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DAL: DESCRIBE Statement and Accessing Data Dictionary (8/94)

Article Created: 21 August 1992

Article Reviewed/Updated: 31 August 1994

TOPIC -----

Is it possible to access the data dictionary information in a DB2 database from DAL? We can query against our tables using third-party products like DataPrism and ClearAccess. The problem is that we may not know what a "sale" means in different tables.

For example, in one table a sale field might mean that the product had an invoice filled out, but not shipped yet. In another table, sale might mean the product was shipped, but money wasn't collected yet. Another table might define sale as product shipped and money collected.

When we query against the database, we have to access the data dictionary to determine the meaning of the fields. Without the ability to access the data dictionary, users can query and get information that may not be what they were expecting, based on the definition.

DISCUSSION -----

DAL provides information about the structure and organization of entities that it manipulates through a special data-manipulation statement. Using the DESCRIBE statement, the client application can determine the names and data types of the entities stored in the database and any implicit relationships among them. The client application can have DAL describe:

- The supported DBMS brands on a particular host system
- Available databases for a particular brand
- Currently open DBMS brands and databases
- The tables in a database
- The columns in a table
- The linksets in a database

The DESCRIBE statement generates a rowset containing the requested definition in the same way as the SELECT statement creates rowsets.

The DESCRIBE COLUMNS statement is probably what you need, because it returns, among other fields, the column title and column remarks. For more information regarding the DESCRIBE statements, please refer to the DAL Programmer's Reference, available from APDA, part number M0877LL/B.

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Article Change History:

31 Aug 1994 - Added ITI information.

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Keywords: supt

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19960215 11:05:19.00

Tech Info Library Article Number: 10624