

10 Reasons You Need Half a DBA



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ABSTRACT:

Nearly all companies need database administrators—but not all companies need a full time DBA. Sometimes you might need “half a DBA.” Sometimes it’s for a one-time need, such as during a transition to a new platform or a surge in overflow work. Other times there’s a persistent need for such fractional services, such as providing overnight support, or covering for DBAs on vacation or family leave. Many companies also maintain databases that do not require the services of a full time DBA, but do need to be monitored and maintained.

This white paper explores 10 reasons you might need “half a DBA.” But how realistic is that? How can you hire half a person? We examine the conventional difficulties associated with finding exactly the services your organization needs, and propose solutions that will enable your organization to obtain the coverage needed at an affordable price.

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Data Growth Drives Database Needs

Organizations aren't static. Why should your database staffing be any different? There are many situations that require flexible human resources to get the optimal performance from your databases.

Your organization may want to hire someone when work volumes temporarily increase, for example, but not enough to justify hiring a full time DBA. In addition to seasonal needs, there also may be specialized tasks on the horizon. Or maybe time consuming, routine chores are draining staff, siphoning time they could be spending on higher value projects.

The business demand for database services is exploding along with data volumes. Both are growing roughly 20 percent per year, according to a 2014 Unisphere Research survey. "In contrast, most IT organizations are experiencing flat or shrinking budgets," reported Joe McKendrick in Database Trends and Applications. "Other factors such as substantial testing requirements and outdated management techniques are all contributing to a cost escalation and slow IT response."

How can you respond effectively and efficiently? Often, a fraction of a DBA—half or less—is all you need to address these types of challenges. With a global delivery model, database management companies such as Datavail can provide exactly the services you need, and only those you need.

What do we mean by a fractional DBA? It's not like a part-time employee—you're not getting partial effort or attention from a single person. With a fractional DBA you're getting a specific number of hours from a dedicated team of DBAs with precisely the expertise you need for your database platforms and tasks. There may be situations in which there is not enough consistent work to require a full-time position. Supporting 24x7 coverage, for example, requires three shifts a day, seven days a week, for a total of 21 shifts. Covering these shifts in house would require as many as four full-time equivalent positions when you factor in coverage for training, sick days, vacation, and family leave.

Often budgets don't warrant hiring more people, despite a pressing need. Budgets may also not allow you to hire a person with the necessary experience or expertise. You may not be able to find someone in your price range, for example, who has worked with Oracle EBS, MySQL or MongoDB.

Rather than worrying about the problems associated with staffing up and cutting back to meet cyclical needs—or settling for an inexperienced junior DBA—just end the problem. Rather than hiring an expert database professional whose salary and benefits your growing organization can't afford, purchase only the time and services you need from a pool of experts. A fractional approach to database administration will enable your organization to achieve better database performance and greater system/database availability with less expense than is typically associated with hiring a full-time employee.

When Do You Need "Half a DBA?"

Many ongoing tasks in your organization could benefit from coverage by a fractional DBA. A managed service option may also be useful for periodic events, such as new projects or employee leave. Let's look briefly at some of these situations.

1. More Work Than Your Staff Can Handle

When your database has become sufficiently complex that you need professional database administration capabilities, but not a full time DBA, fractional coverage may be an ideal option. This scenario is typical in small to mid-sized companies, especially since DBAs are now managing more instances across various platforms. In a March 2015 survey of DBAs, Dell found almost half of the DBAs surveyed manage more than 25 databases with roughly 70 percent managing databases from at least two vendors. The survey found both the number of databases and products a single DBA must support are increasing.

An advantage associated with the use of a fractional DBA is that it resolves a common situation in which one of your IT staff becomes "the accidental DBA." It also gives you a team of experienced professionals best matched to your technologies and your specific needs.

2. Round-the-Clock, Vacation, and Holiday Coverage

You've assembled the best team possible, but they do need time off. Your staff is human. A fractional DBA can cover nights, vacation time, and even holidays to allow your staff the time they need to decompress or stay home if and when they are ill or needing to attend to an event requiring family leave.

3. Reducing DBA Burnout and Turnover

One of the leading reasons DBAs quit is burnout. The seemingly incessant need to work overtime, holidays, and weekends takes a toll on staff and erodes your staff's morale. Protecting your team means you are also protecting your company. Ensuring your staff is stable keeps your data resources stable.

You can also address the needs gap created as the result of an employee's retirement. Roughly two-fifths of data professionals are projected to leave the field in the near future, either because of retirement or because they are moving into a business-related job, according to a Unisphere Research survey reported in Database Trends and Applications.

In the event you are unable to find someone with the required skills, a fractional DBA arrangement can span the gap, filling one or more concurrent needs.

4. Better System Maintenance and Customer Service

Proactive maintenance is essential in avoiding operational problems. A well-maintained system and up-to-date database results in fewer operational issues. Applying patches, for example, is often tedious work, but supports database reliability and security. It is also a task well suited to a fractional DBA.

