

Re: Output to text files or a database?

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kd wrote:

I was reading The Art of Unix Programming yesterday, and was inspired to rework and split up an large monolithic application of mine.

This software has to do with the retrieval and processing of travel information (flights, hotels, etc) from different sources. Each source has travel data formatted differently.

With plain text files being the universally loved file format, I planned on writing small apps that would pull down data from these different sources, and write them to text files in a universal format.

Another small app would read these text files, generate sql insert statements from the data, and dump all the data into a relational database.

I proposed this to a coworker, and he asked why the text files were even necessary -- why not just immediately generate sql statements from the different formats, and use the tables in the DB as the universal format? Textual representations of that data could just be generated from the database, after all.

Is he right? Is there any reason to use text files as an intermediate format?

I don't know. But I'd have some questions, like

-- what do you do if the database server isn't available when the app needs to store it's data?

-- what do you do if the database server isn't available when the app that needs the data requests it?

-- does the data need to be preprocessed, hand edited, or otherwise

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subjected to non-db processing?

-- database apps are largish. Are you getting into the same sort of maintenance issue that you are moving out of, by building one larger app rather than two smaller apps?

-- is there any reason to want to perform ad-hoc analysis on the text files? can you do the same against the database? How easily?

-- is there any reason to want to perform alternate processing on the data (does it or can it serve any other purpose other than what you intend)? can you do this processing on text files? how easily, as compared to against a database?

-- what about recoverability? Auditability? Are these important?

My gut is telling me to keep them, but my gut isn't good at convincing people. :) What am I missing?

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(Opinions expressed here are my own, not my employer's)

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