



DMAC

TECHNICAL REVIEW

TECHNICAL NEWS AND VIEWS CONCERNING THE UNIBASE BY DMAC ENVIRONMENT

Volume 14, Number 3

Summer 2004

Winchester, Virginia

Recovery From Bad Tiff Images Drives a Great Improvement

Unibase Imaging automatically expands a Tiff (Tagged Image File Format) reference into all its pages in an IDC (Image Data Control) file if desired. For one DMAC client, this means that an entire operation step can be saved. But it also brought about some issues.

Seems that the operation step also included loading the image. What this piece of the operation did was weed out bad tiffs. DMAC developers originally wished to take the "high road" -- Unibase Imaging processes Tiff files; not broken TIFF files. But if the step were eliminated, the imaging process would be more efficient. And that is what DMAC wants more than anything -- efficient data capture.

DMAC's client was willing to feed bad Tiff files in context to DMAC. A standard was set. If Microsoft Word and Kodak Imaging could recover from the bad tiff (not create a General Protection Fault) then so would Unibase Imaging. That was three months ago. Almost there.

First the code had to sense the bad image. Then it had to report the error and then continue. All three parts -- sense, report, and continue -- were hard to implement. For the curious, Unibase Imaging, Microsoft Word, and Kodak Imaging all agreed these test tiffs were bad.

So now Unibase Imaging is stronger. It can sense, report, and continue when a bad Tiff is encountered. Think about it. The image might be bad when you try to open the TIFF file. The image might be bad when the pages are detected. The image page might be bad when it is decompressed. And lastly, it might be bad the second time you try the same code segment, not the first.

Wez_edit Joins Unibase by DMAC; This Ez_edit is Notepad on Steroids

As Unibase by DMAC users become more comfortable with the Graphical User Interface (GUI) for Unibase by DMAC, they want all features. They want everything in the Menu User Interface (MUI) and everything in the Microsoft GUI interface. This applies to ez_edit.

So Wez_edit now is an option in the MUI and GUI version of Unibase by DMAC release 8.1. It has all the features of ez_edit merged with the features of notepad.

Wez_edit is an option so that if the user wants to go back to the mouseless ez_edit (or another editor) they can. Over the next period of time DMAC expects user feedback will help Wez_edit to be bug free. DMAC will set the default options most clients prefer where there is an out and out conflict with Microsoft. And there are a few of those conflicts.

Unibase Imaging, Release 8.1, Shows Images More Consistently

How images and snippets look on the screen is important. Most users know Unibase Imaging, Release 8.1, has available the new fuzzy look to make things clearer. But now the image snippet always has borders where it has borders, and images do not leave their window unless the designer chooses to have them do so.

Little changes, but requested by a client, so they are important changes.

system Call in Unibase by DMAC Works As a Bat File Using Start Should

Many Unibase by DMAC client workstations today run on a Microsoft Operating System which comes from the Windows NT family. That is Windows NT, Windows 2000, and Windows XP.

Those just moving from Windows 95 and Windows 98 client workstations usually run into a problem. A bat file runs differently on the two Microsoft product families. In the Windows NT family, a bat file normally does not wait for the first task to complete before the second task is started. Execute a program after another in a bat file expecting to find the results from the first programs execution and you will normally be disappointed. You can make it wait using the command "start." To find out how start works, you can execute

```
start /?
```

Using "start" will not solve all the problems of running from bat files. Start input is different on each Microsoft operating system version.

So a quick fix might be using the "system" verb in Unibase by DMAC. This verb works the same in all Microsoft flavors. It returns with the call completed – not in process. You can use the "system" verb in a field edit, file edit, output edit, or macro procedure. Moving bat files functions to a macro procedure edit might be the best way to transfer bat files from Windows 95 and 98 with consistent results.

Make sure you have the latest Unibase by DMAC release 8.0 or release 8.1. Unibase keeps spotting items which need tweaked; and the macro procedure processor needed tweaked this summer.

Unibase by DMAC Embraces Older Data Entry Systems; Adds New Verbs

Unibase by DMAC grows stronger every year. One way is by meeting the need of the influx of new clients coming from older systems which are no longer supported. If the old system can output its meta data (data about the standard jobs, record formats, edits, etc.) in ascii format, then usually DMAC can computer convert the old jobs to Unibase by DMAC. This gives a much more reliable upgrade to the new world of computers than any sort of hand conversion.

