

IT Digest

Volume 3

Summary for April 2006

The Australian Tuesday 4 April 2006

Without incentives it's game over, developers say

"The Australian dollar has eroded the reason publishers come here" Bill McIntosh said. "There's no business reason for us to be here, what with payroll tax and fringe benefits tax". Mr McIntosh, who runs Torus Games, one of Australia's largest games development studios, was speaking for an industry fed up with heavy regulation and little support. Tired of seeing competitors in the US, Korea and Canada slurping up millions of dollars in tax breaks, the industry has put the Government on notice that it has a year to do something or face the demise of a promising industry. Many Australian developers are contacting to big US games publishers, ending up with uncertain cash flow. No intellectual property and narrowing margins. Games for present-generation consoles cost up to \$10 million to produce, and tie up 70 staff for two years, while titles for next generation games cost up to \$30 million and could take about 120 staff. Australia's games development sector is large compared with competitors such as Canada and South Korea. The largest developer, Brisbane company Krome Studios employs 195 staff and Auran has 75.

Training and writing lead strong growth in tech jobs

The technology employment market in March registered its best growth for some time. Job vacancies rose 10.65 per cent on February's figures. Queensland seems to be the boon state for IT jobs. Vacancies doubled in the past 12 months. Although vacancies in all IT job categories improved, the instruction, training and writing area did particularly well.

The Australian Wednesday 5 April 2006

Unis declare war on red tape

UNIVERSITIES desperate to shore up their income in the face of falling student demand are calling on Education, Science and Training Minister Julie Bishop for more freedom to move government-funded places to where the need is greatest.

They say Ms Bishop's first policy move in higher education last month, to relax "nonsensical" rules restricting the enrolment of domestic fee-paying students, did not go far enough.

They want the new minister to further unravel the legacy of predecessor Brendan Nelson by freeing them to switch unfilled government-funded university places from subject disciplines, where demand is low, into different disciplines where there is unmet student demand.

This year at least three universities - Edith Cowan, James Cook and Central Queensland - are preparing to hand back millions of dollars in government funding for student places they have been unable to fill in particular disciplines such as information technology and the humanities. Yet they complain they have had to turn

away students in more popular areas such as, in JCU's case, health.

"I think it is a logical follow-up ... to allow the universities more freedom in that regard," Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee president Gerard Sutton said. He said the universities planned to approach the minister on the issue.

"If we have demand in, say, health for more places, we ought to be able to move from other disciplines such as education or wherever," AVCC chief executive officer John Mullarvey said.

The problem was particularly acute now as students wanted more flexibility in their study patterns to free them for more work in the booming economy.

"The way it is structured at the moment, we don't have the flexibility to respond to these cyclical changes," Professor Sutton said.

Minister's ARC grip stays tight

THE Education Minister will control appointments to a new advisory committee within the Australian Research Council under legislation introduced in parliament last week.

The ministerial powers raise the possibility of another intervention in the peak research funding agency's independent peer review process through the establishment of committees and their composition.

Although Education Minister Julie Bishop has said she will not adopt the hands-on approach of her predecessor Brendan Nelson in relation to ARC grants, the Australian Research Council Amendment Bill 2006 does not diminish the capacity for this to occur.

The bill abolishes the ARC board and transfers most of its powers to chief executive Peter Hoj, under moves announced last year. And it retains the same system whereby the minister must sign off on grants recommended to it by the ARC.

The Australian Friday 7 April 2006

Apple boots up Mac option, but warns of virus threats

Apple's biggest obstacle to selling more computers in a market dominated by PCs may have been overcome with a new piece of software that can run Microsoft's Windows and the Mac Operating System on the same machine.

Boot Camp, as the experimental "Beta" version of the software is called, can be downloaded by anyone with a new Apple computer that has an Intel processor. Older Macs have IBM processors, which will not work with the new software. Once installed, Boot Camp enables Mac users, in theory, to choose between running Windows XP or MAC OSX when they switch on their computer.

The Australian Tuesday 11 April 2006

Microsoft wins biggest Aussie deal in health

NSW Health will standardize its information technology systems on Microsoft products under a \$36 million, three-year deal to upgrade core infrastructure and provide a platform for the state's e-health record system. With an option to extend the agreement to six years, Microsoft will potentially earn \$72 million, making it the software giant's largest-ever contract in Australia.

No more alphabet soup with HP tablet

Hewlett-Packard has built an electronic data-entry tablet for India and other nations that use non-Western alphabets. The tablet was among HP Labs India inventions intended to help grow opportunities in rapidly expanding economies.

Apple's Boot Camp seeks fresh recruits

Apple's Boot Camp software that lets Microsoft's Windows run on its new computers has sparked interest from Mac and Windows users, but some say it may end up gathering dust. The Boot Camp beta software released last week is designed to reassure users thinking of switching to Mac that they'd be able to run Windows if required. Boot Camp is expected to be included in the next generation of Apple's Unix-based OS X operating system. Boot Camp, made possible by Apple's switch to Intel processors, differs from the various emulators that allow Windows to run on a Mac with OS X in that it creates a separate virtual disk for Windows to run "natively".

The Australian Wednesday 12 April 2006

Sydney retrenches innovator

Tim Hurst, the entrepreneurial scientist chosen to lead Australia's oldest university in the new struggle for research supremacy, has been retrenched. Prof Hurst, an authority on how to commercialize science, had been hired in 2003 as the University of Sydney's first deputy vice-chancellor for research and innovation. Last Friday he agreed to be retrenched under a confidential deal with the university, which last October ordered a private investigation of undisclosed, serious allegations against him.

The Australian Tuesday 18 April 2006

Software a top job

Software engineers have the best jobs, says a US survey. Second placed were college professors and administrators and third were financial advisers. Rounding out the top 10 best jobs were human resources manager, physicians assistant, market research analyst, computer/information technology analyst, real estate appraiser, pharmacist and psychologist.

