

# Managing Through the Y2K Challenge

by Robert Wallace

Elizabeth Hall rises at 5:30am and begins her morning ritual. She awakens her husband and five children and begins the arduous task of preparing them for work and school. After getting the children off to school and, anxious to get to the myriad of legal issues that await her at her downtown office, she rushes out the front door, leaps into her car and reaches over to start the engine.

Unfortunately, the engine won't turn over, because a processor that isn't Year 2000 (Y2K) compliant controls the ignition system. So, Liz hitches a ride with a neighbor and finally makes her way to her downtown office. Moving through the revolving door, she dashes into the elevator and pushes the button for the 17th floor, but the lighted buttons simply blink and the elevator refuses to budge. To her chagrin, the computer system that controls the elevator system is not Y2K compliant and is unable to discern the commands of the occupants.

Catching her breath after climbing 17 flights of steps, Liz opens the door to the 17th floor and walks over to the water fountain to enjoy a cool, wet drink. The fountain sputters like her father's old '58 Chevy then abruptly goes silent. There is no drinking water, and who knows what she'll find in the ladies room. It seems that the computer system that manages the water purification and pumping systems are not Y2K compliant, meaning that the electrical commands that are piped to the pumps are inaccurate, causing pumps to shut down when they should be feverishly pumping fresh water to water fountains, kitchens and bathrooms throughout the region.

Tired, thirsty, and frustrated, Liz plops

down in her chair and immediately seeks relief by tuning to her favorite radio program. To her horror, she hears that buildings are on fire all over the country and that automobiles are piled up at major intersections due to fault traffic controllers. As she listens further, she learns that banks are closed due to panicky depositors, and that chaos and mayhem prevails because the 911 and emergency dispatch systems are unable to communicate with one another. It turns out that these systems are also not Y2K compliant.

Welcome to the twilight zone. Our society's doomsayers and the "end of the world" crowd are predicting that the scenario described above will be the norm and not the exception. This scenario could happen. But it clearly does not have to happen. Leaders in government and industry must take charge and shepherd the community through this technical and logistical maze called the Y2K bug.

## What the Y2K Problem Is Not

The Y2K problem is not:

- Just another technology problem.
- Something that should only be addressed let alone managed by the information systems departments of business and government.
- Something that affects only mainframe systems.

The Y2K challenge is arguably the most complicated and complex threat ever to face the industrial world. During this time of uncertainty, fear and consternation, leaders must continue to lead, manager must manage, and programmers must program. Level headedness, honesty, diligence, impeccable planning and astute execution must be the order of the day.

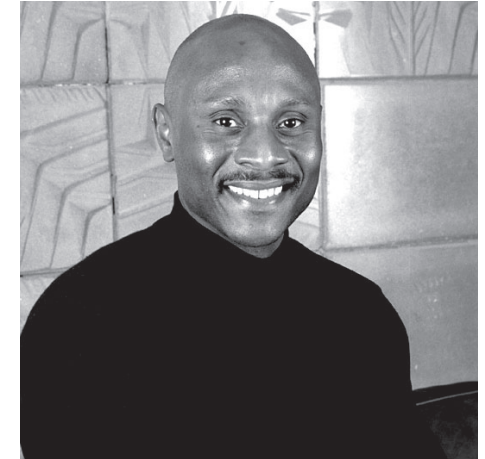
## The Y2K Management Formula

Given the limited time and resources, it is imperative that government and industry prioritize their efforts. The four areas that must be addressed, in parallel, by the leaders and business managers of our society are as follows:

- Continued diligence in identifying where the date problems occur in our computer hardware, software, and embedded systems and focusing on the remediation of these problems and validation of all known fixes.
- Concurrent development of contingency plans for disaster recovery and for work around systems for completing business processes. Disaster recovery contingency plans must consider the interdependence of power, water, sewer, public safety, medical, transportation, postal operations, government services, and financial systems.
- Thoughtful focus on public relations and the intelligent dissemination of key emergency and Y2K preparedness information. The community must be educated on what the Y2K exposure means to them and what they can do to prepare for it.

Cooperation among state, local, and federal governments and the business community must be built and strengthened. Our true commitment to regionalism and corporate cooperation will be put to the test. No entity, in this scenario, is an island, and no one stands alone. Like it or not, we are all in this together, and together we can manage our way through it and beyond.

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