



A 'high dominance' trio has its eyes on the US market

By BILL JOHNSTON

Much space has been devoted in this column in recent weeks to the various factions involved in the computer copyright controversy — and there have been many. But one question is constantly raised by all sides: just who are the small Australian microcomputer software development houses that need copyright protection?

Since the debate began after a Federal Court case early last December, when it was ruled that software does not come under the jurisdiction of the Copyright Act, several developers have come to the fore. And they have been vocal about the lack of protection against illegal copying of their software products.

One which has often been mentioned as a prime example of a local microcomputer software producer is a Melbourne company called HiSoft, which specialises in vertical market systems for doctors, dentists, solicitors and real estate agents.

The company has won praise from many quarters and it was something of a shock for this writer when he confronted the executives behind HiSoft. The oldest is only 31.

Alan Kras, 29, David Payes, 31, and Philip Weinman, 29, are HiSoft. Between them they comprise the technical, commercial and marketing divisions of the company.

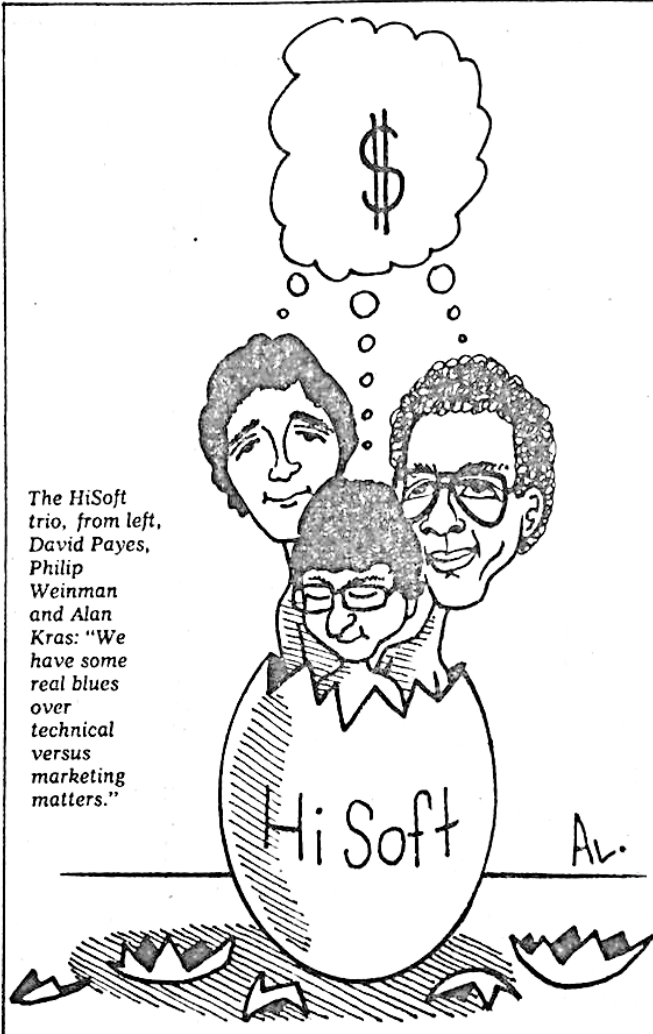
Alan Kras, the technical director, is an electrical engineering graduate from Monash University. Before writing the program which launched HiSoft, he was technical support manager with another Australian company, Hartley Computers.

Philip Weinman, marketing director, is a commerce graduate from Melbourne University. He was market support manager for ACI before forming his own packaging company. It was after buying a computer for that business, and asking Alan Kras to write a program for it, that these two decided to get together and form HiSoft.

David Payes, commercial director, was a tutor in economics, statistics and mathematics at Melbourne University, where he specialised in commercial and tax law. He also lectures on the tax implications of computer software development.

Among the three of them, they have an excellent cross of commercial, marketing and technical expertise on which to base a company like HiSoft.

"We are a pretty lively bunch and don't mind voicing our opinions," says Alan Kras. "We have



The HiSoft trio, from left, David Payes, Philip Weinman and Alan Kras: "We have some real blues over technical versus marketing matters."

some real blues over technical versus marketing matters, but overall we get on very well as a team. We seem to compliment each other's style of management."

These three are very concerned with the social issues of computerisation, sometimes, one presumes, at the expense of sales.

"We supply total solutions (both hardware and software) to the respective markets we address," says Philip Weinman. "And we have the expertise to provide total customer support with both."

HiSoft specialises in packages running on the IBM personal computer and recently won the 1983 IBM dealer of the year award, for which the prize is an all-expenses-paid trip to the Los Angeles Olympic Games.

Unfortunately, the prize is for only one person, so there was some serious discussion on who of the three HiSoft directors would get the trip.

"As can be expected," said David Payes, "it resulted in a few arguments who would go, but I'm glad to say the matter was settled amicably." Alan Weinman will make the trip.

HiSoft is only two years old but, according to industry pundits, it is pointed in the right direction and has already established a solid userbase and reputation on which it should be able to build.

The five main packages marketed by the company are:

- HiMed, a system for the medical profession and medical clinics.
- HiFinance, a fully integrated program for small businesses,

consisting of debtors-invoicing creditors, inventory and general ledger modules.

- HiTrust, a system for legal firms containing a trust accounting system which meets statutory and Law Institute requirements.

- HiEstate, a system which provides management, accounting and reporting for estate agencies.
- HiRags, a management package that is specifically designed for the textile industry.

- As an authorised dealer for the IBM PC, the company can provide total customer service for hardware and software, starting at around \$9000.

"We have a staff of 24, including 14 programmers, and we offer total support, unlike those interested in selling boxes only and relying on a third party to provide software support," says Philip Weinman.

"We find people would rather deal with one company. Then there is nobody to shift the blame to when problems arise. It is an in-house problem and we fix it."

The IBM dealer of the year award was based not only on the number of IBM PCs sold, but on customer satisfaction levels and general performance, criteria which vindicate HiSoft's policy of all-round one-stop service.

In the first year of operation, the small, Australian-owned company had a turnover of \$400,000, of which a substantial amount was derived from custom software contracted by the corporate market.

This year, turnover is expected to be around \$3 million, with most coming from vertical market systems' sales.

Last year the company sold 140 systems and it claims to have a userbase totalling 70 per cent of the Australian microcomputer medical market.

"The current software copyright situation does concern us because of its impact on Australian-developed microcomputer software, but from a business point of view I don't think it will affect us too much," said David Payes.

"Because nearly all of our micro software is for vertical markets in different professions or businesses, it requires support and maintenance.

"Anyone who bought an illegal copy of our software would need that support and maintenance for the whole system. And because we provide both hardware and software support and maintenance for the entire system, it gives us a decided edge."

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