

eVIEWS

An interview with Adam Mendelson.

GLOSSARY

Apple 2E	relatively old version of an Apple computer
to aim	to target, to have as an objective
to reproduce	to repeat
cool	clever
neat	fun
joystick	control lever
to tinker with	to experiment with
huge	great, very big
to be heavily involved	to be deeply committed
web-based software	applications for web programmes
HTML	programming (hyper text markup) language
fame	glory
obsolete	outdated
waste of time	bad use of effort and/or time
to crank out	to produce large amounts
esoteric-ness	mystery
penetration	use
piece of cake	easy
standard component	common element
bandwidth	access speed to/from Internet
to download	to receive data from the WWW
instantaneous	immediate
research	study
to book	to reserve
tool	utensil
hands-on	fully involved
to screw up	to make a mistake
to put things back in order	to fix
to jump in with both feet	to be totally involved
to have your eye on something	to watch for
you'd rather be doing	you'd prefer to do
to better something	to improve
to mislead	to misinform

COMPREHENSION EXERCISE

1. When did Adam start using computers?
2. Did he start programming then?
3. How much does he understand of the “mechanics” of a computer?
4. When did he have his first computer?
5. The Internet has the potential to combine the _____ and the _____ ...A lot of it is just _____ and _____, but there’s a _____ involved that’s very exciting.
6. Does he think that the Internet is going to change societies and cultures?
7. What does he think is the future of programming?
8. How will we connect to the Internet in the future?
9. Adam would like to get back into _____.
10. What software would Adam like to see developed?
11. One important piece of advice for someone learning to use the Internet is that it’s not going to suddenly _____.
12. Computers and the Internet are tools, you have to expect to experience _____.
13. It’s very important not to be afraid to _____ or _____.
14. Why would Adam like to be working in the public sector? (2 reasons)

Answers

1. When he was in elementary school.
2. No, he was just copying.
3. He has minimal understanding of the mechanics.
4. When he was in the sixth grade, about 12 years old.
5. I feel that the Internet has the potential to combine the telephone and the television...A lot of it is just media and entertainment, but there's a communication factor involved that's very exciting.
6. He doesn't know.
7. A lot of programming will become obsolete.
8. With mobile phones and through television.
9. Adam would like to get back into public education.
10. He thinks right now that the bandwidth issue is more important than software.
11. One important piece of advice for someone learning to use the Internet is that it's not going to suddenly fix your problems.
12. Computers and the Internet are tools, you have to expect to experience frustration.
13. It's very important not to be afraid to break things or try things.
14. There is exposure to a larger market, he feels it's more rewarding helping people who perhaps don't have the advantages of a private education.

LESSON PLAN

1. The following are all words that can be connected to the world of computers.

Students explain what they are in pairs or threes.

mouse	to e-mail	service provider	joystick		
keyboard	hard disc	web page	laptop	HTML	
error messages	fibre-optic line	programming	Internet	to	
access	icon	to hook up	scanner	font	to
download	to store	virus			

2. Go through glossary, check pronunciation and meaning. Go through comprehension questions. Predict the answers.
3. Listen and check answers. Repeat and pause if necessary.
4. Give the students the following expressions for agreeing/disagreeing. They should order them from agree strongly to disagree strongly:

That's fair enough, but.../ That's absolute rubbish!/ You could have a point there./ I couldn't agree more./ I'm afraid that I don't agree./ I agree./ I believe.../ As I see it.../ You must be joking!/ You're so right./ I'm not sure...

5. Students discuss the following (do they agree/disagree?). Make sure that they use as many of the above expressions as possible.
 - Companies should/shouldn't have the right to screen their employees' e-mails.
 - Computers create more work than they save.
 - Using computers helps save paper.
 - Computers are fun.
 - It's too difficult to control what's accessible, children can access adult-content material too easily.
 - Computers mean that you never get away from work.
 - Computers stop people developing their own abilities (e.g. they store things for you => you don't need to use your own memory).
 - Computers cause a lot of health problems.
 - Computers are only widening the gap between the haves/ have-nots.
6. Students use some of the above to prepare a short conclusion on computer technology and their effect on modern day society, which they can then explain to the rest of the class.

TRANSCRIPTION

eV What first attracted you to work in computers?

Adam Wow... I don't even know where to start... I used to play with computers a lot when I was in elementary school, back in the "Apple 2E days". I used to get, I can't remember the names of the magazines but they were computer magazines aimed at users and especially young users. I remember they would have programmes written in Basic in them that you would just copy in and reproduce, and I remember thinking that was just real cool, and being able to feel like I was programming but really I was just copying but... Even so, typing it in and making the computer do something that I told it to do was real neat. And I remember making a little drawing programme where the joystick actually moved around... you could change colours... a little game where there were snakes that ran around or something... I don't know what the attraction was, but it was fun from the start and I always... I still... one of my favourite things about it is to look at this machine, and really have minimal understanding of what's going on inside there, in terms of how the mechanical parts and the electric parts work together, but being able to tell it to do things, and seeing the results of it.

eV So how many years has it been since you've been tinkering with computers?

Adam Tinkering... I guess... let's see. I had my first computer... probably in about sixth grade, so I'd have been about twelve years old... twenty eight now so that's 16 years. Is that correct math?

eV Yeah, I'll believe you. We've all seen a huge amount of changes in the past few years. You're heavily involved in the sector now, you're a professional. You're more specialised in web-based software. Where do you think it's all taking us?

