

Will computing flow like electricity?

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As a provocateur, he's very effective. But as a prognosticator, people are less convinced.

Business writer Nicholas G. Carr raised many hackles in the information technology industry when he published a piece titled "IT Doesn't Matter" in 2003.

His latest piece with a similarly extreme headline, "The End of Corporate Computing," reopens the discussion of utility computing--the notion that corporations subscribe to computing services over the Internet much as they purchase electricity.

Yet Carr's latest article, published earlier this spring, failed to spark much industry soul-searching or a heated debate on the future of corporate computing.

IT executives queried by CNET News.com agreed that hosted services, or utility computing, will become more common and that corporations will take advantage of new technologies, such as Web services, grid computing and virtualization, to lower computing costs.

However, few executives envision a whole-scale transition to utility computing, even in the far-off future. None appeared to buy into Carr's assertion that the balance of power in the computing world could shift dramatically from technology infrastructure providers to Internet companies, such as Google or hosting companies.

For example, Charles Giancarlo, the chief technology officer of Cisco, downplayed the importance of utility computing scenarios. Like many others, Giancarlo said hosted services will become more important in certain situations but utility computing services will not be the norm in three to five years.

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