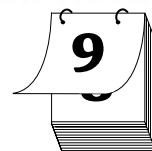# Be prepared

9

Windows users, worry not — Tim Nott assesses Microsoft's year 2000 readiness.

If you lie awake at night worrying that Windows may go belly-up at the end of the year, taking your settings, applications and data with it — relax and get some sleep. This will not happen, or to be more statistically correct stands no greater chance of happening at midnight on 31st December than at any other time. Microsoft has declared that all its current English operating systems are year 2000 compliant, but with minor issues.

So first, what does Microsoft mean by 'compliant'? And second, what are these 'minor issues'? How minor are they and what can you do about them? The answer to the first question, to quote Microsoft's Y2K FAQ, is as follows:

'A Year 2000 compliant product from Microsoft will not produce errors processing date data in connection with the year change from December 31, 1999 to January 1, 2000 when used with accurate date data in accordance with its documentation and the recommendations and exceptions set forth in the Microsoft Year 2000 Product Guide, provided all other products (e.g. other software, firmware and hardware) used with it properly exchange date data with the Microsoft product. A Year 2000 Compliant product from Microsoft will recognize the Year 2000 as a leap year.'

As for the minor issues, Microsoft owns up to the following in Windows 98. There is a possibility that an incorrect system date might result if a PC is booting at exactly the time the year changes. But as the time-frame is less than a second, this is very unlikely.

There's a bug in the Time/Date Control Panel component which can allow February 29th to display in non-leap years but this is purely a display problem — this date won't appear in applications or the file system. The Regional Settings Date panel also has a problem in that two-digit dates may display incorrectly.

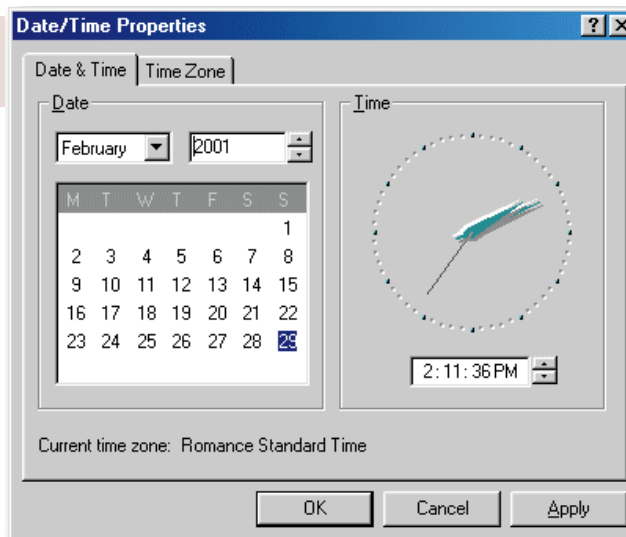▶ **A LEAP IN THE WRONG DIRECTION**

Then there's a problem with the phone dialler log showing incorrect two-digit dates and a similar glitch with two-digit credit card expiry dates in MS Wallet. The Java Virtual Machine (versions 1.1.1 to 1.1.5 of the Sun Microsystems Java Development Kit) may also have problems with two-digit dates, and the /D (date) switch in DOS XCOPY handles two-digit dates incorrectly.

Dates in the Custom Properties of Word or WordPad documents assume two-digit dates to be 20th century (and lose a day in the Far East time zones) and programs such as the System Information tool, which use the COleDateTime function, may create incorrectly dated files.

In fact I found further problems while trying out the first of these to produce the screenshot above, pressing Cancel set the Windows clock back five years, which is rather more serious.

All these issues, Microsoft claims, are rectified by downloading the Year 2000 Update for Windows 98, either by using the Windows Update facility or connecting directly to the update web site. The patch is also available on CD from Microsoft Connection.

Windows 95 users are not so lucky, in that there are more problems but fewer fixes. For example, because of the way MS-DOS handles dates as offset from 1980, certain utilities such as the MS-DOS DATE command, File Manager (WINFILE.EXE) and Find File will return

The Y2K Product Analyzer will check all Microsoft products

non-numeric dates. For instance, 20/03/2003 will display as 20/03/C3. Updated versions of COMMAND.COM and WINFILE.EXE are available from the Microsoft Web site so you'll need to search for Win95Y2k.exe.

Microsoft has also announced the Y2K Product Analyzer. This will check all Microsoft products on a user's PC for Y2K compliance and advise of suitable upgrades. Although this was not yet available at the time of writing, it should be freely downloadable by the time you read this. For corporate networks, the System Management Server 2.0, although not free, offers similar functionality. For those who prefer a third-party solution, Norton 2000 claims to audit applications, data files and hardware advising of potential problems.

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