Adam I think that it's... Let's see... where is it taking us? I feel that the Internet has the potential to combine the telephone and the television and that a lot of it is just media and entertainment, but there's a communication factor involved that's very exciting... When I first discovered how easy it was to programme in HTML and make web pages and discover, you know, I can put this thing up on the Internet and anybody can see it. That factor was very exciting, the sort of... I guess the fame of it. You're thinking that other people are seeing my work but just... the access factor was, to me is... is very exciting and I see that getting bigger and bigger, so... I think it's a... You know, I don't know if it's going to change societies and cultures but I think it's going to take sort of... the role that television plays in our life and the role that telephones play in our life and just keep going in that same direction.

eV How do you think we'll look back in 10 years time? How do you think we'll see ourselves with what we've been doing and trying to do with web-based technology, with new software?

Adam I think that a lot of programming is going to become obsolete, and I think that we'll look back and think you know, what a waste of time it was to spend so many hours cranking out pages in HTML when, even today there are programmes that will do it for you. And so I think that that will continue to grow... I don't know, I don't see the personal computer disappearing ever, but I do think that the Internet will grow and I think that connecting to the Internet with mobile phones, connecting to the Internet through televisions, I think that

that will become more of the norm. And so in that sense, the esoteric-ness will slowly disappear. There will obviously still be the group of people that push it and make it grow. There will always be programmers but it's... I expect to see the type of penetration that the television has so... looking back on it I guess it'll be sort of funny to look at how silly it was at the beginning in terms of how esoteric it was and how hard people thought it was, and how... people were so excited and impressed by your first web pages and later on it'll just be a piece of cake.

eV Let's say you've got three wishes. What would you do with them? What sort of things would you like to be able to do, with your work?

Adam I'd like to see it get back into public education. I would say... one of my wishes would certainly be to be able to continue to work with technology, to continue to develop web sites or web applications or whatever, something Internet based, but I'd like it to be in the public sector so that there'd be even more exposure to what I was doing, and specifically I'd love it to be in public schools. I would like to see the Internet become a standard component of public education, public education curriculum, and I would enjoy taking part in either teaching the students how to use it or in developing things for the students that would help their learning.

eV What piece of software would you most like to see developed, or develop yourself?

Adam Oh I don't even know if I could answer that... I don't know... I think that bandwidth is more important than software so if I could wish for any technology to suddenly appear, it would be that we all have amazingly fast, bi-directional connections. We wouldn't have to pay Telefónica huge amounts of money and wouldn't have to waste our time waiting for things to download, it'd just be instantaneous.

eV Let's say you've got someone who's never touched a computer before. They're middle-aged or 20 years old, it doesn't matter but... someone who doesn't know how a computer works. What sort of advice would you give them?

Adam One thing that's important is... I notice this from trying to teach my father some things... it's not the answer to everything. It may not actually be the only answer to anything... For example I see my father, he wants information whether it be about sports or a trip he wants to plan or whatever. He wants to do some research and he has this concept of, "This new Internet thing, I can use it and it'll answer all my problems and I'll find the information that I want and book my train or my plane and my hotel and all that, and"... And I think that for some people, at the beginning, they'd do better just to go to the library and find the information in traditional ways. So I think that one important piece of advice is that it's not going to suddenly fix your problems, and to not expect too much of it, and to understand that a computer is a tool and the Internet is a tool, and it's a tool that's getting to be easier and easier to use but it's not automatic so you have to be very patient, and have to expect to experience frustration and not... certainly not give up but not expect too much, too quick. And then other than that, the other piece of advice that's very important is to not be afraid to break things, and not be afraid to try things. Almost all of the programmes that I know how to use, and most of the programming that I know, I've learnt from doing and I've learnt from playing with. It's a totally hands-on thing, and if you go into it with the mentality that I can't do this, or I'm going to do something wrong and it's not going to work anymore, you're

not going to learn, and you're going to end up stopping yourself. It's very difficult to break a computer. You can screw some things up a little but and have to call a friend or take it to a store and they'll put things back in order for you but, it's real important to just jump in with both feet and start pressing buttons and see what happens and... actually reading what your error messages say, that helps too.

eV You're meant to read those are you?

Adam Exactly.

eV You've just started a new job and it's a job you've had your eye on for a while, and you're pretty happy to have it. Is there anything else you'd rather be doing today?

Adam Rather than the job I have? The only thing that would make me happier than the job that I have right now is if it were in the public sector, as opposed to being a business to business model.

eV Why's that?

Adam Why's that? Two reasons and I think I touched on them earlier. One is that... I think that being involved in building something for the general public is very exciting, because it means that suddenly you've taken part in building web pages that are seen by thousands of people every day, or even hundreds of thousands of people every day and I think that's exciting to me. I think that sort of fame aspect of things is exciting to a lot of people. And then the other thing is that... even though being a classroom teacher was difficult, and working in public schools in California was incredibly frustrating, I felt good about doing it. I didn't necessarily feel good day by day. I felt tired and frustrated and upset, but ... it's very rewarding to help people learn especially when you see that that learning is actually bettering their lives. I'd always rather be involved in public education than private education because in private education, a lot of times I feel like you're teaching skills to people that are already very advantaged, and you're just giving them more advantages... and that's not necessarily a negative thing. It's good to help anybody but, it's more exciting to work with people that don't have some of those advantages and help them get to places where you feel that everyone deserves to be.

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