ACI US Corporate Backgrounder

About ACI US

ACI US is a worldwide leader in database software development tools for both the Windows® and Macintosh® platforms. For over a decade, the ACI US 4th Dimension® (4D®) product line has delivered database development solutions for companies of all types and sizes, from single-person operations to Fortune 500 companies. A wide range of industries, organizations and educational institutions use 4D applications.

United States headquarters are in Cupertino, California and the parent company, ACI SA, is based in Paris, France. ACI has subsidiaries in Germany, Japan, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom, and sells products through distributors worldwide.

Since its inception, ACI US has excelled by breaking new ground in the database software market. Successful in delivering cross-platform database applications, ACI US focuses on perfecting technologies that take database publishing beyond the desktop.

History

ACI, Analyses Conseils Informations, was founded in 1984 with a vision of producing and distributing a powerful and easy-to-use desktop relational database management system — 4th Dimension (4D).

Laurent Ribardière, president of ACI since 1984, is the original author of 4th Dimension and the primary designer and programmer for other products in the 4th Dimension environment. ACI's other core programmers have been with ACI for an average of eight years. This unprecedented continuity in engineering brings efficiency and consistency to ACI's software development processes.

A privately held company, ACI is a leading European exporter of computing products. Since it began shipping 4th Dimension, ACI has been the leading RDBMS vendor for the Macintosh. The company's market share varies in each individual country. ACI holds 70% of the Macintosh RDBMS market in the United States and over 90% in France. In 1995, ACI penetrated the Windows market with significant success.

Product History

Since 1984, the 4D product line has evolved to include a desktop relational database, an integrated client/server solution, an SQL front-end, numerous productivity plug-ins, an ODBC driver and an Internet development environment.

In 1993, ACI released 4D Server®, the client/server version of 4th Dimension, which broadened ACI's presence in many corporations and organizations. By the end of 1993, 4D Server accounted for 40% of the company's revenue.

Originally created for the Macintosh, all ACI products have been available for Windows (95 and NT) since 1995.

The Products

ACI markets products and services under the 4th Dimension (4D) product line. 4D products focus on database solutions for organizations of all sizes, and represent the most complete family of relational database products available for desktop platforms. 4D enables users to create and manipulate all the elements of relational database publishing, from data tables to integrated spreadsheets and graphics, and combine them into complete forms for use on the desktop and the Web.

All 4D products run on Windows 95, Windows NT® and on Macintosh and Power Macintosh®. All are 32 bit clean. 4D products on both platforms are completely compatible without modifications.

High level integration characterizes the 4D product line. Upward and downward compatibility provides scalability and flexibility. Any application developed with 4th Dimension or 4D Server can be run by the other database, on either platform, without modification to the source development efforts.

From inception, all 4D products have been and continue to be Year 2000 compliant. A white paper on 4D and the year 2000 is available from ACI.

4th Dimension

ACI's flagship application, 4D, provides a graphical user interface, comprehensive programming language and multi-platform capabilities. It offers an ideal development environment for all types of users in companies of all sizes. 4D enables rapid development of flexible, powerful applications, making it an indispensable RDBMS for hundreds of thousands of developers and users around the world. With its graphical, multi-tasking and transactional capabilities, 4D runs successfully in all industries, including: scientific and medical research, automation, finance, production and process control.

With the latest version, 4D V6, ACI again sets the standard for what power users can expect: intuitive Internet implementation and rapid application development (RAD) for client/server architecture. 4D V6 won the Macworld Editor's Choice Award for the best RAD tool of 1997.

4D incorporates data management on the Web as a standard database task within the 4D integrated client/server architecture. By writing only a few lines of code, users can work with any 4D form in a browser to create and publish data on the Web. 4D supports HTML formats and external products; users can also add JavaScript applications and Java applets to built-in 4D features.

4D Server

4D Server is the cross-platform data and application server for 4D, developed for companies and workgroups that need powerful and economical multi-user database systems. Any stand-alone 4D application easily scales to a workgroup client/server solution using 4D Server.

4D Server is an extremely versatile software platform with the ability to integrate and consolidate all types of data for thousands of users over any network, including the World Wide Web. It intelligently gives users access to data using standard Web browsers. Because Web services are part of 4D Server and not a CGI, 4D Server takes full advantage of the existing 4D engine, giving Web users the same views and data integrity as those using 4D Client.

4D Server handles a wide range of data management tasks. 4D Server applications can consist of 4D Server alone or can be integrated as part of larger enterprise information systems. Many 4D Server applications are mission-critical and include advanced technologies that synchronize distributed, remote or mobile data and control peripherals such as bar code readers, linear accelerators or satellites.

