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DAL: AS/400 Server Q & A

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- For technical accuracy.

TOPIC -----

On September 1, 1992, Apple announced a Data Access Language (DAL) Server to support IBM's AS/400 family of mid-range computers. For those not familiar with the client/server world, this article answers some questions about these products.

DISCUSSION -----

Q: What is a DAL?

A: DAL is software that resides on both the AS/400 (server) and the Macintosh (client). The software allows Macintosh applications to use/access the client to make SQL queries of data on the host.

Q: What does DAL mean?

A: DAL stands for Data Access Language, and it means being able to enter the AS/400 system (server) via a desktop computer (client) and access database information. That information can then be brought onto the desktop system where it can be manipulated and managed the same as any application on the desktop. Data access is different than accessing a file server. With a file server, the desktop user is able to drag or copy an entire file from the server such as a letter, an application, or an entire spreadsheet (file transfer). Data access allows the desktop user to selectively retrieve portions of data (not the entire file or database that may be millions of records large) by interacting with the server's database management system to obtain the specific data the desktop user needs.

Q: Is it only for IBM midrange and mainframe computers?

A: No. DAL has been in existence for three years and permits connectivity with a number of platforms, including Digital VAX/VMS minicomputers and popular UNIX machines such as Sun Sparc, HP9000, and IBM RS6000, and

Mainframes. Including the AS/400, Apple's DAL database connectivity solution includes support for 13 major database host operating environments in addition to 13 different relational databases. In fact, the AS/400 is one of the "last frontiers" for connectivity to IBM hardware by Macintosh.

Q: What is an AS/400 computer and what functions would it typically perform?

A: The AS/400 is a family of midrange computers from IBM, primarily used to run applications software for running a small business or a department or division of a large enterprise as servers to PCs on a network. There are approximately 175,000 AS/400s installed and over 9000 applications packages available. The most common use of AS/400 is to run general purpose business software such as an integrated manufacturing software package that would handle bills of materials, engineering production schedules, order entry, accounts receivable, purchasing, general ledger and payroll. For example at Apple, AS/400 computers have been used to handle product distribution.

Macintosh access to the data used to run and measure a business is becoming increasingly important. To date, access to an AS/400 computer was provided only through terminal emulation, a less than satisfactory solution because terminal emulation does not take advantage of the point-and-click Macintosh user interface; it simply recreates the old character-based terminal interface on the Macintosh. It is expected that this capability will further enhance Apple's attractiveness to large, mid-size and small companies alike.

Q: Describe a typical business scenario of a Macintosh being used to access a AS/400.

A: A typical business scenario would be a mid-sized company that uses the AS/400 to build and store database information, such as sales report information. While this company originally grew up with IBM PCs as the dominant platform, many Macintosh systems are in place for a variety of functions and customers increasingly want to be able to integrate them into the network they already have in place, thus AS/400 connectivity is desired.

Another important thing to consider as you look at typical scenarios is the growing popularity of the PowerBook by large sales forces. As in the example above, many of these sales people using PowerBooks have a need to access information residing in the AS/400 servers, such as sales info or the sales history of a particular company, while they're on the road. The DAL Server for AS/400 will allow them to access that information.

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