



What's New in Advantage Database Server 10

WHITE PAPER



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Introduction

Over the past 15 years, Advantage Database Server has become the heart of many database applications with millions of deployments worldwide. We invite you to take a look at the next-generation release of Advantage, version 10. Advantage 10 brings developers new features and usability enhancements such as support for Unicode and Visual Studio 2010, 64-bit clients and local server, events with user-defined data and more. Check it out, we think you'll be impressed with the performance enhancements too.

This new release offers some attractive reasons for upgrading - including:

- Increased application performance – especially increased performance that doesn't require client side changes.
- Support for current technologies allowing you to stay ahead in the market.
- Increased developer productivity with popular productivity and feature enhancements to the Advantage technology you have grown to love.

While this white paper is organized as a “laundry” list, it does not imply that item 5 in the list is more important than item 8 and item 1 is the most important of all. How important each item is to you will depend on the relevance to your current project – and could quite easily change with the next.

Enjoy.

Data Handling

Unicode Support

Processing of Unicode character text is supported by the Advantage Windows and Linux servers and all Advantage clients. Unicode character data can be stored in three new field types, NCHAR, NVARCHAR and NMEMO. These new field types are available in all table types supported by Advantage. Advantage 10 includes new APIs within the Advantage Client Engine. With UTF16 encoding, these APIs read and write Unicode text directly. Unicode characters can also be supplied directly in SQL statements and filter expressions. Unicode columns may be sorted or indexed using various collation locales. See Unicode Support in the Help File for details.

Nested Transactions

Transactions can now be nested within other transactions. Normally, this transaction nesting occurs as stored procedures or triggers that contain begin/commit pairs call each other. See Nesting Transactions in the Help File for details.

Transaction-Free Tables

There are some cases where it may be desirable to update a table within a transaction, yet have those updates remain outside of the transaction (audit tables, debug log tables, key-generation tables, etc). While this is possible using a secondary connection for such updates, this is not always feasible (for example, when the table is modified in a stored procedure or trigger). Advantage now provides a mechanism to specify a table as a transaction-free table. See Transaction-Free Tables in the Help File for details.

Table Data Caching

Table Data Caching is a feature that enables the caching of table data in the Advantage caching system. This feature is intended for use with tables that contain static data that is used often and shared among multiple users. This feature can be used with tables that are backed up on a regular basis, or tables that contain static or read-only data such as zip code lookup tables, insurance code lookup tables, etc. See Table Data Caching in the Help File for details.

Temporary Table Caching

Advantage now fully caches temporary tables in memory when possible. Only when Advantage cannot fit temporary table data in its cache (or when it is configured to not cache any data) will it create a physical file or write table data to disk. See Temporary Tables in the Help File for details.

Event IDs

Events can now be signaled with a user-defined data string that will be returned when the signal is received. The typical use of this string data is to provide a method of locating the record or table for which a signal is sent, however any string data can be used, providing a flexible mechanism to deliver per-event context to threads receiving the signals. See Events (Notifications) in the Help File for details.

SQL Enhancements

Stored Procedures in the FROM Clause

The Advantage query engine now supports using stored procedure results in place of a table or view reference in the FROM clause. For example:

```
SELECT * FROM ( EXECUTE PROCEDURE sp_mgGetConnectedUsers() ) connectedUsers
```

Boolean SQL Expressions

The SQL engine now supports Boolean value expressions. For example, the following statement is now valid:

```
"SELECT ( flag = FALSE ), (val = 1) FROM table1 WHERE fld1 OR fld2"
```

Limiting Query Results

The Advantage query engine now supports the START AT clause when using a SELECT TOP statement. START AT can be used to provide paging functionality. The following query will return the first 10 employees:

```
SELECT TOP 10 * FROM employees
```

To return the next 10 employees in the table, the following syntax is now supported:

```
SELECT TOP 10 START AT 11 * FROM employees
```

See Limiting Query Results in the Help File for details.

ROWNUM Support

The ROWNUM scalar function is now supported. ROWNUM can be used to generate integer numbers starting at 1 for each row in the result of a query. The ROWNUM function is primarily intended for use in the select list and can be used to provide a numbering of rows in the result set. The number associated with a row is determined when the row is selected for inclusion in the result set. See ROWNUM in the Help File for details.

