



“Keep cool amid Y2K hysteria”

That was the headline in one Computer Newspaper back in September '97. Businesses around the world were being urged not to panic as extreme media reports fuelled fears of chaos when the Bug struck. In the same month the Alliance & Leicester financial institution disclosed the costs of its proposed millennium fix to be between £30 and £40m. NatWest disclosed a figure of £100m (later adjusted to £150m) and other businesses quoted similar figures in line with their individual turnovers.

Politicians proposed committees, surveys, action plans, task forces & mentor schemes and businesses across the world put together pay deals for experts to advise and correct. The UK government allocated £26m to train 20,000 “Bug busters” to advise smaller firms on Y2K compliance and the wheels of big business used strong arm tactics to force suppliers into doing work some could ill afford. Critics scored headlines with “Too little too late” messages and Doom-mongers warned of catastrophe in the worlds banking system. One survey suggested that if an interbank settlement system failed (such as the British CHAPS), it could cost over \$750m per day until corrected.

least 10 years. Large-scale redundancies were being forecast as the order of the day despite the industry’s next call to update for monetary union.

And then the day itself! On television in the UK, Peter Snow stood before the World Bug Map waiting! As the bewitching hour approached in New Zealand the lights went out in 100 homes in a suburb of Auckland. Officials in the makeshift Y2K bunker were reported to be in a state of panic. Had the bug struck early? Would planes now fall out of the sky? Was this the Armageddon for the entire computer dependant world?At one minute past midnight, according to the report, the emergency staff breathed a collective sigh of relief as news came in that an electricity pole had been knocked over by a drunk driver.

The world waited as the millennium dawned around the globe, Countries were ticked off without incident and by the time Big Ben struck its resounding chimes in London, emergency call-out teams were being stood down as the world came to realise that the predicted chaos had been avoided.

An estimated £600 Billion had been spent around the world and now the questions were being asked.

£600,000,000,000

Late in 1998, Taskforce 2000 in the UK singled out the DTI, The Ministry of Defence, the Home Office and the Office of National Statistics as being particularly vulnerable to Y2K problems. And in November 1998 Donald Dewar, then Secretary of State for Scotland said that the government may need to call in the army to resolve any breakdowns in communications and electricity supply due to the Y2K problem. The British American Security Council warned that the world’s nuclear weapons arsenal could be triggered by Y2K failures

By January '99 the Office of Fair Trading was being asked to look at allegations of “extortionate” millennium software upgrades. Y2K security experts were warning of an anticipated spate of hacking over the new-year period and the Prophets of Doom suggested that there were bound to be millennium nutcases who will set up chain letters and mail bombs.

By April 1999 many of the early fears had receded as various groups began declaring their bug free status. But others were only just waking up to their problems. The UK Computer Press reported that the application software industry faces a major crisis after the year 2000 because most users will have upgraded their systems and will not need to do so again for at

Had it been money well spent or was this industry’s biggest ever confidence trick? ...

Will we ever know?

Editors note: As I put together this piece in early January, the media in the UK, already bored with the Bug, was gearing up for the next big apocalypse warning. Apparently we are all in extreme danger from an asteroid collision with the Earth. Millions now need to be spent on asteroid defence systems and shelters. According to someone called Michael Dossin the world will end in 2012 when hidden messages embedded in biblical scriptures reveal that a comet will strike the earth. If this worries you, you could start building your own private shelter now, however others believe that once again it will be a “too little too late” scenario. According to the Unarius Society, life as we know it will change forever when alien contact is made as Atlantis resurfaces from its position under the Bermuda Triangle in 2001. Interpreters of the always ambiguous Nostradamus however, now forecast the end of the world to occur in the year 3420. I hear that one “enterprising” bookie is offering 1,000,000 to 1 against the world ending in the next century. Anyone want to place a bet?