



Hands-on Management

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Keep a Full Tank of Gas in Your Car & Traveler's Checks in Your Wallet . . . Just in Case

This is not a drill!

Repeat—This is not a drill!

In the June 2, 1997 issue of *Newsweek*, the date January 1, 2000 is referred to as "The Day the World Shuts Down." Credit cards, ATMs, elevators, cars, traffic lights, phones, banks, utilities, planes—and just about everything else—may stop working. All of this mayhem will be caused by the lack of two numbers in the way dates are recorded in programming codes of computers all over the world.

The date format that will cause all this trouble is: 01-01-00—not 01-01-2000. Older computer programs assume that the year "00" begins the numerical column of years; for the year 2000, the reverse is the case.

What will be the cost to the U.S. just to stay open for business? Estimates range from \$240 billion to \$1 trillion! Because of the enormous costs encountered when correcting and testing millions of lines of program codes, analysts believe that up to 10 percent of all businesses will not survive the bite of the millennium bug. Even if your in-house computers will not be affected by the year-2000 bug, your business needs to assess the impact external service providers might have on its operations. Considering that your company shares data with several computer mainframes found in your bank, government and suppliers, the century turnover may be more of a dilemma than you think. Will you be able to pay employees, produce billing and financial statements? Will the computerized phone system in your plant work on January 2, 2000?

Get your team working on this problem ... now! Mike Hogan, who

contributes to a column in *PC Computing*, states, "The trick for survival: Don't wait until doomsday. A great place to start is the Year 2000 Website (www.year2000.com). It has plenty of detailed explanations of what will happen with various networks and software programs." You feel confident that you are the computer expert in the company because you have mastered "Solitaire," but you are not sure you can handle this problem because you're still a little shaky with "Minesweep."

Have you hired a third party to handle your "Year 2000" conversion yet? Start now, because computer programmers are going to get very, very costly as we get closer to the year 2000. The local Yellow Pages is a good place to start looking, and so is the Website mentioned above, where you'll find a list of consultants.

Okay, so the whole world breaks down ... yada, yada, yada. Will my personal computer croak, too? For the most part, this is a mainframe software problem, but PCs can also be affected. Odds are, nothing much will happen. With PCs, the problem is in the basic input/output system (BIOS). BIOS is the software that boots the computer and contains the internal clock and date information. Apple Macintosh computers distinguish dates up to 2040. Some Microsoft operating systems, such as Windows NT and the next version of Windows 95 (due out in 1998) fix the BIOS problem automatically.

"Microsoft advises against performing any tests yourself, such as setting the computer to 11:59 p.m., Dec. 31, 1999, and waiting to see what happens. If your machine

contains applications with time limits on them, the software might be fooled into thinking it had expired, or be damaged. If you're unsure whether your BIOS will trip on the date change, your best bet is to contact the computer manufacturer; 386 and 486 machines may possibly need a BIOS upgrade."*

There are some older computers with major hardware problems and, depending on the age of your system, it may be more cost effective to replace the total system. Are you more of a computer "do-it-yourself surfer"? The Web page to access is RightTime's www.RightTime.com. You can download software that reads your internal clock and, based on this information, you can design a strategy to beat the bug.

The bottom line: Plan and conduct a full test of critical systems during 1998.

From a personal perspective, my recommendation is to enter into the year 2000 with hard copies of all your personal records, a full tank of gas and plenty of traveler's checks. To quote *Newsweek*, "Just in case." P&SF

Bibliography

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* Katie Hafner with Deborah Branscum, *Newsweek*, June 2, 1997.