SQL Bitwise Operators

The Advantage query engine now supports six bitwise operators: & (AND), | (OR), ^ (XOR), ~ (NOT), >> (SHIFT RIGHT), << (SHIFT LEFT). See Operators in SQL in the Help File for details.

SQL Timeout Property

Added support for an optional SQL timeout value for a given connection or statement handle. The timeout setting will independently apply to the initial query execution, and to any operation that supports Advantage callback functionality. This new functionality is exposed via a new ACE API AdsSetSQLTimeout and the new Delphi properties TAdsConnection.SQLTimeout and TAdsQuery.SQLTimeout. See Callback Functionality in the Help File for details.

Query Execution Plan Improvements

The SQL execution plan has been improved to include more detailed information about the indexes that are used to optimized each specific segment of the WHERE clause. The information includes the order in which the segments are evaluated, the estimated key count that the server uses to select the index for the optimization if applicable, and the actual number of keys that are returned for the specific segment if it is evaluated.

New Expression Engine Functions

The following new expression engine functions are supported by Advantage. These new functions can be used to create indexes that Advantage will use to optimize SQL queries that reference their corresponding scalar functions. See Indexes with Expressions and Indexes and SQL Performance in the Help File for details.

- WEEK
- QUARTER
- DAYOFYEAR
- DAYOFWEEK
- HOUR
- MINUTE
- SECOND
- DAYNAME
- MONTHNAME

New ISOWeek Scalar and Expression Engine Function

A new ISOWEEK expression engine and scalar engine function has been created that returns the ISO 8601 week number of a given date value. See ISOWEEK for details on the expression engine function (which can be used to create an index for filter and query optimization). See supported DATE/TIME scalar functions in the Help File for details.

Hex Scalar and Expression Engine Functions

CHAR2HEX and HEX2CHAR have been added to facilitate hexadecimal conversions. The function CHAR2HEX can be used to convert character data containing hexadecimal characters to a binary value. Two hexadecimal characters will be converted to one byte. The function HEX2CHAR converts a binary value to a character value. Each byte of the binary value is represented as two hexadecimal characters. See Functions to Convert Hexadecimal Values in the Help File for details.

Delphi Enhancements

Advanced Delphi Property Editors

The SQL Utility available in the Advantage Data Architect is now used as the TAdsQuery.SQL property editor in Delphi and C++Builder. This editor provides many additional features including syntax highlighting, code templates, find/replace functionality, ability to run and preview query results, ability to verify query syntax, ability to debug SQL scripts, etc. In addition, you can now create new tables from inside the Delphi IDE by right clicking on a TAdsTable or TAdsQuery instance and selecting "Create New Table". See Advanced Property Editors in the Help File for details.

New Delphi Methods

The existing sp_SetApplicationID and sp_GetApplication ID canned procedures have been exposed in the Advantage TDataSet Descendant via the new TAdsConnection.ApplicationID property and TAdsConnection.GetApplicationID method. See ApplicationID in the Help File for details.

The TAdsConnection component has a new constructor called CreateFromHandle which can be used to clone a connection using an existing Advantage Client Engine (ACE) handle. See CreateFromHandle in the Help File for details.

New Delphi Component for Notifications

A new Delphi/C++Builder component called TAdsEvent can be used to listen for and handle notifications. This component automatically handles the creation of a background thread and an Advantage connection, allowing the developer to handle asynchronous events with ease.

Indexing

Binary Indexes

Advantage now supports binary indexes for logical expressions. These are especially useful for building indexes of deleted records for faster filtering and traversal of records on tables with large numbers of deleted records. When a binary index with the DELETED() expression exists, Advantage can use it for optimizing the filtering of deleted records when traversing record data in natural record order and when creating Advantage Optimized Filters (AOFs). This optimization helps with both DBF tables (when filtering deleted records) and with ADT tables. See Binary Indexes in the Help File for details.

sp_Reindex Procedure

Added a new system procedure called sp_Reindex to provide reindexing functionality in SQL.

Performance Improvements

Express Queue Support

Advantage Database Server now supports a dynamic queuing of client requests based on the historical cost of a connection's requests. Connections that are predicted to be under a dynamically computed threshold may be given preference in the request queue when the system is busy. This can make interactive applications that are making inexpensive requests more responsive when used in a busy system. The developer can also change a connection's request priority with the new system procedure sp_SetRequestPriority. It is not necessary for the developer to make any application changes in order to take advantage of this functionality. See Express Queue in the Help File for details.