Staying on top of, or ahead of, essential updates also promotes better customer service; a fractional DBA can also be used for any number of basic customer service related tasks such as responding to tickets or alerts.

5. Off-Peak Back-Ups, Diagnostics, and Tuning

While your DBAs are sleeping, a remote DBA can perform essential maintenance tasks such as back-ups, diagnostics, and tuning. Shifting these tasks to off peak hours optimizes your system as well as your time and resources.

6. Better System Performance During Peak Times

During peak hours, your database should be available and performing optimally. Your customers or users don't need to know who's behind the curtain, only that everything is working as it should be. To ensure this, you should be conducting routine maintenance as well as constantly evaluating and analyzing your system based on its baseline performance. Undertaking such proactive tasks—with the assistance of a fractional, remote DBA—reduces customer comments about the system or database running too slowly, or even worse, operational problems.

7. Increasing Job Satisfaction and Human Resource Optimization

Staff morale can be eroded from constant demands on their time. Adding a fractional DBA to attend to low-level work, such as responding to alerts or routine maintenance, frees employees to do high-value work that is rewarding and challenging. Rather than always reacting to problems, your DBAs are free to become more involved in long-term, more interesting projects that fully use their skills. That results in happier, more professionally satisfied employees able to thrive and grow in their job. You've taken great pains to recruit great employees. Now you have to retain them. As John Rivard, research director for infrastructure and operations at Gartner, told CIO, "Highly engaged employees are innovative, loyal, and they're far less likely to leave." Employing such an approach also enables your organization to fully and strategically use all its human resources.

8. Expert DBAs Needed with Skills in New or Complex Technologies

There may be a situation in which a new database platform has been added, but there isn't an employee on staff with the skills needed to maintain or manage those resources. This may occur when your firm merges with or acquires another company who has, an older database technology, or conversely, has a NoSQL database platform. This may mean your organization has at least one more database platform to maintain. If maintaining that legacy system does not warrant a full-time hire, contracting with a databases services firm makes sense. If that database needs to be migrated to a different platform, a database services firm should be able to handle that migration—no matter what platforms are involved.

9. Support for Systems with Less-Than-Full-Time Needs

With a fractional DBA, you can hire expertise to meet precisely your needs and no more. If, for example, one of your DBAs quits, but a full-time replacement isn't warranted, you can get exactly the support you need from a fractional DBA. When and if the work load increases or a project necessitates, you can adjust accordingly based on the amount of time and services needed.

10. Costs Less than Hiring a Full Time DBA

Datavail can provide clients with the same coverage and deep expertise associated with a standard contract; however, with our fractional database services, you only pay for a fraction of a DBA. On average, Datavail saves clients 25 to 60 percent on their database administration costs while providing 24/7 support, improving quality, and adding flexibility.

What Can You Get for Half a DBA?

Datavail's solution provides customers with the most comprehensive and flexible database services available, providing you with exactly the services you need when you need them. You get our full attention for precisely the time you need it. And here are a few other things you can get:

A Good Night's Sleep! Your organization is able to leverage our remote DBA services to gain operational stability. Our expert staff is able to monitor and respond 24/7 to any issues that arise. This means your staff can work regular shifts with nights and weekends off. In addition to proactive monitoring, we can also provide project-based services or architecture and design advice to meet your needs.

Integrated Maintenance. Our database support services are fully integrated into your operation. We can execute basic preventative maintenance tasks—including patching, backups, installation, and configuration—using industry best practices. Each task is specifically tailored to a your database environment, but has the focused attention of an expert familiar with that database.

Database Upgrades. Database upgrades can be seamlessly done using our services. We have performed more than 1,000 upgrades in the past three years to industry standard products. This includes end-of-life upgrades to products such as SQL Server, DB2, and MongoDB. We go beyond upgrading the database to configure, test, and implement fallback routines. We also help implement new features and conduct other tasks designed to help improve your database's availability and reliability or recovery, as needed.

Continuous Monitoring. One of our signature services is database monitoring. With our staff attending to routine alerts 24/7, your staff is free to focus on key, high-value tasks. We use staff in multiple remote database monitoring locations in order to give you full coverage overnight and on weekends.

Special Projects Support. Support for database projects is another key service we provide. We have extensive experience in planning and implementing a wide array of projects, from performing health checks to capacity planning or disaster recovery. We work with you to determine your needs, providing you with the specific support required to complete the project.

Onsite and Offshore. As a full-service organization, Datavail has a wide variety of database staffing services available. This includes expert DBAs across the country and around the world. Whether you need onsite or remote assistance, we can provide the best possible candidate for your organization.

Database Assessments. Our experts can also provide you with database assessment services, which function as a baseline for starting any project. This equips you with basic information about the status of your environment. At the conclusion of the assessment, we offer suggestions for improving the database environment, which may include addressing its physical and virtual operations.

Database Tuning. Of particular interest are our database tuning services, which use industry best practices to ensure your databases are operating optimally. This proactive service blends the art and science of tuning by focusing on your short- and long-term tuning needs.

How is Half a DBA Delivered?

