customer base includes the BAe board of directors, we have to undertake a significant amount of testing before implementing any upgrades. This involves the extra cost of involving our IT partners and constitutes a substantial additional workload for the team to absorb as well as 'doing the day job'. Consequently, we only upgrade when there is a significant business reason to do so.

"So what?", I hear you ask. Well, the problem comes with support. The best levels of support are available for the version that was issued six months ago—the most recent one isn't quite fully understood and anything older than six months comes in the category of "Yes I understand your problem, but all I can say is it doesn't happen in this version".

When you compound this with the issues that fall into—*"It must be the version of the database you are using"*, you can understand that at times dealings with support become a little tense!

Next steps

Aside from Year 2000 and the Euro, what are we looking at next?

On the technical side, the 300 or so users in Head Office are being upgraded to a 32-bit operating system environment this year. This will allow us to upgrade the HO Accounting implementation to v2.4 or v2.5.

We are also developing the database to operate more effectively with the transactions we have with our 25 overseas offices.

The accounts received from the overseas offices will be directly imported into Dream, thereby reducing the manual input of data, and at the same time utilising currency and exchange rate capabilities to report costs in sterling and base currencies.

We are currently rolling out a Purchase Ordering/Invoice Matching system. When fully implemented, this will have the effect of removing most of the direct input of invoices into Dream as the data collection will be performed largely by the end user department at the point they authorise the invoice for payment. Once it has been reviewed for accuracy the data will then be imported into Dream.

There is major initiative under way at BAe Head Office to move towards the paperless office and in support of this initiative we will be investigating how to make overhead reports available on-line to budget holders around the site and remotely.

We are also developing a routine to pick up remittance advices and route them automatically via email to employees (for expense payments) or suppliers (for purchase ledger payments), removing the need for paper remittance advices altogether.

Finally, the recent merging of the Treasury and Head Office Accounting functions will bring a whole new set of opportunities in the future, no doubt!

*Phil Garside and
Sejal Jobanputra*



"Very interesting"

"Well presented"

"Group discussion very very useful!"

"Very useful session—good to interact with other Dream users"

"As a new user of Dream, I found the discussion with other users very helpful"

"It was good to put faces to the names"

"An excellent meeting, and we're all looking forward to the next. Thanks."

These comments are from the highly positive survey of members who attended a recent Dream User Group meeting.

If you have read this far, then you have probably made the commitment to purchase the Dream accounting system. If so, then the Dream User Group would warmly welcome you as a member. Most licenced users of Dream have joined the User Group and are reaping the benefits brought about by the open exchange of information. In addition to meetings held in London and Birmingham, members have the opportunity to influence future directions of Dream by participating in the compilation of an enhancement list, and subsequent voting on the points raised.

What does it cost?

- Full membership costs £480 per year.

What are the benefits?

- The meetings: a minimum of two meetings are held each year, one in the South East, the other in the Midlands. Up to five individuals from your organisation may attend these meetings free-of-charge.
- The newsletter: you receive five copies of each issue of *The Journal*, a newsletter published 3-4 times a year, which keeps members up-to-date with developments, meetings, support and general technical articles.
- The Enhancement Ballot: you are invited to nominate enhancements to Dream and can subsequently vote on the entire enhancement list. The User Group Enhancement Liaison Coordinator coordinates this prioritised list with SquareSum.
- The Dream User Group Register: members who agree have their company profile entered in a register which is distributed to all members. Companies with similar profiles can identify and communicate with each other.
- An electronic messaging system for members.

Can you afford NOT to join?

Name Position

Organisation

Address.....

.....

.....

.....

Town Post Code

Telephone Fax.....

Email

When are you going to start using Dream? How many users do you have?

Please enclose a cheque for £564.00 (*£480.00 plus VAT—an invoice will be issued on receipt of your cheque*)

Send to

**Dream User Group, 7 The Brow, Friston, Eastbourne, East Sussex, BN20 0ER
Tel 01323 422051 • fax 422052 • email irene.cullis@dial.pipex.com**

Meeting Needs "Beyond Accounting"

"Beyond Accounting" covers almost all business processes. Eventually all business processes interact in some way with the corporate accounts package—for example, sales and purchase order processing, project costing, customer service, expense claiming etc. It makes sense to integrate the software that controls these processes with Dream where possible. Two Dream users, ICD Marketing Services and CBX, selected Radica from Mondas Information Technology to meet their "beyond accounting" needs.

