

"Two years on, the full implications of Y2K are still open to speculation."

Was it in fact "a big game controlled and exploited by the media, consultants and lawyers?" Maybe, but we might never know and there was considerable relief in the early days of January, 2000 when we all realized that nothing was going to happen. Were we all conned or was it a well conducted exercise to put right one of technology's biggest howlers?

Firstly, the aftermath of the crisis. What actually happened whilst we were all watching fireworks and singing in the new century? Well, not a lot! Here is a list of some of the things that went wrong:

1. Data recording systems in two Japanese nuclear power stations failed, but vital control systems remained unaffected.
2. A New Yorker was allegedly fined \$ 91,000 for returning a video 100 years late.
3. A German bank accidentally credited a customer with \$ 4 million – then took it back.
4. Up to 30,000 antiquated Greek cash registers started printing receipts dated 1900.

.....and many other similarly unexciting stories. As the sagas being reported have an amusing edge to them it may be that we are not hearing the more serious ones. But maybe we will never know because organizations have no obligation to report everything and they certainly will not do so if it causes any embarrassment and loss of credibility with their products or customers.

Let's listen to the critics. They claim that global spending in the region of \$ 500 billion was spent on Y2K issues to 'avert the Y2K disaster,' \$ 100 billion of which was spent in the USA and \$ 30 billion in Europe. Well, although we all cried wolf at the media hype and although those who could not benefit in some way from the job explosion tended to be a bit negative about the whole thing, we must remember that CEOs all over the world carried the burden of responsibility and must have been convinced of the sincerity of the fears being expressed, and such was the fear of losing customers or even going out of business, Board of Directors all over the world gladly put their signatures to these gargantuan expenses so no one should complain now, even more so because the job was clearly deemed successful beyond expectations. Moreover, there is no sign of companies having suffered financially because of their outgoings in the last two years and the stock markets have been booming.

The figures quoted above might be exaggerated for a purpose, so if there was media hype putting fear of global devastation in the minds of CEOs, more media hype has been necessary to justify the original fear in overstating the amounts spent over the past few years on systems re-engineering and achieving Y2K compatibility. A lot of the costs quoted would have been necessary anyway to keep systems updated and some of the expenditure involved would have merely been

thrown into the Y2K 'kitty.' Now back to my original article in 1997 so that you can make up your own minds:

YEAR 2000 - TIME BOMB OR MEDIA HYPE ?

"There are many reasons why we are reading almost daily of one of the most fascinating subjects which has faced the world of technology since decimalization in 1970. Even then, when Bill Gates was a 17 year old programmer planning his destiny, we were warned of chaos. Fortunately, it did not happen, save a few pence shaved off revenues and a few added on to our costs. In fact it all went like clock-work. But there is a difference in 1997. Computer systems have since grown in magnitude and their influence is much more significant. But in the earlier years, in the 60s and 70s the price of computer memory was very high and most programmers stored year dates as two digits rather than four to save space. These software programs will not be able to differentiate between dates in 1900 and 2000 and files and programmes, software and hardware will have to be changed to accommodate the coming of the year 2000, which in most computers will register as 00.

The only reliable information we as customers and the general public have gleaned from all of this is that there is a best scenario and a worst. The latter is in some areas of business or public service, unthinkable so as the unthinkable always makes good reading, computer gurus and consultants have tended to concentrate on the worst scenario, which, if it does nothing else is awakening some businesses from their lethargy, and causing their CEOs and IT Managers to do some research, analysis and planning which is what we have all been taught is the right and proper way to conduct business but which we rarely do. In this case, however, there is so much doubt surrounding the whole area that most financial institutions and industrial companies in the private and public sector, are playing it safe and possibly also playing into the hands of consulting firms specialising in Year 2000 methodology. But who can blame them?

Let's look at the hype, more appropriately termed worst scenario. What could happen after midnight on the 31st. December, 1999 ?

Let's start with one everyone will understand. You may be out of a job, at least temporarily. The business may close due to computer failure but by the end of 1999, there will hopefully be something resembling a disaster recovery programme in place.

You probably will choose not to fly after mid-night of 31st. December, 1999 and whether people have thought of this yet or not it may inhibit your ability to be with loved ones for the big millennium bash or at least leave them afterwards. The reason you may choose not to fly is because air traffic control could be effected and cause navigation problems. This may be hype but one thing is certain. Airlines will be very reluctant to guarantee complete safety. This is logic.

Y2K - WAS IT ALL FOR REAL ?



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This article has been extracted from a book titled: Career Management in the 21st Century, written by RGBB member Paul Hawkins and produced by Jumana House. It is now on sale in Riyadh for SR50. Copies may be obtained by calling Paul Hawkins on tel: 052 124 048 or Andrew Mead on Riyadh 402 4785

