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## Data Centers Give Intel Static over Electric Bills

By John G. Spooner  
March 6, 2006

Jeffrey Skolnick, of the Georgia Institute of Technology, used to just worry about harnessing enough computing power to chase down cancer genes. Today, he's worried about his electric bill, too.

Skolnick, director of the Institute's Center for the Study of Systems Biology, in Atlanta, said concerns about server power consumption and heat weighed heavily on researchers who had to design a new 1,000-node computing cluster at Georgia Tech.

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"If I'm going to have problems with overheating, and I'm only going to be able to turn on 60 percent of [the nodes], I'm not a happy camper," said Skolnick, who isn't the only one fretting about how much electricity his servers gobble up.

Both heat and power have "become a concern in the last 12 months as we have begun to add racks to our new data centers," said Jevin Jensen, director of IS at Mohawk Industries, in Dalton, Ga. "We are already reworking some [heat and air conditioning units] in one data center to provide better cooling. We are watching this much more closely going forward."

Chip makers such as Intel and Advanced Micro Devices are also watching. Lower-power chips are expected to be the focal point of the Intel Developer Forum, which kicks off March 7 in San Francisco.

Focusing on energy-efficient



eWEEK.com Special Report:  
Intel Developer Forum

chips seems like a good bet. A confluence of events has pushed electric bills to the top of IT managers' list of worries.

For starters, electric bills rose 10 percent, year over year, to an average of 8.16 cents per kilowatt-hour in November 2005, according to the latest figures from the U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Information Administration.

[Click here](#) to read more about what to expect at the Intel Developer Forum.

Meanwhile, the energy price spike comes alongside an increased number of x86 server rollouts. And it's unlikely that managers will see any relief soon. A barrel of crude oil, which is coupled with the price of natural gas, continues to hover around \$60, forcing electric companies that rely heavily on natural gas to raise rates.

"Electricity costs have gone up so much that [energy consumption is] starting to appear on the plate of the higher-ups," such as chief financial officers, said Robert Rosen, president of the IBM Share user group in Bethesda, Md., and a member of eWEEK's Corporate Partner Advisory Board.

"They're going to start coming back to the IT people and saying, 'Hey! You're our biggest power user. You're costing us x per month. What are you going to do to reduce that?' IT managers are going to have to start becoming more aware."



The big question is whether chip makers, which are beginning to tout more energy-efficient processors as a step toward creating lower-power servers, can ride

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At IDF, Intel, based in Santa Clara, Calif., will give details about its new server chip platforms and discuss its more power-efficient processor

architecture, which is set to arrive later this year. Company officials said the platforms will underscore Intel's efforts to offer a better balance between performance and power consumption in its chips.

The focus on power consumption marks a change for Intel, which has always sought to boost computer servers' capabilities, but often by offering faster, more power-hungry chips. Intel now has gone from touting speed to an approach it said could help technology departments hold down electric bills.

Intel officials said the company's latest server platform, combined with less power-hungry chips, will fend off rival AMD from key accounts such as **Google, which, according to Morgan Stanley, is now using AMD chips to save energy.** AMD will also highlight its offerings at IDF.

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