ICD

ICD are suppliers of marketing data and analyses—they are one of the largest consumer data owners in the UK, and the only direct marketing company in the UK with the ISO9000 certification.

They chose Radica to control their budgets and their purchasing process because they needed a

system sufficiently technologically advanced to

- handle change, expansion and potential acquisitions into the millennium
- conform to ISO standards and provide full audit trails.

The system also had to be capable of seamless integration with ICD's new accounting package, Dream.

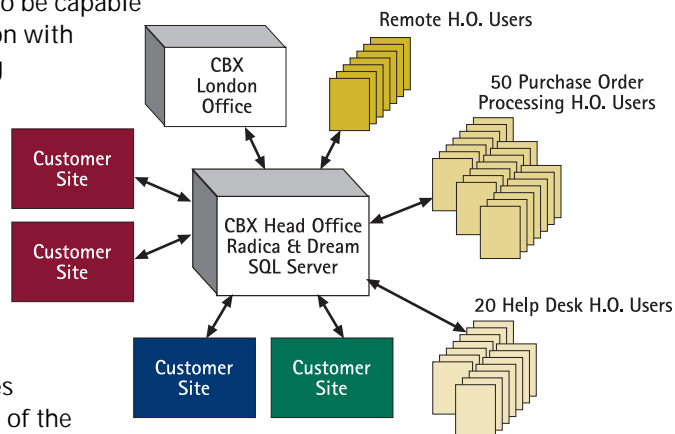
CBX

CBX is a leading, independent facilities consulting and management company which evolved from the Property and Facilities Management Division of the Xerox Corporation. CBX has integrated five commercially related, although traditionally separate, services to provide a single point of responsibility for the

overall financial management needs of their customers in Facilities Management, Real Estate Consultancy, Project Management, Workplace Consultancy and Technical Services.

CBX selected Radica for Purchase Order Processing and Help Desk tools. They were looking for a tool to:

- integrate with their unique software environment called 'Advantage'
- enable customisation to their corporate policies and
- provide flexibility to handle unforeseen changes



The Mondas approach

The Mondas approach is to prototype initial requirements which can be achieved in a matter of days using Application Templates built with Mondas' transaction, process and workflow control, Radica. The prototype is then tested and evaluated by management and final users of the systems—modifications and enhancements are made graphically on screen until the live system is ready for deployment on the sites required. Improvements and new ideas can be included without disturbing the users and their day-to-day activities.

Copies of these case studies and the new Radica demonstration CD-ROM are available from Mondas.

What do ICD and CBX say about their Radica systems?



- "...enormous productivity gains"
- "...controls are implemented reliably and consistently"
- "...simple user interface...save time...increased our control"
- "...70 percent faster than our previous system"

"...speeded up by at least 50 percent"

"...improved the level of information available"

"...provides an even greater service to our customers"



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Planning your disaster

By Philip K Taylor, SquareSum plc

RECENTLY, TWO DREAM users have suffered database loss without having any backup. This started me thinking about "disasters I have known". As usual the story has a moral—*'take care, check everything, be safe'*. The best way of encouraging you to do this is to tell you about other peoples' problems and draw lessons from them. Each story is true, they all happened to either companies I have worked for, to customers, or to people I know.

First a bit of ancient history, not quite BC (Before Computers) but about 30 years ago.

The Fire

A large company in the North had the customary works Fire Brigade and one of the fireman liked to liven up his day by setting a little fire in a safe place. One evening he started a small fire in some rubbish against the wall of one of the buildings. Off he went to a place from which he could see the fire and give the alarm. Unfortunately he got delayed and by the time the alarm was given the building was well alight. Of course the building was the computer department. The machines and all the tape libraries and working papers were burnt. A total loss, a total disaster.

Apart from reminding us to keep off-site back ups this story also brings in another point. In most disaster there is an element of luck, if you make use of it you can minimise the loss. In this case one of the main systems had converted from punch cards to tape that very day, the hated cards ceremonially dumped in a skip. Next day the business was saved by getting the cards out of the skip, borrowing a punch card computer and running it for the next six months.

