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A Curmudgeon's Look at Business and Technology.

Featuring the Stuff You Really Need To Know

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A somewhat abridged version of this issue is available online at

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Reassuring: According to *Forbes* ASAP, 5,218 laborers built Hoover Dam, only a few of them engineers. Microsoft has 5,345 full-time workers building the Windows 2000 (W2K) operating system, which contains about 30 million lines of source code. The magazine says there are about 450 managers; 110 translating the user interface into foreign languages; 50 persons providing information technology support; 115 training Microsoft field reps; 1,120 in developer relations; 100 in marketing; 900 writing the software code; 1,800 testing the code; 600 support persons who assist developers and IT administrators; and 100 writing manuals and help files. And just like Hoover Dam, the big test will be whether W2K holds water.

Useless Air, Don't Fail Me Now: I'm scheduled to return to Pittsburgh from a New York business trip this coming Friday evening, August 20, which means I should miss the GPS Rollover by about four hours, if I'm lucky. A first cousin to the Y2K bug, the Global Positioning Satellite system goes through an "End of Week Rollover" event every 20 years. Because of the way in which GPS receivers work, the clocks on some older units may go crazy at midnight this Saturday. Since positioning is determined by comparing the timing of signals from orbiting satellites, an accurate clock is crucial. Otherwise, one minute you're over LaGuardia and the next second you're orbiting a small planet near Epsilon Eridanii II. Another thing of which to be wary: this Thursday morning at 6 am EDT, new almanacs will be uploaded to the GPS satellites, so your GPS receiver could go nuts a full day and half ahead of schedule. The *AVweb AVflash* newsletter notes that if GPS receivers aren't fully compliant with current standards, the new almanacs could cause the devices to do some interesting things: they may fail completely, because they can't locate the satellites; they may take more time than usual to locate the satellites or, my personal favorite, they may appear to be working fine but will display inaccurate information.

By Any Other Name: Seventy percent of stock market day traders lose everything they invest and only ten percent make a profit, according to a report issued by the North American Securities Administrators Association, making the activity more like gambling than investing. So why is day trading still popular? The same reason gambling is widespread: the possibility of making a bundle. While most gambling is a passive activity, making scores of trades each day on a computer terminal gives participants a feeling of some control over their destinies, even though it's mostly illusory. Also, one in ten is still substantially better than the 40 million to one odds of hitting a state lottery jackpot or the 10 million to one odds of hitting an instant lottery. Plus, you don't have to clean up all that messy silver crud from scratching tickets.

Is This Really Necessary? General Motors Corp. plans to offer voice-activated Internet access in some of its high-end models by the end of next year. I'd settle for access to humans at GM service departments.

But Can You Hear The Burp in Cyberspace? Tupperware is now selling its stuff online, in addition to shopping mall kiosks and Home Shopping Channel specials. The company insists its prime sales method remains the Tupperware party.

Write Your State Rep: The National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws (NCCUSL), whose recommendations are routinely adopted by the states, has approved and is sending the Uniform Computer Information Transactions Act (UCITA) to legislatures. UCITA essentially grants consumers the right to give their money to software companies. That's about it. Really. Write your state representatives and warn them not to rubber stamp this travesty.

They're Here! Just in from the printer, the Y2K KGB Consulting Tetradecagon Pop-Up Calendar! Check out our new *Desperate Sideline Enterprises* web page at <http://www.kgb.com/tshirts.html>, which also features our new line of Curmudgeon Tees, with new low prices!

Quotes of the Week:

"Y2K is going to be the Lawyers' Full-Employment Act."-Jim Seymour

"Deja moo: I've heard this bull before."-T-shirt

"How do they get the deer to cross at that yellow road sign?"-Bumper Sticker

"One plus one equals three for large values of one."-Unknown

"To know recursion, you must first know recursion."-Unknown

"Programming simply consists of using the right wrench to pound in the screw."-Unknown

"Invest in America. Buy a Congressman."-T-shirt

"People are more violently opposed to fur than leather because it's easier to harass rich women than motorcycle gangs."-Unknown

The *KGB Random Quotations Generator* has over 3,000 entries and is frequently updated. Visit it online at <http://www.kgb.com/cgi-bin/kgbquote.cgi>. Many of the quotes are also available on our Curmudgeon Tees... check out <http://www.kgb.com/tshirts.html>.

Useless Web Site of the Week: Don't you hate it when you hear on the news how hackers defaced some major site on the web, but the site is either down or repaired by the time you're able to take a look at it? Just go to <http://www.onething.com/archive/>, which contains copies of some of the biggest web hacks of all time: the Justice Department, CIA, NASA, Air Force, ValueJet, US Army... some really impressive stuff.

Y2K-A-Rama

Survive Y2K? How About Surviving Until Y2K? At least we know what the Y2K problem is and when it will arrive. Unfortunately, our technology dependent society gets whacked almost daily by unexpected crises that emphasize the infrastructure's fragility. Some recent events that blindsided us:

Not Just Kansas Anymore: Downtown Salt Lake City was nailed by a rare tornado which caused over \$150 million in damage, killed one and injured over 73. Many of the injured were hurt by flying debris when they left the safety of buildings to get a clearer view of the maelstrom. These are the same people who will try to make phone calls at the stroke of midnight on 1/1/2000 and then panic when the telephone system "fails".

