"And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die." That's how the Old Testament heralds the great flood in Genesis 6:17. It's an interesting story of animals, two by two, with some interesting parallels in the technology world. I make the comparison because we are about to get hit with another flood of epic proportions — a flood of data that will swamp us all.

Here's the situation in a nutshell. The sheer amount of data we computer-using, Internet-addicted online travelers are creating increases logarithmically each year. Soon, this flood of information will reach the new levels that are more than 3 million times the information contained in the total number of books published in all of human history. That's an amount of data called an Exabyte. And we simply do not have the storage or the tools or the mental capacity to easily manage such a massive flood of data.

To be sure, much of this data will be in the form of the high-definition videos that populate YouTube and movies that are illegally swapped on Bit Torrent. But there will also be an increase in spam, in e-mail in general, and in web pages and blogs.

Research firm IDC calculates that the amount of digital data being created increased six-fold in the past year, passing 161 exabytes (billions of gigabytes) in 2006. And that amount will grow to 988 exabytes by 2010, less than three years away.

IDC further calculates the growth of the data, much of it generated and communicated via the Internet, at an annual rate of 57 percent. Only 48 million people routinely logged onto the Internet in 1996. Last year, there were 1.1 billion users on the Internet, with over 100 million in the United States alone. IDC expects another 500 million users to come online by 2010.

That's a level that staggers the imagination. It also creates some real challenges for

data.

- In spite of all of these efforts, the cost of storage of company data (including the records required under a myriad of federal and state laws) will increase. Substantially.

The ExaFlood will have other effects as well. It will change the way we get our news and information, and what we use to filter that information to make it more manageable. We'll put more faith in web browsers to help manage information flows and new communications tools that can integrate all of those flows into formats we can use more easily.

None of this will really be enough. I'm no techno-Chicken Little, but I do believe we are in for a downpour even if the sky does not fall. Already, I find that people who keep up with Internet and technology trends for a living are suffering from fatigue — worn down by the sheer volume of the data we have to deal with each day. And the flood hasn't even started yet.

Sane people are probably building arks to get ready. For the rest of us, I recommend investing in faster processors, more RAM memory and the biggest hard drive you can afford. Oh, and definitely vamp up your office policies so they will be designed to cope with an information flow the likes of which we have never known.

Reality Check

Brother's MFC-845CW

Every accounting firm should have laser printers (and color laser printers) for finished work. But for drafts and the home office, this wireless printer combines everything you need — fax, scan, print photos, connect via Wi-Fi and more. And it includes a wireless telephone hub with messaging that handles up to four cordless phones. This is an amazing device, and it costs less than $250.

Web Authoring Tools

process called de-Googlizing) in favor of alternative searches. Now the people behind Wikipedia have announced a new, collaborative search to debut. If it were just another search engine, I'd yawn. But one not based on paid advertising results? This might be very, very interesting.

The Vista Hardware Gold Rush

As I predicted six months ago, hardware vendors are using the Vista upgrade as a way to force you to buy all-new peripherals by simply refusing to create drivers for any hardware that is a year or more old. In your calculations for the cost of upgrade, include the cost of new mice, printers, scanners, etc. Hewlett-Packard should be ashamed of itself; the company promises to deliver drivers "in the near future," but with Vista in the workplace for seven months already, where are they?

Microsoft Office 2007

The transition to the new formats and procedures in Microsoft Office 2007 isn't easy … nor is it painless. I'm constantly going to Help in order to figure out how to do things that were second nature in previous versions. The toolbar at the top of the page is confusing, and the new file formats make it a pain to share documents with those who have not upgraded. Nonetheless, I love the new applications and will find (eventually) greater productivity from them. I know that's not much of an endorsement, but I really do like the new Office suite and plan to stick with it.

Internet Site of the Month

Electric Scotland

Ten years ago, little was said or taught about the contributions of Scottish immigrants to North America, Australia and other places. But the creation of the definitive Scottish information and history website in 1997 helped to change all of that. Kudos to Alastair McIntyre for his decade of efforts. Even if you are not as Scottish as I am, it's a fun and interesting site to visit.

Technology

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