

KGB REPORT

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*A Curmudgeon's Look at Business and Technology.
Featuring the Stuff You Need To Know*

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Written by Kevin G. Barkes

Forgive Me, For I Have Surf-ed: The Internet Observation Service has asked the Vatican to consider naming Saint Isidore of Seville the patron saint of the Internet. Isidore (560-636) is the first recorded author of what would today be considered to be a database. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications confirmed there's an organized petition drive to tap the Spaniard for the honor. Actually, an argument can be made the Internet is already covered by Saint Jude, the patron saint of hopeless, impossible or desperate causes. I wonder if I can fit the medal on my laptop somewhere?

And The Oscar Goes To: Believe it or not, the inventor of the cellular telephone is: Hedy Lamarr. Actually, actress Lamarr and avant-garde composer friend George Antheil patented a "Secret Communications System" in 1942 that laid the conceptual groundwork for today's spread spectrum technology. Lamarr had been married to a weapons manufacturer in the 1930s, and she learned a great deal. She hit on the idea that radio-controlled torpedoes would enable the Allies to destroy the Nazis' naval capability. Radio control signals could be easily jammed or intercepted, however; so Lamarr suggested the torpedo's receiver and the transmitter controlling it should constantly change frequency. The system achieved synchronization using a clockwork mechanism to drive perforated paper strips: player piano rolls. Lamarr and Antheil never tried to commercialize their invention. They turned it over to the U.S. government, which didn't implement the technology until 1962, three years after their patent expired. Lamarr and Antheil were truly ahead of their time. Frequency hopping radio systems didn't become practical until digital technology made signal synchronization a non-mechanical operation. Today spread spectrum is everywhere, from the Milstar defense satellite to the digital cordless phones in millions of homes. Sort of makes you wonder if Nicole Kidman is working on anything.

KGB Personal Travel Hint: Always take an extra tie with you, and when you iron the wrinkles out of the shirt you inadvertently slept in the night before, remember the large triangular burn mark goes in the back.

An Authentic Gootchie. Internet security firm Cyveillance looked at 150,000 web pages and found that 10 to 20 percent of online sellers specializing in luxury items are actually pushing counterfeit goods. Even large retailers like Wal-Mart get stuck with phony lookalikes from time to time. Use common sense: deal only with reputable firms that have written guarantees and return policies.

Better Than Sex? According to www.searchterms.com, a website that tracks the most frequently searched-for words on the Internet, more people are looking for "MP3", the hot new music format, than "sex", the number two search word. (By the way, the best place to search for MP3 files is www.scour.net.) Other popular terms include, in descending order, Hotmail, warez, Yahoo, Pokemon, chat, trenchcoat mafia, trench coat mafia, Britney Spears, jokes, Playboy, porn, lyrics, eBay and Pamela Anderson. And you thought the web was a waste of time.

Early To Bed, Early To Rise: If your family situation permits it, and you're self-employed or fortunate enough to work for an employer who's embraced the concept of flextime, consider starting your workday as early as possible. I generally begin at 4 or 5 am; that gives me a good four or five hours to get things done without having to answer the phone or deal with other distractions. I estimate I get about 50% more completed than I would working 9 to 5. Of course, it also means rolling into bed at 8 or 9 pm every night, but skipping the primetime television schedule really doesn't have much of a downside. Unless, of course, it's "Shark Week" on the Discovery Channel. There *are* priorities.

Politically Incorrect: An increasingly popular site for computer system technical and pricing information is www.kickasscomputer.com. Wonder if their moms pass out their business cards at social events?

