

Year 2k, dangerous as they say? 1932

[Technology](#), [Computer](#)



The year 2000 represents more than just an end to the 1900s. For computers worldwide, it can mean major problems.

When software for many of the business computers in use today was in development, many programmers tried to save space by programming computers only to deal with years in the 20th century. Today, though, many computer users discover problems anytime they are dealing with a date that falls after the next turn-of-the-century.

When calculations involving the year 2000 or after come up on the computer screen, many computers only read 00 and not know the correct date. They malfunction or fail.

" The looming prospect of disabled computer systems and paralyzed enterprises around the world makes the year 2000 one of the most critical and universal challenges to ever face the IT industry," the magazine *Managing Office Technology* reported in December 1997 (Marcoccio and Mathew, online). Talking of GartnerGroup research, it added, " While the date change crisis has achieved maximum awareness, 30 percent of all companies worldwide have not yet started on any Year 2000 compliancy efforts, and 40 percent have not progressed to a point where they will be certain not to encounter significant mission-critical failures by 2000."

Having the most problems are health, care, education, government agencies and small and medium-sized companies (Marcoccio, online, 1997). Large companies seem to be the farthest along, perhaps because they have the greatest resources from which to pull money and help. The leading large

company industry is insurance, with financial services trailing just slightly, and banking behind that.

Yet many businesses have been hard at work trying to update their source code, sometimes by reprogramming and sometimes by replacing rather than reprogramming software. Sometimes they must replace with a vendor package, retire the application, or even get rid of the entire business prospect. Managing Office Technology said that most enterprises expect to repair at least 40 percent of their applications (Marcoccio and Mathew, online, 1997). The effort is expected to cost nearly a trillion dollars, and some say there aren't enough knowledgeable programmers to fill the demand for these fixes. Upgrading software has become a booming business, one that some say isn't booming enough to meet all the demand.

While mainframes may have the biggest problem, desktops aren't immune, even if they have been manufactured fairly recently. PCs manufactured in the past two years have exhibited some BIOS-related year 2000 problems. These are low-level instructions for the keyboard, monitor, and disk drives. Craig Luis, computer service manager at Linfield College in McMinnville, OR, said he just bought a logic board last November and it wasn't year 2000 compliant. To cope with this problem some are buying a millenium bug fix and detection tool as part of a Nuts & Bolts Deluxe utility suite for PCs (Ung, online, 1998).

No individual, company, or country is immune because many computer programs are inter-linked and because there aren't enough engineers and programmers available to deal with it even if they knew where to look and

what to do, according to the paper "The Year 2000 Computer Problem," put out by Action 2000.

Industries in the United States, Canada, and Australia lead the pack in dealing with the problem, while Western Europe, South Africa, Japan, and other countries follow. Parts of Asia, central Africa, central South America, Mexico, Thailand, and other countries are behind even farther (Marcoccio, online, 1997).

To cope with the situation, Europe has set up Action 2000 to coordinate public sector contingency planning so that public services such as telecommunications, health services, transport management systems, social security, and emergency services do not suffer major disruptions.

The European Commission also is concerned because the need for programmers comes at a time when Europe is trying to change to one currency, and the workload may be too much for the available manpower to handle. Not only is there that problem, but the workload overseas has been hampered by extensive computerized preparations for the introduction of a single currency in 1992 (Bevins, online, 1998).

It's not just mainframe computers that have the problem. Security alarms, credit card machines, elevators, and hundreds of other appliances with computer chips could fail, says U. S. Rep. Stephen Horn (The Year 2000, online, 1997). He says the U. S. government is only 20 percent ready.

Although warnings are very clear, governments are slow to act. While the U. S. Senate has at least two bills in committee, the U. S. House of

Representatives passed H. R. 3116 in February. The Examination Parity and Year 2000 Readiness for Financial Institutions Act requires federal financial regulatory agencies to offer seminars to financial institutions on the implications of the Year 2000 problem and tell them how to solve the common problems. It also extends authority to the Office of Thrift Supervision and the National Credit Union Administration to examine the operations of service corporations or other entities that perform services under contract for thrifts and credit unions (House, online, 1998).

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