If you're in IT and haven't made any plans for the coming year, Brian Clegg has a few suggestions.

Nice and easy does IT

As this is the February issue and I'm writing in November, it must be the month of January. Time, then, for all IT managers and directors to pull on their thermals and jot down a few resolutions for 1999. Here's the Business Matters guide to what all good business IT people should be seriously thinking about this year.

Firstly, learn to love the year 2000. There's less than 12 months to go, now. We spent last year panicking, so now let's take a different approach. After all, the IT director of a large firm recently moved to the role of "Director of Year 2000 Systems" so that he could "slow down a little" — he has obviously realised that it doesn't need to be stressful. I'm not saying that the millennium bug won't cause problems, just that most businesses will find it less cataclysmic than the prophets of doom are predicting. You would be stupid if you didn't make sure your key systems won't fall over as you slurp your NV champagne. But don't lose too much sleep. Bear in mind that the past few years have seen companies reducing the importance of the IT department. What better than a plague of irritations to make their saviour (that'll be you) appear more valuable? Consider taking a week's holiday across the New Year, proving your immense confidence and making sure you miss out on all the phone calls that will be inevitable for the first couple of days.

Secondly, don't fret about the euro. So what if you can't print a cross between the letter "e" and a cent symbol (by the way, what is one-hundredth of a euro called? I've never heard it mentioned)? Just use an "e" until you get a new font. If you handle foreign currencies, you should be able to handle the exchange rates. If you don't, it's a matter of supreme indifference. Let those excitable foreigners worry about it — you need to watch your blood pressure.

Thirdly, grab the world wide web by the scruff of the neck. Up until now, you've dabbled. You've put up a pretty, corporate site probably designed by the people who produce your annual report and accounts. It's glossy, it has pretty pictures, it looks wonderfully professional and… it's exquisitely boring. What to do then? Get it remodelled by an arty-farty designer who thinks he's got a sense of humour? Nope, you are missing the point. The web is not a corporate monolith, it's about diversity. Instead, give each of your employees 5Mb to do something for the company. Provide them with the sort of facilities that Amazon.com gives its associates, so your staff can link their sites into your products, services and information, just as an Amazon Associate links into books on the Amazon site. Sit back and be amazed. Of course, some of it won't be very professional, and they'll probably use your corporate logo in the wrong colours. But so what? Those are measures of the old world; the web is a different place.

Finally, introduce a new business model. Once upon a time, the IT department was a bunch of hotshot engineers. Then you lot became despots, ruling over data with iron fists. After a while this became irritating, especially to the people who paid for the IT

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department, so you became partners, working together with business managers towards a common goal. Briefly you were entrepreneurs, selling the joys of personal computing. Most recently you have been governesses, servants who are scared of dismissal (outsourcing) but still feel that you have to tell the children what to do. Now it's time for you to be broadcasters.

Set IT users free to do things in the way they want, but provide backbone services they can tune into by choice. Let a department run its own payroll system, but make it so easy and attractive to plug in to your central service that they won't want to. It's time to let your "customers" grow up. That should be enough for any IT manager, but to pull it all together (and this resolution applies equally to IT vendors) remember that IT is only there to supplement people. Make sure your IT works for what *they* need, not the other way around.

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