

# TECHNOLOGY

# ARISTOCRAT

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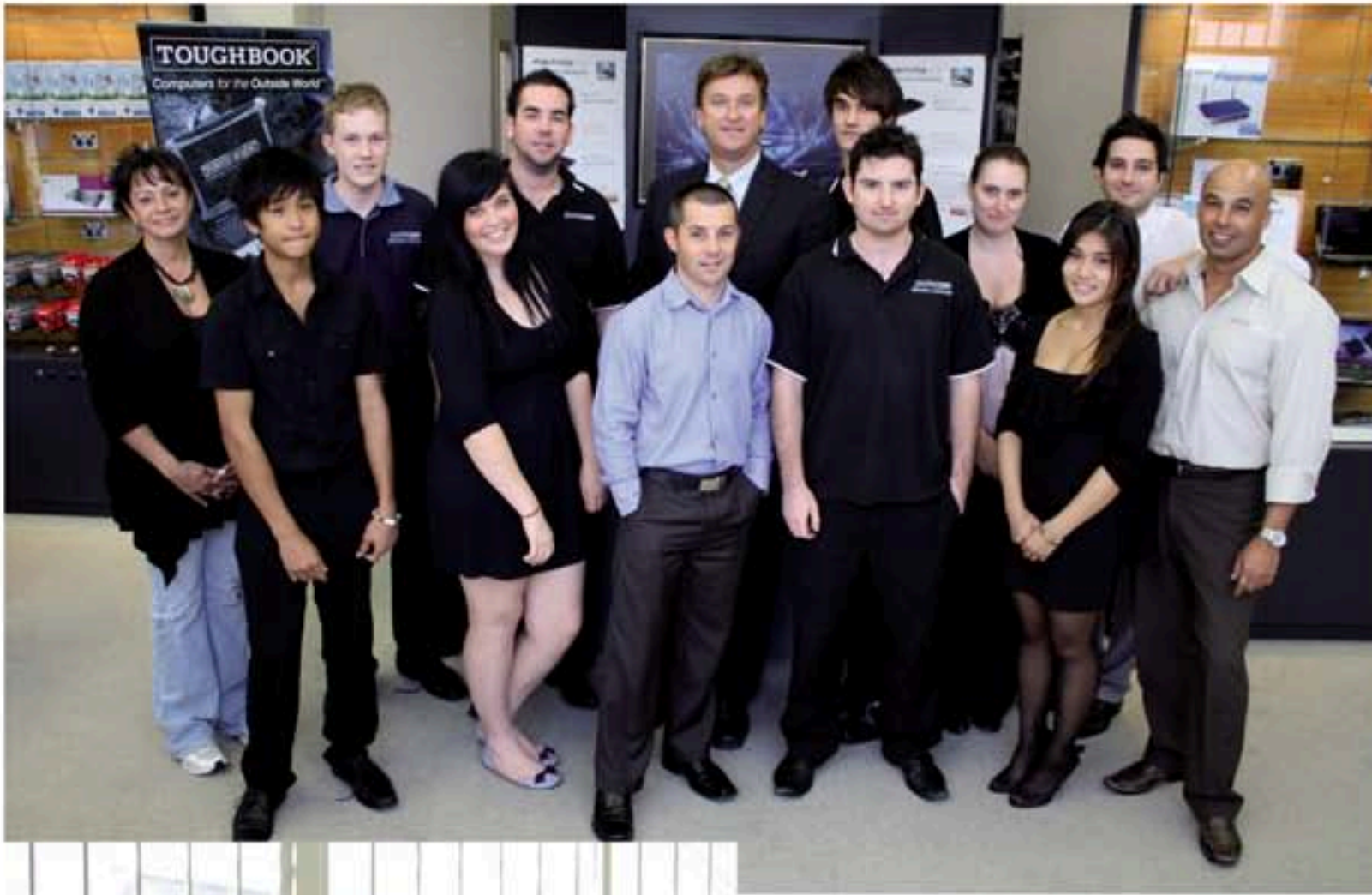
PERTH WOMAN RECENTLY MET WITH PORTACOM'S TALENTED COMPUTING ICON, NEIL HANCOCK. WITH MANY ACHIEVEMENTS UNDER HIS BELT, INCLUDING DEVELOPING SOFTWARE FOR SHARP AT JUST NINETEEN, AND INVENTING THE FIRST CONCEPT OF A TOUCH PAD MOUSE, NEIL CONTINUES TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN SERVICE TO PERTH BUSINESS...



