

The Problem - A company has a large investment in a 15-year-old mainframe system. While the system works well for daily business and accounting, it is unable to act as a web server and does not support easy extraction of data for reports. Reports are typically printed on "blue-bar" paper and sent to everyone in the company that might need the data.

This results in a huge cost to print and circulate reports that may never be used! In addition, the hardcopy reports are difficult to use, un-searchable, and do not meet the needs of most staff. While some reports could be "dumped" to a PC or web server, they would typically be used as a paper report displayed on the screen!



The Solution - Define the true problem. *What do the employees need to be effective?* By answering

this critical question, many organizations discover that a large number of the reports they generate are used by *no one*, simply because either the information or format of the reports is no longer relevant. By defining needs, most organizations will re-examine where the data is located and how it is accessed. Even with archaic data systems, tools can be developed to extract the data and convert it into a contemporary SQL database. Often, these tools can even be created to provide real-time query access to the data. Once in the database, this legacy data can be used to generate reports tailored to provide users with the knowledge they need to make critical business decisions. In addition, "ad hoc" queries can be developed to allow

employees to create customized reports as needed. From this point it is very easy to integrate the data into a web technology for easy and effective use. Controls can be established to ensure extractions occur, alerting key personnel if they fail (see the diagram at left).

Ultimately the means of accessing data, and degree to which it can be accessed relates to the specific hardware and software. Often, systems which are seen as "inaccessible" are easily integrated through a PC that acts as an "information broker". In many, if not most cases, the cost of implementing a solution such as this is easily covered by the savings in report printing and management. It is often possible to see an ROI in under a year on this type of solution!

