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Internet Expo - Proceed Cautiously To Browser/Server

TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA, 1996 OCT 2 (NB) -- By Grant Buckler. A new computing architecture that might be called "browser/server computing" is emerging. It will not replace the client/server model we know today, and it is still untested and may not work very well, but forward-thinking companies should be exploring it cautiously, said George Schussel, founder and chief executive of Digital Consulting Inc., during his company's Internet Expo conference in Toronto Tuesday.

Delivering a keynote address, the Andover, Massachusetts-based consultant said using Internet technology as the protocol linking clients to servers makes good sense in a number of ways. It reduces cost, and it simplifies dealings with a variety of hardware clients because the application need only be concerned with the Web browser, which is relatively standardized.

Schussel traced the history of client/server computing back to the file server model, in which virtually all work was done on the client, while the server was just a place to store data in files that had to be downloaded to the client for use. This led to the two-tier client/server model, which put a proper database server with record locking and such features in place of the simple file server. Then in the past two years came three-tier client/server, using an application server separate from the database server and relying on the client only for the presentation logic.

Schussel said the browser/server model closely resembles this third model, except that the protocol used to link client and servers is Internet technology -- either the public Internet or an internal intranet.

This model is very good for providing access to a very large number of clients, he said. A second generation of World Wide Web applications are adding database capabilities to the Web, providing capabilities that start to look like those of client/server database environments.

In the next year or so, Schussel predicted that many software vendors will start to launch what will in effect be fourth-generation languages for developing Web applications. These will be tools designed to let you create applications that run across database servers, Web servers, and the like. "This is application development for open clients," he said. "The client is a browser, period."

However, Schussel poked fun at the notion that client/server computing will go away. First, he said, the Internet is essentially a client/server network anyway. And second, the traditional client/server approach will probably remain the best way to do some things, while the emerging browser/server architecture will be better for others. (19961001)

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