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# Powering Product Distribution

MARK C. POPE ASSOCIATES, INC.  
WWW.MARKCPOPE.COM



For Mark C. Pope Associates, Inc., a distributor of industrial and electrical products within the material-handling and communications industries, business began in 1950 and is still flourishing today.

Even with a strong history, Mark C. Pope Associates needed to revise their database development software to fit their changing needs over the years. In 1985, the company kept lists with spreadsheets. In 1987, they switched to Hypercard, and then in 1987 to Filemaker. However, Mark C. Pope Associates still needed more from their database solution, particularly in terms of true custom scripting and layout capabilities. With typical annual sales in equipment, service, and parts reaching over 20 million dollars, they also needed a database solution that would accommodate their expansion in the business without sacrificing the need for effective software – a database engine that would cater to their daily data entry and networking needs.

For Scott O’Connell, a product manager at Mark C. Pope Associates, increasing sales and an inefficient data management system were the first matters that led him to seek a more capable database solution for his company. According to O’Connell, “Our sales were growing and we were in dire need of a way to keep track of our equipment sales, warranties, etc., since our accounting system was too limited for what I wanted to accomplish.” The expanding business called for a necessary re-thinking of the way sales information was being handled and organized.

### MULTI-USER-FRIENDLY

Aside from needing a software solution to fit the massive growth and expansion of his company, O’Connell was also seeking a database with a user-friendly interface that would also support a multi-user environment. “After seeing the

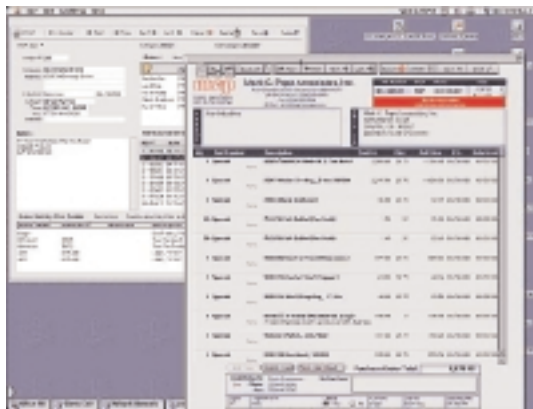
older styles of software, I realized that the limitations posed by the screen interfaces of those software packages did not allow us to do something that would match what was printed, and I also really wanted something that was more user-friendly,” said O’Connell. “Another one of my main goals was to have an intuitive interface which would facilitate simplified data entry and cut down on training costs.”

As far as networking needs were concerned, O’Connell wanted a database solution that would support an easy transition from his former, and one that would efficient utilize connectivity options. With the old system, sharing files was difficult and employees were not able to efficiently make use of each other’s information. Said O’Connell, “The problem we had was that everyone was managing their own file systems and we couldn’t really share information properly. We had people managing contact files and fax and e-mail information, and all of them were different.”

### 4D BRINGS THE BUSINESS TOGETHER

Ultimately, Mark C. Pope Associates chose 4D as the database solution to manage their growing sales and staff. Transferring older data to the new 4D system was a smooth and easy transition. “I was able to import all of my old data without any problems,” said O’Connell. “Any networking difficulties that we had previously experienced were now solved with the multi-user solution of 4D Server.” He began with a 5-user 4D Server but now has a 4D Server supporting 21 users with four satellite locations around the United States and a main office in Atlanta. “Since we can get to our 4D Server/Client via TCP/IP, we can use any type of connection such as modems, cable modems, ISDN, ethernet, and wireless networking. In addition, several offices around the country are using DSL and cable modems to log on to our database to manage equipment sales and contact management. It’s very quick and efficient.” O’Connell’s sales team

4D Server/Client provides Mark C. Pope Associates, Inc. with support for users located across the United States.



