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Librarians Can Party Like It's 1999

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The Systems Librarian
Librarians Can Party Like It's 1999
by Terry Ballard

E xactly 1,000 years ago, end of the world fever was sweeping Europe. The year 1000 was a turning point, the shock of still existing in a world with a 4-digit date abated, humanity got back to its main business of creating food, shelter, and entertainment, and everyone seemed to be sleeping soundly. As the second millennium approaches, there is a new problem on the horizon that may not be apocalyptic, but can generate sleepless nights for all of us in the library systems. The problem goes under many names—the most popular are the "2000 problem," the "Millennium Bug," and the "Millennium Problem"—and its impact can be far more than a few uncooperative machines. Computer memory was expensive, and so they cut some corners by programming the computers to only work with two digits for the date. Anyone who lived through the 1960s can understand this attitude. At the time it didn't seem possible that the world would take the leap into the 21st century because it couldn't live the lie of existing in an invalid date? At the stroke of midnight, my computer dealt with this by skipping back 24 hours to December 31. When I looked a few days later, I saw that the computer had moved further back in time to the beginning of 1980. I am told that machines running Windows 95 are immune to this problem, but if you have any machines still running DOS in two years, you'd better start making some inquiries.

Vendors Address the Issue
To get a sense of how bad the problem might be for us, I checked with some of the more important people in library technology. According to Bruce Washburn, technology director at Research Libraries Group, "An overall review of RLG's systems is being conducted. At this stage of our review, RLG systems have been found to be capable of handling the year 2000-plus in most cases, and the rest will be added shortly. We will be publicizing more information on this later on at a special location on our Web page (http://www.rlg.org/year2k.html)."

Perhaps because OCLC was invented in the late 1960s, it can always use the backspace key and change by us at any time, although it will probably be a feature of some new release of the software. In the matter of displaying due dates, even though the system only displays the last two digits, it is tracking them as four-digit dates."I verified this with my own system by extending the time period for a professor's materials due December 31, 1999.) Since the major OPACs mostly run on UNIX, most systems librarians should be out of the running for dealing with the $3,000 fine and the angry patron.

Web-Based Resources
As with any major event, there is a Web page dealing with the 2000 problem—the Year 2000 Information Center (http://www.year2000.com). This is an electronic clearinghouse for articles on the subject and, of course, links to other sites. Even if you have covered every angle of the year 2000 problem, don't think that the information superhighway will be free of potholes. Steve Silberman pointed out that there is another problem that could be just as bad. "A method to increase the number of IP addresses needed is to find a solution for the Internet to expand enough to take care of projected use over the next few years." [See a related news announcement on p. 55.] I look at this way—if there weren't problems, we wouldn't need systems librarians.

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Internet Waves

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www.netmind.com/URL-minder/)

results are either e-mailed to you or you receive a notice that the agent has "found something" and you can surf directly to the service's Web site to peruse the new information. Interested? Try these:

• Reference.com (http://www.reference.com): Set up "Active Queries" that let you store topic searches on Reference.com's computer, and have them run automatically each day for some newsgroups. Register with your e-mail address and choose a password.

• All-One Gateway to the Invisible Web. (http://www.all1.com): There's a lot of nifty stuff here, including the ability to run free searches of proprietary databases (although you'll pay to receive full-text results). Set up "agents" to scan Usenet newsgroup postings by using natural language queries. Or register URLs you wish to track with "URLy Warnings," and receive e-mail notification whenever something on that Web page changes. (Another site that provides this service is NetMind's URL-Minder at http://www.netmind.com/URL-minder/)

Seven New Top-Level Domain Names for Internet Addresses to Be Provided

Under a plan recently announced by the Internet Society's International Ad Hoc Committee (IAHC), a coalition of partners from the broad Internet community, working to satisfy the requirement for enhancements to the Internet's global Domain Name System (DNS), the number of names available to specify Internet locations, such as Web sites and e-mail addresses, will increase and more firms will be allowed to act as registrars for the names. The plan is a result of efforts by the 11-member IAHC, an international group that is trying to resolve questions critical to the current and future growth of the Internet, which is chaired by Donald M. Heath, president and CEO of the Internet Society. Before formulating its plan, the IAHC received input from individuals, organizations, and government agencies from around the world.

When the plan is implemented, Internet users will have seven new generic Top-Level Domains (gTLDs) in addition to the existing ones (.com, .net, and.org) under which they may register Internet names:

• .firm—for businesses or firms dealing in businesses offering goods to purchase

• .web—for entities emphasizing activism or political actions

• .arts—for entities emphasizing cultural and entertainment activities

• .rec—for entities emphasizing recreation/entertainment activities

• .info—for entities providing information services

• .name—for those wishing individual or personal nomenclature

Another part of the plan allows for up to 28 new registrars to be established to grant registrations for second-level domain names under the new gTLDs. For example, in http://www.infoday.com, the TLD is .com and the second-level name is "infotoday." The new registrars will be selected by lottery from applicants who fulfill specific requirements established by the IAHC. All the new gTLDs will be shared among the new registrars, meaning that each registrar may effect registration of second-level domain names under all the new gTLDs. It is intended that the three existing gTLDs (.com, .net, and.org) would also be shared upon conclusion of the cooperative agreement between Network Solutions, Inc. (NSI) and the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), which allows NSI to act as the registrar for those gTLDs and remains in force until 1998.

To guide future registrar developments, an association of all the registrars, to be called the Council of Registrars (CORE) and established under Swiss law, will create and enforce requirements for registrar operations. These requirements are spelled out in a separate legal instrument to which each registrar must agree. The IAHC plan includes the establishment of a notegulatory policy framework in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which both the public and private sector will be invited to sign. The MoU will provide a mechanism for signatories to advise on future policy evolution of the global Internet domain name system.

An earlier draft proposal by the IAHC had recommended a mandatory 60-day waiting period before activation of new domain names, in order to allow what is considered to be a major source of instability in the DNS, namely widespread piracy of famous trademarks by certain domain name holders. In the final report, that recommendation has been replaced by a more comprehensive solution that addresses the needs of all classes of stakeholders. In addition to making the 60-day waiting period optional for registrants, the final report institutes a system for dispute settlement involving online mediation, mandatory arbitration (if a domain name challenger chooses to initiate arbitration), and a fast-track online administrative domain name challenge procedure.

The full text of the IAHC report is published on the Internet at http://www. iahc.org.


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