

ACTion!



Happy early Valentine's Day!

I hope everyone had a wonderful New Year's and are gearing up for this romantic holiday.

This month we are introducing a new series from our Senior Oracle Instructor, Terry Stough. Terry will be writing on Oracle 11g Release 2. See his article on page 3 for more details.

Enjoy!

Stephen Johnson
President
Advanced Concepts
Training Corp.



Training Partner

Valentines from the Heart, not the Wallet

Valentine's Day has often been accused of being a commercial holiday; a way to counteract the post-holiday shopping lull. However, you don't have to clear out your savings account to show your significant other how much you care.

The standard gifts that come to mind when one thinks of Valentine's Day are flowers and candy. Breaking free from the normal standards can help you showcase how much you care, especially if your budget is tight.

Participating in or doing an activity outside the realm of what you normally concede to is a great way to show you care. Is there something your significant other likes to do that isn't really your cup of tea? Surprise him or her by offering to come along and participate in their beloved activity alongside them.

Along the same lines of self-sacrifice: is there something that needs to be done around the house that neither of you wants to do? Take the initiative and tackle those chores yourself--if it's something you can't do yourself, (i.e. plumbing, intense organization, etc.) hire someone to do it or enlist the help of some friends who can.

You don't necessarily have to resort to something out of the ordinary or something you dislike in order to be creative in expressing your love. You can always look to yourself for the perfect gift. Harness your own individual talents to develop a unique gift. Can you sing? Write? Draw? Paint? Cook? Dance? Whatever your skills, utilize them!

On a slightly more conventional note, breakfast in bed is ALWAYS a great gift. While this does typically require minimal cooking skills, if you aren't handy in the kitchen, order in or go pick up breakfast from a local restaurant.

For those who celebrate in the evening hours, going out for dinner isn't a vital part of your "date". How about a romantic night in? Drop the kids off at a friend's house for the night and enjoy a peaceful home-cooked meal, a DVD that isn't rated G or PG and each other's company. Candles are always a good way to create the right romantic ambiance.

It's important to remember that you don't have to be in a committed relationship to celebrate Valentine's Day. The holiday is also a great opportunity to show the important people in your life that they're appreciated with a little treat; be it your dog, cat, nephew, niece, or your next door neighbor, it's always nice to know that you are loved!



Tips for Tallying Your Taxes

That wonderful, stress-inducing time of year is upon us again--tax season. There are many steps you can take to minimize the stress and headaches that accompany the filing of your tax return; the most important of which is being organized!

If it hasn't arrived already, you should be receiving your tax paperwork (either from your employer or at your home) any day now. Dedicate a folder or storage container for ALL of the proper tax documents (ideally in sequential order) including:

1099s, W-2s, a record of paid mortgage interest (if a homeowner), total annual rent paid (if a renter), receipts for charitable donations, records of childcare expenses, interest-income statements, etc. If you don't have the proper forms, you can always find printable versions of them at www.irs.gov. If you're doing your taxes yourself, organizing these papers ahead of time will help keep you from getting flustered when the time comes to sit down and crunch numbers. If you're hiring a professional, having all your paperwork in order will ensure that they are able to perform their job accurately, without wasting time sorting through your endless piles of papers. (Don't forget, the earlier the IRS receives your tax information, the sooner they can send you a check!)

If you plan on doing your tax paperwork yourself, do all you can to keep yourself distraction free, and your mind clear. First, gather all the supplies you'll need (calculator, pens, pencils, scratch paper, etc.), then pick a comfortable, quiet, well-lit spot where it's easy for you to concentrate & get to work! Give yourself plenty of time and be sure to take occasional breaks to ensure your mental acuity and your sanity.

Once you get started, make certain you double check

EVERYTHING. A few "small" mistakes could send up a red flag and eventually result in an audit--which nobody wants. There are a few mistakes common to income tax returns that when avoided can save you the headache, the time and even money!

First and foremost, if you do not have everything together and are not ready, file for an extension to avoid a late filing fee. For most income tax filers, you will need form 4868. This can be found at the IRS website, www.irs.gov and must be sent in prior to your tax due date, otherwise, you could still incur late fees.

Simple as it sounds, check your math, or even have someone else look over it for you to be absolutely certain everything works out properly (According to a set of tips from Ronnie Deutch, the most important parts to pay attention to are "Earned Income Tax Credit" and "Child Tax Credit"; they are the most commonly miscalculated areas.). Also, be certain not to fall into the temptation to round off your numbers. While it seems like it may save you some time, energy, frustration, etc. In actuality it will likely compound those things. Round numbers indicate that the preparer is not being exact with their numbers and could land you in the front of the audit line.

When you've completed your work, be sure to sign your tax return! It sounds simple, but it often gets overlooked. Once everything is finalized and in order, make a copy of your return and keep it for your files.

If the idea of doing your own taxes by hand worries you, there are plenty of reputable software or online programs that can assist you. If the idea of even using software to do your taxes is daunting, look into using a professional service, but be sure to do your research before making a final decision.



Oracle Instructor's Corner!