Tape Backup

One organisation regularly made a tape backup every night and carefully rotated the tapes using the daily, weekly, monthly cycle. One day they had a total disk crash. Everything was lost. They fitted a new disk and got out the tape, unfortunately it was blank. They got the previous tape, it was blank. They found that every tape was blank—a fault in the tape drive had caused it not to write tapes for at least two years.

This reminds us to check copies actually exist. In this case the element of luck was that they were moving to a new computer. Many applications had been moved from the old UNIX system to a client/server system. They only lost a few of their applications and survived.

Full Dump

The company had the "usual" disk crash. They had been using a computer manufacturer's utility, Full Dump, to copy their disk files every evening so, of course, everything was safe. But the computer had been set up by an expert from Head Office who realised that the disks were bigger than the tape capacity and thought

that the local staff were too dumb to change a tape.

He edited Full Dump so it copied a subset of the disk. A few months later the company had purchased a certain accounting system and had an accounting database. Of course this was not included in the Full Dump. The company had never had a copy of its accounts.

Again this reminds us to check that copies actually exist and to understand what we are doing. In this case the element of luck was that the engineer made a copy of anything he could read from the disk before it was scrapped. This held part of the accounts and with a lot of effort over the next few weeks it was possible to put most of the books together again.

Disk Copy

A PC disk was backed up by making a disk copy. The disk failed and a replacement was purchased. When the user tried to restore from the copy it failed because the new disk had a higher capacity—the software stored a disk image that could only be restored onto the same type of disk.

Not only do you need to have a copy, you have to be able to restore it. This story is the exception to the rule. There was no element of good luck. All the data was lost.

What Problem?

A company had a database that worked perfectly, except that one validation routine kept reporting an error. Obviously since everything was working correctly nothing was wrong. Eventually they realised the validation error was actually a serious corruption of the database. It just happened that they could add new data and the reporting for the last couple of months had not fallen into any of the holes in the data. By this time the only "clean" copies they had were several months old and they faced having to restore the old database and re-input all the data.

Philip Taylor



Frequently Asked Questions

When I try to run Rebuild Indices, I get an error message "CLSID from PROGID failed".

Firstly, check that Database Manager has been installed on the machine on which you are trying to run Rebuild Indices. If it has not, rerun the installation programme, choosing a Custom installation and checking the DB Manager box. If it is already installed, go into Database Manager and simply log out again. This will update the registry settings on your PC, then go back into DREAM and Rebuild Indices, which should now run.

I am getting a SQLServer dblib error message 515 "Attempt to insert the value NULL into column 'x.xx', table 'y.yy';" while trying to post a document.

There have been changes in the SQLServer date formats as used in DREAM 2.4 and 2.5. While using 2.4, the formats as shown on the database tab in File, Configure should be either 'mmm dd yyyy' or 'dd mmm yyyy'. The second format occasionally occurs when used by a NT Workstation, whilst there was also a problem using the French version of SQLServer.

In order to resolve these problems the update to DREAM 2.5 changes the format to 'yyyymmdd'. DREAM uses this one standard format which is based upon the server date format.

How can I delete the names of users who have left?

The bad news is that you can't. The good news—from version 2.4 onwards—is that you can create a User Group, named e.g. Old Users (or is that ageism?), and set the access level to zero. Transfer users who are no longer in current use into that group. You can still see these old users by checking the Show Inactive Users box, otherwise they remain hidden.

Why can't I allocate from the Account Report?

From DREAM version 2.4 onwards, you need to use Nominal Detail Report to allocate, dispute documents or 'unhold' previously disputed items. Account Report is now used to enquire on first or second ledger accounts, which may be attached to more than one nominal. If, for example, you have established an analysis ledger for employee expenses, which is attached to various expense nominals, the only way to pull up a listing of the entries on this ledger is to use Account Report.

After upgrading to 2.4, we cannot see the doctypes.

There is a minor problem after upgrade, which is solved by the SQSDBA user going into Admin, User maintenance, then simply exiting again. Everyone should be able to see the doctypes after this.

Audit—other users are using the system.

