

California Computer Care

News,
Views,
Tips and
Cool Techniques
for CCC Members

August 1999
Vol. II, No. 4

We
speak
Geek,
so you
don't
have to.

Y2K: the year 2000 bug

By July of 1999, it's a little hard not to be aware of the *Year 2000 Bug*. So, how does Y2K affect us Mac users?

Not much (*AKA history lesson*)—

About a million computer years ago (otherwise known as the late 1940's), when computers were being invented, one of the toughest challenges was memory.

Just like us, a computer has to be able to remember things in order to do work. Long term memory was solved through the use of wiring systems, punched, paper cards and magnetic tape (on our Macs we use hard disk drives, Zip Disks, floppy disks and CDRoms). Short-term memory was much more difficult to create.

A computer uses its short-term memory to store the questions and instructions that it is currently using to solve your problem of the moment. The more short-term memory a computer has, the faster it can work on a problem. Today we call short-term memory RAM (*Random Access Memory*).

Until recently, RAM was incredibly expensive. Today a megabyte of RAM costs about \$1.00, 10 years ago about \$500.00, 50 years ago millions of dollars (so much in fact, that nobody dreamed of megabytes of RAM, rather they fantasized about how all of their problems would be solved if they could just afford to get a tenth of a percent of a megabyte of RAM.).

Because of this, the engineers writing computer programs had to use every trick they could think of to save RAM. One trick they created was to describe the current date, for example July 12, 1999, as 7/12/99.

They assumed (quite reasonably in the 1940's and 1950's) that none of the current

generation of computers would be around when the year 2000 arrived. They were right; all of those computers are either scrapped or in museums.

But this dating method introduces our famous Y2K bug. When the date changes to January 1, 2000, computers using this RAM saving date recording technique will note the date as 1/1/00 and since they assume the year is always 19-something, they will see 1/1/2000 as 1/1/1900 and be 100 years behind reality. Ouch!

This method of dating became a tradition and survived long after it was no longer necessary. However, not everyone is a slave to tradition.

When Apple was developing the original Macintosh, they broke almost all of the rules of how computers should be made. One tradition they tossed out was the dating method and because of this, our Macs are programmed to use four digits to note a year. All of our Macs know the difference between 1900 and 2000.

But not all software companies are smart enough to let your Mac figure the date on its own. When these companies decide to bypass the built-in dating system, problems are the result.

Uh, oh! Intuit idiocy.

Even though your Mac can handle the next century with aplomb, there is one significant pitfall out there: the Intuit products, *Quicken* and *Quickbooks*.



The only major Mac software with significant Y2K problems is software from Intuit.

Quicken and *Quickbooks* are the most popular financial and accounting software. Nearly everybody has one or the other. Because Intuit felt they were smarter than Apple, they bypassed your Mac's built in dating with their own (derived from the IBM PC versions of *Quicken* and *Quickbooks*) and brought the Y2K bug from the PC to the Mac. Fortunately, this only affects *Quicken* and *Quickbooks*, your other applications (with very rare exceptions, see below) are immune.

But what about Quicken and Quickbooks?
Intuit finally realized its error with *Quicken* in 1998. *Quicken Deluxe* and *Basic 98* are fixed for Y2K. If you have *Quicken Deluxe* or *Basic 98*, you are safe. If you have an older version of *Quicken*, contact Intuit immediately to get a free copy of *Quicken Deluxe 98*.

Here's Intuit's contact information:

Intuit Inc.
2535 Garcia Avenue
Mountain View, CA 94043
1-800-446-8848

This website has more information:

http://www.intuit.com/corporate/year2000/quicken/quicken_mac.html

California Computer Care
P.O. Box 9445
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
(800) 540-8989

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For *Quickbooks* users, things are a little more difficult. As Intuit has short-sightedly stopped development of *Quickbooks* and *Quickbooks Pro*, the only recourse is an update to these programs with an updater that Intuit will be posting soon. Please contact Intuit at the above address and phone number to find out when the update will be available.

A few more worries

The only other applications to worry about are *DateBook Pro* (out of business for more than two years, so no updates or fixes, but never a popular product) and ALL Microsoft products before the current versions (though to be fair, the problems are subtle and unlikely to be noticed by most users). Microsoft has updaters to help you.

This ticks me off!

All of these problems could be avoided by the simple step of letting your Mac do what it knows how to do. There is no excuse for such arrogant behavior. I personally do not use Microsoft products because of their arrogance, but many users have no choice. *Quickbooks* and *Quickbooks Pro* users can send Intuit a message by switching to the superior and Y2K compliant *M.Y.O.B.* (<http://www.myob.com/>

[us/home1.htm](#)), but *Quicken* users are stuck; there is no competing product. That's what happens when we let one company dominate a market; when they blow it, we all get hurt.

July Tip —

In September we showed you how to take a snapshot of your Mac's screen. Here's a cool variation on that previous tip.

- 1) On your keyboard, hold down the Command key (the one with the Apple logo or four-leaf clover thingie) and Shift key.
- 2) With your other hand, type the number 4 key (use the 4 that is above the E key). Your mouse arrow becomes a cross hair.
- 3) Use the cross hair to drag and draw a box around the item you want to snapshot. Release the mouse button and you'll hear a crackly sound.
- 4) Open your hard drive icon and look for an icon called Picture 1. Double click it and there's your snapshot. Unlike the other snapshot routine (Command+Shift+3), that records the entire screen; this snapshot only records the part of the screen that you specify.