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Sage who warned of Net's collapse eats his words.

SANTA CLARA, Calif., April 10 (Reuter) - The networking pioneer turned computer industry columnist who predicted the Internet would collapse last year, Thursday kept to his promise by literally eating his words.

Bob Metcalfe, inventor of Ethernet technology and founder of 3Com Corp, had pledged he would eat the words from a December 1995 InfoWorld column he wrote if the dramatic debacle he predicted did not come to pass.

In the column, Metcalfe warned of a "catastrophic collapse" of the Internet in 1996.

He made the original vow at a conference of World Wide Web engineers and enthusiasts in Boston in 1995, and he argued here before the Sixth International World Wide Web Conference Thursday that the Web had logged major outages.

Metcalfe said that outages at Netcom On-Line Communications, America Online and BBN Corp had demonstrated instances where thousands and millions of lost service hours had occurred.

But he also acknowledged the "gigalapse" catastrophe he'd projected had not yet happened.

Metcalfe did plead that he had just turned 51 years old and, although he had checked to determine the ink in his column was non-toxic, ingesting it could make him fatally ill, jeopardizing the happiness of his children.

Metcalfe's arguments in a closing keynote address on Thursday night were apparently not persuasive enough to swing a room packed with Internet partisans and experts with a stake the Web's continued growth.

The crowd erupted in hoops, claps and chants of "Eat, baby, Eat!" when he put the decision to a voice vote.

Then the crowd booed and whistled when Metcalfe tried to get away with eating a piece of giant cake, shaped and finished with icing to look like it was his column, instead of eating the column itself.

"You mean eating just a piece of cake is not enough to satisfy you? I kind of suspected it would turn ugly," he said in mock surprise.

Metcalfe then ripped a copy of the offensive column from a back issue of the industry publication, tore it into pieces and dropped it into a clear liquid in an electric blender he'd hidden on stage.

The columnist then poured the resulting mix into bowl, and tasted the cloudy, pulpy substance with a spoon before slurping down the bowl's contents to the crowd's cheers.

Sage who warned of Net's collapse eats his words.

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