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• EDITORIAL & COMMENTARY

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'Business Information: Looking Forward'

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At the beginning of a new year, you always see a number of articles summarizing lists of the top stories from the previous 12 months. So I figure, why not one more version highlighting the top three stories of 2007 and how they will affect information systems (IS) for years to come.

Mortgage and Real Estate Meltdown

The past year has seen the worst real estate market in the United States in more than a few decades. What does this have to do with IS, you might ask? Most managers and decision makers in the business world in the United States cannot remember when real estate was not a sound investment. When something you thought was so solid that you did not need to worry about it becomes a shaky investment and market, you have to ask yourself, what else are you counting on without a contingency plan? In IS, it might be the dominance and the resulting reliance we have in Microsoft. What if Microsoft suddenly went under like Arthur Andersen did a few years ago? How many organizations have a backup plan for what platform they would run their systems on? The real estate meltdown of 2007 should remind business managers everywhere that anything is possible, and we need to plan for contingencies.

Virginia Tech Shooting

In 2007, we have seen a number of horrible shootings in the United States, most recently at a church in Colorado. The one we will most likely remember and be affected by in the future was the shooting at Virginia Tech in the spring. What does this have to do with IS, you might again ask? Every college, university and large organization in the United States in the wake of the terrible disaster at Virginia Tech must be re-evaluating their plans to respond to an event of this type when, not if, they are faced with it. Many universities have implemented a text-messaging emergency response system this year utilizing cell phones. We used to think that an e-mail system was a fast way to notify people in the event of an emergency. In the wake of Virginia Tech's shooting, we all could see how woefully poor an e-mail system can be for quickly notifying people in an emergency. Cell phones have become ubiquitous, and it only makes sense to include them in your emergency response system. Every manager in business must be thinking about disaster recovery and emergency response systems; information systems are at the heart of the issue.

Apple's Release of the iPhone

When it comes to information technology, the biggest news I can recall from the past 12 months is the release of the iPhone by Apple. Finally, I have come to a story with a direct tie-in to the Business Information Zone. Information Systems is reliant on the underlying technology to do its job. In the wake of the enormous success of the iPhone, every organization and manager in the business world must ask, what can we do with the iPhone? The iPhone is the latest, and best, example of the convergence we have witnessed for several years now for voice, data and video. All forms of communication have been merging for years, and this convergence has made it easier for one device like the iPhone to provide the user access to all his or her video, data and voice information. Once users get used to this ease of access, they start demanding it for all their data needs. The effect this will have on newspapers, television stations and a whole host of services and organizations not normally considered a competitor of a cell phone company must be analyzed. What other company might enter the cell phone market? Or can you even call the iPhone a cell phone, since it is used for so much more than that? Every manager in business must be considering what effect the continuing convergence of data, voice and video in the wireless market may have on their product, service or market.

Implications and Conclusions

I could include many other stories here and then explain the effect they will have on business information systems for many years to come. Three stories, however, will have the biggest effect, and the variety of these stories helps illustrate my major point: that business information systems consisting of information technology (hardware, software, telecommunication and data), along with people, policies and procedures can, and will be, affected in some way by every major event that comes along. Business managers need to watch the news daily, along with their financial statements and competitors, and react to the consequences as soon as possible.