

BUSINESS APPLICATIONS DIGEST

Human Resources

Laptops Track Employees

The best way to get at human-resources data on a mainframe may be through a laptop.

That's what Peter Block, director of human-resources information systems at drug-store chain Revco D.S. Inc., discovered when his firm's regional personnel directors requested access to employee data that resided on the IBM 3081 mainframe at corporate headquarters in Twinsburg, Ohio.

So, Block gave each of them a laptop PC and four hours of training. That wouldn't make them experts with the technology, but it enabled them to use the computers for "as long as they will sit still," Block explained.

Every weekend, corporate data is downloaded from the mainframe to a network at headquarters. On the network, it is stored in Borland International Inc.'s Para-

dox database-management system, then distributed to the company's seven regions.

Once every two weeks, the regional directors use Meridian Technology Inc.'s Carbon Copy communications software to download human-resources data for the area; at 4,800 bps, it takes about 45 minutes, Block said.

Besides giving the regions smoother access to information, the downloaded data, when examined with PC-based analysis software, enabled the corporate human-resources department to examine problems in new ways.

For example, a study of turnover at the firm was used to bring about changes in its compensation policies.

"Without the PC tools, we could not have supplied compensation and the regional people with the detailed data on which to base these changes," Block explained.



Automating Task Analysis

Lots of software vendors automate the obvious human-resources functions, like benefits and résumé tracking. Protech I stands out as an automated task-analysis program that automatically creates training materials.

Dean Prigelmeier, president of Proactive Technologies Inc., developed Protech to fill a gap between task analysis and its conversion into job descriptions, training plans, employee-certification plans and performance-appraisal forms.

Many human-resource departments analyze jobs manually, then manually convert the analysis into the documents needed to implement it. The lack of linkage between job descriptions and training means that the \$30 billion spent each year on training is "mostly wasted, since it improves neither quality nor productivity," because workers receive incorrect training or spend time training for non-critical tasks, he said.

Protech, based on the Department of Energy's guidelines for job/task analysis, also incorporates Defense Department standards. In addition to automating the analysis, Protech automates the production of accompanying documents—ensuring that training matches the job.

Protech ranges in price from \$5,500 to \$24,500, depending on the number of modules and the extent of training ordered.

Proactive Technologies, Denver: (800) 533-2502.

Further Reading

How I Did It: For a nuts-and-bolts approach to human-resources (HR) systems implementation, see "Human Resources Computerization: A Dollars and Sense Approach," in the July issue of Personnel Journal. Author Lee Quillen is the supervisor of HR systems at Florida Power Corp. Included is a useful and illuminating copy of the worksheet Quillen used to cost-justify the system.

Personnel Journal, Costa Mesa, Calif.: (714) 751-1883.

The Theory and the Practice: In the Summer 1989 issue of the HRSP Review, Naomi Lee Bloom, managing partner of consulting firm Bloom & Wallace, writes that developing a comprehensive plan for an HR system, based on both corporate and personnel policies, practices and information needs, is an essential first step

in development projects. Her article is titled, "The Human Resources Management Business Model." In the same issue, Joanne Wisniewski writes on "Effectively Managing HRIS Consultants," contending that the keys to such a relationship are clear objectives, education and project control. She should know: She's a founding principal of consulting firm Implementation Support Associates Inc.

HRSP, Dallas: (214) 661-3727.

Users Rate HR Software: In the August issue of Personnel, Marc Miller reports on user reaction to three micro-based human-resources packages—Abra 2000, Empire and Profiles PC. In the same issue, Sonja Hunn's "A PC/Mainframe Team to HR's Rescue" describes how it took both PCs and mainframes to solve the HR systems problem at an unnamed metropolitan newspaper. In the July issue, Judith Dunnington discusses "The User-Driven

HRIS." While a user-driven approach may be popular, it also requires human-resources systems professionals to address some serious issues before adopting it.

Personnel, New York: (212) 586-8100.

Curing Computer Phobia: The sources and some of the cures of computer phobia are outlined in "Computer Phobia: Technological Advances Can Create Worker Apprehension," in the August issue of Personnel Administrator. The authors, Nick Nykodym, Jan Miners, Jack Simonetti and Joseph Christen, are academic researchers.

Personnel Administrator, Minneapolis: (612) 633-1214.

Using AI To Train People: The July issue of Training describes "What Artificial Intelligence Is Doing for Training." According to the authors, consultant Peter Kirrane and free-lance writer Diane Kirrane, "smart" machines have their limits, but are also finding useful niches in the training field.

Training, Minneapolis: (612) 333-0471.

The Future of Benefits Automation: Human Resource Executive conducted a roundtable discussion on "Benefits Automation: What Lies Ahead," with executives from various firms.

Human Resource Executive, Ft. Washington, Pa.: (215) 540-1180.

Apple Beats Resume Flood

Apple Computer Inc. is in the enviable position of receiving 300,000 résumés each year. It's also in the unenviable position of having to keep track of them.

The firm handles résumés by scanning them into a Digital Equipment Corp. VAX minicomputer that reads key words from the text. Using this database could require a VT100 and the knowledge of an arcane retrieval language, or it could require a Macintosh front end that hides the VT100 characteristics and the retrieval language behind its familiar interface.

Rather than modifying the VAX software to create the front end, Apple officials created HyperResume using MitemView, Mitem Corp.'s new developers tool kit for rapidly creating intelligent Macintosh graphical interfaces to host applications.

Stephen Austin, the HyperResume development project leader at Apple, of Cupertino, Calif., explained that a single Macintosh HyperCard screen can be attached to several VAX sessions, and that the user interface can quickly be customized by the company department—all while making the host think it is talking to VT100s.

Mitem, San Jose, Calif.: (408) 559-8801.

Tools of the Trade

Abra Cadabra Enhances Abratrak, Abra 2000: Abra Cadabra Software recently enhanced both its applicant-tracking system, called Abratrak, and its general human-resources package, known as Abra 2000.

Version 3.0 of Abratrak for PCs adds a new skill screen that can track 99 skills per applicant, a new education-and-employment screen and a new notes screen for interview and follow-up notes, as well as improved report writing.

Version 7 of Abra 2000 for the IBM PC (Macintosh and Xenix updates are slated for late 1989) adds a built-in report writer, pop-up code tables and automatic benefit calculation.

Abratrak and Abra 2000 each cost \$995 for the single-user version, and the network versions of the packages are priced at \$1,990.

Abra Cadabra, St. Petersburg, Fla.: (813) 525-4400.

Tracking Immigration Status with PCs: The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 imposes strict standards on employers, requiring that they check the citizenship of every newly hired employee or face stiff fines.

Immigration Tracking, a \$285 software package from Specialized Software Solutions, ensures an organized and consistent approach, including both follow-up and reminder letters and automatic notification if an employee fails to provide proof of citizenship within the legal time limit.

Specialized Software, Old Hickory, Tenn.: (615) 754-4334.

"The mainframe believed a lot of employees were born in 1988. With PCs, HR can generate and correct error reports."

Peter Block
Revco D.S. Inc.

For corporate PC professionals, technical expertise is no longer enough. Increasingly, micro managers must understand the business functions that make a company tick. Each week, this digest will examine a corporate function or industry, its data requirements and the PC applications that meet those needs. The premise: The better PC professionals understand users' business goals, the more valuable corporate resources they and their PCs become. Next week's digest examines the use of PCs in travel and transportation.

—Compiled by Paul E. Schindler Jr.