Year 2000: The MacGyver Solution

I've been talking to year 2000 (Y2K) experts and reading the recent Y2K analyses of heavyweights like Capers Jones, Ed Yourdon, and Peter de Jager. Although they present what looks like irrefutable evidence that much of the world will be unprepared for the Y2K crisis, unfortunately they ignore one critical factor that should cause us all to reject their gloomy forecast: nothing as bad as a worldwide computer failure could ever happen! Not in a million bajillion years! It can't! It can't! IT CAN'T!

In spite of this kind of strong data, many Y2K "experts" insist that most organizations have started far too late to fix all their systems. It is sad that just because these experts have watched a few hundred non-Y2K-compliant systems crash and burn, and have seen how long it takes just to test a system, and have seen that organizations are allocating only a fraction of the needed resources to the problem, they think they can do some math and declare that almost everyone is ridiculously behind schedule.

These experts obviously haven't watched enough television. By now, everyone should know that no problem is too big, and no odds are too high for a scrappy group of misfits who appear a little rough around the edges, yet when the going gets tough they can do the impossible. I can't count how many times I saw "The A-Team" take only one afternoon to create, for example, a tactical stealth helicopter using nothing but duct tape and an abandoned '76 Pacer. Certainly, *our* computer engineers could muster an equivalent feat! I bet that MacGyver alone could fix the Y2K problem using nothing but PVC pipe, a transistor radio, and Gouda cheese.

But I won't bore you with the technical details of Y2K fixes. For the sake of argument, let's pretend that, as the experts predict, by Jan. 1, 2000, a large portion of the world's computers will be spitting out *even more* garbage data than they do right now. Let us assume that non-Y2K-compliant microchips cause everything from microwaves and elevators to airplanes and bank vaults to start malfunctioning. As I will prove below, any nitwit can refute the worst-case projections of the experts.

Businesses will have a greatly decreased ability to produce, distribute, and sell goods. Rippling financial losses may trigger stock price plunges, business failures, bank closures, unemployment, and recession. Yeah, right. Do they really think the world economy is that volatile? Look at the U.S. stock market—stable, independent, impervious to any outside influence other than when Alan Greenspan sneezes in the wrong direction. And who cares if all that highly overvalued stock suddenly self-corrects to a fraction of its present value? The Great Depression wasn't *that* bad.

The communication, distribution, and utility infrastructures may limp badly for a time. (Yawn.) What if it did happen? Most people have a few days' supply of food on hand and plenty of flammable furniture. And we're talking about the dead of winter here—plenty of snow to melt into water. A few days is time enough for thousands of food distributors and utility companies to work out any unanticipated Y2K bugs from their decentralized, real-time networks run by thousands of interconnected, one-of-a-kind computer systems. Not to worry!

State, local, and federal government computer systems will be largely unable to function. This could result in many wholesale changes to the way taxes are collected and services are rendered. That's supposed to be a disadvantage? It goes without saying that in the face of disaster, our elected leaders would set aside petty differences, and in less time than it takes to vote down a congressional pay cut, would form a solution that is efficient, effective, fair, and beneficial to all.

I could go on and on, but I've made my point. And one more thing—if the experts are so sure this "crash" will cause such chaos, may I ask: Are *they* working frantically to safeguard their organizations' survivability? Are *they* storing food and fuel for a worst-case scenario? Are *they* avoiding debt and putting their wealth into tangible assets? The answer is yes, they are. But what do *they* know? It all comes down to whether you believe we can grit our teeth and somehow do the impossible (Rah! Rah!), or you think it's time to face the music and start working on feasible system contingency plans (Boo!). So who do we bet the farm on: MacGyver or the "experts"? I'll take MacGyver—after all, what have we got to lose?

—Lorin May

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