

## **HOW PEOPLE USED TO PIRATE RETRO SOFTWARE**

You will be forgiven for thinking that I am teaching you how to make illegal pirate copies of your software after reading the title above. Well, rest assured I won't be walking the plank as this article is for information purposes only. As a programmer, I understand how software piracy can hurt companies so I do not recommend it. There is plenty of good software that can be downloaded for free, especially if you don't need all the fancy features of expensive software. This article explains how people used to pirate software from retro computers such as the Spectrum and Atari ST.

### **SPECTRUM AND COMMODORE 64**

Spectrum and C64 software came on cassette tapes which were inserted into data recorders (or tape recorders) and could be loaded into memory by typing a command such as a load". These computers relied on a series of sound signals which were never pleasant to listen to as they were horrible screeching sounds. Quite often you would have to wait up to ten minutes (for a Spectrum 128k game especially) to load when it could crash, meaning you had to re-adjust the volume and start again. In case of a low recording, the game cassette would usually have a separate copy on the other side.

Most people could copy these games by using a hi-fi system with twin cassette decks. By inserting the original game cassette in the first deck and pressing "play", then inserting a blank cassette in the second deck and pressing "play and record" you could get a perfect copy. You could buy cassette tapes for saving data such as a C15 which allowed you to record up to fifteen minutes. Some people would use a C90 which would allow them to store many games on it.

If you didn't have access to twin cassette decks then you could use coping software. On the Spectrum, you could use something like "007Spy" which would allow you to load the entire game into memory and then back up onto a blank cassette. Some games had different ways of loading such as the pulsing (or clicking) loaders, a method used by many Ocean Software games. This led to the release of other software capable of tackling these loaders. The average Spectrum game would consist of a short piece of code (the header), a loading screen, and the main code. This is the standard loader and is easy to copy.

When the Spectrum 128k +3 was released, it came with a built-in floppy disk drive. As there were only so many games released on +3 disks,

methods were used to transfer them from tape to disk. The standard loader was easy, all you had to do was type merge" to get into the header code and save that to a +3 disk (save "a:program-name"). Next you would load the loading screen higher into memory (load "screen-name" code 30000) and save that to a +3 disk. Finally, you would do the same thing with the main code and add the load commands to the main header code.

For the more complicated loaders, a suite of programs called "007 Trans-Master" was used to convert the files into the standard format so they could be saved to +3 disks.

## **ATARI ST AND AMIGA**

The great thing about the Atari ST and Amiga computers was that you could lay your hands on hundreds of pieces of free software, no need to pirate commercial software. There were many PDLs (Public Domain Libraries) who would distribute free software for the price of a disk and postage, and their distribution work. The actual software is free and covers anything from demos to games and pictures to music files. There was also the Shareware method where you pay a small subscription fee to receive extras for full versions of the software and Licenseware where the PDL would offer a small commission to the original contributor.

Atari ST software was normally copied using dedicated disk copiers such as "Fast Copy" while the Amiga used the popular "X-Copy". However, some disks were protected and therefore other more powerful copying software had to be used.

## **PROTECTION METHODS**

Software publishers have used many forms of production to deter copying such as the more complicated loaders on the Spectrum. Other methods would require the user to enter a word or letter from the manual before they could get into the game, or choosing a series of colours or symbols from their book to match the ones on screen. Some games allow you to think you have copied them until you have played them for so long and notice some nasty surprise. The game "Shadow of the Beast" turns the screen upside down on certain levels for example.

This led to the rise of Cracking Groups such as the famous "Pompey Pirates" on the Atari ST who would hack into the game and remove the copy protection. They would then release several games (hacked and

packed) onto a single floppy disk which were passed around to various users.

## **CONCLUSION**

The battle between software publishers and pirates is an ongoing one and people will always want free software if they can get it. Old retro software is freely available for download on various websites for people who want to re-live the old days so there is little need to copy them from originals. I am not going to tell you how to copy the latest PC software. I only wrote this article to explain how people used to back up their software for the older systems. I stated that there is a lot of free and in-expensive software available for the PC and I urge you to use that rather than resorting to piracy.