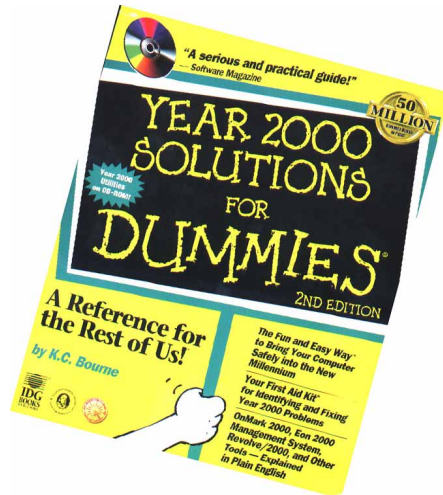


Identifying and Fixing Year 2000 Problems:
A Review of Year 2000 Solutions for Dummies, second edition



Year 2000 Solutions for Dummies, second edition, K.C. Bourne, Dummies Press, a division of IDG Books Worldwide Inc. Copyright 1998. \$29.99 USA, softbound, 383 pages plus companion CD-ROM. ISBN 0-764509465-7. Category: Computers/Year 2000. Reader Level: Beginning to Intermediate.

Who's A Y2K Dummy?

Unless you've been living on a mythical south seas island, you've heard of the Y2K (Year 2000) problem or "Millenium Bug." To save time, money, or both, computerized systems often skimped on the way they expressed dates, typically by shortening a four-digit year (like 1999) to only the last two digits (99).

If the Y2K problem is simple, why does it take 383 pages to describe it in this book? Y2K, although fundamentally simple, is difficult to deal with because of its sheer pervasiveness. There may be Y2K bugs lurking everywhere from your PC to your VCR, the elevator in your office building, and your local hospital's ICU. The forte of this book is that it helps you understand Y2K problems, highlights their pervasiveness, shows you how to develop an approach to these issues, and then gives you very practical tips on how to solve some of them.

Practical Y2K Help

What practical ways does this book offer for dealing with Y2K? First, as expected, this book devotes considerable space to diagnosing and fixing Y2K clock problems on PCs. However, this is just a warm-up for Y2K on other platforms and the larger issues of developing a Y2K plan.

Beyond PCs, Bourne points out that problems extend to MACs (although not as soon as for PCs), UNIX, and even embedded chips in ICUs and elevators. In fact, the book (to its credit) emphasizes the interdependency of computing devices, processes and data. If you think of a networked computing system like an onion with many layers (peel each one and you weep), then you have grasped what makes the Y2K problem so intractable.

To paraphrase Euclid, there is no royal road to Y2K remediation. The sheer pervasiveness of this software problem makes it virtually impossible for this or any book to provide

cookbook solutions for testing all layers, from BIOS to spreadsheet data. And for those of us focused on the Western (Gregorian) calendar, Bourne points out that there are many other calendar systems (such as the Islamic, Japanese and Chinese). And if software uses a non-Gregorian calendar, but runs on a computer that **uses** the Gregorian calendar, that system is also exposed to Y2K problems.

The book provides many helpful hints for specific Y2K tests. It even suggested some simple tests that I didn't know about and I thought I'd seen them all. The book then goes far beyond testing to developing a plan for system-wide remediation strategies. Since most organizations at this late date will not be able to fix everything, the book also offers triage techniques, an overview of Y2K tools, and suggestions for dealing with consultants and vendors. Lastly, Bourne offers many resources, including listings of on-line user groups and web sites. Finally, true to the "Dummies" style, Bourne offers a list of 10 items to do to get started.

Is the author an alarmist? As a check on the quality of the book's predictions, as I write this review the President has announced that the U.S. Social Security System is Y2K-compliant. Bourne (writing last year) said that "The Social Security Administration is generally regarded as the best-prepared government agency." Good call. Bourne also lists many other agencies with "D" or "F" grades, including the Dept. of Defense, EPA, Dept. of Transportation, and the Dept. of State.

With time running out, if you are new to the Y2K game, is this book the place to start? While there is still time, buy this book and read it. I've been working on Y2K issues for over a year now, and I still feel like something of a "Dummy." I've always been somewhere on the spectrum between a Jimminy Cricket optimist on the left and a survivalist on the right. This book moved me definitely towards the survivalist end of the spectrum, nudging me to think about Y2K outside my day job. If you've been putting off Y2K preparations, either for yourself, your company, or organizations you belong to, then *Year 2000 Solutions for Dummies, second edition* may give you the nudge you need to get working while there is still time.

Bonus CD-ROM

Year 2000 Solutions for Dummies, second edition contains a companion CD-ROM containing Bourne's links to Web sites dealing with Y2K, and a variety of documentation (in Acrobat PDF format) plus samplers of Y2K software. The latter includes data conversion utilities, PC analysis software, and applications analysis software. I have not tried out any of these, but at the very least they offer a chance to try before you buy.

Summary

Although I'd quarrel with one of the book's assertions: "The Fun and Easy Way to Bring Your Computer Safely into the New Millennium," the book takes this esoteric topic, makes it approachable, and offers solid solutions. If you own a computer, or virtually any device that uses electricity, or if you know others who do, this book is worth buying. For more information, visit IDG's web site: <http://www.dummies.com>

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