Print Solutions from Atac

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Barr Systems Releases BHCS 7.2.3.5

Barr Systems has released version 7.2.3.5 of the Barr Host Communications Suite, or BHCS. This is the first new release in nine months, strengthening the 7.2 product line's additional feature set.

Compared to 7.1, the 7.2 stream adds:

NJE over IP -

Connect to your mainframe as an NJE node via HPR/IP (High Performance Routing over IP) using a standard Internet connection.

Print FICON -

The mainframe connects to the Print FICON Server via a fibre-optic FICON cable connection. Using the Barr FICON Input module you can receive jobs to the Barr Host Communications Suite (BHCS) and from there you can direct your jobs to existing network or local printers.

Remote Spool Window -

The Remote Spool Window (RSW) is a modern spool window for the Barr Host Communications Suite (BHCS). Although it can run on the same computer as BHCS, it is designed to run on a different computer and communicate with BHCS remotely. The RSW provides for multiple simultaneous connections from other computers in your organisation. One RSW license is provided free with every system.

Notifications -

BHCS sends email alerts and notifications using standard Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP). Alerts can be sent for errors as they occur. Custom email notifications can be sent for other events (e.g. RJE being disconnected from the mainframe, a job failing to print). Notifications can also be triggered by a specific message ID from the Operator Console. All BHCS Operator Console log messages are routed to a SQL database which, in turn, provides new ways to view, search and archive BHCS history.

There's a new .NET based RJE Console, which provides a better user experience. A new .NET based installer can install the product on Windows 8, 10 & 11 as well as Server 2012, 2016, 2019 and 2022.

Upgrading from 7.1 x to 7.2.x is an in-place upgrade; no need to uninstall then re-install. Simply run SETUP and choose Upgrade.

Contact Atac for advice and assistance to upgrade BHCS and start using these great new features.

Getting Legacy Print Streams Under Control

So you work for a large organisation which produces a "Legacy" print stream such as Xerox LCDS or Metacode. You'd like to do something with it, as the outsourced printing of same costs an arm and a leg. Yet the applications which produce the Legacy print are ancient and unable to be changed, even if there is any certainty that the right source code is available, with programmers who understand it!

Additionally, you are now starting to run into compliancy problems as new legal requirements apply to the Legacy print which is distributed to staff and customers alike. "Don't they know there isn't any way to change this stuff?" you think to yourself….

Well, there is indeed a way to "change this stuff" AND provide industry-standard print streams to your outsourced print provider.

Bluecrest's Output Manager (Emtex) can convert your Legacy print stream to industry-standard Postscript, the easiest form of print stream for a print bureau to handle (or any other print language they prefer). Output Manager provides complete Legacy print stream transformation with:

- tray mapping from MAIN, AUX etc. to WHITE, LETTER etc.

- file bundling of many small files into efficient print run sizes

- re-plexing of pages/sides to suit

- resource optimisation with all required resources present in each print file

Bluecrest's Output Enhancement (VDE) allows you to modify the print stream during transformation. This allows you to make those compliancy changes and enhance the output in many ways:

- Add/replace colour, images, logos, text or forms anywhere in documents

- Add high quality electronic overlays/stationery/inserts and move to "plain paper printing"

- Insert targeted marketing messages based on your external demographics database

- Extract text data and write log file(s) with control totals etc. for audit control

- Add address block DPID barcodes and sort into quantity/envelope break points

Take control of your Legacy print streams today and reduce your printing costs substantially.

Contact Atac to discuss the extraordinary functionality you can achieve at the same time.

Output Manager (Emtex) Processing Speed

How can you speed up your Output Manager system? OM is a complex software suite which requires a high-performance PC.

Here are some rough guidelines to enable you to provide OM with the resources it needs for FAST processing:

OPERATING SYSTEM – Server 2016 or 2019 are recommended for server setup in a client/server configuration, with Windows 10 64-bit the preferred Client OS. In a standalone setup, Windows 10 64-bit is ok.

