Print Solutions from Atac

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Barr – Banners or Overlays?

Barr Host Communications Suite (BHCS) gives you the opportunity to add Banners and/or Overlays to print jobs. What's the difference and which is appropriate?

Banners are added at the start and (optionally) end of print jobs. Banners may comprise coloured stationery to assist job (or bundle) separation after printing.

Banners are intended to delineate jobs as well as identify each job and subsequent destination clearly, with LARGE printing of relevant attributes. Banners therefore carry variable information about each job, such as Jobname, Class, Destination, User, Date & Time etc.

BHCS includes a Banner/Trailer editor which facilitates the design and placement of job attributes on Banner & Trailer pages. Static text and Job attributes can be printed in normal or LARGE mode, any place on the page that they fit.

Overlays (or Forms) are designed to replace pre-printed stationery containing logos, shading, boxes etc., i.e. all the static info which is the same on every page. An Overlay is sent at the beginning of each job, after the Banner, with special printer commands to reproduce the content on every page, then apply the print data on top. Optionally, an ending Overlay can be sent, before the Trailer, to turn off Overlay reproduction.

Overlays mean printers can be loaded with plain paper instead of special pre-printed stationery, which must be inventoried/ordered, warehoused and conditioned, retrieved and loaded to a printer before printing can commence. This saves time on warehousing, retrieval and loading of stationery between jobs. Jobs can run continuously, one after the other, with the printer printing the static overlay info unique to each.

Overlays are normally created and designed using software unique to each printer, then triggered by a job attribute such as FORMNAME at print time. BHCS allows an Overlay to be sent at various points such as before/after Banners (and/or Trailers), during reprints, per copy etc.

So, Banners carry variable info and print before/after a job. Overlays carry static info and are printed as a background to pages within a job. BHCS caters for both Banners and Overlays, automating the printing of each and facilitating printer efficiency and maximum utilisation (non-stop printing).

Atac can help you to setup and configure BHCS to enhance and streamline your print procedures via the use of Banners and Overlays.

Output Manager & Output Enhancement - Forms

Output Manager (OM) & Output Enhancement (OE) can process print streams containing Forms (also called Overlays). These are essentially sets of repeating static information found on every page. This can have an enormous effect on OM processing time; in some cases turning hours into minutes.

OM can be instructed to ignore Forms, processing every page's information completely. Alternatively, it can be instructed to process repeating items as Forms; this includes Forms and external EPS files.

The profile command (PSIN/PDFIN)_USE_OVERLAYS controls detection of Forms/EPS repeating items, and subsequent creation of VDO files containing same. This functionality is enabled by default for both Forms and external EPS files.

AFP and Xerox print streams have their own version of Forms, which are converted to OM VDO resource format automatically as processed. A VDO from any print stream can be added to any other, i.e. an AFP Form in VDO format could be added to PS or Xerox output.

Forms can be Sampled, Extracted, Deleted and Added just like Images and Fonts. This allows entire page content to be repositioned on page sizes more suited to continuous high-speed printers, for example.

A Form can be created from existing page content, then used to rapidly reproduce say 10,000 identical pages. This technique can be used to print a large quantity of "letter-box-drop" content on high-quality offset printers from a single page, high-quality document, without the overhead of a file 10,000 times the size.

Forms can also be created from scratch in a tool like Word, by printing to a .PS file, adding a wrapper then processing the file through OM to create a VDO. This VDO can then be re-used in OE, just like Fonts (VDF) and Images (VDI).

Forms are incredibly efficient, reducing file sizes considerably with only one copy stored in a document then simply called from all other instances. Processing time is similarly reduced, with a Form processed once only as opposed to storing and processing the same content across multiple pages.

Database "best practises" suggest storing only one copy of static data; why wouldn't you extend this to your print files as well?

Atac has extensive experience streamlining transactional print documents and processing time for same. Contact us to discuss your requirements in depth, any time.

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Output Manager – How to use SQL (and other) Databases

Output Manager (OM) can read from and write to SQL databases, via ODBC drivers installed on the OM PC. ODBC opens up database access to OM by providing a consistent programming interface, regardless of which database type is being accessed. ODBC currently supports Excel, Oracle, SQL, TXT and Paradox (DBASE) databases.

Here are the high-level steps to setup SQL database access, which can then be used by Output Enhancement (OE) scripts to query, read and write SQL data:

1. Ensure “ODBC Data Source Administrator” is installed, along with the SQL driver.
2. Add a new Data Source to “ODBC (DSA)”, using the SQL driver and pointing at your SQL database.
3. Create a “schema.ini” file, which describes the data file’s structure and record format.

The above steps only need to be performed once to enable access.

Create an OE script to access SQL.

1. At job start, format then call an SQL OPTIONS statement containing the ODBC database name to access (along with Username and Password, if applicable).
2. During processing, format then call SQL READ statement(s) specifying the record scope and fieldnames to read. These are SQL SELECT statements and can contain any valid SELECT options.
3. During processing, format then call SQL WRITE statements, specifying data to write. These are SQL INSERT statements.
4. At job end, format then call an SQL CLOSE statement, to terminate access.

As mentioned above, programmatically the steps are identical to access Excel, TXT, SQL, DBASE etc. data. ODBC converts and applies your SQL statements as applicable for the type of database in use.

See the Output Enhancement Reference Guide for SQL statement syntax and, in particular, the SQL Appendix for a low-level step-by-step walkthrough of the above.

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Q & A

Q. We've just added a new rule to our BHCS Override Table, but it isn't working even after a restart. Why?

A. Examination of the BarrBackup obtained shows the O/T you mention is not the Active Table. Ensure the O/T you edited is listed as the Active Override Table.

Q. 7 days data purge evidence for BARRPC has been shared to us today. Please advise the cutoff methodology for BARR (whether cutoff by date / time).

A. At midnight each night, or when BHCS SpoolCore is restarted, any files older than the specified number of days are deleted. It doesn't matter what time of day the file was moved to Retain, at 00:01 (one minute past midnight) or at 23:59 (1 minute to midnight).

So, if a file is moved to Retain on the 10th and the Retain period is ten days, the file will be deleted on the 21st. This is because on the 21st, the file is eleven days old and has exceeded the Retain period.

Q. We process Postscript and PDF files as Binary format, imported to BHCS as Binary and sent to our LPR printer with the "Pass data to printer unchanged" switch. We need to put a Banner on the data containing the JobID and Filename. Can we do this?

A. Yes, on the BHCS Spool printer's LPR Port Configuration panel, choose "Banner (-L)" and put <NDHBJBID> next to it. This sends a Banner with the Job ID as the Title. Also select "Job (-J)" and put <NDHDJNAM> next to it. This puts the Jobname on the Banner page as well.

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