This message occurs when DREAM considers that there is more than one current user. If you are sure that you are the only user, go into Admin, Parameters, Database User Count, and reset the number to 1, being yourself, the only user. Audit should then run.

The report is not showing all the entries on a ledger or account.

Check the security settings for the user concerned, who may be prevented from seeing certain doctypes or accounts.

I know that we posted these documents but I cannot see them on Document report.

Try running the same report with the Hold database checked, which will show documents input to the Hold database. This happens

if a clerk has inadvertently hit the F11 button on the keyboard and posted the items to Hold.

How do I change the due dates on a document after posting?

Run a document report and highlight the entry concerned. Go to Document, Change document, press F5 to post, and when the Due date Prompt box appears, change the date as required.

How do I change only the Alternate Home value on a document?

Run document report, and highlight the document concerned. Go to Document, Special Change Document, Post(Input), Options. A dialog box appears, highlight the Alternate Home option, and change the default to Don't Set. You can then change the Alternate Home entry without affecting the Home value.

SquareSum Support

Housekeeping Q & A

How often should I run Audit?

Normally once a month, before you run important month-end reports. It is also advisable to run Audit immediately after a system crash or other unusual event.

How often should I run Rebuild Indices?

New users should run this daily, then just weekly, then eventually once a month. In addition, if you have added large amounts of data, typically 20 per cent of your database size, you should also run rebuild indices, since this can affect performance, particularly on reporting.

Have you checked that you can restore from your backups?

One of our users didn't...

SquareSum Support

Extending the Dream for



WHEN A GROUP of academics from the Management Business Centre at Bradford University founded what has become MCB University Press, even they were unaware of the business potential.

From its early beginnings as a management consultancy in 1967 the company has grown to be one of the world's most influential academic publishers. With specialist editors located around the globe, they produce over 150 publications, most of which are well-established in the 'leading journals' league table.

Titles range from the long-established *Management Decision* to the more recent *Internet Research* and they are pioneers in the field of electronic publishing with over 30,000 subscribers worldwide.

MCB University Press has some demanding accounting and management information needs, and chose Dream and DreamSuite to streamline their key business functions.

Malcolm Hardy, Finance Manager at MCB, reports on their decision to implement Dream and DreamSuite and MCB's relationship with Get Real Systems, "Some time ago we implemented one of the world's leading business and accounting systems, but it quickly became evident that it could not live up to its reputation in terms of performance or ease-of-use."

"We were very much more circumspect in our selection criteria second time around. Our chosen infrastructure is one of client/server running under NT in a move towards the paperless

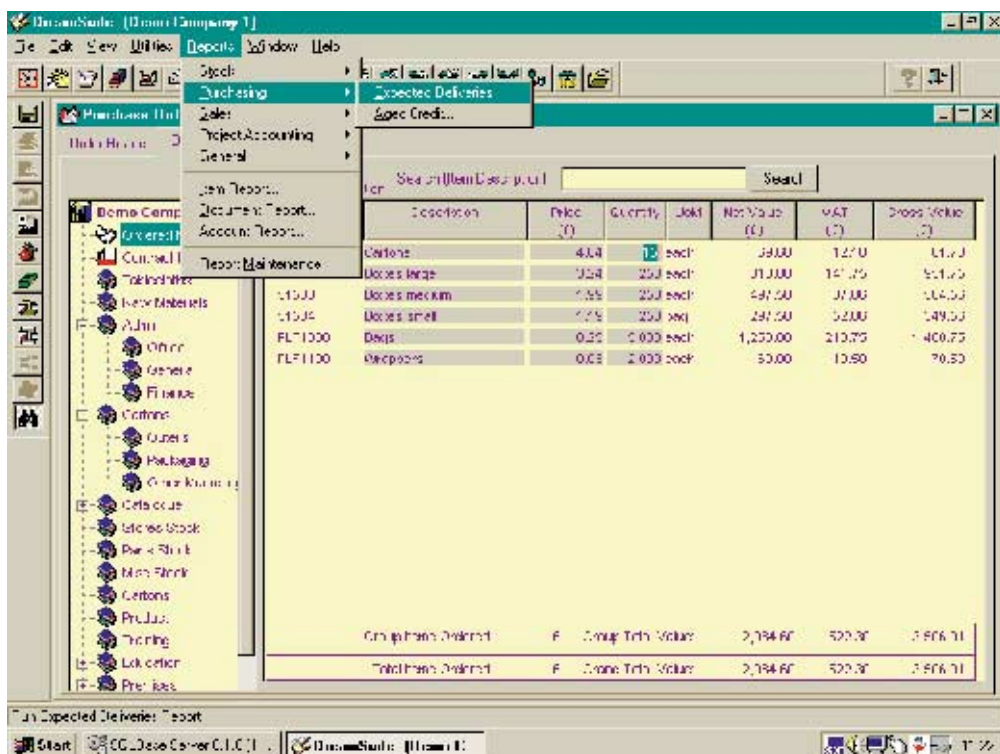
office—something which is already becoming a reality within the electronic publishing environment. But, given that infrastructure, the real criteria had to be usability and access to information."