CPU – An eight core (or more) 64-bit CPU, at least 3Ghz+ with Hyperthreading DISABLED in the BIOS. Hyperthreading has been shown to preclude OM from using multiple CPUs. Allow two cores for OS and OM plus one core for each input/output client running on a server or standalone installation.

MEMORY – Allow 4GB for the OS and OM to co-exist PLUS enough memory for each server-based OM client (input or output) to run without paging. 64 or 128GB is not uncommon on a high-end server.

DISK DRIVES – The best you can buy! We've found that by increasing disk speed, performance can TRIPLE. OM is a very disk intensive product, with DISK almost always being the performance bottle-neck. SSDs are strongly recommended with a very busy, top-end server having three fast dedicated local disks for OM's system, VDD and output directories.

VIRUS/Spyware scanners should be tested carefully for their impact on OM processing speeds. One product is known to consume 100% of the CPU for excessive periods when OM outputs to PDF for example.

Client/Server – OM can expand to a full Client/Server setup where the server is dispatching jobs to run on Client PCs, allowing for virtually unlimited expansion. On the server, assign input & output clients to run locally until cpu cores or memory approach their limit. Assign remaining input & output clients to Remote Client machines – an 8GB Windows 10 Pro 64-bit Client machine can run up to four input & output clients simultaneously.

LAN – In a Client/Server setup, Server and Client machines should be on the same network segment and connected with hi-speed (Gigabit) networking.

So, a high-end Server with a 32-core CPU and 128GB RAM should be able to run up to 30 odd OM input & output clients concurrently before memory or CPUs are exhausted.

Additional input & output clients should be located on Remote Client machines (without GUI so the Server can control them).

The input data does play an important factor in memory usage calculations; complex documents with many graphics / small bitmaps reduce performance and increase memory usage.

As you can see, there are a variety of things you can look at to speed up your OM system.

Contact Atac to discuss this further.

Q & A

Q. We receive files from another BHCS system at a remote site. BHCS encryption is used between the two sites. We receive files and they view ok but when we print them or write them to disk, they are scrambled. What's going on here please?

A. It's most likely the transfers from the remote site are using the Barr Archive format. Any type of file can be transferred using the Archive format and files arrive looking exactly as they did on the sending machine. The catch here is that the Encryption Key Name field (NDHBKEYN) is still populated with the Encryption Key Name so when sent out by the receiver, the file is encrypted.

The solution is to put an Unconditional Action in the active Override Table, setting NDHBKEYN to "" (nul). As files arrive they are DeEncrypted and then UnArchived and finally fed into Spool; in this last stage the Override Table is actioned and the Encryption Key Name is blanked.

Now when you send the files out to disk or printer, they won't be encrypted and will look correct.

Q. We got an error when we extracted some print file text and passed it to another application. The text had a character hex(92) in the middle of it and our other application didn't like it. How can we overcome this?

A. It's best to programmatically vet the extracted text to remove any offending characters. This can be achieved by use of the MODIFY (search and replace) statement and a Regular Expression to swap all chars beneath hex(20) and above hex(7F) with a space.

Q. How can we "reserve" Output Manager input & output clients for a particular customer so they are always ready and available? (We don't want to change any other customers' jobs.)

A. Use the CLASS functionality as follows:

In VIPExec.cfg set AMDOCS_CLASSES=YES; this enables the following logic.
In Default.prf, set a system wide default of CLASS=A.
Set all "general-use" input & output clients to CLASS=A.
Set all customer "reserved" input & output clients to CLASS=B.
Set all reserved customers' profiles to CLASS=B.

So, if a profile has no CLASS=, it defaults to A and won't match the "reserved" input & output clients. None of your existing customers' jobs will therefore require any changes.

Our customer with CLASS=B in their jobs will use only the reserved input & output clients. This functionality can be extended to other customers via CLASS=C, CLASS=D etc.

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