4D Server fills the gap between low-end file sharing based systems and complex SQL-based RDBMS systems. Any 4D Server application smoothly interacts with existing enterprise databases (ORACLE, Sybase or any ODBC-compliant server) with the use of 4D Connectivity Plug-ins.

4th Dimension Environment

The 4th Dimension environment includes four series of products, tightly integrated into the 4D database engine:

- Development Tools:
  - 4D Backup®. This is an integrated, transaction-based backup utility that offers programmable backups, mirroring, log file and a host of other backup and restore features.
  - 4D Compiler®. This is a cross-platform, multi-target compiler developed for 4th Dimension and 4D Server applications. As a true machine-language compiler, 4D Compiler generates code adapted to a wide range of processors.
  - 4D Insider®. This cross-referencing tool and graphical code browser and management application enables component builders and users to modularize or merge existing applications and to examine database objects and their dependencies.

- Productivity Plug-ins:
  - 4D Calc®. An integrated spreadsheet application, 4D Calc is designed for the analysis, simulation, review and forecasting of numerical data. Cell formulas in 4D Calc can include references to database components, while entire spreadsheets can be created directly from information in a database.
  - 4D Write®. An integrated word processing application, 4D Write can create and modify all sorts of textual documents, from simple letters to multi-part contracts. 4D Write provides file translation capabilities and a complete document merging system.
  - 4D Draw®. An integrated, object-oriented drawing application, 4D Draw creates graphics that can be derived from, dependent on and integrated with database information. 4D Draw pictures can be constructed to act as graphical user interfaces.
  - 4D Chart®. A charting application integrated within 4th Dimension. 4D Chart enables both two- and three-dimensional graphing of data directly from a database.

- Connectivity Plug-ins:
  - 4D ODBC. This plug-in allows data exchange between 4D and any ODBC (Open DataBase Connectivity) data source, easily connecting 4D with products developed by third party vendors.
  - ODBC Driver for 4D Server. This plug-in enables any Windows application to communicate with 4D Server through ODBC calls and SQL queries. Based on existing ACI components (Server API and Network Components), this driver is a fully integrated element of 4D's open architecture. With only a client installation, ODBC Driver can be deployed without any changes to an existing database in production. It follows the standards of the Open DataBase Connectivity interface defined by Microsoft.
  - 4D SQL Server®. This plug-in provides direct data exchange between 4D and Sybase SQL Server, or between 4D and Microsoft SQL Server, enabling manipulation of the data and the structure of an SQL Server database from the 4D engine.
  - 4D for ORACLE. This plug-in allows 4D to communicate with an ORACLE server, enabling management of the data and the structure of an ORACLE database from the 4D engine.

- Application Programming Interface:
  - 4D Open®. This is the Application Programming Interface (API) for connecting to 4D Server. Using a set of C/C++/Pascal libraries, any foreign client application can access a 4D Server database. Allows data manipulation ranging from basic operations such as selecting a server on the network to high-level data processing.

Distribution Channel

ACI is supported by an established distribution channel in over 30 countries in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia. The product line is localized in 15 languages, including: English, French, German, Japanese, Hebrew, Arabic, Korean and Farsi.

Developers

A key factor in ACI's success is its large developer community. ACI has over 6,000 third-party solution providers and VARs worldwide creating custom 4D databases for clients and vertical applications. Many of the commercial developers publish off-the-shelf applications based on 4th Dimension. These applications include sales automation, accounting and client tracking programs. An active and well-respected community, 4D developers possess expertise in a variety of markets, technologies and cultures.

Developers are an important element in the success of 4th Dimension. Their competence and creativity yield mission-critical and highly sophisticated applications in organizations of all sizes. ACI works synergistically with its developers to reinforce their 4D skills and to obtain valuable feedback.

Support and Education

ACI US provides answers and assistance to customers through a variety of services and programs.

Partner Services

ACI US supports registered third-party developers (Partners) with tools to produce and deliver 4D-based solutions and to take advantage of new market opportunities. Services include technical support, a developer registry database, referrals, lead generation, monthly mailings, product discounts and technical notes.

Technical Support

ACI US offers a variety of technical support options to meet the needs of all users. Knowledgeable engineers who have immediate access to current technical information provide quality phone and on-line response to customer questions.

Training Classes

ACI US has a program of training classes and seminars for every type of user, from beginners to information system managers. The classes range from introductory sessions to sophisticated programming techniques and advanced development methodologies.

Technical Notes

These monthly notes contain valuable database examples as well as 4D and 4D Server programming tips.