

SOFT SELL

Imagine Software is one of the new generation of software houses riding high on the wave of enthusiasm generated by the booming sales of home microcomputers. The company is relatively new, having been established in late 1982, but now employs more than a hundred people — over 40 of whom actually write programming code.

As with all successful companies, Imagine has attained prominence in its particular field because of a blending of talents. The founders, David Lawson and Mark Butler, both Liverpoolians, represent the two essential elements in any business endeavour — technical expertise and business acumen, respectively.

Imagine's speciality is in writing software for the range of Commodore machines. At one point four separate games programs — Bewitched, Catcha Snatcha, Wacky Waiters and the long-running Arcadia — written by Imagine for Commodore were in the Top Ten best-selling programs. Imagine's efforts with Commodore computers led to the unusual distinction of an invitation in 1983 to tour their Norristown, Pennsylvania factory and offices in order to preview the 264 and V364 machines. These machines are aimed at games enthusiasts, and so far Commodore has resisted the temptation to push its products up the price scale to attract the small business user. As a result of the tour, Commodore commissioned two games from Imagine, which will sell under their

own imprint — a feather in the cap for such a young company.

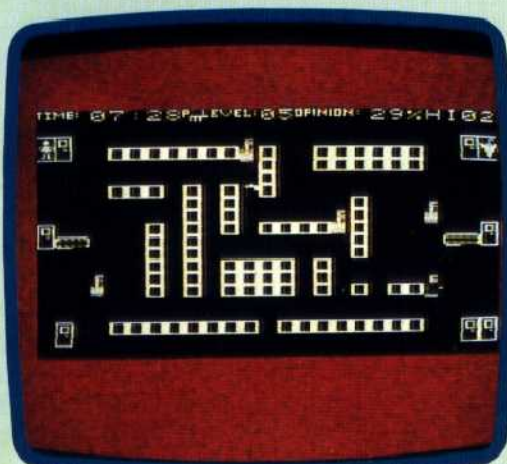
In Britain, however, it is the Sinclair Spectrum that enjoys the widest software support. But Imagine has not always had the best of relations with Sir Clive Sinclair. When Mark Butler and Dave Lawson left Bug-Byte Software, where they spent their formative years, they paid a visit to Sinclair but left without coming to any working agreement. Imagine's policy is that its existing games can be modified for a new machine without anything much more complex than changing the memory locations of a few chunks of program code. This policy should certainly be tested by Sinclair's QL.

The QL is based on the Motorola 68000 central processor, and at present most programmers with a working knowledge of this chip are already employed by professional software firms or are in the computing departments of universities. Psion, the software house responsible for the development of the four programs that accompany the QL, had the benefit of a year's advance notice of the specifications of the computer, and was able to model its workings on a Vax minicomputer.

In order to find programmers to work with the 68000 processor, Imagine started advertising to fill a large number of posts, but on the whole results were disappointing. Though the response was enormous, few had more than a few months' experience. Many had not even succeeded in completing the coding of a single game. Not the

Catcha Snatcha

Written for the Commodore Vic-20 this particular maze/chase game sets a store detective to catching thieves, finding lost property and restoring wandering children to a parent.



Bewitched

Another maze game, but different in that parts of the maze are accessible only after the doors into them have been successfully unlocked. To complicate matters further, not all the doors actually open. The placing of the doors is varied randomly, and there are ghosts to be avoided.



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