



Nicolae Anicu

Is this any way to begin a decade?

A humorous look at the goofs, gaffes and glitches that made 1990 the year that wasn't

BY PAUL GILLIN

JANUARY

In Delaware, a Control Data Corp. computer-based state lottery system goes haywire, allowing lottery agents to buy \$555,000 worth of winning tickets after the winning number is drawn.

Savings and loan tycoon Charles Keating contracts with CDC to process the financial statements at Lincoln Savings & Loan.

AT&T's nationwide network crashes, crippling long-distance services across the country for nearly nine hours. MCI reacts calmly to its foe's troubles, taking out a series of full page ads reading "Nyah nyah nyah nyaaah nyah."

FEBRUARY

The Software Publishers Association announces plans to combat software piracy by staging unannounced raids on selected large businesses. The first raid on a major Chicago-area retailer nets 17 illegal copies of Lotus' 1-2-3 and a half-dozen pirated copies of Ashton-Tate's Dbase at a cost of

only four lives. The SPA calls the bloody attack "a warning."

Lotus unleashes a mainframe version of 1-2-3. Analysts charge that Lotus still can't free itself from the PC mentality, noting that 1-2-3/M is delivered in a shrink-wrapped box the size of a Buick.

MARCH

Former McCormack & Dodge president Frank Dodge sues Dun & Bradstreet Software, claiming he was forced out of the company. Dodge alleges that he was publicly humiliated by being locked out of his office. D&B Software vehemently denies that a snub was intended, pointing out that it was necessary to close Dodge's office while washing machines were being installed.

With Paperback Software International mired in a copyright suit with Lotus, Paperback Director Adam Osborne leaves to start a company that will build a "revolutionary" next-generation expert system product.

Aion Corp. reports that the source code to its next-generation expert system product is missing.

APRIL

Lotus and Novell stun the industry by announcing plans to merge. Signs of trouble emerge quickly, though, when the two companies clash over whether to serve crab canapes or mini egg rolls at the announcement press conference.



Leasing giant Atlantic Computer Systems all but goes out of business because of the collapse of a popular leasing program. The failure forces the company's IBM mainframe customers into a difficult choice between keeping their current equipment or

upgrading to a 1990 Ford Taurus with the Power Option package.

Computer Associates announces that it will offer its own software architecture that supersedes those of IBM and DEC. The company says under the first stage of the CA '90s strategy, to be released in 1991, all product announcements will be printed on identical stationery.

Convicted Internet worm author Robert T. Morris is sentenced to three years' probation and 400 hours of community service. Morris chooses a volunteer job at AT&T headquarters in Morristown, N.J., working on the vendor's long-distance network.

MAY

The last major holdout to the surge of Microsoft's Windows support gives in as Lotus announces that it will port its 1-2-3 spreadsheet package to Windows, which is known inside Lotus headquarters as "The Great Satan." Lotus Chairman Jim Manzi dismisses the significance of the move, saying that the merger of Lotus/Novell will make Microsoft "dog doo-doo."



The Lotus/Novell merger falls apart at the eleventh hour as Novell suddenly demands an additional seat on Lotus' board, royalty rights to all Lotus products, a fleet of Cadillac limousines and season tickets to the Boston Celtics. Manzi learns of the disaster while on vacation at Disney World.

Microsoft introduces Windows 3.0 to widespread critical acclaim. Bill Gates sends Manzi a Federal Express package containing 1,000 plastic "dog doo-dooos."

IBM releases the first version of its Repository Manager. Although the initial product consists of little more than a blank computer tape, every software vendor in the world announces plans to standardize on it, and a 400-member user group forms.

Japanese scientists say they have developed a computer with as much intelligence as Leona Helmsley, but they can't think of a use for it.

JUNE

Hitachi Data Systems announces a new family of processors that for the first time exceeds IBM's high-end offerings. The company denies charges that it is moving aggressively toward the mainframe market, noting that it positioned its announcement as far from Pearl Harbor Day as possible.



Lotus wins its "look-and-feel" lawsuit against Paperback Software. As punishment, the judge forces Paperback Software to assume all responsibilities for marketing Lotus' Manuscript word processor.

Lotus shocks the industry by announcing plans to merge with Oracle Systems.

