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Processes Automated
Printing, Faxing, Emailing



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World Wide Technology

(Written by WWT Systems Engineer)

WWT is a Platinum level Sun iForce partner and we sell literally hundreds of millions of dollars worth of Sun hardware and software every year. Due to that fact, we receive extremely generous discounts on their products for our own internal use. We have well over one million dollars worth of Sun hardware in our own data center. Our ERP database is Oracle 8i running on a Sunfire V1280 with 12 processors and 24GB of RAM. We are in the process of planning an upgrade to Oracle Apps 11i running on Oracle 10G database, all of which runs on Solaris hardware today and the new versions will as well. All of our internally developed Applications, Web Portals, eStores, etc. are all developed in Java using products from BEA/Weblogic, Sun, CoMergent, etc. The data center contains approximately 100 servers, 85% of which are Sun servers running Solaris 8 or 9. The remainder of the servers are HP Proliant's running Novell NetWare (10%), Windows or Linux (the remaining 5%).

So Yes, we run UNIX! I'm an old-time Novell guy, and one of the things that attracted me to World Wide Technology was the fact that we're very much a "non-Windows" shop. Lots of good technology from lots of different companies...that's what makes the job enjoyable!

One of my initial fears with Reform, was that it ran on the Windows platform. Although, when you look at what it does and how it works, you quickly realize it would be much more difficult to implement that on a Linux or Unix platform. But that doesn't prevent it from being used with UNIX, which is why we bought it and the only OS we use it to with. We wanted something to print PO's from Oracle Apps to both Fax and Email...something which the 11i version of Oracle apps "claims" to do, but the current version we have does not.

After demo'ing the product, which was very easy as setting up of a sample PO form, it was obvious that this would be extremely easy to integrate into our existing systems. Oracle printing is host-based, meaning the jobs originate from the Solaris host (lp / lpadmin) and are sent to the printers directly over TCP/IP. Traditionally, we had to have different printers loaded with different PO forms and then had to select which printer based on which company (we own more than one) was cutting the PO. Then the employee had to go to the printer, pick up the PO forms, then go to the fax machine and (if the fax wasn't busy) drop the forms in and hope they went through... you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure that with 150+ customer reps sending PO's eight hours a day this was a gigantic time waster!

Integrating Reform was simple. Our PO's are text-only print jobs, with the graphics being on the pre-printed form. I used an LPR/LPD emulator on the Windows server running Reform to make the server "look like" just another UNIX LPR printer. Solaris just "prints" the form to that printer, and the text stream ends up on the hard drive in the Reform input queue. It's virtually bullet-proof. If either UNIX or Windows host is rebooted, or if the network is disconnected or interrupted, jobs will just queue-up and resume when the links are restored.

The next task was to "automate" the process of deciding whether to e-mail or fax the PO. Fortunately, Reform has examples of how to do just that, and between those examples and some "above and beyond" help from the company, I was able to do far more with the scripting language than I initially thought possible!

I can't really say anything bad about Reform, except that once you get the hang of it, you'll be addicted to automating just about every form-driven process you have! Unfortunately, I've got a million hats to wear, so I haven't been able to do anything else with it yet in our environment, but we've identified several possible uses for it in other areas of the business.

Thanks and Best Regards,

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