The Year 2000 and your Computer

The year 2000 problem has everyone wondering what it will mean to them and their computer. While this is a very complicated issue that effects everyone at many different levels I will only address the individual computer user.

How did the problem develop? When computers were first developed memory was very expensive. Programmers decided to use 2 digits instead of 4 to represent years. 81 was used for 1981. When we reach the year 2000 (Y2K) will 00 represent 2000 or 1900? Most computers purchased in the last 2 years will correctly recognize 00 as 2000. Older computers may or may not.

Hardware vs. software. When we talk about whether a computer will correctly recognize the Y2K we must look at both the hardware (the physical computer

Y2K, Hardware & Software

motherboard and the Real Time Clock (RTC)) and the software (the programs that run the computer and perform the tasks we want such as the BIOS, Windows 95, WordPerfect, Quicken and America Online). Even if the Real Time Clock on the motherboard does not correctly recognize Y2K the BIOS and/or the Operating system (Windows 95/98) may correct the problem. What is the RTC and the BIOS? The RTC is a battery backed chip on the motherboard that stores the date. That is how the computer knows what date it is every time you turn it on. The BIOS (Basic Input/Output System) is responsible for retrieving the date from the RTC and passing it on to the operating system. Therefore it is possible for the RTC on the motherboard to fail the Y2K test but the BIOS and the operating system to pass.

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Each computer must be tested to see whether the BIOS correctly recognizes 00 as 2000. I can perform this test in approximately 15 minutes. After this test we will look at the software you are using. If you are only using word processing and the Internet then you will not have to worry about your software. If on the other hand you use financial software such as Quicken, spreadsheet programs such as Excel or database programs such as Access then we will have to take a look at the versions you are using and check with the manufacturer to see if they are Y2K compliant.

Glossary

Cookie (Most of the time they are harmless)
An Internet feature that permits a web site to store some authenticating information about you on the server's hard drive, so that the next time you visit that site, the server can "recognize" you as a return visitor.

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