Broker Speedometer: Time is of the essence; you want your online stock trades to go through as quickly as possible. Do you believe the television ads for who's fastest? Sure, and I've got this virtual bridge in Brooklyn. Keynote Systems, Inc. bills itself as the "world's leading supplier of Internet performance measurement, diagnostic and consulting services to companies that operate e-commerce web sites." The firm now runs the online Web Broker Trading Index, which measures and rates the speed of online brokerages. Recent results showed Dreyfus needed only 9.16 seconds to complete a trade, while the highly advertised e*Trade took 41.75 seconds. Dreyfus uses ATT/TCG CERFnet and CommerceServer400/1.0; e*Trade weighs in with Epoch and WorldCom/UUNET connections running with Netscape-Enterprise/2.01 software. Both times are faster than the aggravating interval it takes my broker to figure out the ringing noise on his desk is his telephone. Keynote's results are updated every week. For more information, check out the site at <http://www.keynote.com/measures/brokers/>.

Automated Anger: You're really cheezed at a gross injustice foisted upon you by some insensitive, brain-dead company and you want to write a Really Strong Letter, but you don't have the time and don't know the name and address of the CEO (cretinous execrable officer)? No problem. Just go to www.complain.com. For \$19.95 the firm will supply the names of the morons in charge of the offending company, compose a professionally worded complaint letter and send the mis-sive to you. Review and sign the letters, add copies of your receipts, supporting documentation or any little personal hand-written invectives you desire, then drop them in the mail. Complain.com reminds you in a month so you can either escalate the complaint or send a thank you letter for having your problem resolved.

Thin At A Price: The next generation of PCs is starting to appear, modeled after the Apple iMac concept of locating the monitor and system box in a single unit. The new machines take up only about a quarter of the space of current office systems, but you'll pay about \$2K to reclaim that extra real estate on your desktop. While the iMac continues to fly high, Apple has serious problems with its long-anticipated, consumer-targeted P1 PowerBook laptop. ZDNet says that because of chip problems the machine "just doesn't work." The computer is certainly going to be delayed, at the very least. Some inside the company want the thing killed outright.

Trendy Tradesmen: I recently received a catalog and purchased some items from Duluth Trading Company (800-505-8888; www.duluthtrading.com). The firm sells products "designed and tested by tradesman", which means it has a lot of belts, knapsacks, traveling bags and other items traditionally used by big guys who use power tools in dangerous ways. If you don't mind the khaki/military look, you can use this stuff for business travel. I bought a "contractor's field bag" for under \$50 that holds a laptop, cell phone, tools, files... just about anything. I've never seen anything similar to it in traditional luggage outlets, and the price - under \$50 - is unbeatable.

Why I Love Computers: The adventure begins while trying to book a flight on the airline's web site. I spend about ten minutes searching through schedules, confirming flight information and

entering personal data. I hit the "submit" key, and get a message that says the reservation service is "Temporarily Unavailable... Try Again Later." I keep doing so for about an hour, but I finally call the 800-reservation number to book the flight. I lose 1,000 frequent flier miles by not using their web site. Even though it's the airline's fault, they won't give me the bonus miles. Okay. I make the reservation with the phone agent, give her my credit card number, and am told my credit card company's approval computer is down. I try a couple other cards, but they all seem to be on the same network. I finally get approval, and am asked if I'd like an "e-ticket": instead of picking up a paper ticket at the airport ticket counter, I just go directly to the gate where I will be automatically cleared to board. Sounds like a timesaver, so I agree. The next afternoon, I'm standing with a dozen other folks in rumpled business suits watching people with real tickets get on the plane, since the computer at the gate that handles the e-tickets isn't working. We finally board and are immediately told there's a fifteen-minute delay due to air traffic control system computer problems (see "Y2K-A-Rama", below). Fortunately, the flight and the cab ride to the hotel are uneventful. But after I check in, I can't seem to get my room's door to open with my just-issued card key. I return to the lobby to find another dozen or so folks in even more rumpled business suits watching helplessly as a hotel employee with dubious technical skills repeatedly thwacks the side of the computer-controlled key card recorder. Surprisingly, it works and we all shuffle off to our rooms. I take a can of soda from the mini-bar, and when I review my computer-generated bill while checking out the next morning, I discover I was charged a mere 29.20 for my refreshing beverage the night before. Someone put the decimal point in the wrong place when entering the price into the hotel system, I'm told. I return home, where my computer incessantly beeps that I have 60 waiting e-mail messages. I take off my tie and shoes and sit on the back porch with the dog. We watch the butterflies in the garden and idly scratch ourselves, and I wonder if having opposable thumbs and a verbal language is all it's cracked up to be.

