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Action and Attitude can Conquer Y2K

By Bob Berner - Father of ASCII text



Operation Desert Storm was hailed a success. We knew our number of targets. And found the needles in the haystack with our superior **Tomahawk** missiles. Technology helped the United States obliterate Iraq's weapons of destruction.

Today, we need another special operation to pinpoint needles in the haystack and overcome a potential world crisis called the **Y2K Bug**. This time, we have created our worst enemy: ourselves.

Thanks to our "intelligence," our lives and well-being are in danger. Our own lack of foresight created the problem. We have allowed the computer to usurp our thought and action processes. Returning to our old ways is impossible. We've forgotten how.



At age 77, I came out of retirement. I figured one way to beat the Y2K Bug. I got excited and anxious about the problem's significance and ramifications. Today, with approximately 18 months and 150 billion lines of software code still to be fixed before Jan. 1, 2000, very little is being done.

For the last several months, I have called on the United States government to act immediately to solve problems beyond internal government organizations. We need leadership, aggressiveness and a sense of patriotic duty. The history books show us that governments that act too late incur heavy casualties and costs. Governments acted too late when a single assassination began **World War I**. Years later, it occurred again when Hitler initiated **World War II** with little resistance. Like today, the governments were complacent and disbelieving.

This call to action to solve Y2K is more than appropriate. Again, I look to history, our Founding Fathers and the **U.S. Constitution**, which say our government is there to "ensure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare" and more.

So where is our Winston Churchill? He was a man who lived and breathed the major problems his country faced. He paid attention to detail, toured defense sites and armaments factories, and regularly informed the people. He never countenanced inaction on assignment. His personal notes to the people in charge said, "Action this day!" When he didn't get it, he fired them, and hired someone else who would take action. And he studied the opponents and possible ways to defeat them.

I personally remember World War II and working for **Douglas Aircraft Co.** It wasn't a choice I made. I was assigned! And we weren't working in some large aircraft hangar but a converted

lollipop factory that was cranking out ammunition instead of candy. "Action this day" rang loud and clear.

Have we such an enemy now? Yes. Are we facing it head-on? Absolutely not. Have you seen a resolute commander-in-chief leading national business, government and technology leaders to combat the Y2K Bug? I have not.

Should we table the majority of social and environmental issues until the Y2K Bug is resolved? We certainly should evaluate and re-prioritize. Why worry about global warming if it will decrease automatically anyway if worldwide production and distribution screech to a halt? Why worry about family leave? We may all have plenty of leave. Unfortunately, it won't be voluntary.

Recently on TV, a famous author was being interviewed. He was talking about his poor grades in college writing and how he received a D minus on a paper. When he asked the teacher why, she lit into him, saying his spelling was atrocious and his grammar was worse. It got me to thinking about the **U.S. Treasury Department** and its D minus in Y2K-solving. Equally poor was the **Nuclear Regulatory Commission**, according to Congressman Horn's Y2K survey. Will these and other organizations successfully overcome their immediate failure and succeed in the long term? I hope so.

Let's face it. The Year 2000 Bug is big. Solving it requires more than single-vendor solutions or corporate investment. It takes action. Action from companies, governments and individual citizens. To conquer, we must have national direction! It is vital to our well-being.

So is there another Churchill in view? Someone to direct and lead the charge? President Clinton has recently appointed, though tardily, a Year 2000 czar. Unfortunately, he just heads a committee and has no real power or authority.

For each of you, I offer my ancient motto for the software business:

DO SOMETHING. You know you have to. Why delay?

DO SOMETHING SMALL. That gets you started and makes something to build on.


DO SOMETHING SMALL BUT USEFUL. Be sure it's pertinent and helps to solve the problem.

And finally **DO SOMETHING SMALL BUT USEFUL NOW.**

Now we're back to Winston Churchill.

ACTION THIS DAY!

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