**I**f I was to describe to you a man who is a budding musician, plays squash, is part of Rotary Club, bike rides, and has plenty of time for his many friends, I would presume that a technical expert and an important contributor to the portable computer industry is not the first image that would spring to mind. Neil Hancock, the driving force behind 'Portacom', defies any stereotype association with technical acumen.

Neil was an engineering student at Curtin University in 1982. He recalls everyone buying expensive Hewlett Packard programmable calculators. "I wanted something different," said Neil. At the time Sharp was making pocket computers that were much more powerful than the HP calculators. "I wanted to buy software that would enable the Sharp pocket computers to have the same engineering maths," said Neil. So Neil commenced the creation of an advanced maths pack for the Sharp pocket computers. During this time Neil had been talking to Sharp. "They thought I was forty years of age but I was just this kid," laughed Neil. Sharp propositioned Neil and said if he was to make the software and package then they would look at it. So at the young age of nineteen, Neil set to work in his family garage. Neil eventually entered a competition with the software that he had made and it won him a prize, a portable computer. This is how the name 'Portacom' was born, simply meaning 'portable computers'.





Portacom's friendly staff are always ready to assist.



B9 from 'Lost in Space' is alive and well as guardian of Portacom.

Not only did Neil create software for Sharp and establish Portacom at nineteen, he also invented the concept and prototype of the touch pad mouse that we find in the front of practically every notebook today. He took the prototype to America and they were enthralled by the idea! Neil managed to find a way to get to the big conventions like the COMDEX computer show in Las Vegas and finally his idea was being displayed. Unfortunately the idea was taken by larger companies that Neil was unable to compete with. Neil still stands rightfully proud of his achievement, "I feel very proud of the fact that back in 91 I thought of the idea to implement the touch pad into the notebook and introduced it to the world".

Neil established Portacom in 1983 when his very supportive family helped him settle into a little office on Hay Street in West Perth where the business would be based. Portacom originated from a focus on software and hardware development and then expanded into supplying and supporting portable computers. "I always wanted to contribute to the service side of things. That was very important to me!" At such a young age Neil differentiated himself from his competitors with his dedication to service. "I was new to the industry and I just assumed that service and support was what you must do," said Neil. Now in a much more spacious office on Hay Street, West Perth, Portacom still prides itself on its original commitment to impeccable service.

Neil's straight forward nature and hard working ethics are clearly evident within the Portacom showroom and offices, his staff reflecting his philosophy. "I always treat people respectfully and there is no need to be ruthless or discourteous to be successful in this environment." This integrity and focus on customer satisfaction sets Portacom apart from other IT companies. Neil says "we are here to ask what your needs are and to honestly recommend each customer a notebook that is best suited to them. We want to educate people, not mislead them, and back it up with impeccable service and support."

I was surprised when Neil let me in on a little industry secret, that there is a 25-30% failure rate in notebooks in the first three years, not because they are badly designed but because they are portable devices that are continually moved and





Professional technical service can be relied upon at Portacom.

bumped around. That is why Portacom offers 24 hour support to assist with any troubles their customers are having with their notebook and to accurately diagnose the problems. Portacom services hundreds of notebooks a month and after twenty eight years in the business Portacom has secured many loyal, regular customers. "We will always do the right thing by them," says Neil.

Probably the real secret to Neil's success is his genuine interest and passion for computers. "I didn't start out intending to supply or service computers, I enjoy the technology behind them. And portable computers are a lot of fun." Neil explained to me that a portable computer combines chemistry, physics, maths, science and engineering, all areas that fascinate him. It was obvious from the brief time I spent with Neil that he was not narrow minded. He is intrigued by everything and no doubt this has contributed to Portacom's success today. "When I was young I believed that you should only deal with products that you totally understand. I love fault finding and problem solving." Neil went back to university once Portacom was on its feet and gained a Masters in Leadership and Management. "I see myself as a people person foremost and I continuously strive to be the best technical person I can be."

Neil has a vast array of interests ranging from science and technology to politics, humanities and arts. He has a love for music, appreciating most genres and plays three instruments. Neil says that having an interest in such a broad spectrum of areas can be conflicting at times but he feels it is necessary for a balanced view and the success of his business and personal life.

