

THE BENEFITS OF LEARNING TO PROGRAM COMPUTERS

I still remember the excitement I felt when I wrote my first basic program on the BBC Micro at school. It was a simple four-line program that drew a triangle on the screen. In the early 1980s, we enjoyed playing games such as Chuckie Egg and the famous Granny's Garden on the BBC Micro which was the first computer we were introduced to, but the real excitement was getting the computer to perform tasks in the basic programming language. Simple programs that drew shapes or printed text on the screen weren't exactly ground-breaking but it was enough to whet my appetite for programming and set me on the path to programming games on other computers such as the Spectrum, Atari ST and Amiga.

In the good old days of Spectrum, you could buy magazines that featured pre-written games in basic code that you could type into your own Spectrum and hope the program ran okay. This was a great way of learning how code works and what commands do what. Books on basic programming were also released that would take you through the basics of commands and structure, and end up programming an entire game. The satisfaction of making things happen was amazing.

So, what are the benefits of learning how to program computers? In my personal experience, it gives you a sense of achievement to create an entire program from scratch and see it working. Working out how to get the computer to do something is challenging as you try to decide how you are going to do it. The excitement of being able to create your very own game where you make the rules. The joy of other people playing it.

Programming is good for the mind as it involves problem-solving. For example: how to get multiple sprites moving across the screen and dropping bullets like the famous Space Invaders game. What to do if a player does something unexpected and the game crashes, how to tell the computer how to deal with these unexpected events. I once spent over a week programming a zoom function into an Art Package, I wrote which gave me a great feeling of relief when I finally got it working.

Programming can also be lots of fun and a great hobby. I met some good friends when I was writing programming tutorials for various Atari ST diskzines in the 1990s who I still hear from to this day. We would send each other disks full of programming tools and routines and look forward to the many programs we could create where we were limited only by our

imaginations. Our creations were reviewed in the top Amiga and ST magazines of the day which is something we all looked forward to

Finally, programming can become a good source of income for you. Creating your own programs can become a reality with the many excellent programming languages available such as App Game Kit which allows you to create software that runs on multiple devices. People always want new software and employers need to find programmers to create it.

Many game creator programs on the market require no programming at all but I find them limiting. If you want to create your own games or applications then I highly recommend you get stuck into some good old-fashioned coding with one of the popular programming languages on the market today such as App Game Kit.