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September 9, 2008 5:05 PM PDT

Execs want green data centers

Posted by [Stefanie Olsen](#)

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SAN JOSE, Calif.--Energy efficiency has always been a serious consideration of the tech industry. But executives from Cisco Systems and IBM here Tuesday said it's become crucial as their customers are aware of rising energy costs.

One of their key areas of focus is the data center, or the room where a company houses its computer servers and data-storage hardware. Power usage related to data centers doubled from 2000 to 2006 to comprise about 1.5 percent of the energy Americans use annually, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Silicon Valley Leadership Group President Carl Guardino said that if the growth continues as expected, then U.S. companies will need 10 more power plants to generate their added electricity by 2012.

That's why tech executives are examining new ways to design data centers and improve existing ones.

"Energy costs rank right after labor costs for our customers who run large data centers," Nikhil Jayaram, Cisco's director of engineering in the mid-range router group, said while speaking on a panel about green IT.

"Cisco's now moved to a new era where we're really focusing on power. Before it was performance, performance, performance, and cost was the fourth (concern)," he said.

J. Antonio Carballo, a partner in IBM's venture capital group, said on the panel his investment focus is "all about energy efficiency," especially in data centers. His group teams with external investors and start-ups to focus on power and efficiency in the United States and China. He said that in China he's seeing power at the center of 100 percent of designs.

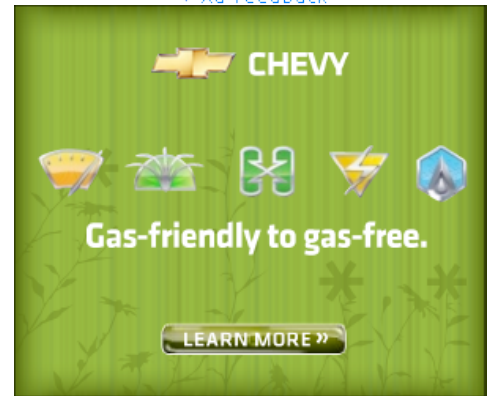
Still, he said, there are gaps in the energy system design in tech and semiconductor conductor industries as a whole. He said he would like to see adaptive systems that can monitor and shift energy distribution as needed. "It is the case where we have to develop internally some system monitoring tools," Carballo said.

Cisco's Jayaram said his company is also teaming with coalitions like the Green Grid to advance energy efficiency in data centers. Cisco is particularly concerned with improving the energy usage of existing data centers that will be in operation for years to come. But for future tech, it is examining uses of virtualization software, or software to run multiple applications on a single computer instead of two parallel systems, he said.

Power has long been an element of the electronic design industry, but what's new in the last 10 years is a need "for power and energy to be looked at from a more holistic perspective," said Ted Vucurevich, chief technology officer at Cadence.

To that end, he talked about a so-called grid 2.0, or a system to distribute energy generation in a

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way that would be adaptive and efficient. Google CEO Eric Schmidt touched on a similar idea Monday night in a talk about his company's [energy plan](#).

Jan Rabaey, a professor in the department of electrical engineering and computer sciences at the University of California at Berkeley, said that he's been in power design since the late 1980s. The good news, he said, is that the industry has made much progress; the bad news is that it's still a problem. He said the low-hanging fruit of this issue is to make more information available to companies and consumers about their energy usage, and that will change consumption.

"Most consumers don't know what their primary source of energy consumption is. Once you have information, then you have room to start addressing things as inefficiencies," Rabaey.

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