Transaction Processing System

A number of improvements have been made to the Advantage Transaction Processing System resulting in significant performance improvements. Many internal optimizations to lock lists and visibility lists have increased the performance of transactions with a large number of operations. In addition, the performance of shorter repeated transactions has also been improved via a new temporary file handle pool that is now used instead of dynamically creating and deleting TPS log files with every transaction.

Advantage Optimized Filters (AOFs)

Improved the Advantage Optimized Filter (AOF) multi-segment index algorithm to consider more index tags when optimizing an AOF, not just the first index found. This modification increases the possibility of fully optimizing a multi-segmented AOF. In addition, it may reduce the number of index scans required to resolve the filter.

Enhanced Advantage Optimized Filter (AOF) cost estimations for improved ordering of filter segments combined with AND operators. This enhancement can improve performance for both navigational operations that set AOFs directly and for SQL statements, which automatically use AOFs for optimization. Advantage is now able to more accurately estimate the cost of evaluating each segment and can order them appropriately and can make better decisions on when to short-circuit the index scans.

Improved Advantage Optimized Filter (AOF) optimization and record traversal when a binary DELETED() index exists. This enhancement provides a fix for an issue where large numbers of deleted records at the beginning of a table had to be traversed at the server in order to read the first record in the table. See Binary Indexes in the Help File for details.

Record Count Operations

Improved record count operations on DBF tables when a binary DELETED() index exists. See Binary Indexes in the Help File for details.

Efficient Table Creation

Improved table creation efficiency. The parsing of field definitions is faster and now uses fewer memory allocations. This affects temporary table creation, trigger execution, stored procedure parameter passing, and various other operations that either explicitly or implicitly involves table creation.

Indexing

Performance improvements have been made to Advantage's low level indexing code. These improvements increase the speed of most index operations including updates, inserts, deletes, and seeks.

Referential Integrity Cascade Operations

Improved the performance of referential integrity cascade operations.

Appending and Deleting Records

Improved the performance of appending records and deleting records. Modifications were made to optimize table header writes required with each update.

Temporary File Handling

Improved cache usage with intermediate files (temporary files used by the SQL engine). In previous versions of Advantage, it was possible for the cache to be overrun with intermediate files. The lazy cleanup of intermediate files was replaced by active deletion, which can provide much better throughput especially on a busy system.

Improved the performance of temporary tables by storing their data in memory when possible.

Added functionality to reuse temporary files. When Advantage does not have enough cache memory to hold a result file from a static cursor, a temporary table, or intermediate query files, it uses a physical temporary file on disk to store the information. In version 10, these files are stored for a short time in a temporary file pool for reuse. Avoiding physical file creation and deletion can improve performance in a busy system.

Memo Header Caching

Improved caching of ADM and FPT memo headers. Advantage no longer writes the physical header to disk on every update. Page recycle information is maintained in the cached header with a safe version of the header residing on disk in case of a power outage. Now only the first 4 bytes of the root are written and only if the file length changes (when new blocks are written to the file).

Table Open Performance

Removed a retry loop for server-side table opens. This modification makes attempts to open a table that does not exist much faster.

Cached File Pool

Improved searching of the cached file pool. In a very busy system, the number of closed intermediate files could be somewhat large and it is a global pool. Reducing the search time relaxes a potential global bottleneck.

Record Locks

Improved the storage algorithm used for record locks, increasing performance when Advantage is managing a large number of record locks (for example, during a long transaction).

Advantage Extended Procedures (AEPs)

Improved performance of stored procedures and Advantage Extended Procedures (AEPs) by using in-memory tables for the virtual __input and __output tables.

Worker Threads

Improved the efficiency of signaling worker threads when client requests are ready. An inefficient pattern was identified that potentially required worker threads to immediately stop and wait for a sync object after being signaled to run. This modification can improve a busy system that is handling a large number of small requests.

Rights Checking Behavior

The default behavior for rights checking has been changed. The new default behavior is to ignore the rights checking setting for table opens and creations and always ignore the client rights check. Free table opens in most clients would previously default to do rights checking; the client would do an existence check for a table before attempting to open it. For most applications, this unnecessary and potentially expensive check could result in long timeouts on the client. See Effects of Upgrading to Version 10 in the Help File for details.

