Will that be NC or PC? Rivals duke it out in debate - network computer; debate at the **Database and Client-server World Conference** - Technology Information

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TORONTO -- It was billed as the great debate, and those looking for insight on what the future has in store for client-server witnessed, if nothing else, a little mud-slinging here between some of the industry's main players.

The scene was DCI's Database and Client-Server World Conference. The panelists were representatives from IBM Corp., Sybase Inc., Netscape Communications Canada, Microsoft Corp. and Oracle Corp.

And the questions?

George Schussel, panel moderator and CEO of DCI, jumped to the chase early by asking: has the PC become too complicated and too expensive to maintain?

The answers quickly narrowed the debate as one between the personal computer, fat with applications and files, and the network computer, a thin client with minimal memory which leaves control of applications with a network server and draws them when needed.

"I'm obviously the designated defender of the NC today," responded Chuck Rozwat, senior vice-president of Oracle Corp.'s database server division. "The PC is here to stay ... but you're going to pay for it."

Rozwat was referring, of course, to the area of PC maintenance, where logic holds that simple costs less, complex costs more.

For example, if an IT persons' time is spent running around a corporation making sure its networked PCs are holding and running the same up-to-date applications, that will cost much more than keeping and maintaining everything on servers that distribute those applications when needed.

"We've gotten so embroiled in the PC mentality, we've lost sight of what simple is," said Rozwat.

Robert Epstein, executive vice-president of Sybase Inc., who played devil's advocate for most of the session, said the maintenance problem of having too many applications on a PC isn't so much a technology problem but an issue of self-discipline.

"The cost of deploying an app should be as close to zero as possible," said Epstein, adding that after you deploy it "you should then have the self-discipline to leave it alone."

At the same time, Epstein turned to Norm Judah, director of enterprise program management at Microsoft Corp., and said: "I think we all agree that the cost of PCs is too expensive with regards to the

software," referring specifically to each, more memory-hungry and costly generation of operating system that Microsoft launches.

Epstein then asked Judah directly: "What's the date that PCs will be affordable to own?"

Judah, supplying an answer that no one seemed satisfied with, responded that in some situations and in certain organizations PCs are affordable.

On that note, Rozwat jumped back into the debate by confessing that while he's a Microsoft Word user, constant upgrades to the application have turned it into a product that does more than he needs or wants.

"Part of the problem is we've gone beyond what people really need," said Rozwat. "In a product like Word or Excel, people are using about 10 per cent of the functionality in them."

Rozwat added that the NC offers people that core 10-per-cent functionality, and in streamlining the computing environment, can bring that functionality at a greatly reduced cost.