

Have backup-copy firms lowered the pirate flag?

BY KATHY CHIN

Reporter

Software piracy is a subject that always seems to generate interest, but never does it raise its black flag as high as when a computer exhibition hits town, and last week's Applefest in San Francisco, was no exception.

The traditional atmosphere of the software underground is changing. Pirates — many still using the skull and crossbones to attract attention — are turning to more professional methods to sell their wares. And as the battle stiffens between vendors trying to prevent copying of software and buyers who say they need backup copies, companies are springing up in an effort to aid both sides.

More and more companies are finding profit in selling boards that copy disks, in publishing magazines that assist users in cracking programming codes and in manufacturing other devices that are all perfectly legal — and they find a ready market at consumer shows.

Pirate's Bay, of San Francisco, worked both sides of the fence at Applefest. Down on the show floor, the firm sold its circuit boards and software. Upstairs, in a conference room supplied by the show's management, a little more than a handful of users had paid \$70 each to Pirate's Bay to learn how to copy disks, allegedly for "backup purposes."

Customers were welcome at either of two sessions: a morning beginners' class on basic copying techniques and an afternoon advanced seminar on how to crack codes. Users also obtained a sneak preview of Locksmith 5.0, the latest version of a four-year-old, software-copying program that its developers claim "started the whole controversy."

PBI Software, which operated Pirate's Bay's seminar, flew in two speakers from Chicago-based Omega Microwave, distributor of Locksmith. Ken Rose, its vice-president of marketing, claimed that the Locksmith copying program is intended for users who want to create archival copies of their software.

Rose bristled at the suggestion that Locksmith is intended for piracy, rather than to make backup copies for private use. "We don't advocate piracy, and we'll assist in prosecuting anyone who misuses our program," he said. "We even explain



the copyright law in our documentation."

Rose admitted, though, that the firm really doesn't keep a close watch on the use of its product. "We don't know who buys our programs; we guess that many are the major companies."

Rose also acknowledged the likelihood that some buyers will misuse the program and duplicate software for profit. "There's always a temptation to do anything," Rose said. "It would be like taking a book and copying the pages. There is nothing that can't be copied. But I think the vast majority of users are honest."

Despite Rose's belief, at least one of the few attendees at PBI's seminar was attracted by the pirate flag, rather than by the idea of making backup copies of software. "I came to this conference to learn cracking techniques," declared 15-year-old Kirk Meyers, a high-school sophomore from San Jose, California.

"Our computer club at school, which I

started, has 40 members. We pass disks around and copy them. I already have \$8000 worth of software that I haven't even paid for," Meyers boasted. "I want to learn how to take a copyright program and crack it."

Those whose business is protecting software know that techniques are being passed to people like Meyers, and some are boarding the pirates' ships to find out what's going on.

Ron Sturdevant, an engineer for the Data Encore subsidiary of Verbatim in Sunnyvale, California, said his employer paid for his attendance. His firm devises protection schemes for other companies. "But we have to learn how to break the codes first," Sturdevant pointed out.

Sturdevant, though, did not come away too enlightened, even after watching the demonstration of Locksmith 5.0. "It was nothing terribly surprising. They went through the specifics and walked us

through how to crack a disk. This could have been learned from reading any magazine or any electronic bulletin board," he said.

Beyond copying programs, Pirate's Bay is also looking to profit from the interest in gaining access to protected computer systems. It is distributing a program called War-game, "designed to show how easy it is to do what the kids did [in the film] *WarGames*. It didn't take a lot of brains." The \$19.99 program, used with a modem, can seek carrier tones and generate random access codes, according to Lee Lawrence, founder of Pirate's Bay.

"We didn't sell that many," he claimed. "It's of dying interest."

He admitted that people could use the program for illegal purposes, but contended, "It's just like buying a knife. You can kill someone or use it to cut vegetables. It depends on how you use it. We developed it mainly to satisfy curiosity."

The same bone of contention is raised by developers of software copying tools.