Many times in the conversion process, DMAC finds it easier to add support for a verb rather than set up a work around procedure. Remember, most of these old systems were developed by the same set of individuals or came from the same original specifications or software source. Unibase just keeps going forward; the others have fallen away.

So here is a new verb – "record". It replaces one or more "next" or "back" verb occurrences. Has some unusual properties. Probably would never be used in new code; but was hard to remove from lots of edit programs. Now it is present in all its glory for those coming from an old system.

More Reliable Computers Produces "Do Not Lose My Production Stats" Requests

In the "good old days" computers rarely "stayed up" for more than 45 minutes. So data entry batches were small in size, rarely taking more than fifteen minutes. Losing production statistics on a single batch statistically could not really affect measurement of a keyer's performance. And servers could crash every day or so.

But today computers can stay up for days. Keyers do not want their statistics lost – even for one not-so-short batch. So enter the environment variable OPSTSAV. Now it can be set to the number of records which should be keyed before the statistics for a particular operator in the current batch are written to a "scratch" record. This "scratch" record can be recovered in the remote case that a workstation fails or operator aborts during the current batch.

The "scratch" record is stored in the folder %ETROOT%\text\OPSTSAV by operator id. The "scratch" record disappears when the batch is terminated or interrupted. This happens because the data is entered into the master statistics upon the end of a batch as always. Tina Kay has provided a file edit which can be used to update the master statistics file if the need arises. Clients can modify this file edit as desired. This new folder data can also be used to provide an instantaneous view of operations also. New possibilities exist here.

Unibase by DMAC Release 7.49 On LINUX Steps Out on its Own

The Linux version of Unibase by DMAC in 2002 took a half step so that its persistent files would be identical to those created in Microsoft. This was so LINUX could support WebBase, Samba, and LINUX versions concurrently. Proved to be too complicated for users (and DMAC) to administer.

DMAC clients liked the ability to trade files between Microsoft and LINUX. So, Unibase by DMAC Release 7.49 was reborn and retested on LINUX. All the persistent files are the same; but the upper case, lower problems remain. LINUX users argue this is not a problem since they have had the issue for years.

Knowing what is coming in future releases, these LINUX users are willing to also write all libraries and then read all libraries so that the persistent files get in step. Great!

This version for LINUX is on the new Unibase by DMAC release 8.1 cdrom. In the future, those changes which make Unibase by DMAC release 8.1 different from release 7.49 will migrate to LINUX. As WebBase release 3.0 arrives, the LINUX users will again have the ability to use Unibase Imaging under their browsers. Lot of hard code to make run on LINUX. In particular the picklist verb will be difficult. Keeps DMAC busy.

WebBase by DMAC Wiggles In Its New Environment; Stay Tuned

Those following the progress of WebBase by DMAC through its third release can rejoice. Monstrous problems have been overcome. Solutions are in hand– now can we put it all back together? What is coming?

First, WebBase by DMAC now lives on a Windows 2003 server. Why? Most important is Windows 2003, compared to Windows 2000, isolates one website from another and allows the user to set usage levels and priorities. With careful setting, this server can optimize the remote user experience. And this remote user experience needs optimizing. Speed and disconnects play havoc with remote data entry.

Second, the installation process is being automated. Why? We at DMAC spent four weeks getting WebBase by DMAC installed on a second server after “proof of concept” on the development server. We figured most users would not like to spend an equal amount of time just getting WebBase by DMAC set up.

Third, we are ready to ask again for a beta site for WebBase by DMAC. If you wish to volunteer to be the beta site, we want to hear from you. It is not easy being beta. You have to put up with hearing developers say “ I don’t know” and then disappearing while they think. You have to listen to users say “Why doesn’t this piece of software work? I thought they knew what they are doing.” Too bad we are not perfect–but we try. Fortunately, the WebBase approach works; just that previously it was slow and could not handle disconnects and alphabet case problems well. Now on IIS we expect new problems.

