



2000: Happy New Year ?

By Colin Roy

What does the Year 2000 have in store for you? Most of us are thinking of the normal New Year's Eve parties, just on a much grander scale. Whilst partying on 31st December 1999, how many of you will be safe in the knowledge that your business will not be destroyed by an invisible force when the clock strikes midnight. This is the Year 2000 Problem. It has the potential to cause havoc to all companies all around the world. Not one single company can be 100% immunised against it. This article has been written by a team at British Airways who have been charged with increasing the awareness of this problem to limit any potential disasters before the fateful date. I share it with you in the hope that you too can determine your risk and limit the damage where possible.

Year 2000: What's the fuss all about?

The Millennium (i.e. 00:00, Saturday 1st January, 2000) presents a major business risk, which is only just being recognised by corporations around the world. Indeed preparation for the year 2000 is a major part of some large organisations current business plans.

In computer software, dates are frequently represented by two characters. For example '1997' is represented as '97', '1999' is represented as '99', hence the year '2000' is represented as '00'. A computer puts two events in

time order, by subtraction of the dates of the events, so unless corrective action is taken, '00' will be assumed to take place earlier than events in '99'. The impact on the calculation of for example, interest payments, reservations, length of service and computerised inventory control is immediately apparent.

There are also less obvious effects. For instance, date stamping of data is used by computers so that recovery is possible in the event of failure. Many electronic chips have the same problem built into their hardware and in this case the problem can only be rectified by replacing the electronic chip itself.

Year 2000 is a critical BUSINESS problem!

It is vital to stress that the Year 2000 problem is a business and not purely Information Technology (IT) problem. The main reason for this is that its not only computer programmes that are potentially affected by the problem. Just about every product containing a micro-processor "embedded chip" is potentially affected.

Crudely speaking, you can regard such an embedded chip as a little computer having a software program permanently loaded up in its memory. A large percentage of these chips rely on an internal clock based on the "Western Christian...
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