More Windows Observations: Overheard in various places... Windows 2000 as "W2K", almost as reassuring as Y2K; NT as a "21 x 6" operating system (vs. the ideal 24/7, of course); the difference between the W2K beta and a virus a virus isn't shrink-wrapped.

Quotes of the week:

"Yesterday it worked. Today it is not working. Windows is like that."-If Error Messages Were Haiku web site, www.pcpoetry.com

"This computer makes me all frowny with pure nougat-filled hatred!"-Jhonen Vasquez

"[A computer is] like an Old Testament god, with a lot of rules and no mercy."-Joseph Campbell

"The only truly portable computer language is profanity."-Unknown

"If a programmer is found to be indispensable, the best thing to do is to get rid of him as quickly as possible."-Gerald Weinberg in *The Psychology of Computer Programming*

If you like these quotations, be certain to visit the *KGB Consulting Random Quotations Generator* on our website at <http://www.kgb.com/cgi-bin/kgbquote.cgi>. We also have a search function that allows you to locate a name, word or phrase in our ever-growing database of over 2,800 quotations.

Trivia: Rock Stevens starred in *Muscle Beach Party*, *Hercules and the Tyrants of Babylon* and *Goliath at the Conquest of Damascus*. He's better known by his real name, Peter Lupus, who portrayed strong man Willy Armitage on the 60s hit *Mission Impossible*. Our winner is Doug Holt of R.R. Donnelley Financial in Nashville, TN. This week's trivia: what was the real profession of the person who developed the first dial telephone? Extra point question: what prompted the individual to develop the device? First correct answer gets a Y2K compliant KGB Consulting pop-up calendar. (It's Y2K compliant because it's a 1999 calendar, although we just looked at our sample 2000 calendar, and it appears to pass muster.)

Or Maybe Government Service? Perfectly marvelous example of selecting the right person for the right job, from a *New Yorker* cartoon: The career counselor asks, "So why do you want to go into public relations, Jones?" Jones snaps, "I thought I made that bleeding obvious, you stupid bastard." (Thanks to Stan Kelly-Bootle.)

Useless Web Site of the Week: <http://www.gwbush.com> parodies the official Internet web site of Texas Governor George W. Bush's presidential campaign (<http://www.georgewbush.com>). Last month, the joke site received over 6 million hits; the real site received only 30,000. Commenting on the situation at a press conference, the AP said Bush complained "There ought to be limits to freedom." Zack Exley of Massachusetts, webmaster of the parody site, is now selling t-shirts emblazoned with the Bush quote. Also check out <http://www.nhprimarysource.com>, which, in the true spirit of this great nation of ours, makes fun of *all* the candidates.

Y2K-A-Rama

Thanks For Flying Y2K: *ComputerWorld* says American Airlines and US Airways gate agents recently blamed departure delays on Y2K testing by the Federal Aviation Administration. Unfortunately, the FAA wasn't performing any Y2K tests. The magazine quoted an American Airlines official who noted the phrase "Y2K testing" gives gate agents a fast and convenient, if inaccurate, explanation for late flights. They promised to do a better job of providing accurate information to their agents. Recent slowdowns in New York, Chicago and Cleveland were attributed to FAA air traffic computer system upgrades. Some flights were restricted to give human controllers time to become comfortable with the new equipment. Of course, that's not to say there are no real airline-related Y2K problems. *e-Business Advisor*, in its e-Biz Buzz column, quoted an unnamed airline official who observed that "every major application we have would have failed" had it not performed Y2K remediation. The same airline honcho also reportedly claimed that bomb detection and de-icing equipment "is certain to fail unless fixed." If you have to travel by air on Y2Kday, your best bet may be to book a flight for yourself and your significant other on British carrier Virgin Air. First-class passengers can get full-size beds and privacy screens. It doesn't address the Y2K problem, but the odds are you probably won't notice. Or care.

