The Final Countdown to Y2K: Is Your Small Business Ready?

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By Doug Swanson

With each passing day, more predictions are offered about the so-called “Year 2000 Virus.” Some say it will unleash chaos in the world’s economy at the stroke of midnight on Dec. 31, 1999. Others think the risk is minimal, at best. Many big businesses are ready for Y2K. Many small businesses are not. If your business isn’t prepared, you should take precautions now. After all, it’s six months and counting.

**Final Countdown**
Whether or not you have big computer problems depends primarily on the size of your business and the extent of your use of computer technology. Regardless, there’s no reason to panic. Just take adequate precautions:

**Ten**
First, recognize Y2K is a problem. It will affect your business in some way, even if you don’t own a computer and don’t use computer technology in your office. You need to be educated and prepared. Learn everything you can about what systems you’re in direct contact with are susceptible to the Y2K potential for failure.

**Nine**
If you do use computers in your business, have them tested for Y2K compliance. Several simple software programs are available either in stores or the Internet. I used one to check our computers; it took about three minutes on each machine, and made me feel much more at ease.

**Eight**
Examine every software program, in every application, for Y2K compliance. Don’t assume that just because you bought a particular software package recently that it will be Y2K ready. Any program not Y2K compliant needs to be changed or updated with a new version immediately. Seek help from a professional if you need it.

**Seven**
Check all of your other business systems and equipment (mechanical and electronic) to determine as best you can whether Y2K will be a functional issue. Don’t assume that just because something doesn’t ‘look like a computer’ that it won’t have a Y2K bug. Anything that tells time could have a Y2K problem waiting to surprise you.

**Six**
Be aware u.w. businesses and government entities are much more prepared for Y2K than organizations in other parts of the world. According to the World Bank, less than half of the world’s developing nations have initiated Y2K action plans. And an even smaller percentage of nations are actually taking steps to eradicate Y2K problems. Several “crisis countries” in Asia, South America and the former Soviet Union could see the heaviest impact from Y2K. If your company is located in the United States and does business overseas, it’s likely you’ll experience Y2K compliance problems—and those problems may take an extensive amount of time to resolve.

**Five**
Make sure your installation, service, and support staff are prepared to deal with Y2K problems with equipment you’ve put in the field, as they may arise. Are you sure everything you’ve sold or rented is Y2K compliant?

**Four**
Make a list of every business you contract with—including suppliers of services, products and information.
Request written proof they’re Y2K ready. This is particularly important if you receive computer-generated data of any kind from an outside supplier—e.g., sales leads, actual orders or customer records. But even if all you receive from a supplier is physical goods e.g., products ready for retail sale you still need confirmation they’ve dealt with any computer non-compliance issues which would prevent timely and accurate shipments. Ask for proof to be provided no later than Oct. 1, 1999. If one of your suppliers can’t or won’t comply, tell them you’re going to start shopping somewhere else.

Three

Take care of as much outstanding “information-oriented” work as possible prior to the end of December 1999. While many experts don’t believe there’s going to be a huge Y2K economic crash, it never hurts to be on the safe side. Clear up your payable and receivable accounts as much as you can. Verify amounts. Reconcile your bank accounts. Back up all your data on disc—keeping a printed copy, if possible. Be prepared for the unexpected.

Two

Prepare a contingency plan for possible interruptions in delivery of supplies and services you need for your business. While many experts don’t anticipate great economic disruption in the United States as a result of Y2K, it’s still wise to prepare for uncertainties. You should have enough products and supplies on hand so you won’t have difficulty filling customer orders or completing service requests for at least 3-to-4 weeks into January from stock on hand.

One

After you’ve learned all you can and done everything possible to prepare your business and family for Y2K, do one last thing. Be calm. While Y2K does present the potential for economic disruption, any inconvenience should be temporary. Think of Y2K as just another challenge to be overcome. Respond appropriately, act professionally—and get ready to see your business thrive in the post-Y2K environment.

Conclusion

As with anything else, the best preparation is education. Y2K will affect your business, even if there’s no computer in your office, if only because the people you do business with and that do business with you likely have computers. So, you need to be educated and ready. Check out other sources of information available in your local library and on the Internet, which discuss all or in part Y2K issues.

About the author

• Doug Stimson, Ed.D., is an assistant professor and director of the journalism and public relations program at Oklahoma Baptist University with 18 years’ experience as a journalist, broadcaster and educator. He’s founder of the public relations and marketing firm The Stimson Group, and formerly worked in management for the Kayne Corp., within its company-owned water conditioning businesses in San Jose, North Hollywood and Glendale, Calif. He can be reached at (405) 878-2236, (405) 878-8701 (fax) or email: tsgroup@stewbell.net

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