



Homegrown products make work and learning fun, easy

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B.C.'s Lower Mainland isn't a software-development super-region like Seattle or even Ottawa. But local companies like **Pivotal Corp.** and **Crystal Decisions** are well-known for their enterprise tools. **ActiveState** produces a range of Web-friendly programming tools from their comfortable digs on the Granville Mall. And there are many lower-profile companies scattered throughout the area, producing software that is useful, educational, or just plain fun. Here are a few local products I've had opportunity to try out recently:

Burnaby's [Strydent Software](#) has long been well-regarded for their **PowerPrint**, which enabled Macs users to print to a large range of PC printers. Now, they've moved their printer expertise to the much larger Windows market with **InkSaver** (\$35).

While ink jet printers are cheap, replacement ink cartridges can easily double the printer's cost in a year or so. (Users spend \$17 billion a year on replacement cartridges.) InkSaver supports many (though not all) popular inkjet printers and lets users control the amount of ink used by their printer, producing output with high-quality black text and reasonable-quality colour graphics while using significantly less ink. There's a trade-off between the amount of ink used and page quality and the software makes it easy for users to balance the two. A free 15-day trial version is available from www.strydent.com.

As CD burners have become widespread, especially on home computers, many users have wanted to use them to make CD copies of music they own on older cassette tapes or LPs. While that's perfectly legal, it's not necessarily easy. (I've posted a tutorial on the process on my Web site: www.zisman.ca.)

Delta-based [Coyote Software](#) offers a nice tool to simplify digitizing your music collection, the \$60 **Groove Mechanic**, (available on 15-day trial from www.coyotes.bc.ca). Typical recording software forces users to record each track on their tape or record separately. Groove Mechanic, however, automates the process, letting you record an entire side at a time. The software generally does a good job of splitting the side into the individual tracks. As well, its built-in noise reduction cleans the clicks, pops and rumble off old vinyl LPs and reduces tape hiss.

Also in Burnaby, [Candy Byte Software](#) (www.candybyte.com) makes software to make learning fun. Its first release, Mathamagica (\$25), is aimed at seven- to 11-year-olds. Mathamagica hides math practice (adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing, time telling, greater than and less than, word problems and sequences) in an engaging game-like interface. It supports multiple users, so a single copy can keep track of all the children in a

family. Just try to have an adult on hand when children get started, to help them choose an appropriate level of difficulty. Most of the children I tested this on were happy to use it to do math for as long as I let them. (Currently, it's only available for Windows. The company promises that a Mac version is forthcoming.)

And in far-away Langley, [Leboe & Grice Multimedia](#) offers 10 Minute Publisher (\$120). The software makes it quick and easy to create media-rich publications combining text, images, music, sound and video aimed at print, CD, or the Web. The company offers a range of templates that can be customized by business, education or home users, and provides 10 MB of Web space for customers to post their multimedia documents. There are versions of 10 Minute Publisher for Windows, Mac OSX, Linux, Solaris, and Unix, in English, French, and Spanish (www.10min.com).

At home, work or play, support your local software developer.

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