Plenty of Nothing: Despite the fact 46 state governments in the US begin fiscal year 2000 on July 1 this week, most experts expect nothing of consequence to occur. Canada and New York City began their FY2000 in April without incident.

Duh: This quote from Microsoft's website pretty much explains how we got into this Y2K situation, and why it's so difficult to fix: "A March Gallup telephone survey of 1,021 adults found that 28 percent of Americans plan to prepare for the Y2K issue by stockpiling household supplies such as food and water, and 20 percent plan to have more cash on hand or to closely monitor their financial records. By comparison, only four percent plan to update their home computers." Actually, Microsoft does have Y2K fixes for most of its products, but is not pushing consumers to install them because it's worried about support workload. When the 96% of people who didn't fix their systems all call Microsoft at the same time after the first of the year, Microsoft has the perfect out: overwhelmed support lines, and "we told you so..."

A Look Ahead: The experience of the Penobscot Bay Medical Center in Rockport, Maine is probably typical of the problems unprepared businesses can expect next year. The hospital's fiscal year 2000 began on April 1 and their accounts payable software went belly-up. Hospital staff had to write checks by hand for two weeks, but everything's back to normal now. There might be a big demand for programmers and consultants the first week of next year. You may want to consider trying to book their time in advance, although I know a lot of consultants who plan to make themselves scarce until February.

Getting Better All The Time: The head of the World Bank's Y2K program says 170 countries are now addressing the problem. The experts' biggest worries continue to be panic and hoarding. Expect more and more businesses that deal directly with the public to be open on 1/1/00. Many banks are considering opening their doors on New Years' Day to reinforce public confidence.

Shameless Self-Promotion: Culturally enrich your employees or clients by getting them a subscription to the weekly *KGB Report*; quantity discounts are available. Also, *KGB Report* items make handy and entertaining broadcast media spots (hint, hint), and I'm much more attractive looking since the corrective surgery.

KGB In The News: We were featured last week in a spot on Beth Trapani's Small Business Report on KDKA Radio.

The Official KGB Y2K Beanie™ Now Available! Nobody knows what the dickens is really going to occur on Y2KDay, but the odds are about a million to one that anything bad will happen to you personally. You say that's not good enough, bunkie? Step right up, here's the answer to your problem! Through the miracle of modern mathematics, you can virtually eliminate the chance of any Y2K calamity visiting upon your person by purchasing and wearing The Official KGB Y2K Beanie™. It works by exploiting the elegant if little understood concept of statistical probability. Now here's the deal... The odds of getting personally zapped by a Y2K bug, according to various generally reputable mass media sources, are, as we previously noted, about a million to one. But the odds of getting zapped... while wearing The Official KGB Y2K Beanie™... are virtually incalculable! Do the math yourself! See what we mean? In order for The Official KGB Y2K Beanie™ to maintain its statistical validity, it's necessary to restrict the seeded universe (the number we sell) to... wait a minute... carry the two... say, 100,000. At a mere 20 bucks, it's the best insurance you can buy! Each beanie is unique, hand-modified to further increase the odds against personal catastrophic happenstance! No two are alike! Beware of inferior, mass-produced Y2K Remediation Headgear™... those duplicate beanies may save you a few bucks, but do you dare tamper with the delicate mathematical balance of our pristine calculations? Don't muck around with celestial mechanics, my friends! Accept only The Official KGB Y2K Beanie™! Plus, it'll be a great way to break the ice at that New Year's Party! The Official KGB Y2K Beanie™ is more attractive than a lampshade, not to mention far more functional! Order The Official KGB Y2K Beanie™ now, save your butt, beat the odds, and make a timely fashion statement! Call KGB Consulting at 412-854-2550, fax us at 412-854-4707, or email us at kgb@kgb.com. Act now! Visa and MasterCard accepted! Quantities will be strictly limited to the number we can sell, so hurry!

All About Us:

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