"We examined seven families of products, quickly reducing this to a shortlist of two. They both met the demands of our infrastructure, although Dream and DreamSuite did offer advantages in terms of management information. The acid test, however, had to be usability and to this end we allowed our users to make the final decision. The Dream/DreamSuite combination was their unanimous choice."

"Our relationship with Get Real Systems is twofold. They acted as consultants during the implementation of Dream, giving us very practical, 'hands on' advice, guidance and even user training. Our main contact has been Kevin McCarthy and his background as a qualified accountant and as a Financial Director meant that he can view issues through our eyes, rather than simply as a computer specialist. Based upon our experience working with Get Real, it became an easy choice to adopt DreamSuite for the peripheral applications—all truly integrated with our Dream accounting system."

As well as being the authors of DreamSuite, Get Real Systems offers Dream users effective management information and reporting solutions.

For more information, visit www.getreal.demon.co.uk or telephone 01904 690777.



Get Real ad

MAP and Servers

Key words for servers are manageability, availability and performance

by Tim Cullis, INFAR

Choosing a server in 1987

We installed our first LAN file server eleven years ago. We needed an easy way to share files between a 20-MHz 386 running Windows 386, and three 12-MHz 286 PCs running Windows 2.0 and DOS 3.0.

The normal choice would have been either Novell NetWare or IBM/Microsoft LAN Manager. After due deliberation, however, we became one of the first UK installations of Novell ELS, an entry-level version of NetWare that didn't require a dedicated server.

Amazingly we were able to use one of the 12-MHz 286-based PCs with 40 MB disk space as both a DOS workstation and as a server supporting the other three PCs. The only enhancement from the standard configuration was the addition of an expansion board with an extra 2 MB RAM (£1,040) and a LAN card (£520).

Choosing a server in 1998

Nowadays all PC manufacturers offer up-to-date technology and competitive price/performance, and some organisations chose to deploy a high-specification PC as a LAN server.

It makes more sense, however, to install a purpose-designed system such as a Compaq ProLiant, HP NetServer or IBM Netfinity. These shun top-end PC components such as ultra-fast video in favour of features such as error-correcting memory, pre-configured backup devices and high-speed disk I/O. Plus they are

certified by the network operating system (NOS) vendor for NetWare, NT Server, OS/2 Warp Server, Banyan Vines, SCO UnixWare, etc., so there's no finger-pointing when NOS difficulties occur.

Extended support is important, so Dell's statement that *"by not building and maintaining a captive service organisation we continue to maximise the efficiencies of the Dell business model"* causes me to strike Dell PowerEdge servers from any recommended list.

By comparison, other top-tier vendors such as IBM and HP offer a wide range of service contracts to cover late night, weekend and even 24x7 operation. They are also able to offer a wide product family starting from a basic single-processor system up to configurations that challenge yesteryear's mainframes.

The other issues to consider in choosing a modern LAN server are manageability, availability and performance.

Manageability

This is basically the ability to identify and correct problems, either locally or over a remote connection.

