

“Leveling” the Y2K Playing Field

BY MIKE SUTTON

I realize that, aside from the various investigations going on here in Washington, there are probably few subject you are more weary of hearing about than the ever popular Y2K issue! So please forgive me, but there is a silver lining in this dark cloud that you may not have considered. I know I hadn't.

Lately, it's gotten to the point that the television networks are covering the story on their evening news shows. So, now that Dan, Peter and Tom (Fox doesn't have a national evening news program) have started talking about Y2K the general public seems to feel that it must be a serious issue. Maybe that's why the subject comes up now in social conversations.

For example, I met a guy at a party a couple of weeks ago. He said that there was no doubt in his mind that “2KY” was really nothing but a way to sell more hardware and software to unsuspecting fools like me. That's not a typo by the way; he refused to say “Y2K” because according to him, that only perpetuated the myth.

I asked him what business he was in and was told landscaping. Of course, that could mean anything from spreading mulch to designing botanical gardens, so who knows, he may be smarter than the rest of us by a long shot.

Unfortunately, like the landscaper, some organizations didn't take the issue very seriously until fairly recently. This includes various government agencies, one of which is the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Earlier this year the FAA said that it would take them seven years to fix the Y2K problem.

Now, as a bona fide math major with a degree from Beverly Hillbillies University — Jethro Bodine College of Applied Mathematics — I can do “cipherin” with the best of 'em. And, as a result of that exhaustive education, I know that if you take 1998

away from Y2K it leaves a remainder of considerably less than 7! Maybe there are a lot of landscapers working at the FAA.

The good news is that after the millennium change, those that made most of the changes necessary to be in operation on 01/01/00 will be at pretty much the same level. That environment could allow for some very creative and unique things to happen in the IS world.

But, fear not, my fellow NaSPA members, I'm not here to talk gloom and doom. It's my privilege to point out that, in spite of all the work required to get ready for it, the change in the millennium will provide a side effect that is highly Desirable!

*“With a capital D,
And that rhymes with C,
And that stands for cool!”
(To paraphrase Professor Harold Hill,
a.k.a. “The Music Man”)*

No, it's not time to give me the Thorazine Bug Gulp. There's a reason for my euphoria. As NaSPA member John Spier pointed out, since Herman Hollerith first rubbed two bits together — that's “binary” bits, not 25 cents — the chance of finding two IS environments that were at the same level was a little harder than choosing your own parents.

Typically, when programmers and other IS types meet others employed in the same field, one of the first things they do is to compare levels right down to the last PUT tape they applied.

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When I was a young systems engineer, I remember trying to convince customers of the prudence of staying “current” from a software and maintenance standpoint. Some listened, while many didn't want to be bothered. The Y2K problem is going to take care of the “currency” issue ... one way or the other.

It's hard to believe, but there are shops still running “unsupported” operating systems and applications and RYO code that was written just after the Dead Sea Scrolls. In some cases, the last maintenance application was in the '80s. Of course, the old argument for not applying upgrades and maintenance was “stability.” One thing is for sure, when the “Big Bang” comes at the end of next year, those who didn't get “current” will be very “stable” shortly thereafter.

There is, however, a downside to everyone being at the same level. We'll have to find new subjects to talk about when meeting others in the same line of work. Which shouldn't be a problem, considering all the war stories that will be created on the way to the big “Double Naught,” as Professor Bodine would say. **ts**

Mike Sutton consults and speaks on management-related issues such as project management, personnel, vendor and customer relations, and technical support. He is president of Washington Systems Consulting, Inc. (WSC) and can be reached at www.wscinc.com or (800) 825-5972.

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