

W HERE ARE THEY NOW?

They were well-known names at the cutting edge of a new industry. They invented products, started companies, earned fortunes and then stepped out of the limelight. CRN takes a look at some past industry luminaries. By LISA PICARILLE

ED ESBER

*Chief Executive, SoloPoint Inc.,
Los Gatos, Calif.*

Best known for his role as chairman and chief executive of Ashton-Tate Corp.--the high-flying database giant of the late 1980s--Ed Esber is now taking great pride in helping behind the scenes in the industry.

He is especially proud of his participation in the Angel Forum, a network of people who profited enough from their business ventures that they could afford to help fund the efforts of other entrepreneurs. It is the burgeoning high-tech alternative to venture capital.

"I have, like many in the computer industry, been fortunate enough to have had early success and a certain amount of personal wealth, so this is the stage where I can help others achieve their entrepreneurial goals," Esber says.

Helping and advising others also means Esber does not have a traditional full-time job. Instead, he offers guidance by sitting on the boards of several publicly held technology companies, including Borealis Technology Corp., Integrated Circuit Systems Technology Inc., Socket Communications Inc., SoloPoint Inc. and Quantum Corp. He also sits on the board of a large Midwest-based bank and a handful of privately held high-tech companies, and he is an investor/partner in a restaurant in Park City, Utah.

"Now I am involved in a much broader spectrum of things than software, he says.

Esber's most well-known role, at the helm of Ashton-Tate, ended when the Torrance, Calif.-based company's board ousted him in 1991 over differences regarding the future direction of the database company. Esber appeared on CRN's Top 25 list in 1985 and 1986.

Esber proposed several potential merger partners for Ashton-Tate. But Esber says that when he first proposed a merger with Borland Corp., "the board thought I was nuts." However, a year later the board "told me to leave and turned a merger into a mercy killing at half the price."

Esber also claims that a year before the Ashton-Tate/Borland deal, he attempted to structure a merger with another software giant--Lotus Development Corp. "It almost happened, twice," he says. According to Esber, high-level negotiations with Lotus, including then Chairman and Chief Executive Jim Manzi, never panned out because the two parties could not reach an agreement on how top management would be structured. "Now, that would have changed the face of the entire computer industry," Esber says. "Hindsight is always perfect."

Dwelling on the past is not something Esber does often, however. After his departure from Ashton-Tate, Esber moved back to the Bay area from Southern California to lead several start-ups that "merged computers with other industries," he says.

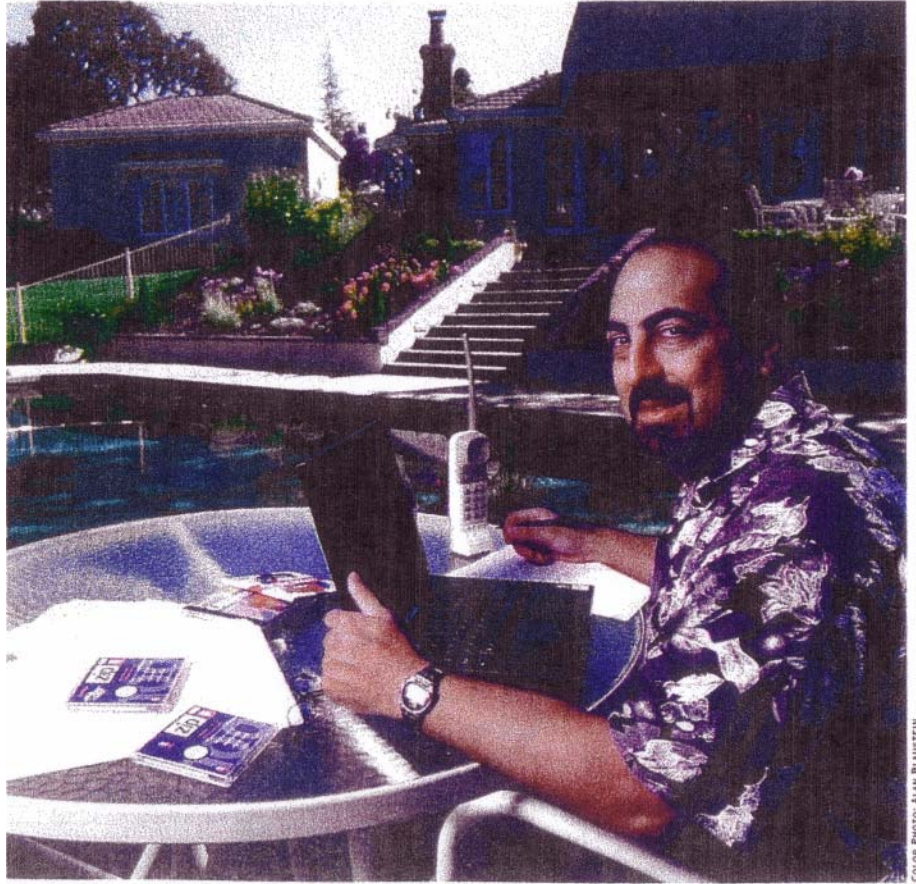
These included Creative Labs Inc., which fused sound and computers, and Creative Insight, which melded toys and computers.

By Lisa Picarille Computer Reseller News 11/16/1998



HARD AT WORK:

Former Ashton-Tate CEO Ed Esber, above with Bill Gates and at right in a more relaxed setting. Esber's industry work is now behind the scenes.



Color Photo: Alan Blumenthal