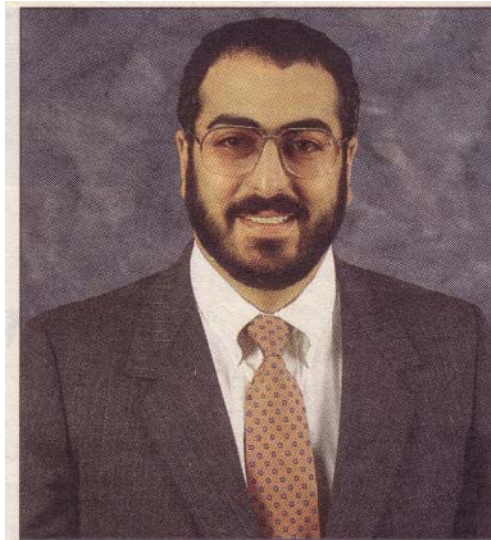


# No more Mister Nice Guy; Esber says gloves are off as Ashton-Tate regains fighting trim

In the last six weeks, Ashton-Tate Corp. has grabbed the personal computer industry by the collar, forcing skeptics to take a second look at the Torrance, Calif.-based software firm. With the announcement of some potentially hot applications for Apple Computer, Inc.'s Macintosh and the long-awaited unveiling of Dbase IV, Ashton-Tate is ready to live down two years of criticism.

But a Rocky-like comeback for the one-time king of the database market will not be easy. An absence of product upgrades has eroded Ashton-Tate's share of the PC data base market, and the firm faces a crushing wave of new competitors in the emerging PC relational data base business. Ed Esber, chairman and chief executive at Ashton-Tate, spoke with Computerworld West Coast correspondent Stephen Jones about the company's new aggressiveness, its controversial deal with Microsoft Corp. and its plans for the future.



*Ashton-Tate's Esber ready for Rocky-like comeback*

## **Ashton-Tate made an uncharacteristically early announcement with Dbase IV. Have your competitors forced you into the vapor wars?**

There are three reasons Dbase IV was announced early: one, major corporate buying cycles are longer, and as advance information began to get out, it was important for Ashton-Tate to show its product to developers, customers and third-party add-in developers; two, with advanced news out, it was possible that the customers would pause in their purchase of products unless we let them know what to expect; and three, IBM was beginning a 13-city tour during which several software firms were given access to IBM's customers, and one of the prices of admission was a product running OS/2.

I still prefer to announce and ship at the same time, and we will do that whenever possible.

**At the Dbase IV announcement, Ashton-Tate took a few swipes at its competition. Will you be taking a bolder stance with competitors?**

Ashton-Tate clearly tried to be a gentleman competitor in the past, maintaining a strong sense of professionalism.

Today, we're down to fighting weight, we're bringing out leadership products, and we won't allow ourselves to do less than the best.

**What affect will Dbase IV have on the Dbase clones?**

If we continue to move technology, we will be able to maintain a strong share of the market. We do intend to be very protective of the technology in Dbase IV, more so than we have been of earlier versions of Dbase.

We're going to take a more vigilant approach, but instead of doing a Clint Eastwood, we're saying, "Let the cloner beware."

Continued on page 46

**Did you give up competing for a share of the back-end data base market when you opted for SQL Server?**

That is a misconception. Dbase IV ships with a back-end engine that is roughly 30% of the code, and other versions will have back ends that are world-class. For the OS/2 server market, we joined forces with Microsoft to promote the Sybase technology. Nobody has given up anything; what's happened is that three companies have said, Let's confuse people less and support one OS/2 server product.

**Do you have a role in how SQL Server is enhanced?**

Both Microsoft and Ashton-Tate had lots to say about what SQL Server will do and how, but clearly, Sybase had the most to say. Both Microsoft and Ashton-Tate will play a substantive role in SQL Server's evolution.

**Could Ashton-Tate's Framework or Multimate be positioned as a frontend to SQL Server?**

Expect that any release of an Ashton-Tate product that could benefit from the SQL Server technology will be designed to capture that benefit.

**Are you concerned that Microsoft might take you on in the data base market?**

I am restricted in certain ways in competing with Microsoft on a server in the OS/2-Intel world. Microsoft has some restrictions on it in competing in the data base workstation market, and those deal with SQL and the Dbase language, among other restrictions. To make this relationship work, it was necessary that we agreed to certain restrictions related to servers and data bases.

*Computerworld*

*March 7, 1988*