

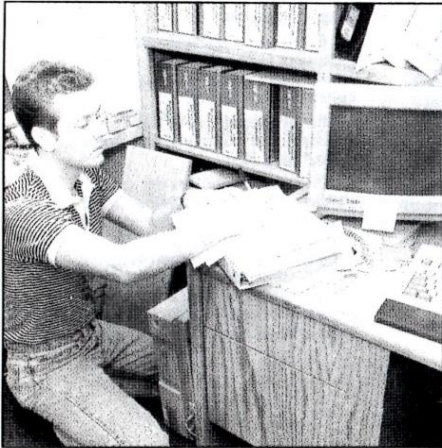
THE SUNDAY DENVER POST

BUSINESS

Sunday, August 21, 1994

SECTION H

THE DENVER POST



The Denver Post / Glen Martin

InfoLink's Jeff Bechtel takes notes during a recent computer audit.

Software sleuths clean up

By Stephen Keating
Denver Post Business Writer

The computer audit was going fine until the dreaded "Israeli Boot Virus" warning appeared onscreen in the Englewood company's technical support room.

A flurry of action by InfoLink Corp. employees conducting the audit soon determined that the "virus" could be cleaned off the computer's hard drive before infecting other valuable software. "Basically, it's like catching a cold rather than the flu," said LeeRoy Pederson, an operations manager with InfoLink, a Greenwood Village company that is equal parts virus detector, computer guru and inventory taker.

InfoLink's eight-person team, hired by businesses descends on its clients on weekends to clean up computer transmitted viruses and identify pirated software that could result in big fines.

"Some people really think it's OK to borrow and copy software," said Joseph Castro, the president and founder of InfoLink, a company finding a niche in the relatively new field

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of computer management consulting. "We've had some companies with a \$20,000 or \$30,000 shortfall in licensing," said Castro. "Conversely, if they're over-licensed, they may want to pull off some of that software and resell it. The companies we work with are going to make a lot of purchasing decisions depending on what we tell them."

Last year alone, losses from business application software piracy totaled more than \$7.4 billion worldwide, according to the Software Publishers Association, the industry trade association.

While the casual hacker may get away with copying a computer game

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Software sleuths identify problems

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from his buddy, software trade organizations have been cracking down on businesses that ignorantly or willfully copy valuable programs without paying the license fees. Many of the cases are initiated by a disgruntled or knowledgeable employee who reports the violation.

Local case

In February, Colorado Free University agreed to pay \$60,000 to settle a claim that it used unlicensed software in some of its classroom computers.

In a case brought by the Business Software Alliance in Washington, D.C., CFU also agreed to purchase original software to replace the illegal copies, likely doubling their cost.

Castro's consulting service — which he started last year after 12 years in the computer field — aims to get companies in compliance before facing big fines.

"Some of those companies are worried, and they have reason to be," said Castro. "They don't always know what they've got in their computer system, or where it came from."

For that reason, InfoLink is hesi-

tant to divulge the names of its clients, who are charged anywhere from \$30 to \$75 per computer station for the consulting service.

"It's like going to a psychiatrist," said Kenton Johnson, InfoLink's sales and account manager. "People don't like to advertise it until there's a lot of water under the bridge."

On a recent Friday night and Saturday morning — after weeks of prep work — InfoLink's team inventoried and bar-coded hardware, and analyzed the software on 150 computer stations at CommNet Cellular Inc.

InfoLink will provide CommNet with an accounting of hardware and software on site, along with computer virus disinfection. They also provide a key report on copyright compliance.

"I was really impressed by their thoroughness," said Homer Hoe, chief information officer for CommNet. His company is the nation's largest provider of cellular phone service to rural areas and one of Inc. magazine's top-performing 100 small public companies.

Rapid growth

Commnet's growth over the past year is part of what convinced Hoe and other company officials to hire InfoLink.

"We are rapidly growing, which stresses our department even more," said Hoe.

"Personal computers are a mixed blessing. They provide a lot of solutions, but they also create problems with management. We needed an exact census of what our PC population was, along with virus protection and a copyright report. We thought we'd kill a lot of birds with one stone," Hoe added.