JULY

Ashton-Tate finally ships a clean version of Dbase IV, 18 months after bug reports forced it to pull the original Dbase IV off the market. An Ashton-Tate spokesman says the fuss over the original product's problems were simply a result of confusion. "Did we say Dbase? We meant Dbeta-test," he says.

CA hits a financial brick wall as the nearly billion dollar company reports that quarterly revenue will fall well below last year's figures. The company says that it can't explain the slowdown except that for some reason, customers are having a problem understanding its strategy behind selling 32 different database management systems.



The Lotus/Oracle merger falls through at the last minute as Oracle demands full control of the board of directors, the right to produce 1-2-3 clones, a corporate jet and a seat on the Cambridge, Mass., city council. Manzi is informed while playing tennis in Guadeloupe.

AUGUST

After years of denying that it is overstaffed, DEC finally admits that it must cut its work force by 5,000 people, beginning with the 1,200 employees in the corporate Brushless Car Wash Department.

Charges are dropped against a 20-year-old hacker after prosecutors discover that information he allegedly stole from Bellsouth could be purchased from the company for a small fee. We are not making this up.

A blackout plunges New York's financial district into darkness, paralyzing the nation's securities trading markets. The failure is traced to a volunteer's cubicle at AT&T's Morristown, N.J., headquarters.

IBM says it is repositioning Systems Application Architecture (SAA) as "a grand architecture for all mankind," and will expand the SAA umbrella to encompass Unix, VMS, Apple Macintosh, Wheel of Fortune, bacon double cheeseburgers and all General Motors vehicles made since 1983.

Lotus announces plans to merge with Amdahl.

SEPTEMBER



IBM rolls out the most ambitious mainframe announcement in 25 years, replacing its System/370 with a radical new architecture consisting of millions of digital watches running in parallel. Analysts are quick to praise the IBM initiative but lambaste the System/390 for its annoying tendency to beep in movie theaters.

Wall Street darling Oracle Systems shocks investors by taking a \$36 million quarterly loss. At a caviar and Dom Perignon luncheon at Tavern on the Green, Chairman Larry Ellison, dressed in a little black crushed velvet Italian number that matches the upholstery in his Ferrari, denies that expenses are out of control.

The Lotus/Amdahl merger falls through when the companies can't agree on whether to order the blueberry pancakes or the corned beef hash. Manzi is called back from the golf course.

OCTOBER

Compaq says it has solved problems that caused cases to crack in earlier versions of its notebook computer line. The new Compaq Rambopro comes in a molybdenum shell with a backlit screen covered by inch-thick plate glass. While analysts concede that the unit is sturdy, they question whether its 38-pound weight justifies the notebook label.



Apple finally gets into the low-cost computer business, introducing three Macintoshes. The company manages to trim costs substantially by removing the "Q" and "X" keys from the keyboard. "People rarely

use them anyway," Apple CEO John Sculley says.

IBM researchers announce they have developed a microprocessor so small that no one cares.

Lotus announces that it plans a "merger of equals" with AT&T. An AT&T spokesman says this is the first he's heard of it.

NOVEMBER

Concerned about mounting losses, Unisys bands with similarly troubled Eastern Airlines in a joint promotional deal. Beginning in November, fliers on Eastern routes will each receive a free fourth generation language.

The U.S. government announces that injury claims associated with repetitive motion — such as typing — soared in 1989. Government spokesman Steve Ballmer says problems can be avoided if users switch to using mice and "insanely great" software such as Microsoft Windows.



Three members of the so-called Legion of Doom hacker group are sentenced to prison for breaking into Bellsouth computers. However, all three quickly escape by beheading the troll that guards the Cavern of Silver and whispering the magic password into the Lantern of Darkness.

DECEMBER

AT&T launches a hostile takeover bid for NCR, claiming that it wants the acquired company to run its founding computer business. NCR Chairman Charles Exley spurns the offer, threatening to hold his breath until he turns blue. He is later coaxed off a fourth-story ledge at NCR headquarters in Dayton, Ohio.

Ashton-Tate's copyright infringement suit against Fox Software is thrown out of court when the judge rules Dbase itself was lifted from a public domain application. Paperback Software immediately files a countersuit against Lotus, claiming the idea for 1-2-3 was ripped off from an order of 15th-century Franciscan monks.

Data General announces a voluntary severance plan whose terms are so attractive that company founder Edson de Castro lays himself off.