



ADT-Automotive



E-Business, Enterprise-Wide Data Distribution, Year 2000 Date Conversion

About ADT Automotive

With 28 locations, ADT Automotive Inc. is one of the nation's top three wholesale vehicle redistribution and auction companies. In 1996, ADT Automotive handled more than 1.9 million vehicles representing more than \$10 billion in client assets.

Besides redistributing vehicles in live auctions, ADT is the first wholesale vehicle redistribution company to implement a real-time interactive electronic auction system. "We live in the information age," comments Jim Henning, Vice President of Information Services at ADT. "We feel that electronic auctions with competitive bidding complement our physical auctions by providing an alternative channel that especially benefits the more remote dealer locations." Henning further explains that online auctioning expands the number of dealers that can participate in ADT auctions because the dealers no longer need to be physically present.

Through ADT LION (Link to Information Online Network), the company's proprietary online network, buyers can review and purchase vehicles during real-time interactive auctions without leaving their dealership. Electronic auctioning provides unparalleled levels of service and convenience, offering dealers reduced costs and increased efficiency. Although other vehicle redistribution companies have gone online, ADT is unique in offering an interactive electronic auction.

The Challenge

By the mid-1990s, ADT saw that electronic communication with its dealer customers was becoming key to maintaining a competitive advantage. Based on this insight, the company began searching for a computer system to handle customer communications on a private network. After interviewing several computer consulting firms, ADT determined that local Digital VAR and Microsoft Solution Provider LanConnects could provide the solution that most closely met the company's needs.

The ability to transfer data from the existing AS/400 network server to the AlphaServer was a critical piece of ADT's customer communication system, which later evolved into the electronic auction application. The communication system ADT initially developed to link the auction sites to corporate headquarters provided batch data uploading. Uploading data in this piecemeal fashion had two significant drawbacks. First, headquarters never had access to the complete database at each remote site and, more importantly, the data was never 100 percent up to date.

Moreover, the system could not handle the real-time, bi-directional data flow required for live online auctions, and limited other applications that ADT had plans to roll out. ADT realized that a high speed, real-time data replication system capable of mirroring the auction site databases was required for the application to be a success.

"By having data replicated in real-time at our auction sites and headquarters, we can respond more quickly to our customers and we can have more current data ready to present to our customers," notes Henning. "We can also have a better handle on our own financial data."

The Solution

To implement the real-time database mirroring required, ADT selected DataMirror Transformation Server. Before choosing Transformation Server, ADT evaluated several alternative products but found all of them to lack many features that ADT deemed important. Transformation Server provides the ability to replicate data in real-time from multiple databases at the auction sites to a single database at head office. At the same time, Transformation Server also feeds data from the AS/400 system at headquarters to the Digital AlphaServer.

Implementation

LanConnects worked with ADT to plan, design and implement the initial customer communications network using TCP/IP and frame relay technologies. Later, with help from DataMirror, ADT added the ADT LION network, expanding to full electronic auctioning and providing web-based as well as private network access.

The company's original AlphaServer system houses the ADT LION database. Using Transformation Server, the AlphaServer exchanges data with ADT's head office AS/400 system. The system has 900 registered users on PCs and can handle 500 customers simultaneously.

While implementation presented challenges, ADT found the DataMirror technical staff very supportive. "We were dealing with very large databases, some of which were not uniquely keyed, and had to be redesigned at auction level," comments Henning. "But we found the DataMirror people very helpful and easy to work with."

Benefits

Significantly for ADT, Transformation Server provides the ability to manipulate data on the fly. This capability is important for both the company's current and future needs. Not all of the auction site databases have auction identifiers included. Rather than overhaul all the databases at the auction sites, Transformation Server enables ADT to assign auction numbers as the data comes in. Furthermore, not all of the databases are Year 2000 compliant. Using Transformation Server, ADT converts the year field from a two-digit date code to standard ISO compliant four digit fields, thereby eliminating a potential disaster.

In addition, with the real-time data on the AlphaServer, dealers have easy access to auction data – including inventory for sale and vehicle condition information – and the ability to bid interactively. They also post upcoming auction information on the AlphaServer. ADT LION is available on the web 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. System availability has been consistently high, running close to 100 percent.

The Road Ahead

Now that ADT has electronic auctions running smoothly, they are planning to expand their system to take greater advantage of the real-time replication capability of Transformation Server. Future projects call for applications including data warehousing, data mining, and a new marketing program called Dealer Direct, which will allow dealers to bid on automobiles over a period of time. With Transformation Server, ADT can confidently move forward, knowing that the flexibility that it offers will help them implement any applications the future may bring.

DataMirror, Corporate Head Office
3100 Steeles Avenue East, Suite 700
Markham, Ontario L3R 8T3 Canada
(905) 415-0310 or 1 (800) 362-5955

DataMirror, European Head Office
Windmill Court, Millfield Lane, Lower Kingswood
Tadworth, Surrey KT20 6DL United Kingdom
+44 (0) 1737 830770

DataMirror®
Visit us at www.datamirror.com