

I just read a list of quotes that have been made by Bill Gates, former chairman and one of the founding fathers of Microsoft, on an article online earlier. One of the quotes was:

"If a kid is addicted to a personal computer, I think that's far better than watching TV, because at least his mind is making choices." ([Programmers at work, 1986](#))

This got me thinking, as the computer had a similar draw to me when I was young, in the early 1990s. It wasn't just a game machine, and it certainly wasn't the multimedia creature it has become today...it was a way to create, a way to make a machine do what I told it to do...whatever I wanted it to do, within its constraints and my own skill level, I could make it do.

The first program I wrote was out of a Radioshack/Tandy TRS-80 COCO programming manual, and it was a simple for/next that counted from 1 to 100, which I then thrilled myself by modifying it to print 1 to 1000 on screen. This was done on the computers in the computer lab in my elementary school, for which I am thankful, as without them, who knows if I ever would have found the interest I did that has led me into a wonderful career in information technology and programming.

I do wonder, though, about the current state of the personal computer. Do some technically minded and curious kids today still yearn to make the machine do what they want it to do, in a

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Written by Tim Wray

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world where the primary focus of the computer seems to be media consumption of every type and sort? This is not the way it worked in the mid 1990s. We had "multimedia", but that meant high-quality interactive CD-ROMs particularly. Otherwise, you were generally offline before about 1997, aside from checking e-mail and maybe doing some BBSing or (ack!) Compuserve or AOL.

I have to wonder if in 2012, does Bill Gates' quote from 1986 still apply to us today? Is being addicted to a personal computer, or (ugh) a tablet or smart phone qualify this statement in the same way?

I'm afraid it doesn't.

I'm afraid that the media has turned the personal computer into a television set in the context of this quote. In a world where a computer can be had at the local Wal-Mart for less than a TV set in some cases, everything has changed. People buy computers to watch videos on Youtube, movies and shows on Netflix, and to play games or connect via others with Facebook and other social networking.

Increasingly, proving this trend, some of these people buy some form of tablet, whether that be an Android tablet, an iPad, a Kindle, or a Win8 device. You certainly can't program on any of these devices in as productive a capacity, and if you manage to, you have had to purchase large amounts of add-ons for your device to pull it off. Some will still say this is a more

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productive method. My thought on that is that they probably don't know how to type at all on a QWERTY keyboard, so going to a hideous portable or (gag) onscreen touchy-sensey keyboard is no big speed loss to them.

I hope that the desktop and laptop PC are still a source of curiosity in the up and coming generations beyond wanting to watch their favorite TV show online. I hope they find the power within the box that I have found over the years, and the excitement and sense of achievement it can bring.

In the end, in 2012, I am unfortunately sure that the PC is a toy to a larger majority than it had been back in the day, by virtue of total population of devices alone.

It will be interesting to see how the market and world looks in 2017, 5 years from now.

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