Keeps Tabs on Expense, Cost Figures

Film Studio Reviews Profitability With DBMS

LOS ANGELES — Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp. is giving rave reviews to a data base management system (DBMS) that has expedited and enhanced its monthly financial statements and analyses.

Such Fox hits as *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, *9 to 5* and about 75 others have all had their profitability tracked with the Nomad DBMS from National CSS, Inc., a Fox spokesman said.

Martin Shindler, director of financial reporting at Fox, oversees the preparation of financial statements for each film made by the studio. He and his staff have been using the DBMS since late 1978. Their application started with some simple amortization calculations producing simple reports, but all financial reporting for the film division is now being handled by the DBMS.

"Our only alternative at the time was to do the reports manually, barely meeting our deadlines for getting the reports produced. Now, we not only get the reports produced by the deadline, we also have time to analyze the results and ask questions about the numbers," Shindler said.

Noting that over 75% of the films made in the industry today never turn a profit, Shindler said it is crucial to watch the profitability of each film closely. The studio's system tracks each film produced by Fox's Feature Film Division. Over 400 items exist in the data base to keep tabs on cost and expense figures for each individual picture. Financial statements are prepared from this data for the entire division, he said.

Shindler came to Fox as a financial analyst in June 1979, when use of Nomad at Fox was just beginning. He was promoted to senior financial analyst in February 1980, manager of financial reporting in October 1980 and director of financial reporting in April 1981.

Tracking Profitability

How does Nomad help Fox track its picture profitability? According to Shindler, "it incredibly speeds up and enhances the monthly financial statements and analysis. A data base management system is a must for our operations now." He added, "It used to be all we could do was get the statements together. There was no time to analyze . . . to ask why a number was this high or this low. Now, with Nomad, we can analyze and get the information we need. It is one of our primary tools [with which] to do our work."

The DBMS' flexibility has come into play on numerous occasions when the applications requirements have changed. Just recently, Fox added several different data items to a schema that already totals more than 400 items. Nomad's schema REORG simplified this task, he said. Another type of application change that was needed once for their most popular film of all time — *Star Wars*.

The item designated to track film rentals was given a maximum size of $99 million, he recalled. One day, one of the reports showing film rentals reported "*****" for the film rentals for *Star Wars* — which had exceeded the $100 million mark for rentals, something the original designers of the data base had never anticipated. A quick REORG of the schema to expand the item's size was performed and everything was in order.