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★Reviews

Moving Files Can Be A BLAST

For Transfers Between Dissimilar Computers, Users Say BLAST Is An Excellent Value

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If the world of computers was perfect (or even close), it would be simple to transfer data files from one computer to another without regard to the manufacturer, model or operating system. Unfortunately, such is not the case; transferring files among dissimilar environments can be a real problem for many users.

BLAST (and the newer BLAST-II) from Communications Research Group (CRG), Baton Rouge, La., is a data communications program designed to provide fast, error-free file transfers across the widest range of hardware and software platforms. BLAST (an acronym for BLocked ASynchronous Transmission) uses a full-duplex sliding-window protocol, such as is found in X.25 systems, to provide efficient concurrent bidirectional file transfers, even across noisy communication lines.

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PERFORMANCE

This is an area where BLAST excels. It offers three major benefits.

First, unlike most other asynchronous protocols, several blocks (based upon the window size) can be transmitted before an acknowledgment must be received. This enhances performance significantly, particularly on satellite links with their long propagation delays. Next, as a full-duplex protocol, files can be transmitted in both directions at the same time, with the appropriate acknowledgments embedded in the data packets.

Finally, error recovery is enhanced as, in the event of a dropped modem connection, only erroneous and missing blocks need be retransmitted, not the entire file. One user at a university research center uses BLAST to tie North and South Pole research bases to a National Science Foundation network via satellites. That user finds that "BLAST is the only program that can reliably communicate in this environment. Our data transfer times have improved 100 percent."

One user reported that the problems associated with peak traffic periods have been reduced with BLAST because file transfer sessions are much shorter. "Our phone costs have really gone down with BLAST," added a systems integrator. "It's really saving us money as well as time."

FEATURES

Aside from performance, far and away the most important feature among the users we interviewed is that BLAST runs on virtually any computer and operating system. Typical of these users was a manufacturer of audio equipment: "BLAST is the only program we found that not only runs on all of our computers, it works essentially the same on all of them." Another user agreed: "We've tried everything, but BLAST is the only program that allows us to transfer files between our Unix, DOS and Macintosh machines."