We provide ITIL-based services focused on incident, problem, and change management. Our tiered delivery model ensures tasks are executed quickly and cost-effectively. We can provide a comprehensive level of services ranging from service desk coverage to database architecture and engineering.

We have more than 100 DBAs located throughout the U.S.; each client is assigned one of these as a lead DBA. We also have more than 400 DBAs based in multiple locations in India. We have an extremely low employee attrition rate and were recognized as the best database company to work for in India. Because we are located in major U.S. markets, we can also deliver services on site when face-to-face consultation or training is needed.

Our managed services method leverages the skills of our remote DBAs. Datavail has DBAs working 24/7/365, meaning we can take 20 hours per week of paid time and deliver it at night, on holidays or whenever you need it.

We provide services through our delivery Practices and Teams approach. We have six database practices, each of which represents a major technology. Each of these communities of DBAs are self-contained. That is, one practice is able to deliver all the tiers of service and has a global practice leader. Each client is assigned to a specific practice, each of which has teams consisting of roughly 25 DBAs. A lead DBA based in the U.S. is the primary contact as well as a Service Delivery Manager based in the U.S. Perhaps more importantly, our customers are given the names of every DBA on their team. Our team-based approach enables us to nimbly and effectively address your ever-fluctuating work load. If you need more assistance, we can provide it.

Datavail offers 24/7 database monitoring. We use the best tools the industry has to offer as well as our own cloud-based monitoring application, which is now installed on thousands of servers. This allows automatic alerts to generate tickets. We use Service Now, a world-class ITSM platform featuring reliable and effective system integration, which provides flexibility in the design of work flows, escalation paths, and processes. Additionally, our staff has created thousands of custom scripts to address commonly encountered monitoring issues, which adds value to the services we provide.

When you work with Datavail, one fixed monthly fee provides you the managed services you need. Contracts can be easily created based on a level-of-effort model and contain explicit terms and conditions that make them easy to get out of. You're not tied into any service you don't need. But you'll like what we offer. We use industry best practices to deliver service that exceeds what you'll find in the rest of the market.

This includes the ability to create custom service levels that are structured across all three service tiers. Our clients have the ability to adjust their priorities within scope of the monthly contract. There are an infinite number of possible solution options available to a customer working with Datavail. This enables us to offer customers a high degree of flexibility and create solutions that fit an organization's requirements.

What Do Business Leaders Say about Half a DBA?

This white paper has outlined some of the benefits associated with using fractional database services. Here's what some of Datavail's customers say about using our fractional DBA services. In customer surveys conducted by a third-party firm, Datavail's customers say that Datavail is helping them achieve their business goals while keeping their database costs low.

"Datavail has provided us much-needed coverage on our off hours for database monitoring," stated one company's vice president of IT services. "They are reliable and we can count on them to be there when needed. They have been very responsive to our needs. I believe they offer just about any service you could ask for."

A mid-sized financial services client stated, "Datavail has become an integral part of our technology team. They are part of our daily processes and weekly meetings and they provide valuable insight that helps keep us moving forward as well as making sure our data and systems are always available to our end users." The company's representative added, "The service we get from Datavail is exceptional; we use them not only for DBA services, but also for our production deployment and overnight load monitoring."

Ryder, the \$6.6 billion fleet management and supply chain solutions provider with international operations, also depends on Datavail for services, including fractional DBA services. "Datavail has great impact overall in our organization," stated one of Ryder's executive team. "The bottom line is that we can trust Datavail because [of] its consistency and quality work. Datavail is the best DBA company I have ever dealt with. They are true professionals."

What's Next?

If you would like more information about how our fractional database services can work for your organization, please contact Datavail. We can help create a custom solution designed specifically for your enterprise.

Biography

Robin Caputo

Chief Marketing Officer for Datavail



Robin Caputo is the Chief Marketing Officer for Datavail, responsible for driving the company's brand and generating demand through online and offline marketing programs. As the external voice of Datavail, she articulates key messages to build brand equity among clients, prospects, partners, industry analysts, media, and other key stakeholder groups.

Robin brings 25 years of marketing and communications experience, including Vice President of Marketing and Communications at Ciber, a major systems integrator and outsourcing company, as well as various marketing and PR roles at Qwest and US West where she launched product and services and was a key spokesperson for major initiatives.

Her career also includes experience as a reporter/editor for the Associated Press, the Arizona Daily Star, the Denver Business World, and the NBC affiliate in Tucson, Arizona. She also was a technical writer for IBM and a public affairs manager for a major cable company. She holds a Bachelor's degree in communications and political science from the University of Denver, where she is also a guest lecturer.

About Datavail

Datavail Corporation is the largest pure-play provider of remote database administration (DBA) services in North America, offering database design and architecture, administration and 24x7 support. The company specializes in Oracle, Oracle E-Business Suite, Microsoft SQL Server, MySQL, MongoDB, DB2 and SharePoint, and provides flexible on-site/off-site, onshore/offshore service delivery options to meet each customer's unique business needs.

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