THE cost of software piracy in Australia came to $545 million in 2004, a new study sponsored by major software suppliers has found. The study, conducted by research group IDC on behalf of the US-based Business Software Alliance, found that the rate of piracy in Australia was worse than comparable developed countries, such as the US, UK and New Zealand.

In global terms the proportion of pirated software dropped one point to 35 per cent in 2004.

IDC found that 32 per cent of Australian software was pirated, compared to 21 per cent in the US, 27 per cent in the UK and 23 per cent in New Zealand.

Latin America was the worst region for piracy, with an estimated 66 per cent of software illegal, the study found.

The study did not specifically investigate the underlying causes of piracy across the different countries and regions.

However, Business Software Association of Australia member and regional director, south Asia pacific group for design software firm Autodesk, Andre Pravaz, said cultural and legal factors had played a part in Australian software privacy.

Until the introduction laws to accompany the free trade agreement with the US, software Australian software piracy matters had to be resolved through the civil, rather than criminal courts, making legal action more expensive, he said.

Australians were also ignorant of intellectual property issues, he said. "People in Australia don't understand IP laws and the fact that they are breaking the law," he said.

This report appears on australianIT.com.au.