

Randolph Tangles With Connectivity

By William Baker

Randolph was looking more tired than usual when I saw him recently. "You look like you could use some winter hibernation," I said.



"Hibernation, humph. Do I look like a bear to you? Actually, being a bear and hibernating looks pretty good right now. I sure could use the rest."

"You might make a good-looking bear, but I think you'd scare off your clients if you looked too much like a bear."

"Maybe that would be a good idea-scare them off so they'd stop asking for so many reports," Randolph said. "I thought that once I learned how to make a report in TAOS in a few hours instead of a few days I'd be ahead of the game, but now they want five times as many reports and I can't keep up."

"That is a standard principle of computers, that all productivity gains in hardware and software will be overwhelmed instantly by increased demands so that all systems are constantly overloaded."

"I've noticed that, too. They brag about how we have more computing power on our desks than there was in an old mainframe. And at the same time, they tell us we can't write a letter efficiently without a Pentium Pro. They used mainframes in the 1960s to send people to the moon, so why do we need more computing power than that to write a letter? It doesn't make any sense."

Randolph let that gloomy thought sink in for a while before he started complaining again about his customers and their unreasonable demands for ever more reports.

I asked, "Do you think you could persuade your customers to write some of their own reports if you made it easy for them to do so?"

"You mean train them in TAOS? I don't think they're ready for 4GL."

"No, this would be even easier. I'm thinking of off-the-shelf report writers like Microsoft Query and Crystal Reports that end users can use to query BBx® files through ODBC."

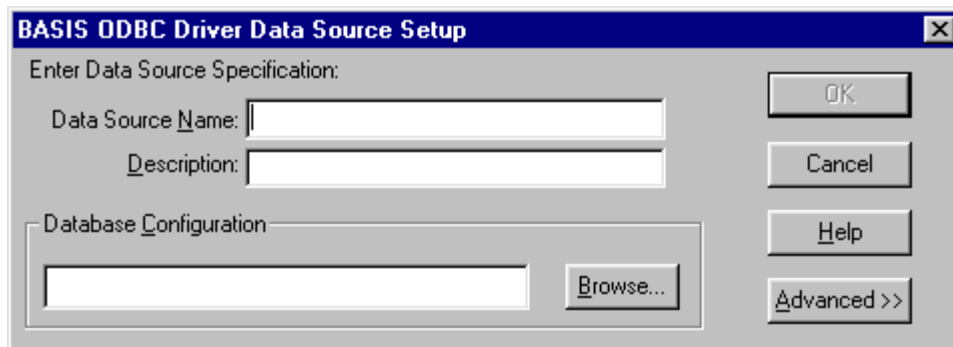
"Oh, ODBC, I heard something about that at BASIS' conference and I didn't understand it. With that B.C. thing I thought it had something

to do with dates, but my date problems are in A.D., not B.C., so I didn't see that it would help me."

"No, it has nothing to do with ancient times. It stands for Open Database Connectivity, meaning different products can access different file formats through a standard interface. And what it means for you is that you can read and write BBx files without using the interpreter. You can use the BASIS ODBC Driver™ and off-the-shelf products like Crystal Reports or Excel to create reports on data in BBx files. You should get a copy of the Driver, and because you're my reseller, you can get several free ones for me so I can show you how it works."

Randolph may have been confused about ODBC, but he saw through my trick. "Maybe the first copy for free, then we'll see," he said.

After I installed a new copy of BASIS' ODBC driver, I ran the ODBC Administrator and activated the product. The driver can't do anything without a data source, so the first thing I did was to click the button to add a data source and bring up a dialog that asked me which ODBC driver I wanted to use, and I took the obvious selection of the BASIS ODBC driver. Then a window came up that looked like this:



"Here we define a data source, which is some data and the data dictionary that describes it. I'm going to name this data source 'Main Accounting Data,' and the description will be 'Accounting Data on Main Server.' Then we have to specify a configuration file, which can be a config.tpm file. This is a text file with one or more data source names and pointers to the data and the dictionary."

Randolph groaned at the mention of pointers. "Is this going to be another one of those configuration files that points to other files that point to other files and so on forever?"

"It's really not that bad," I said, "since you have a config.tpm file from your TAOS installation, you can just use that."

"Well, I could if I could remember what it's called, but why don't they just let you type in the location of your data dictionary instead of having to mess with yet more configuration files?"

"It's the old principle of doing more work now for greater portability later. This is my configuration file:

```
DICTIONARY=/<server1,port=1300>/local/acct/BBDICT/  
DATA=/<server1,port=1300>/usr/acct/data/
```

"You see that it has the same syntax as a TAOS config.tpm file. I point to the directories where the data dictionary and data reside, and if either of those has to be moved to another directory or server, I can just edit the configuration file without having to fool with the ODBC Administrator."

"So you're saying that I should just find my config.tpm file and stick the name of it in there and everything will work?" Randolph asked.

"I can't promise that everything will work, but that will give you the correct syntax. Now look at the Advanced button."

"I don't think I'm ready to get advanced yet. I'll stay a beginner for now."

"You may want to stay a beginner, but you need to set some of these advanced parameters to get good performance," I said. With the Advanced window open, my dialog now looked like this:

BASIS ODBC Driver Data Source Setup

Enter Data Source Specification:

Data Source Name:

Description:

Database Configuration:

Options:

Read Only Access Fast Connect

Disable Use of Math Coprocessor Allow Multiple Reads in a Record

Do Not Read or Write a File With a Non-Zero Access Count in Header

Enable Floating Network Lock Byte

Force File Length Update on FAT (DOS) File Systems

No Shadow Dictionary Consistency Check 14 Digit Business Math

Log File Location:

Network User ID: Read Timeout:

OEM Dates:

Date Column Suffix: Date Type:

Translation:

"The first time the ODBC driver is invoked, it builds what's called a 'shadow data dictionary' in your data dictionary directory," I explained. "It has all the data dictionary information that the ODBC driver needs in BBx files. The default behavior is to check the integrity of the shadow data dictionary against the BBx data dictionary on all later invocations, which can take a while with a large data dictionary. So if your data dictionary is stable, you can safely turn on the 'No Shadow Dictionary Consistency Check' option and bypass that check.

"And you will definitely want to consider checking the 'Read Only Access' checkbox. That will prevent anyone from changing BBx files while viewing them with third-party products."

"I will consider it, after I've had a considerable nap," Randolph said, yawning. "And then I think I'll consider turning into a bear for the rest of the winter."