

**A GOOD IDEA?
– WE THINK SO!**

Dr Tapani Savolainen, vice president of the company and his wife Ulla-Maja Savolainen, president of the company, testing new programmes.

– and they make the most of their creative powers

A computer program developed in Finland encourages people to approach problems in a new way – and make the most of their creative powers.

Garbage in - garbage out” is one way to describe the way computers work. But sometimes the “garbage” in the form of random unconnected ideas contains some hidden gems when it comes to problem solving. A computer program developed in Finland by CAC-Research Oy in Helsinki is designed to help anyone solve all sorts of problems by helping them to find that hidden gem of a good idea among their jumbled thoughts.

Based on the techniques of “brainstorming” developed over the course of 30 years of teaching and research by Professor Vikko Virkala, a specialist in creative thinking, the Idegen++ program uses the power of association to spark off creativity.

“We use two main principles,” explains Dr Tapani Savolainen, Vice President for Research at CAC-Research Oy. “The first is the ‘talking to a colleague’ effect. When you describe a problem to someone, it triggers your brain. With the Idegen++ program we are creating an artificial colleague for you to describe your

problem to and to get some feedback from.”

GETTING OUT OF A RUT

The program also takes advantage of coincidences or random effects. “This,” says Dr Savolainen, “is useful because very often ideas come by accident. We try to get you out of the rut of always thinking in the same way.”

To do this, the program shifts the starting point, so that users automatically start to look over a much broader area and to consider areas they would not normally associate with the problem at hand. “The idea is to encourage people to think in a way they have never thought before. The Idegen++ program is a problem-solving system in which you and a computer work together to solve your problem. Although the program runs on a normal PC or Apple computer, at the same time it is also running on the best computer in the world – your brain.”

The program involves four main stages. First it encourages users to define their problem and