

Ten years on from the Millennium Bug that never was – how things have changed

FileMaker's Regional manager in Northern Europe, Tony Speakman gives his views on how the technology landscape has evolved in the past 10 years and makes predictions for what we can expect to see.

In its time the 'Millennium Bug' was press column gold dust and was a real talking point for everyone from red tops to broadsheets. As it turned out, somewhat predictably, the world did not implode, all software and hardware did not become unusable and when the clock struck midnight at the end of 1999 we were not faced with a global crisis of any nature. But 10 years on what's changed? The rapid consumerisation of technology has broadened the demands of businesses of all sizes; the average consumer now has a much greater awareness of what is available to them in terms of technology and so will have greater demands on the ICT in their workplace. There are a number of trends which emerged in recent years and that we can expect to blossom over the next few years:

Popularisation of mobile working

Mobile working no longer means simply "working from home"; a phrase which 10 years ago might have suggested the employee was at home, working sporadically. With the increased quality of internet access on the go and broadband becoming commonplace in the home, working away from the office has almost overnight become more productive. Strengthened through social networking, iChat/MSN chat, Skype and other common communication tools that have been developed in recent years; making the fully mobile worker a real possibility for the future. The discussion will inevitably turn from the data itself to the device from which it can be accessed. It can only be a matter of time before the gap between 'office devices' and 'mobile devices' closes to leave workers with just one machine that fulfils both roles equally well. However it will require a change in corporate culture if mobile working is to be more readily utilised in the future i.e. bosses will need to move away from the "If you're not at work, how do I know you're working?" mindset.

SaaS and alternative payment structure

We're already seeing some vendors have opted for flexible payment schemes such as reduced contract length, shortened notice periods and lowering costs for those that buy in bulk. These alternative payment schemes mean that vendors can create bespoke agreements to suit businesses depending on their demands, size length of service etc. Many of these offers were heavily prompted by the recession, however, I don't expect them to disappear post-recession. Many organisations will have adjusted their business to suit these plans and so will expect the same service in the future.

Cloud computing

Through 2010 and further down the line, we can definitely expect to see Cloud Computing become commonplace in businesses of all sizes. Small businesses can benefit from minimal investments in IT maintenance, data back-up, on-site IT experts and costs related to purchasing, maintaining and updating storage space for an entire business. Meanwhile large businesses can work across regional and national borders with ease. Making sure that there is only ever one, central version of all information no matter the number of users, while increasing access to relevant data for a large number of employees, will be integral to increasing business efficiency on a large scale.

Threats of the future – A new Millennium bug?

Recent high profile cases of data loss and mishandling have highlighted not only the importance of data, but also the poor handling of data and alarmingly, the naivety which still exists when managing data. Going forward we can expect much more stringent company processes amplified by vendors focusing on further improving security functions and integrating these measures in their products. The recession has clearly highlighted the importance of accurate information if businesses are to succeed. In the smaller business world this message is especially true. Businesses have all of the necessary information available to them; it's those who have the inclination to utilise this information to benefit their business that will be the most successful.