Turning young IT consumers into IT Producers

How can we engage and encourage the UK's next generation of Information Technologists?

Despite the ubiquity of IT in our business & industry, not to mention in most areas of society, the level of interest and achievement in the basic building blocks of IT, other than as consumers, is woefully low in UK schools and colleges. This is a serious issue for UK Ltd which already has significant technical skills deficits.

Much of ICT subjects taught really consists of basic office tools. We expect students to be able to use word processing and spreadsheets, sometimes with design of website content; this is largely end-user, consumer IT and, although essential in many areas of employment, they are now just basic skills. This view in no way undermines the good work done by after school computer clubs and college courses – it's just the numbers don't stack up – the consumers far outnumber the producers.

IT can be Dull

In our view, traditional programming no longer has much appeal to the majority of youngsters. In a world where everyone has sophisticated technology on their smartphones and gadgets, programming in scratch, python or java is perceived as something for geeks and nerds - and a subject for the boys. Low-level computing language programming no longer has the same appeal as it did in the 1990s. In an age of unchallenged attention spans, wasting potential talent taking hours writing a routine in a low-level language, soon loses the interest of most youngsters. Boring!

IT can be Exciting

We believe that to re-ignite enthusiasm for and capability in IT, we should fundamentally move away from the 'nuts and bolts' low-level programming activities which are rarely needed in the vast majority of business scenarios. Rather, students' expectations should be significantly raised and refocussed on goal-oriented activities to demonstrate that problem solving and learning the elegance of logic can delight and produce useful and appealing solutions and applications which can be very satisfying. Once ignited, interest in going further into more advanced forms of IT, is easier to promote.

Encouraging the Producers

At Kegsoft, we have developed a new high-level, business-focussed language called KBL. It's very quick to learn and using the KBL Studio Express tool it's possible for new users to get solving problems and producing pleasing applications very quickly. For example, put your music tracks in spreadsheet and create a KBL app to maintain it, filter, display by artist and genre – and play your tracks.

When road-testing KBL with young students (aged 16 – 20), with no or little 'producer' IT experience, we were delighted at the speed of progress and satisfaction they obtained within a few hours using KBL. The key point here is, that the students could concentrate on what they wanted to achieve rather than be hampered by an arcane language, confounded by IT terminology or needing to work with several technologies to get results.

For an example of work by an IT apprentice after only 3 weeks exposure to KBL look here https://youtu.be/1XD8rBTN4w4

Kegsoft IT Exchange (project KITE)

Kegsoft is working on a new business model in which new KBL problem solvers and application writers (students, apprentices, trainees) can be paired with business and organisations who urgently need low cost IT solutions ….which might even develop into longer term supply / employment relationships. The Kegsoft IT Exchange (KITE) is planned for later in 2018 – but if you are interested in collaboration or just further information …please get in touch through kegsoft.com

April 2018