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Saugus Union School District

SANTA CLARITA, CA



The Saugus Union School District (SUSD) was faced with an all-too-common dilemma – the need for a high-performance, client-server RDBMS for both Macintosh and Windows clients. The solution needed to be flexible, perform well, and require as little programming-time as possible from the already over-taxed IT department. SUSD found that the only development suite truly capable of meeting the needs of their industrious school district was 4th Dimension.

COMMUNICATION "ROAD BLOCK"

When Jim Klein arrived at SUSD he was named the Director of Information Services and became the school's only technology employee. Klein was surprised to learn that the school had no data strategy and that data duplication was rampant, with no less than 7 independent databases and spreadsheets. All of the databases contained similar information, with a great deal of data repeated between them. The effort to keep all this data in sync was largely ineffective. The Personnel Department relied heavily on the Mac OS, while payroll and fiscal services were largely Windows based. This mix of platforms between departments and the lack of interoperability between the

databases blocked communication.

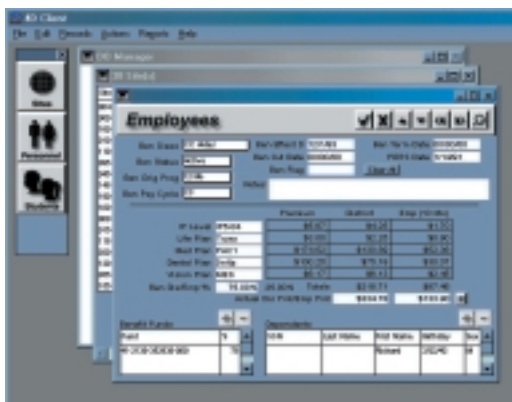
Moreover, the software at the time simply wasn't meeting people's needs. Users were finding it difficult (if not impossible) to create reports, form letters, and labels. At best, employees moved data from one program to another in an attempt to get the job done. Some simply typed and re-typed information to produce the forms needed.

When Klein analyzed the problem he concluded that cross-platform compatibility and rapid deployment were the primary system requirements. More importantly, the system would have to be managed by one person who had a lot of other responsibilities in addition to database management. "I considered many options and found many possible solutions, but none I felt that could more completely fill the needs than 4th Dimension" said Klein.

BREAKING THE INFORMATION BARRIER

In just a few weeks, the personnel department was beginning to enter data into the database. 4D's extensive data import capabilities alleviated a lot of the data conversion/re-entry that would have been necessary with other systems, so the personnel department had their data in the system in a matter of days.

Cross-platform compatibility and rapid deployment were the main requirements for the Saugus solution.



In Focus

4D's data import capabilities enabled easy data conversion from the old system
 4D Web capabilities allow the staff to access information including work orders, class registrations, and the personnel database.

“One of the greatest benefits I found was being able to develop while people were using the system,” said Klein. “This allowed us to gradually introduced new features and services without impacting users who were already online.”

While the personnel department was getting their data in order and using the system, the functions needed by the payroll and fiscal services departments were being incorporated into the system. “One of the greatest benefits I found was being able to develop while people were using the system,” said Klein. “This allowed us to gradually introduce new features and services without impacting users who were already online.”

Within a few more weeks, the Fiscal Services Windows-based PCs were brought on-line without additional programming to make the user-interface consistent on all machines. “I have found 4D to be truly cross-platform, write-once run-anywhere programming,” said Klein.

The Saugus Union School District quickly realized a dramatic increase in productivity. Departments were no longer duplicating data; and people were beginning to work together. 4D and products such as 4D Write allowed the integration of functions into the database that previously required two to three different programs to complete. Employees were finally able to merge information to create forms and reports, saving employees hours of typing.

ONGOING DEVELOPMENT

With the release of 4D web capabilities, SUSD decided to expand their network and connect it to the web to allow the staff access to information such as work orders, class registrations, and the personnel database. This opened new lines of communication between staff members and maintenance personnel. Klein later created WebForms for SUSD so staff can access and input information on-line and submit it directly to a 4D database. Using Java servlets and the 4D ODBC driver, the web-based employee directory at the SUSD web site provides secure access to personal employee information. Information is always up to date since the program is tied directly to the 4D based personnel database at the District Office.

Klein used SUSD’s computer system as a model to create another system to connect surrounding school districts into one central system to provide free technology training

classes to member staffs and the community. The network of schools Klein’s system connects is called the Santa Clarita Valley Technology Consortium (SCVTC).

Klein used 4D to create the SCVTC web site to give teachers and students the ability to browse the list of available classes, and to register for those classes. The system automatically checks for conflicts in the user’s schedule, and provides a class summary. Administrators have the ability to add/edit class descriptions, print enrollment lists, and register students. Developing the system was so simple it only took a weekend to design and implement.

Later, Klein adapted SUSD’s WebForms system for the SCVTC web site to help eliminate the need to produce paper-based forms. The forms look exactly the same as printed versions and form data is saved in a central 4D database, so that the forms can be easily searched and revised from any location.

4th Dimension continues to be the cornerstone of data-based operations at the Saugus Union School District and the SCVTC. It has proven to be an incredibly flexible solution, capable of meeting demanding database needs. “4D’s performance, stability, and reliability have allowed us to consistently provide new, cutting-edge applications to our internal users and the community,” concluded Klein.