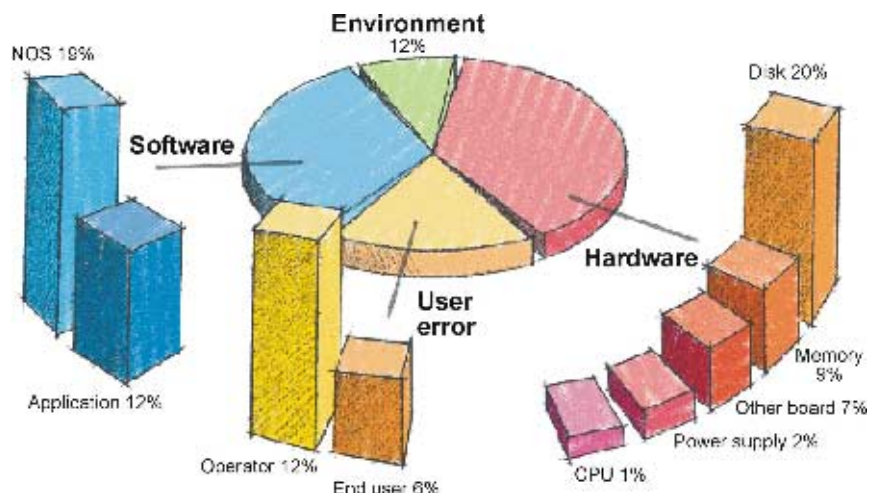
Management tools range from configuration wizards, proactive alert warnings and simple diagnostics for non-IT staff, to the ability for experienced staff to remotely reconfigure and reboot a downed server via a separate in-built diagnostic computer with an integrated modem.

Benefits arising from good management tools are higher uptime and reduced support costs.

Availability

Uptime of 99 per cent sound great until you realise this translates to nearly four days downtime per year. There's nothing guaranteed to annoy users more than to be told, *"Sorry, the server's down."*

There are steps you can take to minimise downtime, each of which adds to the cost of the installation. So before you get the cheque book out you need to carry out a risk assessment. How often is the failure likely? How severe are the consequences? How difficult and



How often is the failure likely?

expensive is it to recover from failure?

Research shows that the top five failure points are disk drives, operating system, operator error and memory.

Even with mean-time-between-failure of 200,000 hours, a system with 100 **disk drives** could experience four or five disk crashes per year. Full disk mirroring will prevent data loss, as will some forms of RAID (redundant array of disks) when configured with hot standby or hot swap drives.

Operating systems always crash at the most inconvenient time. They also need upgrades and reloads. And if you want to adjust a protocol binding in NT Server the NOS insists on restarting. Rule one—don't put all your eggs in one basket by having one server act as a domain server (network security), database server, file server plus communications gateway. Rule two—configure the multiple servers in a cluster. This is a mature and well-tested technique with NetWare, less so for NT.

Just as I got to **operator error** I knocked over a flask, and half a pint of coffee cascaded over the PC systems unit under my desk. 'Nuff said.

PCs and servers come to a grinding halt when a **memory** parity error is detected, so make sure you specify error checking and correcting (ECC) memory.

Finally, the most important availability precaution is **backup**, so read Philip Taylor's article elsewhere in this issue. But as well as a precaution, backup is also a prime cause of non-availability. As we went to press, however, HP and Microsoft announced an 'active' backup solution that in tests allowed 250 simulated users to continue online processing against a 144 GB SQLServer 7.0 database while the database was being backed up at the rate of 100 GB per hour.

Performance

How many users can a LAN server support? The Transaction Processing Council website (www.tpc.org) has benchmarks showing Intel-based servers supporting over 10,000 users. These \$500,000 systems are in a different league to the servers used by the average Dream user, but it gets you thinking.

Fast disk I/O and lots of memory are the most important elements of file/print and database servers. All spare memory is used to hold frequently used files in cache, so if your system feels slow, this is the first thing to check.

Disk I/O is the ultimate bottleneck for any PC or server. The faster the drive rotates, the

quicker data can be retrieved, so specify 10,000 rpm Ultra SCSI units. High-availability disk arrays help performance by spreading disk I/O over several drives. If you have more than three disk drives specify dual SCSI controllers.

You will shortly see servers with the new 450-MHz Pentium II processor. These will also be available in dual-processor systems. If this isn't enough power, high-end servers will utilise the 450-MHz Pentium Xeon which has larger and faster L2 cache memory and is intended to support 4-way and 8-way configurations.

But remember that one 4-way server doesn't have the resilience of a cluster of two 2-way systems.

Tim Cullis

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