

Migration Specialties International, Inc.

217 West 2nd Street, Florence, CO 81226-1403

+1 719-371-1711, Fax: +1 888-854-3417

E-mail: Info@MigrationSpecialties.com

www.MigrationSpecialties.com



Bruce Claremont, January, 2007

Adventures in Consulting: A Few Tapes

I received an e-mail recently asking if I could convert a few 9-track tapes to CD or DVD. The individual making the request had four tapes containing VMS backup save sets and three tapes containing data copied from a PDP-11. The contents were represented as personal property and it was clear large amounts of money were not going to change hands. Being a consultant, I have an antipathy to a lack of funding. On the other hand, I hadn't fired up the old TU81 or the MicroVAX II it was connected to for about three years, so I was curious to see if they still worked. Thus, I elected to ignore the consultant's creed to charge all the market will bear and told the fellow to send the tapes along and I would see what I could do with them.

The tapes arrived in due course, nine good old fashion 1600bpi 9-track reels of various diameters. I lugged the box into the computer room and hit the power buttons on the MicroVAX II and the TU81. Lights blinked, drives hummed, fans whirred, dust motes danced, and twenty minutes later I had a VMS login prompt. Damn, *Digital* built some great hardware.

The VMS backups were dispatched in short order. The save sets had been generated between 1992 and 1994 on a VMS 5.5 system. I copied them directly off the tapes and restore their contents without drama. *Digital* also built a great O/S in VMS.

The PDP tapes proved more challenging. They had been generated on a PDP-11 running RSTS/E using PIP. Using the VMS EXCHANGE utility, I was able to obtain directory listings of each tape's contents. However, I was only able to copy the contents of one out of the three tapes directly to disk.

What to do? My last hands on with a PDP-11 was 24 years ago. Fortunately, the Internet makes this question an easy one. Turn to a user forum, in this case *comp.os.vms*. I posed my questions online and soon several generous souls that also ignore the consultant's creed were offering suggestions and advice. With their help, I worked out a couple of ways to pull the remaining PDP data to disk. It wasn't pretty, but at least the data was recovered.

I transferred all the files to CD and shipped everything back to my new friend. Hopefully, his data is now in a format that is usable for another decade or two. It was a fun challenge and a good deed, even if it did violate the consultant's creed.



About the author: Mr. Bruce Claremont runs a consulting business concentrating on OpenVMS, software migration, and hardware emulation. More information is available at www.MigrationSpecialties.com