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inside:

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Happy New Year!

I know, you're thinking: but the year is already a month old. I'm writing this, however, on January 2, so as they say on ABC: "It's new to me."

First, a word from a sponsor. *login*: has a short new column: "USENIX Needs You" (see page 86). This column lists a myriad of volunteer (and remunerated) opportunities within the USENIX Association. Too often these opportunities are passed by word of mouth to "insiders" who then volunteer – while those who are waiting to "increase their visibility" never get a chance to join the elite set of USENIX volunteers. Check out the listings and see if any of the options appeals to you!

The year looks to be shaping up to be an interesting one:

- Digital music sharing (and its peer-to-peer cousin) should shake out this year. I'll be interested to see how that all turns out. I fear that each record label thinks there's enough internet bandwidth to send real-time music (which can not be saved to disk) to its "customers." I'm not sure there's enough bandwidth given the current cost-structure for the end-users.
- Intel's new architecture (the IA-64, aka Itanium) should be ready for consumer use. Some of the trade magazines are expressing concern already. If things were not to work out, the new architecture would surely prove to be one of the larger R&D losses (although the Iridium satellite telephone project didn't yield the hoped-for returns, either).
- Maybe this will be the year of Java. Or Artificial Intelligence. Or video-on-demand. Or WINE. Maybe not.
- What will happen in the arena of security? I fear that things will continue to get worse in an ever-escalating war between crackers and site-owners where the penalty for crackers failing is relatively low (for them) and the penalty for crackers succeeding is very high for those who are penetrated/denied/etc. How will the war be brought to a close?
- I don't see the bottom dropping of out high-tech employment as some pundits predict. Competent purveyors of our technologies should always be able to find good employment (though potentially not as a 7% shareholder in a multi-billion dollar startup).
- What are we going to do with all the storage? I believe everyone's disk capacity will increase by 1.5-2.0x this year. Backups will be more challenging than ever (as will all the implications of having so much data available for mining).
- Will corporate computing ever re-centralize? Managing millions of non-standardized desktops in organizations is proving to be ever more expensive; many institutions are requiring total standardization on the desktop. Thin clients, "timesharing" and application servers haven't hit really big yet (I think). When will every-day users tire of administering their own systems?

Finally, I am going to take on a quest this year. I'm going to try to get people to say "no" when they mean "no." I spend way too much time listening to correspondents, friends, subordinates, superiors, etc. trying to find new ways to let me down gently. "I'd really like to work on that and it's a really great project and I've thought about it for years and it's something that seems really important, but . . ." I am all for courtesy, and I even buy into the social lubrication that is implied by certain aspects of "political correctness." But when hearing "no" takes a significant amount of time compared to the actual performance of a project, the negative reply starts to feel fairly expensive.

I hope the New Year brings you tidings of happiness, peace, and prosperity. Despite the article on Slashdot about all the great inventions appearing in the first half of the 20th century, our technology continues to march along rather quickly and thus be, near as I can tell, one of the most exciting places to work in all of our human endeavors.

by Rob Kolstad

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