Memory Management

Optimized ACE objects to avoid allocating a large number of relatively small portions of the heap. This modification avoids heap fragmentation and increases performance.

Advantage Data Architect Enhancements

Added support for Unicode files in the SQL Utility.

Added a new Collation property to connections in order to facilitate specifying a Unicode collation.

Added an ARC setting to control the font size in data grids.

ARC now highlights DBF deleted records in data grids when using the SHOW DELETED setting.

Added a protocol type setting to the remote management utility which allows users to test both UDP and TCP settings.

Reporting

Crystal Reports Settings

Added per-alias Crystal Reports settings instead of only providing global settings (for options like Collation, LockingMode, ShowDeleted, etc).

R&R ReportWorks Support

Many Advantage users have a repository of reports that were built with the R&R ReportWorks XBase edition from Liveware Publishing. Traditionally these reports used direct file access and could not utilize the security and performance features of the Advantage Database Server. Starting with Advantage version 10, R&R ReportWorks files using DBF/CDX tables can now be accessed via the Advantage Client Engine. See Advantage with R&R ReportWorks in the Help File for details.

New Clients and Platform Support

More 64-bit Clients

64-bit versions of the following clients have been added in Advantage version 10:

- ODBC
- OLE DB
- Linux PHP Driver
- adsbackup utility for Windows and Linux
- Advantage Local Server

to compliment these existing Advantage 9 64-bit clients:

- Advantage Client Engine (ACE) for Windows and Linux
- Advantage ADO.NET Provider

64-Bit Advantage ADO.NET Improvements

The Advantage ADO.NET provider can now detect the platform type at runtime and correctly load either ACE32.DLL or ACE64.DLL as appropriate. This means .NET applications using the Advantage ADO.NET provider no longer need to specify a platform target of x86 in order to work on 64-bit operating systems. The platform target can now remain at its default setting (Any CPU).

Support for the Latest Development Environments

- RAD Studio/Delphi 2009

- RAD Studio/Delphi 2010
- Visual Studio 2008, .NET 3.5, Entity .NET Framework and LINQ to Entities
- Visual Studio 2010, .NET 4.0, Entity .NET Framework and LINQ to Entities

Updated Platform Support

- Windows 7
- Windows Server 2008 SP2
- Windows Server 2008 R2

Support for Vulcan.NET

Official release of the Advantage driver for Vulcan.NET. Vulcan.NET is the next generation of the xBase family of languages.

No Delphi 3, Delphi 4, C++Builder 3, or C++Builder 4 Components

Support was dropped for these development environments in Advantage version 9, but we continued to ship the components as a courtesy. They no longer build with some product improvements we have made, and therefore will not be provided in Advantage version 10.

Installation and Configuration

Automatically Configured Worker Thread Count

The server will now automatically configure the number of worker threads when it starts up. If the configured worker thread count is not specified or is zero, Advantage Database Server will calculate the number of worker threads based on the number of processors on the system. See the worker thread configuration setting in the Help File for details.

Side-By-Side Server Installations

In some cases, it is useful to install multiple versions of Advantage on a single physical server. Typically, this is done when multiple Advantage-enabled applications are using the same physical server, but are shipped using different versions of Advantage. Starting with Advantage version 10, additional instances of Advantage can now be installed on the same physical server. See Installing Multiple Instances in the Help File for detailed installation instructions and additional details.

New Help File Format

All Advantage help files have been combined into a single HTML Help 1.0 (CHM) help file. In addition, many of the Advantage Tech Tips from the Developer's Zone have been included in the help file and will now show up in help file search results.

Server Discovery

A new API AdsFindServers has been implemented. It can be used to retrieve a list of instances of Advantage Database Server on a network. This API can be used in combination with a server-side alias to eliminate the need for end users to choose a database server and connection path..

Miscellaneous

New System Variables

All trigger metadata information is now available in SQL script triggers via new system variables, see System Variables in the Help File for details.

Support Capture Utility

The Advantage Support Capture Utility is now installed with the server, and can be used to easily bundle relevant files when working on issues with the Advantage Technical Services team.

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