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VIEWPOINT

T Minus 2000 and Counting

by Pamela G. McIntyre

In fewer than three years, the world as we know it will either come to a screeching halt or be thrown into complete chaos. An overreaction perhaps? It may well be, but no one would argue the point that on January 1, 2000, there will be a lot of screaming and shouting if currently used programs are not year 2000 compliant.

Changing date fields to reflect a four-digit date is not a difficult task. The tough part of the job is testing. An estimated 80% of the cost of making programs year 2000 compliant is in the testing phase. Finding all date fields, as well as all other fields impacted by date, and making sure they function properly under all circumstances can be a huge undertaking.

There are, however, dozens of Y2K (year 2000) vendors, software tools, code factories, and consultants that can help you with the job. Regardless of which route you take, here are just some of the things you need to be aware of. Watching out for these pitfalls could save you a lot of time and trouble.

- In order to test for year 2000 compliance, you must be able to set the system date to the year 2000 or beyond. If your software licenses expire prior to the date you are using to test, your software will not function.

- Be aware of any date-related activities such as automatic file deletions and password expiration.

- If you are thinking about outsourcing your conversion to an "off shore" (foreign) company, and you are concerned about your source code being pirated, or worse yet, sold to your competitors, you need to check the laws of copyright, trade secrets, patents, etc. Some countries will enforce these laws: others won't.

- Remember, it isn't just your applications software that is affected by Y2K. You must also look at potential problems with your operating system, hardware, or off-the-shelf programs, etc.

- Be aware of what your software vendors will and won't support. For instance, for those of you running in an IBM environment, VSAM catalogs cannot be used on the MVS operating system after 1999.

- For multiplatform organizations, be aware that the internal representation of the date will vary from system to system (e.g., Oracle will have a different date format from DEC VMS COBOL).

There are hundreds of additional examples, many of which will be specific to your site. Your best defense is to have a plan of action. A year 2000 conversion is no different from any other conversion. Treat it with respect and you will minimize potential problems. **M**

Welcome to Viewpoint. The opinions expressed in this column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of MTA. Guest writers and responses to columns are welcome and will be printed at the discretion of MTA. Email: MTA@mtechnology.org

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