

Computer Games for Barristers

The faculty-based structure of legal education in Australia has tended to produce a division between persons interested in humanities and persons interested in sciences with a very strong bias towards the former class among lawyers. It may well be that new courses combining science and law will reverse this trend. This is probably one of the main reasons for the reluctance of many barristers to computerise.

It is necessary today for barristers to realise that they can no longer expect to practise effectively without a computer on their desks. It is a source of constant amazement to me that not all barristers work at computer screens. The purpose of this article, however, is not to preach but to suggest one way in which a person who is otherwise computer illiterate can at least attain the right frame of mind by learning to love his or her computer. That method is computer games.

Computer games can be played either on one's desktop computer or, while one is waiting outside a court for one's case to come on, on a laptop. They can be played in very short periods of time and most games can be "saved". This means that one can spend two minutes on a game and then do something else (even something else on the computer) while preserving that game at the stage one had reached.

Computer games fall into a number of categories.

The first, and most familiar, are the "arcade games". These are games like "space invaders" of a type which one sees in every amusement arcade. They are useful for training the reflexes and they have the advantage that they do not require a high level of intellectual capacity. The disadvantage is that most of them make a noise (although this can be turned off on some computers) with the result that one's secretary or, worse still, one's colleagues or solicitors, may realise that one is playing games.

The second type, particularly recommended for common lawyers and others who need to cross-examine persons with different thought processes to themselves, are adventure games. A typical adventure game involves a simple picture on the screen showing that one is in prison, in the desert, in the jungle, in a room of a haunted house, or some other such situation with certain objects, some immovable and some movable. One may normally give the computer one of three types of command. These are:

- (a) directional (U, D, N, S, E, W), in which case one moves to an adjoining room or area;
- (b) possessory, in which case one takes or drops a movable object which, if taken, comes with one when one moves; or
- (c) active (doing something to or with some movable or immovable object on the screen).

Commands of the first type usually involve one of the six letters I have indicated, commands of the second type involve

the simple verb "get" and "take" or "drop" plus the single word for the movable object and commands of the third type involve a verb and a noun (e.g. open window, drink water, kick John).

The way the game works is that there is a critical path of actions and moves which are required to achieve the desired objective. That objective may be to escape from prison, to find buried treasure, to solve a murder, to capture a ghost or any of hundreds of other possibilities. There are even some pornographic games the aims of which can be imagined.

The skill which is required is to ascertain the command which the programmer has required as the one which will result in your achieving something. Sometimes this involves a little bit of imagination, for example in one game ("Escape from Rungistan") in order to escape from a prison one needs to "call guard" and then "order meal". The meal includes a piece of cheese which one must use to "feed mouse". The mouse then trots up tamely so that one can "take mouse". At a much later stage in the game, after one has escaped from the prison, one needs the mouse to distract a cat which is guarding a door. Another item on the tray is some candy. One needs to climb up to the bars (having obtained strength to "move bed" by proceeding to "eat steak") and then one must "offer candy" to a small

boy who comes to the bars. He hands over a spade in exchange and there are no prizes for guessing what one does with the spade. The whole process is one of pitting one's wits against the programmer.

A third type of game is an adaptation of a familiar card game or board game. There are large numbers of programs available which will play bridge, poker, blackjack, chess, draughts, monopoly, noughts and crosses, solitaire, chinese checkers and literally hundreds of other less familiar games. The vast majority of these can be played by one person. The speed of modern computers is such that with most of them (except the more advanced chess games) the computer's moves are virtually instantaneous. This means that one does not have the frustration that one often has in real life playing a game against a slow opponent. In addition, with many of the games, one can adjust the computer to play at any of a range of degrees of skill. Like most barristers, I like to win and I therefore tend to set the computer to a level below the standard at which I play.

In addition, most modern computer games are designed so that employees in large corporations can play them without their bosses knowing. They have a "boss" key which enables one, by depressing a single key, to shift instantaneously from the game to a screen filled with impressive looking work materials. By the time the boss has got within eyesight of the machine, the employee appears to be hard at work. One word of warning - make sure you use the boss key on every possible occasion - you don't want your secretary or your clerk finding out what you have on your computer and playing computer games while you are in court. □

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