

## Microsoft Partnering With Startup to Bring Minecraft Into Real Life

*Microsoft, the Redmond software company, is planning to leverage its hugely popular video game, Minecraft, and a partnership with Seattle toy startup, Fort Boards, to target a younger demographic. The two companies believe this collaboration can be a boon for both of their businesses as they work to bring Minecraft into real life.*

Fort Boards has worked with Microsoft on a number of recent projects since winning Microsoft's Small Business Contest. The fact that the two companies are only 30 minutes apart has helped to foster the relationship as Microsoft executives have stopped by to play with Fort Boards on occasion.

"The Microsoft execs noticed right away—something that we've heard customers say to us—that building with Fort Boards was like building something in Minecraft but in real life," said Fort Boards founder August Graube. "The 8"x 8" square Fort Boards part is an exact replica of Minecraft's digital building blocks, so there is a great match between the products."

### **Connecting the virtual with the physical**

Microsoft sees Minecraft and the Fort Boards partnership as a way to bridge the gap between its high-tech culture and a younger audience. While iPads can often be seen in front of toddlers learning shapes and alphabets, the Microsoft Surface has been more about its use for designers, developers, and as a laptop replacement. And where the Nintendo Wii was the console for younger children (and senior citizens), the Xbox was the console for serious gamers.

With Minecraft, a game that attracts children as young as kindergartners, Microsoft has a new ability to connect with younger children. This made the partnership with Fort Boards a natural fit. The two companies believe that children who start playing with a building toy like Fort Boards will naturally be drawn to Minecraft when they start exploring video games. And they also believe that children who play Minecraft will seek out ways to replicate that experience in the real world.

### **Cultivating future developers**

Minecraft has been described by some as a game developers training grounds, where players are essentially making the game that they want to play from the small cubes. There has been a growing effort to introduce coding to children at a younger and younger age. First graders can often be found coding simple games and actions, including Minecraft.

But what many tech companies are finding is that the best employees aren't always the best coders. There are key characteristics like follow through, perseverance, and response to criticism, that are equally important. Multiple studies have shown that children learn important lessons by playing with building toys.

Graube explains, “Kids can sometimes grow frustrated as they try to build upwards and fight gravity and other limitations brought on by physics, but through that frustration they learn how to deal with challenges and adversity.”

### **Applying Minecraft to real-life designs**

The Fort Boards team recently used Minecraft to mock-up the Fort Boards booth for the upcoming American International Toy Fair. After many iterations in Minecraft, they plan to craft a 10' by 10' by 8' tall castle using 2000 Fort Boards pieces in Javits Center in New York.

Microsoft hopes that other Minecraft enthusiasts will benefit from their partnership with Fort Boards. One block at a time, new generations will have fun playing and gaining skills to become the next generation of builders and creators.

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