

The Last Quarter Challenge

Fixing the Y2K problem is like putting the toothpaste back into the tube without messing it around
– Renowned Y2Klogist

On Thursday, 9th September 1999, the electric industry in America conducted a major drill to ensure that its workers knew exactly what to do when the clock strikes 12 midnight on December 31st 1999. 9/9/99 was specifically chosen for such an exercise as it was expected to cause similar hiccups to computer programs quite like the Y2K problem. Such exercises are being carried out by the 'Y2Klogists' to convince themselves of the millennium readiness of various segments of the industry before the day of the reckoning descends on us. Nothing untoward happened on this day was no reason for the electric industry in America to rejoice, as the turn of the millennium would be presenting totally different set of problems--some even undetermined—for the industry. Power, telecommunications and financial institutions are the sectors that are expected to be most susceptible to Y2K attack all over the world.

Y2K problem has been discussed *ad nauseam* in every forum and every medium of mass dissemination over the last couple of months. Still much needs to be done to ensure a normal day on January 1, 2000 when the millennium bug is about to unleash its attack on humanity. It is generally believed that India wouldn't be affected by Y2K due to the country's limited extent of computerization. While this is partially true, the computer population in India that includes 3.2 million PCs and about 2000 mainframes is certainly substantial for us to be weary of the Y2K attack. There is also a misconception that the millennium bug would affect only certain kinds of systems. But the reality is every system be it mainframe, midrange or desktop and all users including large organizations, small enterprises and even individual PC owners would be affected by the bug.

Not just that, all modern industrial systems running on advanced electronic controls would be brought to a grinding halt. Modern machinery that use embedded systems in the form of microcontrollers and microprocessors containing built in time functionality are probable targets of the bug. But there is still hope for the small organizations that are still not prepared for Y2K. They can still get their act together and proceed towards better system control in future as elaborated in our lead article this month.

As Mr. Dewang Mehta, Executive Director NASSCOM describes; the Year 2000 problem itself is only the tip of the iceberg. If Y2K is due to a problem with the date fields, there are many other applications that have problems with name fields and other forms of information. The lessons learnt in solving the Y2K problem would come in handy in solving other such problems. The question is not only about setting right a flawed computer program, it is a larger problem of re-engineering and re-orienting business practices for better future.

So, is your organization ready for the new millennium?

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