Speaker delivers jabs, praise at high-end show - George Schussel of Digital Consulting Inc. speaks on database technologies and vendors

Alison Eastwood

TORONTO -- "In a display of perverse brilliance, Carl the repairman mistakes a room humidifier for a (PC) but manages to tie it into the network anyhow."

This cartoon caption summed up the tone of George Schussel's keynote address at the Software World Conference and Exposition, held at the Metro Convention Centre.

Schussel, a database guru and founder of Andover, Mass.-based Digital Consulting Inc., gave his audience a "quick, irreverent look" at database technologies and vendors, kicking off with a look at relational database management systems (RDBMSs).

"The idea, the holy grail, that we can live with one type of database management system ... wouldn't that be great?" asked Schussel, pointing out, that this is not a realistic expectation.

Because of the limitations of SQL (structured query language) -- the de facto relational language -- relational databases perform poorly in applications such as scientific, OLTP (on-line transaction processing), text-oriented and multimedia. Therefore, he said, we cannot eliminate the need for the old navigational databases.

Converting to relational from a navigational database is a thankless task, according to Schussel: "If someone assigns you that job, quit or ask to be transferred. It's just not a good way to go through life."

Schussel favored best-of-both-worlds solutions from vendors like Computer Associates, which allow a relational and a navigational database to co-exist in one system.

Talking about future and current trends, Schussel praised both client-server and distributed computing. "For the 20 years that I've been in this industry I have never run into a technology before downsizing where the benefits are so immidiate."

Conversely, he recommended upsizing for companies running DBase II/III applications on PC-oriented systems. By utilizing distributed database technology, Schussel said, these organizations will be able to have support for multiple users and forward recovery of their databases.

"It's not like, when things stop running, you get on the intercom and say, 'Um, the LAN went out, so, you know, we're up and running now again,'" he said. "If you can't live with CTRL-ALT-Delete environments, then upsizing is what you want for recovery."

Client-server technology is with us now, Schussel said, but users don't really know how to use distributed databases yet.

Object-oriented programming, he said, is "somewhere between very real and in the future," while CASE (computer-aided software engineering) has migrated to the third generation.

However, CASE doesn't work as well as it should, Schussel maintained.

As for IBM and DEC's CASE environments -- AD/Cycle and Cohesion -- Schussel advised his audience: "It's a long way off before clients will really see significant benefits."