

PricewaterhouseCoopers Taps into the Future

By Emily Sopensky

► Invoking God, Java, and Jini, panelists at the recent PricewaterhouseCoopers Technology Forecast event discussed wide-ranging issues relating to our high-tech future.

This annual event attracts Austin's high technology elite and the latest version was no exception. David King, principal consultant of PWC's Strategic Technology Group (www.pricewaterhousecoopers.com), based in Menlo Park, spoke to a packed ballroom and then joined a panel of Austin's key technologists.

Condensing the firm's 824-

king at IXC Communications, was only half-kidding when he said he had been "talking to God about changing the speed of light." What matters ultimately, the panelists agreed, is what happens at the ends of the network, the "extremities."

Of course, not every bandwidth bottleneck is a hardware or software problem. In a telephone interview afterwards, Meg Wilson of the Austin Software Council noted, "The issues of bandwidth barriers are not so much technological now. Instead, we have policy inhibitors. Standards and regulatory bodies vary from country to country as do regulations and standards. [With the increase in IP] this is of particular concern to Web development."

In a follow-up telephone interview with King and PWC Austin Managing Partner Rob Repass, King was asked what implications the technology forecast has on the software industry. He replied, "There are [necessarily] changes in assumptions when bandwidth is plentiful. [CIOs, corporate developers and programmers should] expect orders of magnitude of improvement, especially at the extremities."

For example, he said that using "videoconferencing, interactive whiteboards, and computer training over the Web" will become much more common with expanded bandwidth. New companies and products will spring out of these improved collaborative technologies.

As co-author with venture capitalist Ann Winblad of the 1990 book "Object-Oriented Software," King's observations on Java are particularly interesting. He says, "Object technology has promised solutions for a long time. Java put in the missing pieces." When asked about Jini, the latest offering from Sun and innovator Bill Joy that allows devices to plug into a network and work immediately, King said simply, "Bill Joy is a really brilliant guy."

King suggests that help-desk functions and call centers should likewise pay attention to the decreasing costs in band-

width and storage. With broadband access into consumers' homes gaining acceptance and affordability, it will be possible for product videos to be sent

into homes instead of being limited to FAQ faxes. "It's a much richer, much more capable channel," he notes.

In short, King said there are

many opportunities to mine as long as "the software industry is willing to anticipate the growth in bandwidth and its implications."



Rob Repass and David King

Emily Sopensky photo

page 1999 Technology Forecast into a 30-minute presentation, King barely drew a breath as he rattled off the technology innovations that are shrinking the globe.

Subtitled "The Bandwidth Revolution," King's presentation sampled the report's conclusions: There is a growing convergence in server technology; Intel-based servers are moving up-market to challenge RISC-based servers; crossbar switches will replace shared buses in high-end servers; greater client platform diversity includes handheld devices grabbing more of the market; and packet switching will replace circuit switching.

Software technologies that enable these trends, King contended, include the focus on run-time cross-platform portability and the use of extensible markup language (XML).

After his presentation, King joined a panel composed of four key Austin technologists. Dominick DeAngelo, VP for mar-

Problem:



His software costs too much, I can't afford it

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