

Microsoft, Google tangle in court

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Secret meetings, confidential messages and alleged exchanges with Bill Gates were brought out as ammunition yesterday in the legal battle over a former Microsoft executive's departure for search rival Google.

Although the case revolves around one executive, Kai-Fu Lee, it is providing a rare glimpse into what's fast becoming one of the industry's biggest rivalries. Filings by Microsoft and Google underscore how seriously the software giant takes its struggle against the search leader.

In a declaration filed with the court, Lee recalled a conversation in which, he said, Gates warned him that Microsoft Chief Executive Steve Ballmer would sue if Lee went to Google, becoming the highest-ranking Microsoft employee to do so.

"We need to do this to stop Google," Lee's declaration quoted Gates as telling him.

King County Superior Court Judge Steven Gonzalez heard arguments yesterday afternoon on Microsoft's request for a temporary restraining order that would block Lee from continuing in his new position at Google. Gonzalez said he would rule on the request this afternoon.

In legal filings and yesterday's court hearing, Microsoft cited internal documents and meetings in an effort to show that Lee has the type of inside knowledge and experience that makes his new position with Google a violation of his Microsoft employment contract.

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