Just Add a Virus Wall Appliance; And Be Done With It

Like most of our clients, DMAC watches all the discussion about viruses coming from the internet. We have always had good protection – Norton, McAfee and others. Then one day our people got busy and installed several protection systems on the network servers. Disaster. Nothing Worked or was so slow you would think it did not work.

There had to be a better way. Right now DMAC thinks it has found it. Now we have a single box appliance which we used to replace our connection to the broadband – our LinkSys DSL Router. Every night at midnight this box is automatically updated with the latest virus checks. If there is a problem with the box, we have a vendor who fixes it.

DMAC did this in April. DMAC removed the virus checking from the fifty or so machines at DMAC. We explained to our people that we had no protection from floppy disks and cdrom’s on the network. We have one standalone workstation which can check the floppy and the cdrom. Company policy says any cdrom or floppy brought into DMAC must go through this one workstation.

We also use Microsoft Windows Update service for all our machines. We stay current.

We now do not need to spend hours listening to others about virus problems. That talk was costing more than DMAC’s new solution. And there is a ton of options with its new black box that DMAC does not use. DMAC stresses the internet is a tool – not

a plaything.

So, if you are being eaten up by "virus talk", go to <http://www.cipafilter.com>. No doubt there are other products, but Anders Johnsson of Derby Tech was a great help.

New On-line Knowledge Base Created For DMAC Software Products

Finally, after much effort, DMAC has started a new on-line knowledge base for Unibase by DMAC, Unibase Imaging, and WebBase by DMAC. As usual, about four different products were evaluated. Each time a "fatal flaw" caused us to go looking again.

We at DMAC settled on Polar Software's HelpDesk and Knowledge Base at www.polarsoftware.com. The product's not perfect, but outruns the pack in DMAC's price range and specification list.

The new software runs on Microsoft's IIS on a Windows 2003 server. This was important, because the next release of WebBase by DMAC is being moved to IIS on a Windows 2003 server. So this is a learning tool for DMAC as well as a repository.

Over the next few months, DMAC will be moving its prior database and word processor based information to the new knowledge base. For those brave souls who wish to follow the progress of building the knowledge base, you can access the data at <http://www.dmac-webbase.com>. When the knowledge base is deemed ready for the big time, the links will be added to DMAC's web sites. Any suggestions on how to improve the process will be greatly appreciated.

On-Line Help Desk Solution To Be Added to Knowledge Base

DMAC's new Knowledge Base, now being stocked with years of data, will eventually have a companion – an on-line help desk.

DMAC encountered this help desk software supporting another product on the web. While right now it appears a little quirky, and provides an email with the solution which is not very user friendly, it does hold promise for the future.

One of the interesting features in the product is the ability to "bid" on help. Pay more money; get faster response. Sort of set up your own priority system. Unibase by DMAC, Unibase Imaging, and WebBase cannot use this feature – we rush through support for all clients as fast as possible (and of course we do not have "showstoppers" very often).

But the product does offer tracking on items submitted to DMAC – notifying the user when the item is thought complete and ready for user review.

How DMAC is going to integrate this with its new expanded support plans remains a mystery. We at DMAC are going slow in this area. We know we want the knowledge and prior solutions available to all who are current with their maintenance agreement 24 x7 (all the time) on the internet. We are experimenting with several approaches. Stay tuned.... and of course, if you have any thoughts on the subject please send them to me (ftarbox@dmac-unibase.com).

"Problem Tracker" Now Supports DMAC Developers and Contractors

While DMAC is working on a user accessible “easy to use” knowledge base and “help desk” (see other articles), its development group has installed a full featured “Problem Tracker” to replace Bugzilla.

The “Problem Tracker” software is “industrial strength.” And too complicated for making a user friendly interface for our clients. But it has all the features needed to keep the product managers, developers, testers and quality assurance group abreast of the status of all items “in house.”

Perhaps the greatest feature is that Fred can sit in his reclining chair at home with music in the background and review everything happening in the product side of the house. Yes, this product allows use on the internet 24x7.

DMAC now has WebBase ready for testing in a similar environment. So these new tracking systems help DMAC see how others have responded to the challenges of using the internet. Too bad they don't address the speed issues facing WebBase; then we all could just sit back and “enjoy.” Oh well, gotta earn our keep.