

Efficiencies of Using Proc Files

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Written by the Operating Systems Department

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What are Proc Files?

Every user knows that computers are an excellent tool for calculating data and running reports. But what of the many repetitive computer tasks that must be completed each day? No matter how quickly you type, these procedures still require valuable minutes, and all too often, hours. So, what can be done to improve efficiency? One solution is to hire more employees to get the job done faster, but this is an added expense that not everyone can afford. The better solution is to use the tools you already have at your disposal.

At DDMS, we believe the problem can be eliminated quickly, simply, and inexpensively through the acquisition of *proc files*. Procs, sometimes called “*procedure*” or “*batch files*”, are a method of combining a series of operations or programs into a single operation. With just a few keystrokes, the procedure will be launched and completed by the system. This process takes the place of an operator sitting down at the terminal performing hours of keystrokes. These procs can be launched using the [E7] Activities Scheduler function in the (Z) screen. This will allow the system to function unattended during the night or weekend without human intervention.

Note: The activities scheduler must be enabled before you can use it. To have DDMS enable this program, call the Support Department.

Currently, DDMS is offering standardized proc files for performing day-end, week-end, and month-end procedures. These procs follow the steps published in *Key Ops*. In addition, these proc files can be further modified to include your preferred procedures and reports. As your business grows and changes, your proc files can also be modified to grow with you.

How Can Procedure Files Improve Efficiency?

One way in which proc files make a substantial contribution is by saving time. Depending on the size of your operation and the reports you run, proc files can save you anywhere from 10 to 20 hours per week, or even more. If you save 20 hours a week, and each hour is worth \$7.50, you'll have savings of \$7,800.00 annually. That's 1,040 extra hours of employee time that can be directed to other needs your business may have. Put these new-found hours to work getting your database updated, or spend more time on the phone in customer service.

Another way in which proc files make a substantial contribution is computer efficiency. If you have long reports that are run each day, such as inventory usage reports, they can often slow down the system. With the proc file program, you can have the system run the reports for you after business hours, providing for more efficient use of your computer.

Proc files also help keep your business on schedule. Once you have established what time of day a report will run, there is less time wasted in confirming when a report will be available to examine. The needed report is always there, waiting for you. One example is lowstock reports for your top 20 vendors. These can print in the purchasing department at 4:00 AM daily. On Monday it may print **Smead** and **3M**, Tuesday it may print **Tops** and **Acco**, and so on. When the purchasing department comes to work they can immediately start building their purchase orders from the lowstock files that were created that morning while they slept.

Another way in which proc files make a substantial contribution is reduction of computer errors. Sometimes your system may slow down or crash because of binaries in some of your files. These may be caused by environmental issues that need to be addressed. Instead of waiting to run into one of these during working hours, let a proc file find and report them as often as you need. This will go a long way in keeping your system up and running for daily operations.

Reindexing is one of the most under-used functions of the system. Your employees can be more productive if the indexes are rebuilt regularly. Proc files can also perform this task.

Some DDMS customers find that they benefit from an increase in scheduling flexibility. Simply stated, employees required to perform day-end, week-end, and month-end procedures are often those upon whom the business greatly depends. Procedures that require the employee to stay after business hours may lead to them arriving later in the day, or being overworked. This may lead to burnout for your employees, which leads to turnover. Their time can now be spent in a more productive manner.

If an employee who normally prints reports or completes the day-end procedures is sick or goes on vacation, the operation of your company does not suffer. In this situation, a backup person (perhaps the owner) prints the necessary reports or completes the day-end procedures, but may inadvertently leave out many of the special reports for customers or salespeople that are usually printed. This leads to confusion and frustration for everyone concerned. The proc file will run every day, day-in and day-out.

Although procedure files can be measured in time and money, it is important not to overlook accuracy. Many keystroke errors that commonly occur can now be eliminated. If mistakes are caught at the time they're made, the procedure or report can be reproduced. Yes, time is wasted, but your business information remains accurate. But on occasions when errors go undetected, your company may be relying on faulty information.

Accuracy and consistency in today's competitive atmosphere is a must. You can't afford to allow mistakes to occur in such a way that your customers see them. Also, you make many business decisions based on information gained from the system. If it was entered incorrectly, you run the risk of a mistake that could cost you hundreds or even thousands of dollars. A common mistake is found when running a sales analysis report. When entered today, you used actual cost, but yesterday you used purchasing cost. Proc files will give you the same cost every day. When running a lowstock report, today you may run it for a 10-week period, yet last week it was run for 4 weeks. These inconsistencies can really add up to lost dollars.

What Are Some of the Functions DDMS Users Have Had Proc Files Written For?

Some of the functions you can automate with proc files include:

- Day-end
- Week-end
- Month-end
- (MB) Compression
- Reindexing
- Resetting inventory through the (+F) screen
- Year-end, including all yearly reports
- Sales analysis reports for customers and salespeople
- Aging accounts receivable daily
- Pastdue customer report which puts them on credit hold daily
- Customer report that shows which customers have stopped buying from you
- Updating MIN/MAX fields quarterly
- Menu systems specially written for every department in your organization
- Backorder call reports for calling yesterday's customers to sub items that are not available
- COD reports, to show what is outstanding

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- Find binaries report
- Running the ;UTLRESET program
- Reboot system automatically
- Verify that your backups are good
- Print extra invoice copies automatically
- Change the dates on your financial reports
- Automatically refigure contracts weekly
- Reindex sales journal files for use with the credit module
- Merge sales history monthly
- Print a Proc-Log daily showing all the proc file activity
- Run the ;SPCCHGIT program for sales journals
- Print cycle count sheets daily
- Run compensation reports
- Transfer data between linked DDMS systems
- Receive and flush purchase orders
- Run the short-buy reports
- Print item labels from the receipts file
- Build shipping manifest from today's sales
- Build and print credit letters for pastdue customers
- Print console screen with 2 keystrokes.

Are There Any Dangers We Should Be Aware Of?

As with everything there is always a certain level of risk. People are prone to making mistakes from time to time. You've heard the old saying, "garbage in garbage out." This also applies, but not as much. If the system performs the keystrokes, then the only thing left is putting paper in the printer, making sure it's on-line, and putting a tape in the tape drive. Unfortunately, these errors can occur often. Use the following check list and your proc will perform beautifully every day for years to come.

- ✓ Make sure your printer is working properly. If it jams regularly or goes off-line, either fix it or get rid of it. It's not worth the hassle it may give you.
- ✓ Make sure the printer is on a proper printer stand. All too often we find the printer is fine, it's the stand that causes the jam.
- ✓ Let the paper fall all the way down to the floor. The increase in pulling weight helps folding.
- ✓ When taking out the nightly backup tape, replace it with the next tape; you'll be less likely to forget that way.

