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*Database Performance Management*

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# **DATABASE**

## **TRENDS**

### **The DAMA Symposium and Meta Data Conference 2000**

by Craig S. Mullins

During the week of March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2000, in Washington, D.C., Wilshire Conferences and DAMA International hosted the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual DAMA Symposium conference. The event was held in conjunction with the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Meta Data Conference. The combined event drew an audience of over 800 attendees and speakers and thirty 30 companies exhibited their wares at the event. This represents a healthy growth

for the event, with more than double the attendance of the 1999 events.

This is a unique conference in that it clearly focuses on the business aspects of data management. There are an abundance of technology-focused database events that concentrate on individual database management systems and how to develop, administer, and manage systems using those DBMS platforms. For DB2 there is the International DB2 User Group that meets three times a year, once in North America, once in Europe, and once in Australia. Also for DB2 is the IBM run DB2 Technical Conference held annually in North America and Europe. The other DBMS platforms have similar conference such as Oracle Open World and the International Oracle User Group for Oracle, the Professional Association of SQL Server Users for Microsoft SQL Server. Other similar events include Sybase TechWave, the Informix Users Group Forum, and even Ingres is well covered at the annual CA World. If you have been to

any of these DBMS-focused events you know what to expect. You will hear many technical presentations covering installation, implementation, development, management, performance, and SQL coding issues.

The DAMA Symposium and Meta Data Conference is something else altogether. It covers the business aspects of data. This includes data administration, data modeling, meta data management, building an information architecture, and ensuring the proper role of data within a business organization. These issues are often neglected or outright ignored by many organizations. What a mistake!

In addition to traditional data administration topics such as meta data management, repository implementation and usage, and data modeling, this year's event provided coverage of emerging topics such as XML and its impact on data management, using intranets for data model publication and

dissemination, and the impact of the Internet on data and database management.

One of the predominant themes of the conference was the benefit of business rules and how they are needed to bring meaning data models. Business rules capture the knowledge of how the business operates. A data model is incomplete. Consider, the following scenario. During a JAD session to capture information about a new system, the business user explains the characteristics of employees and the rules that pertain to them. One comment given by the user is that every employee is assigned to a job role. Thinking like any good data modeler, the data architect builds two entities, EMPLOYEE and EMPLOYEE\_ROLE, and crates a mandatory relationship between the two entities. Later, the same user explains that retired employees are still considered employees. The data architect asks "Oh, so a retired employee has a job role?" The answer comes back "Well, no, the employee is retired." What about

employees that take an extended leave of absence? "Oh, they do not have assigned roles either." So the data architect changes the relationship from mandatory to optional. What just happened there? Information was lost because the specific business rules that dictate an employee's relationship to his role were not captured. This could result in an improperly designed application.

The DAMA Symposium conference offers many opportunities to ponder the role of data and business rules in your organization. Some key observations from the conference follow:

- Don Soulsby clarified the importance of meta data using the PBS television program The Antiques Road Show as an analogy. People bring their possessions to the show without any real knowledge of what they actually have. An expert examines the objects and learns as much as possible about its history from the owner. Data needs to be treated the same way. Not all data is valuable, but some is

worth a fortune and knowing this is essential to preserving that value. Back to the Antiques Road Show analogy again, the information captured during the conversation between the owner and the expert is the meta data.

- Anne Marie Smith described the objective of Information Resource Management as planning, documenting, managing and controlling the information resources of an organization. Key components of this function are data administration, database administration, and data warehouse administration.
- Tom Yancheck believes there is a need to standardize the way business rules are captured and that the rules should be documented using automated tools. Looking at rules breaks down the walls between data and process. As an industry, Tom feels we are on the brink of being able to capture rules in a meaningful way and use them in an automated environment. Such rule capture and implementation will

be the next jump for our industry in enterprise application development.

- Bob Seiner outlined how meta data is the key to turning "data" into "information" and thus creating "knowledge." Bob believes that without meta data this process has no value or meaning. Bob summed up the need for meta data quite succinctly when he said "it is hard to use anything if you don't know it exists."

## **Conclusion**

Every data administrator should make time to attend the DAMA Symposium. Too much useful information is presented at this event that should not be missed by data professionals. But not just DAs, database administrators (DBAs) also should consider attending the DAMA Symposium and Meta Data Conference. The information at this event will help to foster a business-centric view of data and database management. This is good because too much of the daily grind of head-down system management and administration at the

technological level can cause a DBA to lose sight of the purpose of all those databases. Which is to provide data to the business systems of the organization. Too much bit-twiddling can blind you to the overall big picture, and in the long term that is not good.

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