On-Line Public Records Research

"Accessing information in the public domain isn't as easy as it theoretically should be," says Charles Reickhoff ('88), Vice President of CDB Infotek, whose company provides nationwide on-line public records from business to business. Contained in Infotek's database repository are some 2.5 billion national, regional, and local public records. Two terabytes worth of data. Sixteen hundred different databases. This enormous quantity of information is regularly added to, updated, and distributed.

While it can be a relatively straightforward process to obtain information at the county level, there is virtually no coordination among local public entities, so searching out information can become laborious and expensive. CDB Infotek uses the most sophisticated IT processes to gather and combine existing public information to create unique and comprehensive databases searchable by a variety of criteria.

"Our strength is our ability to build custom databases through integrating information. We're essentially an aggregator and a builder of public records databases," says Reickhoff. "What we provide is the access to millions of records in the public domain which would take an incredible amount of time, money and effort to search out independently."

CDB Infotek's customers are typically professionals in the insurance, banking, financial, legal, and private investigatory industries. They use public records information to locate missing persons, identify or verify assets, investigate potential insurance claim fraud, conduct pre-trial preparation, and perform due diligence analysis.

Information technology is relied upon heavily by CDB Infotek. A recent IT breakthrough is CDB's Info-PROBES, a powerful people-locating system with the capability of searching more than 300 nationwide, regional, and local databases. Application-oriented menus help users determine the type of research they need to conduct so that the Investigative Information System (IIS) can direct the user to specific databases. Another time-saver—retained search criteria—allows the user to carry forward search criteria to be used in more than one application.

CDB Infotek has a unique feature in the industry: Windows' Synergy, a graphical user interface to the IIS, designed to make research even more efficient. It provides such functions as merging, editing, cutting and pasting, importing and exporting information from CDB Infotek report files and to external files—such as word processing, client billing files, databases, and more.

"We basically do what the public agencies ought to do, but don't." says Reickhoff, "Make it easy to get information."

Reickhoff received his Bachelor's degree in computer science, and emphasized management information systems and finance in his MBA.

"GSM gave me a much broader scope and vision. It changes the way you look at everything. I had a good technology background, and GSM opened me up to the world of business reality. It gave me the vision of realizing that I need to think about

Charles Reickhoff '88
Vice President, CDB Infotek

tomorrow today, and about what I'm going to do to get there."

The value of vision, believes Reickhoff, is in understanding that every organism—including a business—has a behavior and a particular set of dynamics that are in constant flux. That's why introducing a new technology may make good sense in its practical application, but may incur a cost in company morale, relating to the pressures of new technology.

His stint as assistant computer lab manager under John Clarke at GSM gave him access to working on the computers. But just as important, he stresses, was what he learned about people and organizations. "With my computer science degree, I gained confidence about technology; but from GSM, I gained confidence about the real world and was ready to go out and work. I was, in fact, one of very few people hired by Hewlett Packard directly out of school in the 3-2 Program [three years for the Bachelor's and two for the Master's degrees]. And it was only because I got real experience while at GSM." ▧