How to stop a stolen laptop spilling its guts

When a laptop computer is stolen, more can be lost than a piece of hardware. According to the FBI, about 97 per cent of stolen computers are never recovered. People put too much stuff in laptops they shouldn't be carrying around. To prevent a laptop from being stolen, the first rule is to keep an eye on it at all times. Another is to keep it out of sight. Putting a laptop in the boot of a car is better than leaving it on the passenger seat and using the hotel room safe is a wise move. To protect against someone seeing sensitive files, encryption software with PGP technology, of which there are free versions. It's even better and more convenient to store sensitive data on an encrypted universal serial bus drive.

Putting digital pen to paper in the battlefield

Bridging the gap between the new digital world and the old world of paper has long been a challenge for technology researchers. Innovations from pen-based computing and tablet computers to voice and handwriting recognition software have come along, but none has replaced the simplicity of pen and paper. Now a Seattle startup is pushing the technology forward with government funding and an application that it plans to put to military use later this year. The technology works with a hi-tech pen equipped with a camera, infra-red light, computer chip and wireless connectivity. The gadget weighs less than 56g and also works as a real pen with ink. Every marking on the page is captured digitally and can be replicated as written on a computer screen. It's done using paper printed with a background pattern. The pattern is almost invisible to the naked eye, but it is, in fact made up of tiny dots in a special array. The pen recognizes the positions of the dots at any place within the pattern, so the location of each handwritten stroke can be pinpointed, traced and replicated.

Google web calendar to “play nice”

Google has introduced a free web calendar service for consumers, opening a new front in its battle with rivals such as Yahoo. Google Calendar is designed to be as simple to use as desktop calendars such as Microsoft Outlook, allowing users to drag and drop events from one calendar to another. The service uses JavaScript and XML and RSS.

The Australian Tuesday 25 April 2006

Microsoft vies for scholars

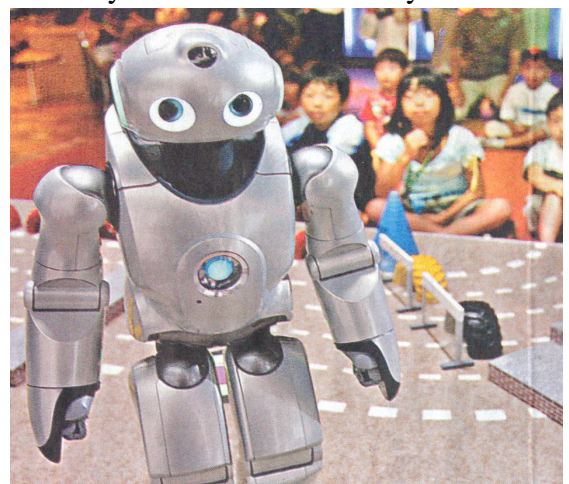
Microsoft has introduced a search engine that scours scholarly journals to attract university researchers and to match a Google service. The initial test site for Windows Live Academic Search includes eight million articles. To eventually include articles from more than 10 publishers, it is designed to appeal to academics and students, who conduct six times as many internet searches as typical users. Google, the most-used internet search engine, introduced a search engine for academic journals in November 2004. Microsoft's site will initially include articles on computer science, electrical engineering and physics.

Honeypot traps worms

Researchers at the Queensland University of Technology say decoy computer systems designed to attract hackers could be the best form of attack on high-profile computer worms and Trojan horses that can cause billions of dollars worth of damage. Known as honeypots, the decoy systems are designed to give security specialists a chance to examine the behaviour of Trojans and worms before they reach critical enterprise and government systems. The research team, from the university's information security institute, is developing an automated, real-time system to quickly analyze and generate signatures to stop worms and other malicious internet traffic in their tracks.

Sparks fly as kids connect with metallic interloper

Playtime over, a toddler says nighty-night and spreads a blanket over his silver coloured friend. It



is a scene at a US childcare centre, where robots are immersed among children to find out what it takes for machines and humans to develop long-term relationships. The experiment, in which Sony is a partner, is revealing that children, with their open minds, welcome and even develop emotions towards, the robots, leading to new commercial possibilities as machines become smarter and friendlier.

The Australian Wednesday 26 April 2006

Campus terror crackdown

Universities are shaping up as the next battle front in the fight against terrorism as security forces consider tougher measures to scrutinise campus activity. Under Howard government plans, academic conferences, research papers, seminars and design drawings could be included in expanded export controls. A government document sent to senior university officials last week said academics would also be asked to report any attempts to procure items or services that could be used for weapons or mass destruction and to report “suspicious advances” by students.

Monash under fire for trial

Under performing Monash University academics are being pressured to leave as a precursor to the research quality framework, the education union claims. As universities wait for a definitive model of the RQF to be unveiled in Canberra, Monash has started its own research assessment trial.

Group to tackle science enrolments

A working group will be formed to deal with falling enrolments in science, engineering and technology and a lack of awareness of career options, identified in a recent study. Macquarie University marketing director Megan Etheridge, who commissioned the study, said a forum last week attracted 80 people from 27 universities, including department heads, recruitment staff, deans of science, a university director of studies, administrators, senior management and lecturers.

A chance to compete globally

The urge to be competitive rather than simply earn export income- has emerged as the leading rationale for internationalization among universities. Competitiveness was cited as most important by 28 per cent of the 526 higher education institutions in 95 countries taking part in a survey by the International Association of Universities. Going international was rated a high priority by 73 per cent of universities, 49 per cent of university associations and 46 per cent of governments. Other key rationales for going global were strategic alliances (20 per cent), cultural awareness (9 per cent) and education experts (7 per cent).