

Year In Review

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The Christmas gifts that were wrapped with such care, are now just a memory - at least until the bills from the charge cards arrive - and a New Year is upon us. No, this will not be an anthology of events, but rather some impressions.

The year started off with dire warnings about viruses that would "eat our hard drive" and turn our computers into a pile of worthless scrap metal. While some were real threats, the majority fell into the hoax variety, intended to scare the computer newbies, who immediately passed them on without checking to see if they were real.

Homeland security was a big issue. Hardly a week would go by without some Legislator announcing a new plan to spend our money. Some Government computers however, despite the grandiose plans, were still fair prey for the "Hackers". Even the entire Internet was brought to a standstill on several occasions.

Anti-Spam Advocates won a major battle requiring that it be made easier to be removed from mailing lists. It also required that "ADV" be included in the subject line of the email they sent. I don't know about you, but I am still having my requests to be removed, being returned as undeliverable because a forged address was used to send it, and seldom see "ADV" in the subject line.

We saw MLMs come and go, but what else is new. This happens all the time and last year was no exception. With "visions of sugar plums" the uninitiated plunked down their hard earned bucks, and signed up in droves, only to find that if they wanted to succeed, they had to work. When they didn't earn their million the first month, while sitting in front of the TV eating "bon-bons", they lost heart.

Again dot.coms came and went at a frightening pace. Some invested "big bucks" in their web sites, only to learn they couldn't compete with the local stores, and couldn't sell overpriced items - plus shipping and handling - just because it was on the web. Surviving dot.coms however, had learned that lesson and prospered.

Some believed the propaganda that "Job" was a dirty word and fell into the 40-40-40 trap - work 40 hours a week for 40 years and retire at 40 percent of your pay. They scraped up a hundred bucks or so, and purchased "automatic submission" software that sent their ads to all the major web sites and ezines that accept free ads. Web site owners and publishers quickly recognized this, and filtered all

their emails into the delete bucket. The only people who made any money from this were those selling the software. Others purchased mailing lists that contained millions of email addresses, and found most were returned as undeliverable.

The pundits continued suggesting that anyone can publish an online newsletter or ezine. What they didn't say is that you have to be at least semi-literate to do so, and will be competing with over 400,000 other publications for a subscriber base. There have been many startups, and just as many who found that publishing is work - there's that dirty word again. Some even gave away free ads in their publication but found they were concentrating on the wrong thing. There is a world of difference between "readers" and people who subscribe only to see if their ad has been published. Readers want content, not just a bunch of ads with an occasional article.

Identity theft and web scams continued to flourish and were the top consumer complaints last year. Many investors have wised up however, and the high tech stocks which were highly overvalued from the "get go", have continued taking a beating.

The merchants of "doom and gloom" once again predict dire results for the new year. But, the market which shapes all our lives, like life in general, will have its ups and downs. There will be winners and there will be losers, but isn't it like that all the time.

The scamsters did flourish. With new "fresh from the farm" computer buyers arriving on the web daily, P.T. Barnum would have had a field day. "A sucker is born every minute" couldn't be truer. Funny thing is that most of the scams were simply reworked versions of ones that have been around for years. The web however, provided easy access to these uninformed, whose greed outweighed their common sense.

My impression is that 2003 will be a great year. The opportunities we face will only increase as the new technology continues to emerge. Sure, some will "bite the bullet" but we live in a great time, and I look forward to it with great anticipation.

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