

Software inventor develops program for lonely singles

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Knight-Ridder News Service

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Computer programming made Stanley Crane a millionaire and wary of women.

As the inventor of Apple Computer Co.'s popular data base software, DB Master, and other programs, Crane earned a fortune. But divorced and looking for a partner, Crane was faced with a rich person's problem — finding someone who liked him for himself, not his money.

True to his profession, Crane sought the solution with software.

His quest led to writing an entertaining communications software

game and finding a wife. His marriage is going strong. But the software fizzled after a bang-up start.

Undaunted, Crane appealed to a big-name software distributor. Renamed from "Lovers or Strangers" to "Friends or Lovers," his original idea is on the comeback trail.

Crane's experience illustrates some important lessons about timing a product to meet market demands. As he discovered, the program wasn't just a game, it was a different genre — psychological software. It represented a new use for software that was ahead of its time in the slow-growing home computer market.

The odyssey began in March 1982. Crane, frustrated with trying to meet women in singles bars, complained about the problem to two psychologist friends, Annette Long and Al Byers.

"I wish there was a computer program that you could do and find out if you're compatible right away," Crane told them.

Crane, who owns Alpine Software in Colorado Springs, Colo., and is a partner in Stoneware Inc. of San Rafael, Calif., kicked the idea around with Long and Byers. They are married and do business as Associates for Psychotherapy in Colorado

Spring. They developed a battery of questions about work, money, sex, religion, power, play and communication. An acquaintance of Crane's, Brigitta Hillis, got involved in the project, too, by supplying questions and suggestions.

"The game turned out not to be a game but a true picture of two people and how compatible they'll be," Lindsey Crane said.

She should know. Lindsey, a marketing consultant, was introduced to Stanley to offer advice on how to sell the program to consumers.

They played the game. By the time it was on store shelves, they were

engaged to be married.

"Friends or Lovers" is composed of 60 multiple choice questions. When played, the computer randomly selects 20 queries balanced among the different categories.

"Friends or Lovers" is written only for Apple IIe personal computers. For every question, players are given five possible answers. Each player first chooses the answer he thinks the other player will pick, and then selects his own answer. Answers are kept secret. The computer tallies the responses. It scores whether the players are a perfect match, perfect opposites or somewhere in between.

The object is to see how each player perceives the other and themselves and then get a discussion rolling.

"It distills the essence of basic problems into an exercise and through the medium of a computer, begins to explore them," said Robert Ng, who was vice president of marketing for Softsmith Corp. of Union City. He recently left the software publisher to start his own business. Softsmith has exclusive distribution rights to "Friends or Lovers."

Softsmith began distributing "Friends or Lovers" several weeks ago. It sells for \$29.95. He would provide no sales figures.