

Foreword

Our consumer culture gives us all sorts of opportunities for entertainment, pleasure, and sometimes even learning. However, by and large, these are passive activities. That's OK—we all like to kick back sometimes and be entertained—but it shouldn't be the whole picture. In addition to the appeal of consuming, there's the satisfaction of producing—that is, of creating. It's the joy and pride that results when we draw a picture, build a model airplane, or bake some bread.

The high-tech objects (like cell phones, tablet computers, TVs, etc.) that we use today to consume entertainment and information are black boxes to most of us. Their workings are incomprehensible and, while there are capabilities in some of them that enable the user to draw pictures, make videos, etc., they are not, in and of themselves, creative media. In other words, most people can't create the apps that run on these gadgets.

What if we could change that? What if we could take creative control of our everyday gadgets, like cell phones? What if building an app for your cell phone was as easy as drawing a picture or baking a loaf of bread? What if we could close the gap between the objects of our consumer culture and the media of our creative lives?

For one, it could demystify those objects. Rather than being black boxes, impenetrable to our sight, they become objects that can be tinkered with. They become objects capable of our understanding. We gain a less passive and more creative relationship to them, and we get to play with these devices in a much deeper, more significant way when we can actually build things for them.

When Hal Abelson first spoke to me about the idea that became App Inventor, we talked about the unique motivating force that cell phones could have in education. He wondered if we could use that motivating force to help introduce students to concepts in computer science. As we built it and tried it in classes like Dave Wolber's, we started to realize that something even more powerful was happening: App Inventor was starting to turn students from consumers to creators. Students thought it was fun and exhilarating to build apps for their phones! When one of Dave's students built the simple but powerful No Texting While Driving app, we really started to imagine what would happen if anybody, not just professional software engineers, could build an app.

So, at Google, we worked hard to make App Inventor easier, more fun to use, and ever more powerful. Hal and his incredible team at MIT took over in 2012 and have continued to improve the experience for beginners and developers alike. The new version, described in this book and commonly called *App Inventor 2*, provides a fully in-browser experience that can turn you into an app creator within minutes!

The authors of this book are truly world-class educators and software engineers. I'd like to personally thank them for their work in building, testing, and documenting App Inventor and, of course, for writing this wonderful book.

Now go, unleash your creativity and build an app!

—Mark Friedman, Tech Lead and Manager of the App Inventor for Android project,
Google