

IT: College found running unauthorised copies of software

It's necessary to be careful in describing the "infringing" software that inspectors from a Malaysian ministry found on computers. The simple fact of finding the data may not be quite as clear cut as the representatives of software companies are making out.

There's a problem in the developing world: large, dominant software companies have created the illusion that only their products will do. As a result, students are, frequently, taught only on those products.

Several large corporations follow the Lutheran line: give me the child and I will give you the man - they donate software to government run educational establishments from junior schools to universities. This is not seen as corruption; indeed, it is often seen as social responsibility. But what it actually does is embed in young minds the idea that a particular piece of software is the only way to go.

This is reinforced with student discounts, and discounts for educational establishments that don't get the software they need free.

But even so, the cost of such software, in the developing world, is high. And so both illicit copies and excess installation are commonplace.

In Malaysia, there is a recognition of this position: no action is taken by universities or other authorities against students who use illegal copies of software. But there are frequent raids upon, and prosecutions of, businesses.

The raid on an un-named "institution of higher learning" yesterday is notable for two things: it's the first time a raid has been conducted on a college, and the college is "private" i.e. is a business not a government owned entity.

The raid discovered eight computers with 58 copies of illicit software. It's being described as

"pirated" but, aside from the dubious use of this term (illegal copying is not piracy: that's hijacking a ship on the high-seas), it's equally possible that the software was installed on more computers than the licence permitted.

Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism Ministry Director General Mohammad Roslan Mahayuddin said the raid was made after a tip-off. Tip-offs can net whistleblowers MYR20,000: a very sizeable sum in a country where many employees earn less than MYR1,000 per month.

But the software found at the college had a full market value of MYR794,000, alleges the Business Software Alliance.

The software allegedly included products from Microsoft, Adobe, Autodesk and Solidworks.

So far this year, Roslan said, 30 companies had been raided, 178 computers seized and 2,106 copies of illegal copies or unlicensed software had been found with a total value of MYR7,600 million. In addition two illegal duplication plants had been raided.