

So what's new in DART 2.1?

Ease of view design

Views are the very heart and soul of a DART report. Displaying data is one thing, but highlighting, sorting and customizing the way that the data is displayed to the viewer is the essence of DART. To aid this vital aspect of the design process, DART view design screens were simplified by moving all of the view fields onto a single screen. Calculated fields were also moved from the report level to the view level. This allows the creation of calculated fields not only be applied to new editions, but also to editions published in the past. What all of this creates for the user is a single area for all view design and alteration to take place, giving a more natural and intuitive feeling to the view design process.

What this means: Streamlined report design saves time. As view creation and alteration are simplified with these changes, less time is needed to design them. Subsequently, the report is ready sooner and less labor is required.

View display enhancements

Views are a highly critical part of any DART report. In DART 2.1 several enhancements have been applied to the way views are displayed. This gives report designers more control over data presentation within a report. Drilldown now is more powerful, allowing many "layers" of data to be accessed from a single view. Entire row highlights have been added, giving DART the ability to highlight entire sections that report designers may want to bring attention to. Descriptions can now also be added to view level if needed, clarifying exactly what the data shown is representing. All of these features allow a view within a report to be concise and easily interpreted by the report viewer.

What this means: Concise reports convey clear meaning to the report viewer. This keeps management aware of exactly what is happening within the enterprise. The provision of greater vision tools and information perspective helps ensure that management can run operations at their maximum efficiency.

Greater breakdown of detail

Careful consideration was given as to how views could be improved. It was decided that having more ways to sort, order and rank data would give report designers more ways to bring attention to critical data in a report. Toward this objective, new options for totaling were added to break down group totals by subgroup. Sorting was expanded to cover data fields in addition to groupings. DART was also given a data ranking function and a frequency conversion function that can aggregate results by intervals of time such as year, quarter or month. Applying a sort order to data allows reports to show data with values critical to the business operation with a higher priority, drawing attention to them and showing any trends that may be occurring.

What this means: Allowing managers to see extreme values and trends in data will help them to find problems and identify areas of the business that need improvement. A drop in sales for example, may be the result of inventory shortages. By being able to identify these trends quickly and effectively, managers will be able to take corrective action sooner and avoid potential harm to business operations.

Ease of expression creation

Expression creation covers one of the most powerful parts of report design. Using complex yet powerful syntax, a report designer can set design parameters for a report that could never be achieved through a GUI alone. The challenge is that these expressions can be overly complex, and problems with expression creation can sometimes cause headaches for the designer. With user expressions becoming more important in DART 2.1, functions have been implemented to assist the designer with expression creation. Rules for expressions have been simplified, creating clearer guidelines for the designer. Syntax checking has been introduced to ensure that the syntax is correct without testing the entire report. DART functions for user-defined expressions were also implemented; a standard set of syntax that allows a designer to use an expression regardless of the type of database being used. These changes allow DART report designers to utilize these powerful functions with much greater ease.

What this means: Making expressions easier to create means that it is easier for designers to make a report do exactly what they want. This means more effective reports that display the right “actionable” data, in the right way, to the right people.

Greater filter control

Filters allow report designers to screen out unnecessary or redundant data from a view or report. By omitting such data, attention can be drawn to the areas of greatest concern or interest. Recognizing that the rules for defining this data are all-important, DART was given enhancements to filter creation. Filters can now use SQL commands to define the conditions of what data should be included, creating a powerful and flexible way to set filter criteria. Also added was greater date filtering flexibility, including a GUI for date selection in the form of a calendar. This calendar highlights invalid dates, creating a much more intuitive and natural method of date selection.

What this means: Better filters mean more refined results. By omitting redundant data, only the information that will have a business impact will be displayed. This allows action to be taken based on superior information. And superior information results in more effective economic action.

New report display methods

One DART customer had a specific requirement to be fulfilled. They needed a way to keep a large team of people informed about their overall progress, keeping them aware of how close they were to fulfilling daily objectives. They required a report that could be left unattended and would update itself automatically with the latest data. The end result is effectively a scoreboard that could be used to keep an employee or group of employees informed of progress made. To meet this challenge, two new functions were implemented into DART that would work in tandem to provide the solution. Live reports were introduced, which are reports that include the latest data (as opposed to pre-published editions). Auto refresh was also implemented, allowing reports to refresh automatically. These two features allow DART reports greater flexibility, as well as granting the IT department greater automation.

What this means: Allowing reports to automatically refresh with the latest data provides the most up to the minute reporting. By keeping all members of staff informed of developments as they happen, they can react immediately to new developments. These new features also free up the IT department, creating greater efficiency and ensuring staff are available for other critical business requirements.

Greater Data flexibility

Data flexibility represents what a report designer can do with available data and the options they have for accessing and utilizing this data. Increasing the data flexibility within DART was given careful consideration. DART has been given the ability to change a data definition's source table without needing to recreate the data definition, saving time that would be otherwise needed to recreate DART objects. Changing a data field's type can be done from outside the data definition, making it easier. Creating outer joins for linked data definitions is now also possible, meaning that all the data of the main data definition can be included in a report, including records without matches in the linked data definition. Giving report designers this flexibility allows more comprehensive and accurate reports to be created with exactly the data that the report designer wants included.

What this means: Providing greater data flexibility for the report designer allows them to include the exact data desired. This will allow reports to contain data that allows more effective action to be taken, action that is based on exactly what is happening within the enterprise.