



Mainframe Data Access: Using LegacyLink to Get Mainframe Data into Windows at a Government Agency

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THE PROBLEM

Executives and employees at a major housing authority required regular access to mainframe data from the Windows notebooks and desktops they used on a daily basis. The mainframe data reports delivered to the end-users for manipulating in Excel or Access also had to be relevant to the individual departments of the organization, so spreadsheet columns not only had to be formatted and scrubbed, they had to be department-specific.

The organization also wanted to remove IT from the process entirely by giving end-users the ability to generate up-to-date mainframe reports for use in Excel or Access whenever they wanted.

Sounds reasonable enough, but to anyone who has ever tried to access mainframe legacy data in Windows, the process can be frustrating and time-consuming, as well as prone to error. One large organization that used Arbutus technology presented the following challenges.

Previously, when mainframe reports for use in Excel or Access were required at the housing authority, the following would occur:

- a mainframe report would be generated to a spool file
- the report would be downloaded to a PC
- converted to ASCII
- then imported into Excel or Access

These steps didn't take long, but executives and employees at the housing authority couldn't use the data just yet. One final step remained, and it was this one that always caused the biggest problem, creating the longest delays:

All the mainframe data had to be aligned, formatted, and scrubbed.

Due to its technical nature, this last step was handled on a request basis by the IT department. It always seemed to take far longer than expected, creating a significant bottleneck, and then, by the time the data was finally delivered to the end-user, it was often stale or useless. Finally, the reports contained columns of information that would be only relevant to certain departments, which created security issues, or additional work at the very least.

The problem was clear - what the organization needed was a solution that would help them:

- access mainframe data with Excel or Access
- automate processes to minimize manual intervention
- eliminate unneeded data from spreadsheets
- remove IT from the process

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THE SOLUTION

Arbutus offered LegacyLink™, a solution that could directly read mainframe reports, select the relevant data, and insert it into an Excel spreadsheet. This allowed “on demand” data access with no manual intervention and no IT support.

End-users could open a spreadsheet on their Windows notebook or desktop to access mainframe data, then create customized reports for Excel or Access, with only the information they required, whenever they wanted. Also, because it provided read-only access to mainframe data, it offered the security demanded by IT and management.

THE PROCESS

LegacyLink™ was first used to read the spool file generated from the mainframe, select the relevant data, and insert it into the spreadsheet. Working with Arbutus consultants, the housing authority was able to create table definitions for each of the spooled report files. This process took very little time, since the Arbutus Data Definition Wizard led them through each step in the process.

The customer chose to define all of the report data, as this maximized the opportunities to repurpose the report cross-departmentally. With Arbutus, it was very easy to select which data elements to include in each spreadsheet.

The second step was to create an Excel spreadsheet for each report that included a data link to the table that would automatically refresh the data from the mainframe whenever the spreadsheet was loaded. Next, each spreadsheet was reviewed to ensure that relevant data - and nothing more - was included, then sign-off was obtained from the end-users.

RESULTS

With Arbutus LegacyLink™, the organization was able to empower its executives and employees with relevant, on-demand mainframe reports accessible for immediate use on Windows notebooks and desktops. Further, following the initial set-up, involvement by the IT department was practically eliminated, while overall workflow increased dramatically.

Phase Two of the project at the housing authority will see the initial step of generating a mainframe report to a spool file completely eliminated. Although LegacyLink™ could have been used from the start, the customer decided to maintain their use of the spool file during Phase One, as it required minimal disruption to their existing processes.

When LegacyLink™ becomes fully implemented, end-users will be able to open a spreadsheet that will automatically apply the business rules on the mainframe, then load the appropriate data directly from the source files, without actually touching the data on the mainframe, thereby keeping it secure.

To request a free 30-day evaluation of Arbutus LegacyLink™, please contact us.

“Arbutus has outstanding customer service and technical support. Its delivery is above and beyond any other data analysis software I have used.”

Margie Reinhart,

CEO, Reinhart Forensic Consulting LLC

“Support by the Arbutus team has been second to none. Often there has been a response time of less than 10 minutes, and they don’t mind ‘simple’ enquiries either. Things are explained in a non-technical manner, which is very helpful.”

Dick Price

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