

Aussies lead way with Kiwi computer-use monitoring

Tom Pullar-Strecker

A Christchurch firm hopes a A\$1 million (NZ\$1.13m) win with the Australian Tax Office may persuade the New Zealand Government to buy software that monitors public servants' computer use and encourages them to take breaks.

The Australian Tax Office has installed Wellnomics' "Risk Management" software on its 25,000 desktop computers in a bid to reduce the health risks related to sedentary office work and computer use, such as "RSI" and heart disease.

The software checks how frequently and intensely staff are using their keyboards and mice, and whether they are taking breaks. It also generates reports indicating which staff might be at risk of overuse.

Wellnomics founder and majority owner Kevin Taylor said the company's software was being used by more than a million computer users, including staff employed by multinationals Intel, Shell and Eli Lilly.

About 10,000 staff employed by the Social Development Ministry have been using an earlier version of its software, which lacks the central reporting function, for 15 years, he said.

Wellnomics, which employs 16 staff, was now talking with officials about the potential for a



Health issue: Wellnomics founder Kevin Taylor says regular exercise doesn't eliminate the risks of sedentary office work. Photo: FAIRFAX NZ

government-wide licensing deal.

It was also talking to individual departments. Interest had increased because of new research that showed the "serious health risks of sedentary office work".

"Studies like those by the Australian National University in Sydney have found the health risks from sitting for long periods without a break are on a par with smoking." Contrary to previous thinking, keeping fit with regular exercise did not eliminate the risks, Taylor said.

"With office work now the most common occupation,

Wellnomics is positioning itself to take a lead in ameliorating what is developing into a major public health issue."

Taylor said current thinking was that office workers should take a five-minute break from their computer every hour.

The average office worker used their machine for three hours a day which was "much lower than people think", he said.

If office workers used their computer for more than six hours a day, that would put them in the "top 5 per cent", he said.