"If people are going to pirate software and sell it, they're not going to use our product," says Norman Napier, president of Pirates' Harbor software house. Napier distributes a program that features a tutorial on cracking techniques. "If someone wants to sell copied software for profit, they will spend \$10,000 to \$15,000 on a machine that copies software."

He maintains that learning to crack a program simply enables a person to become a better programmer, not a pirate.

A few publications are already on the market to instruct users how to break program codes. *The Core*, a quarterly magazine published in Tacoma, Washington, is geared toward Apple users who want to back up their files.

Boot-Legger Magazine, a publication based in Cave Junction, Oregon, "by pirates for pirates," charges subscribers \$25 a year for tips on cracking, pirate-board downloads and pirate interviews.

Some other exhibitors, though, eschew the pirate flag entirely, though copying is still their main plank.

Central Point Software in Portland, Oregon, markets Copy II Plus, which duplicates protected IBM PC programs. The firm claims that the \$39 program "backs up" more software than any other program for the IBM PC. Wildcard Plus, distributed by East Side Software in New York City, is a \$189.95 board that copies programs from a computer's memory and loads them onto disk. A company called dark Star Systems in Williamsburg, Massachusetts, sells the Snapshot Copykit, another card that fits in the slot of an Apple II and copies programs in RAM.

A program hawked at the show took the opposite stand of software copying. "Stop the pirate..." reads the brochure

distributed by Double Gold Software of San Jose, California. "Lock It Up." Jeff Gold, president of the company, said that nothing can be done about the firms selling copying devices. That's why he hopes his \$225 product Lock It Up will discourage the pirates. His program changes the format of the diskette, so the software cannot be copied.

Some experts believe that it will take more than that to discourage the pirate.

"Copying software is indicative of what's happening today," says J. Skipper, senior managing-systems consultant at SRI in Menlo Park, California. "Teachers with limited budgets are copying programs

for their schoolchildren. Youngsters grow up believing that it's okay. Something has to be done to change the trend, but it's not going to change overnight.

"I would put people who are teaching classes on how to copy software in the same category as people who teach others how to break into the slot machines at Las Vegas. It's ethically wrong and morally wrong."

Unfortunately, he doesn't have any specific solutions. As long as these product distributors stress that the devices have been devised for backup purposes, then they will continue to be legal, and there will be users and abusers of the products. ●

Review: Blue

BY JOHN V. LOMBARDI
Contributor

Blue, a word-processing package for the IBM Personal Computer from Symmetric Software, has a good editor with a wide range of unusual features and can competently create a printing format for your text. It offers the facility of some limited multiple-window operation, but if you exceed its limits you could find yourself losing a lot of the work those windows helped create.

As its name indicates, Blue emphasizes color. With this editor and formatter, you can create the color screen in any aesthetically pleasing way. Not all combinations of foreground and background are equally legible, however, and the quality of the display is dependent on the quality of the monitor.

This program excels primarily in its ability to build multiple windows of text and then manipulate them quickly and in numerous ways.

Blue can set up and handle up to eight different windows at the same time; each window can look into a different document or a separate portion of the same text in another window. You set the size and shape of each window, and they can overlap if that is how you want them to work. You can enter or edit in one window, switch to another window and edit a different file or the same file in a different place, return to the original window and find yourself exactly where you left off.

You can move text — about as much as one screen can display — from the file in one window to the file in another window. You can then return to the first file, allowing it to take up the whole screen without disturbing the other windows.

All this is fancy stuff, and in many circumstances also very useful. In addi-

InfoWorld Report Card

Blue



	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Documentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ease of Use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Error Handling	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Summary: Blue is a word processor of the editor-formatter variety for the IBM Personal Computer. It is an excellent editor, with a wide range of unusual features and a good formatter. It works especially well with small- to medium-size documents or for projects requiring multiple-file manipulation or multiple windowing, but has a dangerous tendency to lose your work if you exceed the text size limit.

Product Details: List price, \$150, Available for IBM Personal Computer with PC-DOS, 64K RAM, one disk drive and a printer. Published by Symmetric Software, 3812 East La Palma Avenue, Anaheim, CA 92807; (714) 630-8733.