Portacom and Neil have certainly come a long way from his family garage back in 1982. He accredits his success to his supportive family and many great people that he has worked with over the last twenty eight years. Certainly Portacom's contribution to the portable computer industry and servicing must be of great comfort to all of us who value our precious notebooks and can't live without them. ■

I didn't start out intending to supply or service computers, I just enjoy the technology behind them.



TOP TO BOTTOM: Neil's early achievements with Sharp. The birth of the Touch Pad.

[www.portacom.com](http://www.portacom.com)



# Computer trouble? is your *notebook* being naughty?

are you

# LOST in CYBERSPACE?

WORDS Bronwyn Bate PHOTOGRAPHY Bronwyn Bate

ARE YOU 'LOST IN CYBERSPACE'? ALL OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL MUMBO JUMBO THAT GETS THROWN AROUND TODAY CAN CAUSE YOU A SERIOUS HEAD SPIN! PERTH WOMAN INVITED B9, THE ROBOT FROM 'LOST IN SPACE' ABOARD THIS ISSUE TO MAKE US AWARE OF SOME OF THE 'DANGER DANGERS' ABOUT OUR MUCH RELIED-ON NOTEBOOK COMPUTERS.

If you think back to the sixties or have a great love of old TV shows, then you may remember *Lost in Space*. This was a science fiction program series about the United States trying to beat other countries in the race to colonise space. The program centred on the Robinson family who were selected from amongst two million volunteers to take part in the mission. Along for the ride was the lovable B9 who was the ship's environmental control robot. B9 tested the air and soil, discharged strong electrostatic charges with his claws and detected threats with his scanners. He was a robot of few words, however his frequent utterances like 'Danger! Danger!' were always taken seriously. After featuring in the *Lost in Space* series, the robot B9 went on to make a several guest appearances in other films before retiring. But what is not commonly known is that a small

number of B9 clones made their way into society including the one which can now live at Portacom, an innovative computing business, for which B9 is the perfect mascot. Portacom is located at 1181 Hay Street in West Perth.



## WARNING WARNING!

You are entering a computer store and about to be bombarded with loads of words that sound like a foreign language, RAM Microprocessor, interface, chipset...ARGH! What does all of this mean? Never fear, you will find all the important words and their meanings in the 'Lost in Cyberspace dictionary'

## DANGER DANGER!

You've spilt champagne on your key board! DO NOT attack the keyboard with a hair dryer! Switch it off immediately! If you need to, tilt the notebook to the side where you put in CDs and DVDs and let the liquid drain and dry naturally. If it is a chronic spill then take your Notebook to a repair specialist.

## WARNING WARNING!

Did you know your Notebook has a fan? If you don't get your Notebook serviced every year then dust and lint builds up, just like it does in your clothes dryer, and will cause your Notebook to overheat, shortening its life and slowing it down.

## DATA DATA!

Notebook/Laptop. What's the difference? None!





## DANGER DANGER!

Don't let the technical lingo confuse you! There is a huge range of notebooks on offer and you may be tempted to buy the one that jumps out at you. However chances are you won't need a lot of the unnecessary add-ons. Best to be informed and prepared. Follow our guide and you are sure to get exactly what you need.

## WARNING WARNING!

The notebook you are about to throw out may NOT be broken! It could just be a dead battery! Too many people make the mistake of throwing out their notebook not realising that a notebook battery only has a life span of about 2 years. So replace your battery every two years rather than terminating your otherwise healthy notebook.



## LOST IN CYBERSPACE DICTIONARY

**bug** - a programming error that causes a program to behave in an unexpected way

**byte** - a piece of computer information made up of eight bits

**CD, DVD, BLU-RAY** - are different capacity external disks.

**CPU** - the Central Processing Unit. The processing chip that is the 'brains' of a computer

**database** - an electronic list of information that can be sorted and/or searched

**data** - (the plural of datum) information processed by a computer

**disk drive** - the machinery that writes the data from a disk and/or writes data to a disk.

**DPI** - acronym for Dots Per Inch - a gauge of visual clarity on the printed page or on the computer screen.

**Ethernet** - a protocol for fast communication and file transfer across a network.

**gig** - a gigabyte = 1024 megabytes.

**hard drive** - a large capacity storage device made of multiple disks housed in a rigid case.

**kilobyte** - 1024 bytes

**megabyte** - 1024 kilobytes.

**memory** - the temporary holding area where data is stored while it is being used or changed; the amount of RAM a computer has installed.

**RAM** - acronym for Random-Access Memory.

**SOFTWARE** - files on disk that contain instructions for a computer.