In The Dark: Two areas of downtown Chicago lost power last Thursday, thanks to what appears to be incompetence on the part of Commonwealth Edison. One of four transformers in a substation failed the week before. Two power transmission cables failed Thursday, forcing two of the three still-functioning transformers to shut down. The one remaining transformer began to overheat, and technicians deliberately cut power to certain customers to prevent its failure. The Chicago Board of

Trade shut down early, as did the Federal Courts and scores of skyscraper-based businesses in the downtown area. Police and emergency services switched to backup generators. The Chicago Hilton and Towers broke into its cache of "glow sticks" and distributed 6,000 of the chemically activated luminescent wands to its guests so they could maneuver through the dark hotel. The Hilton was storing the sticks for potential use should power outages occur on Y2Kday.

Not Y2K, Just Stupidity: MCI WorldCom denied major disruptions in its frame relay network for the last week and a half were due to Y2K testing, fingering instead bugs in newly-installed Lucent Technologies Ascend switches and software. That was of little comfort to thousands of MCI's customers, some of whom still had no service early Monday, according to Internet Week. The Chicago Board of Trade, which had been forced to shut down on Thursday because of an electrical power outage, was understandably a tad cranky. It called MCI WorldCom's performance "unacceptable" and said it was "pursuing all available remedies". Customers were particularly incensed that MCI didn't fully disclose the severity of the problem, delaying the implementation of contingency plans. Lots of customers are looking to jump ship. What goes around, comes around: MCI was one of the firms that benefited from a major AT&T frame relay outage last year.

On Hold: NASA has delayed the next launch of the space shuttle Endeavor for a month as technicians look for frayed wires suspected of causing a computer failure during the recent Columbia mission. Backup computers prevented an engine shutdown, which would have forced the shuttle to attempt a dangerous emergency landing. The delay with Endeavor will also push back the launch of Discovery, which was scheduled to take off on October 14 for an emergency repair mission to fix a failing pointing system on the Hubble Space Telescope.

E-Crashes: Both eBay and E*TRADE experienced major outages in the past week and a half, angering customers and causing major drops in the firms' stock prices. The eBay failure was particularly embarrassing, since it occurred after the company claimed to have installed a hot backup system following a 22-hour failure in June. The online auctioneer's book value dropped by \$1 billion after the latest gaffe. Still, eBay and E*TRADE aren't alone. An industry study revealed even firms with emergency response plans averaged over an hour and a half unscheduled down time every month.

Already Bitten: *ComputerWorld* reports that 75% of 161 surveyed US companies and government agencies have already experienced Y2K-related system failures. Fortunately, only two percent of those hit suffered business disruptions. The vast majority were able to quickly resolve the problems or come up with workarounds. The trade journal noted the low failure rate could be considered good news and indicates Y2Kday may not be as terrible as some predict. Still, the survey results reported less than half of the organizations polled expect to have all their mission-critical systems prepared, and 16% don't expect at least half of their most important systems to be ready.

In The Dark II: A power outage of sorts that affected residents of London last week was, in fact, Y2K related. Almost half a million London Electricity customers pay for their power by having funds credited to a PowerKey "smart card". The card, similar to a credit card, is inserted into the customer's electric meter to pay for service. Software glitches related to Y2K caused 2,000 of the utility's 400,000 meters to reject payment. While no US utilities use this system, experts say the failure should serve as a warning to American firms not to become complacent. One of the reasons London Electricity switched to the PowerKey system was because of its alleged Y2K compliance.

Only 3 Out Of 50? ZDNet quotes a General Accounting Office study that claims only Iowa, Nebraska and North Dakota are fully prepared for Y2K. All the states have some plan in order, but 14 won't complete testing until October. Maybe the Chicago Board of Trade should open an office in Fargo. You betcha.

Backsliding: *ComputerWorld* quotes a report by Pittsburgh-based Infoliant Corp. that claims vendors for 58% of the 125 software products evaluated by the firm made "negative" changes to their Y2K compliance status. That could mean discontinuation of Y2K support or the discovery of new Y2K problems.

Higher Learning? Only 22 of the country's 5,800 colleges and universities have successfully completed Y2K testing of their student aid data exchange programs with the Department of Education. Keep a close eye on those tuition bills next year...

Compliant Lubrication: Reader Scott Wheeler reports the following appeared in the *Sunday London Times* last week: "The makers of KY Jelly have just made their product millennium proof. They have renamed it Y2KY Jelly, and it now allows you to insert four digits into your date, whereas before you could only fit two." Funny; there's nothing on the Johnson & Johnson web site...

Shameless Self-Promotion: Culturally enrich your employees or clients by getting them a subscription to the weekly *KGB Report*; quantity discounts are available. Items from *KGB Report* may be used in other media with proper attribution. And buy a t-shirt, will you?

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 e-mail us at kgb@kgb.com. Act now! Visa and MasterCard accepted! Quantities will be strictly limited to the number we can sell, so hurry!

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