By Terry W. Stough, ACT's Senior Oracle Instructor

Everything? Really? Johnny Carson and Ed McMahon (The Tonight Show before Jay Leno and Conan O'Brien) used to do a bit where Johnny would read a very exhaustive list of facts, followed by Ed McMahon remarking repeatedly that the list was everything you could ever want to know about the subject. Johnny would then give a dozen or so additional funny facts that were not on the list.

I just did a "dir /s" in the directory containing my Oracle 11g Release 1 help documents. It showed that I had 18,411 files in 1,760 directories for a total of 1,205,263,326 bytes (+/- 1.2GB) of help! You would think that with all that help, there wouldn't be ANYTHING that isn't covered.

Wrong again! In writing the course manuals and teaching Oracle DBA and programming courses for over a decade, I have often been amazed at what isn't included in the help files. It seems that with all that help, finding the right piece of help, if it is there, is often very difficult.

I now find myself with another major task. I have to once again revise over a dozen Oracle manuals for Release 2 of Oracle 11g. Those thousands of pages are supported by around 3,000 scripts, many of which will have to be revised just because of the change to Release 2. Why? Because Oracle puts the release information in the path for many commands. For example, to get to the BIN directory in 11g Release 1 in Windows, the path is C:\app\oracle\product\11.1.0\db_1\BIN. For 11g Release 2, the path is C:\app\oracle\product\11.2.0\db_1\BIN.

Now that may look like a trivial change (and it is) but try opening up 3,000 files to determine if you need to change the file.

I decided this time around to write a complete PL/SQL solution to the problem. I had not done this before because one of my concerns with the Oracle file management package, UTL_FILE, has always been that it has no directory procedures. That means that you cannot get a list of files that you can then step through to make changes like we just discussed. With every new release of Oracle for the past ten years, I have looked at the new documentation with hopes that UTL_FILE would have added directory procedures. But no such luck.

Recently, I found a brief reference to an Oracle package that, believe it or not, wasn't

included in the 1.2 gigabytes of help. That package, which is owned by SYS, is DBMS_BACKUP_RESTORE. This undocumented package has a procedure called SearchFiles that will allow you to generate a list of files.

Part 1 of a Continuing Series

For the next few newsletters, I will show you how I built a stored procedure and did the setup to allow me to make mass changes to scripts or any other text files. This will include the following steps:

1. Granting privileges on the undocumented package.
2. Creating a methodology for an Oracle user who is not a SYSDBA to see the undocumented X\$KRBMSFT table, which the undocumented DBMS_BACKUP_RESTORE package uses to store directory information. (Just granting SELECT on the table doesn't work!)
3. Setting up appropriate Oracle directories and their related permissions.
4. Creating an Oracle type that will hold up to two billion file paths in a single data structure. (As an aside, the previous sentence originally said "files". We could do that too but that is not needed here.)
5. Creating a stored procedure that will use the above to retrieve the entire file list, returning it as a parameter.
6. Creating the procedure that will use this capability to allow you to make a single call with two parameters (Search_String and Replace_String) to affect potentially thousands of files in multiple directories.
7. Running the procedure.

Although writing all this from scratch may seem to be a major task, once you see the finished product, you can easily adapt it for your own needs. Further, this series will provide an excellent example of the use not only of the incredibly useful UTL_FILE package but also of collections, one of PL/SQL's most powerful features.

If you are new to Oracle or PL/SQL, this series should give you major insight into what can be done with this powerful language. At the end of the series, we will make the entire script available to you upon request.

I look forward to seeing you in a class soon so that we can explore the wonders of Oracle together!

FUN RANDOM FACTS

Over one billion Valentine's Day cards are sent each year in North America.

The Panther is actually just a Leopard with a genetic mutation called "melanism". When closely examined, their coats still consist of the same rosette patterns as leopards, just with much darker colors.

The ballpoint pen debuted in the US in 1945 at Gimbel's department store in New York City. The full stock of 10,000 pens sold out in the first day... for \$12.50 PER PEN.

Barbie's full name is Barbara Millicent Roberts.

The first toilet stall in a public washroom is the least likely to be used. It is also the cleanest.

Over 50 Million Mr. Potato Heads have been sold since his introduction in 1952.

Thailand is the only South East Asian country to have never been colonized by a Western Power.

UPCOMING COURSES/SCHEDULE

Classes in Blue marked with a * are online.
Classes in Red are Red Hat offerings.

START DATE END DATE PRICE

FEBRUARY 2010

*Oracle 10g Release 2 Discoverer Desktop for End Users	2/1	2/2	\$1,049
*Oracle 11g Release 2 Discoverer Desktop for End Users	2/1	2/2	\$1,049
Oracle 11g Release 2 Discoverer Desktop for End Users	2/1	2/2	\$1,049
UNIX (Linux) Jumpstart for Experienced IT Developers	2/8	2/12	\$2,199
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Oracle 11g Database Administration II	2/8	2/12	\$2,199
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Jboss Application Server Administration	3/1	3/5	\$2,199
UNIX Introduction to Commands	3/1	3/4	\$1,849
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Scheduling News

From now until March 31, 2010, enroll in ANY Oracle class (Regular or Online) and receive twenty-five percent (25%) off the retail price of the class!

Enroll in ANY other class completed by February 27, 2010 and receive twenty percent (20%) off the retail price of the class!

These specials cannot be combined with one another or any other offer.



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