Oracle *at* Work

"Developer/2000™ gives us a tool for creating applications that scale from a single laptop to hundreds of users.

It also allows us to develop in a Windows environment and then move to a UNIX mainframe or supermini."

—Tammy Lowe, Associate MIS Director, Burlington Coat Factory

Developer/2000: Oracle's second-generation client/server development tool suite.

Burlington Coat Factory has earned the favor of the cost-conscious public with its quality clothing, outerwear, and linens. Burlington's marketing strategy is simple: buy merchandise direct from the manufacturer and sell it at highly competitive prices. And, by selling its merchandise from retail outlets, Burlington avoids high overhead costs and can pass those savings on to its customers. But Burlington's success also stems from its strategic use of information technology, including software from Oracle Corporation. Since 1988, Oracle technology has played a central role in Burlington's information systems, supporting the company's migration to client/server and its phenomenal growth to a $3 billion corporation. Now Oracle is enabling Burlington to take a highly innovative approach to data warehousing: using its central databases for both decision support and OLTP.

"With the capabilities Oracle provides us, we can run both transaction processing and decision support against the same data warehouse," says Mike Prince, director of Information Services. "We come well within the range of acceptable OLTP performance."

An Innovative Approach

Typically, organizations wanting the information access that data warehousing provides will configure a database for transaction processing and data manipulation, and then make a separate copy of that database for decision support. The second database becomes a data warehouse. By using its central database for both transaction processing and decision support, Burlington is challenging system performance and reliability. But the company has found that its Oracle database easily holds up and delivers under a peak processing load of 10 million transactions—with an average of 750 users—per day.

"We don't agree with the common assumption that you need to have a separate database for decision support," Prince says.

Scalability=Flexibility

Burlington's database configuration mirrors its operational layout. The company has eight merchandising divisions; each has a separate Oracle database that ranges in size between five and 20 gigabytes. Burlington has additional Oracle databases for its distribution center, which handles the tracking of goods, and for its financial

Business Profile:

Since 1923, Burlington Coat Factory has manufactured outerwear for men and women. In the 1970s, Burlington opened discount retail outlets and today operates 250 outlets in 40 states and Mexico. The company's expanded offerings include sportswear for men, women, and children; linens; and accessories. Based in Burlington, New Jersey, the company has major buying offices in New York City and Los Angeles and a development center in New Hampshire.

Solution Snapshot

Hardware:
Sequent SE60 servers, Sequent System 2000 model 790s, PCs, Sun workstations

Oracle products:
Oracle DBMS, Developer/2000, Designer/2000,™ and Oracle Book™

Benefits:

- Enables Burlington Coat to run both OLTP and decision support against the same data warehouse

- Serves as a scalable foundation for Burlington's symmetrical multiprocessor-based client/server systems

- Supports Burlington's plans to re-engineer its merchandising, distribution, and financial applications

operations. These databases—14 in all—reside on three Sequent SE60 servers and on one Sequent System 2000 model 790; three additional 790s serve as clients. This scalable arrangement gives the growing company critical flexibility.

"This configuration allows us to scale, manage, and distribute our processing load across machines and across database instances," explains Tammy Lowe, associate MIS director. "As our operations expand, we can add more servers or more clients."

A Single Warehouse

Another key to the effectiveness of Burlington's data warehouse is the interconnectedness of the applications that comprise it. "Our data warehouse is simply all of our applications put together," Lowe explains. "Even though they are separate, we view and operate them as one unified system."

To connect its Burlington, New Jersey headquarters, its New York City and Los Angeles buying offices, and its 250 retail outlets, Burlington uses a TCP/IP satellite network. At each outlet, a Sun network transmits the sales transactions entered at PC cash registers through the satellite network back to the headquarters data center. This keeps Burlington's sales information constantly updated, and its buyers aware of sales trends.

Each week, using PCs or Sun workstations, buyers examine the merchandise database for the sales activity of different items at different outlets. They also check warehouse supplies. Armed with that information, the buyers can make the purchases necessary to replenish Burlington's inventories.

Time to Reengineer

Burlington developed most of its Oracle applications in the late 1980s. Much has changed since then, Prince explains, and now the company is reengineering their applications using the latest version of Oracle's Developer/2000 and Designer/2000 products.

"We've tripled in size, we carry more product lines, and we have more retail activity going on. It's time to use the new Oracle technology to re-deploy the applications."

This includes equipping the applications with a graphical interface, Lowe explains. "We'll use Oracle Forms™ 4.5, Oracle Graphics™ 2.5, Oracle Reports™ 2.5; plus Oracle Book™ 2.0 for online documentation." In addition, the Oracle7 Parallel Server™ and Sequent's SVM product, which allows for disk mirroring, will add to Burlington's processing power and scalability. "We'll be able to achieve new levels of performance and reliability," Prince says. These greater capabilities will only enhance the effectiveness of Burlington's unique data warehouse.

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