### In Focus

- 4D Server/Client supports company locations across the United States
- 4D Write word-processing plug-in
- 4D Form Editor
- 4D’s design tools create professional layouts

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now handles customer records more efficiently and with greater organization. "The multi-user feature of 4D Server allowed me to create an application that put all of our people on the same page. When we open up a customer record in our Las Vegas office, other users are locked out, but our people in Savannah, Georgia can see that the office in Las Vegas is working on the same record. That's a very handy feature." On a more individual level, O'Connell has seen what the benefits of a well-structured, highly connected network can bring to the daily management of his sales team. "As a department manager," notes O'Connell, "I can look at our daily activity for all of my salespeople around the country. I like the fact that I have complete control over the database design, and that I can have this control from anywhere."

The Mark C. Pope team also needed a database that would accommodate their vendor price lists and make them easily accessible to users. "We download price lists from some of our vendors in tab-delimited format and then upload them into our 4D database," said O'Connell. "We keep up-to-date parts pricing on roughly twenty different vendors on our system. Then with the TCP/IP commands in 4D and the click of a button, we actually perform automated downloads of vendor price lists and availability via FTP from some of our vendors servers."

The customizable features of 4D have helped O'Connell create a perfect fit between a database solution and his company's needs. Combining 4D's relational database and integrated e-mail capabilities with those of 4D Write, a word processing and document management plug-in, he has been able to develop an application that surpasses any solutions that were previously used. "The fact that you can code your own application to customize the software to fit your business is of great significance. With 4D's word-processing capabilities, relational database, and e-mail and faxing features, I could eliminate the redundancy of users managing several different 'phonebooks' in various applications." More specifically, the 4D Form Editor helps the staff create an efficient way of handling business forms, an essential aspect of their business and customer interactions. "The 4D Form Editor allows me to create or copy virtually any business form for use with our database," said O'Connell. "We're able to print out to blank paper rather than ordering expensive forms from a printing company. If we want to make a change to the form, we do it in 4D. It's much cheaper that way, and faster."

As for interface improvements, 4D gives O'Connell the freedom to create professional-looking interfaces that are equally compatible with his users' needs. "The most powerful interface feature for us is the ability to display data from several different tables in one window," he notes. "4D's design tools allow me to create layouts that are both aesthetically pleasing and professional. Each company has different data to utilize, and 4D's design tools allow me to create any kind of entry screen, with drop-down menus, buttons, fields, and more in a way that makes sense to my users."

The business's quotation system has also benefited from 4D,

particularly with the standard set of 4D programming tools. With roughly 8,000 quotations on file created with 4D Write, and fifty quotes being created on a daily basis, tracking equipment sales and optimizing the features of customer records has never been more orderly. "With 4D Write, we've automated the quote process to where you really don't have to do much typing, saving time and entry error," said O'Connell. Each salesperson has his or her own template in 4D Write saved on the specific client machine, and when they pull up a new quote, it's automatically dated and addressed to the correct person. When the quote is saved, we convert the references to text and the original data is preserved. The rest of the process involves selecting an item from an included list and inserting it into the quote. It's too easy." With 4D's integrated e-mail and faxing capabilities, quotes can be easily sent out. "We can click on a part from an attached list, insert it into the quote, and modify quantities, discounts, and more with ease," continues O'Connell. "After entering the quote, we can either fax, e-mail, or print with one click. 4D is great, customized software that fits our mode of business perfectly."

When it comes to providing customers with a more personalized interaction, Mark C. Pope uses 4D Write to create highly customized letters and quotes. "We primarily use 4D Write for letters and quotations that require a personalized approach, since we feel that our customers would rather have a letter that is sent to them on a personal level," said O'Connell. "It's great for print merging, and with the programming language, we can generate quotes quickly and error-free by building quotes from 'boilerplate' word processing templates that we've already saved on the database." From there, the letters are then available in a variety of formats, ready to send to customers.

A product distributor like Mark C. Pope Associates mandates the use of a powerful database that not only handles daily challenges, but one that can also grow and easily adapt to a growing staff and a rapidly expanding business. With customizable software, graphically-rich interface features, an easily implemented database solution, and plug-ins which cater to the specific needs of their customer relationships, 4D has helped Mark C. Pope Associates handle their expansion with ease and confidence.

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