

Boyhood dream becomes a reality for entrepreneur

By Suzette Harvey

In 1968, 13-year-old Hal Prewitt built his first microcomputer at a time when most people didn't know what they were.

Today, the 31-year-old Prewitt is the president, founder and sole owner of Core International, a successful computer software, hardware and peripherals company, particularly well-known for its high-capacity/high-capability hard disk drives.

The growing company is housed in a relatively new facility in Boca Raton, employs 45 people, and Prewitt predicts 1986 sales will be in the area of \$300 million.

In the early '70s, Prewitt dreamed of designing, building and selling a new generation of small business computers with a price tag much less than the going rate of \$50,000.

Convinced that he was on to something big, the young Prewitt sought venture capital to get his plans off the ground.

"I was told that the PC-type market would never come into existence. They turned me down cold. It was an uphill battle from there," says Prewitt.

In 1975, Prewitt moved to Boca Raton from Daytona Beach to earn a degree in computer science at Florida Atlantic University and to build his business.

To get the firm going, Prewitt changed his direction and began providing software, hardware, supplies and technical assistance to users of the IBM 5110/5120 small business minicomputer systems.

Prior to attending FAU, Prewitt spent two years at Daytona Beach Community College where, he says, "I was instructed by real

people who ran their own businesses and knew what it was all about. They were doers." These instructors left a lasting impression on Prewitt.

Without any venture capital or financing, Prewitt eased into the hardware market in the late '70s with the only hard disk drive on the market for the IBM 5110/5120 systems that wasn't produced by IBM.

Accessing the technology to build the hard drive wasn't easy. No documentation was available on the IBM hard disk drive. It took more than five years for Core to develop the drive through reverse engineering.

"It was so difficult," Prewitt admits, "that I don't know if I'd ever do it again."

In 1981, IBM began to phase out the 5110/5120 series as it introduced the generation of the personal computer.

Realizing that the 5110/5120 series users stood to lose much data and productivity converting to the new technology, Prewitt went to working on a product that would allow them to retain some of their investment.

In 1983, Core introduced PC51 software which was a rewrite of the 5110/5120 systems operating language designed to run on the PC.

According to Prewitt, Core offered the only upgrade path available to the 5110/5120 users. Users were able to upgrade their hardware without totally changing the software.

The PC51 software sold worldwide and was well received. Users reported a reduction in maintenance costs and an increase in productivity, as much as 10 percent, says Prewitt.

The following year, Core became an IBM authorized dealer and began selling complete

COMPANY PROFILE

A LOOK AT A SOUTH FLORIDA PRIVATE COMPANY

Core International Inc.

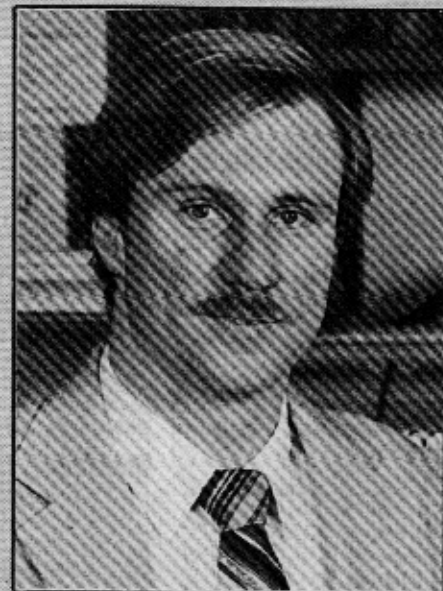
HEADQUARTERS: Boca Raton

STAFF: 45

TOP EXECUTIVE: Hal Prewitt, founder, president and chief executive officer

PROJECTED 1986 SALES: \$300 Million

BUSINESS: Designer, manufacturer and seller of computer hardware, software and comprehensive maintenance services. Core is a market leader in hard disk drives. Serves domestic and international markets.



computer systems bundling products from both manufacturers.

Core had been brought in to do problem-solving for IBM customers in the past and the two companies developed a good working relationship.

However, that relationship was strained during Core's first major advertising campaign for its IBM PC-AT compatible hard disk drive, launched in the latter part of '85.

The rate of failure of the IBM AT hard disk drives had been tremendous. The unit received bad reviews from computer publications and users alike.

Core offered a \$1,000 rebate to any customer who bought its IBM-compatible, ATplus40 hard disk drive in exchange for the original IBM hard disk drive.

To top off Core's aggressive advertising campaign, Prewitt dumped a boatload of the original IBM hard disk drives in the ocean

not far from IBM's Boca Raton office.

The campaign was a huge success, with substantial coverage by newspapers and computer periodicals. However, no word from IBM.

Today, Core International designs, manufactures and sells a variety of computer products and services including its own IBM PC-AT compatible computer and the largest, fastest 5 1/4 inch hard disk. The firm also has a new software product, Gigafile, which allows a single file or volume to expand to 1000MB or one billion characters.

Since Core's inception, says Prewitt, sales have increased each year, as has the work force.

He is proud of his Core's achievements, but says he learned early on that to be successful you have to work at it.

"Don't concentrate on making money," advises Prewitt. "Concentrate on being successful and the money will follow."