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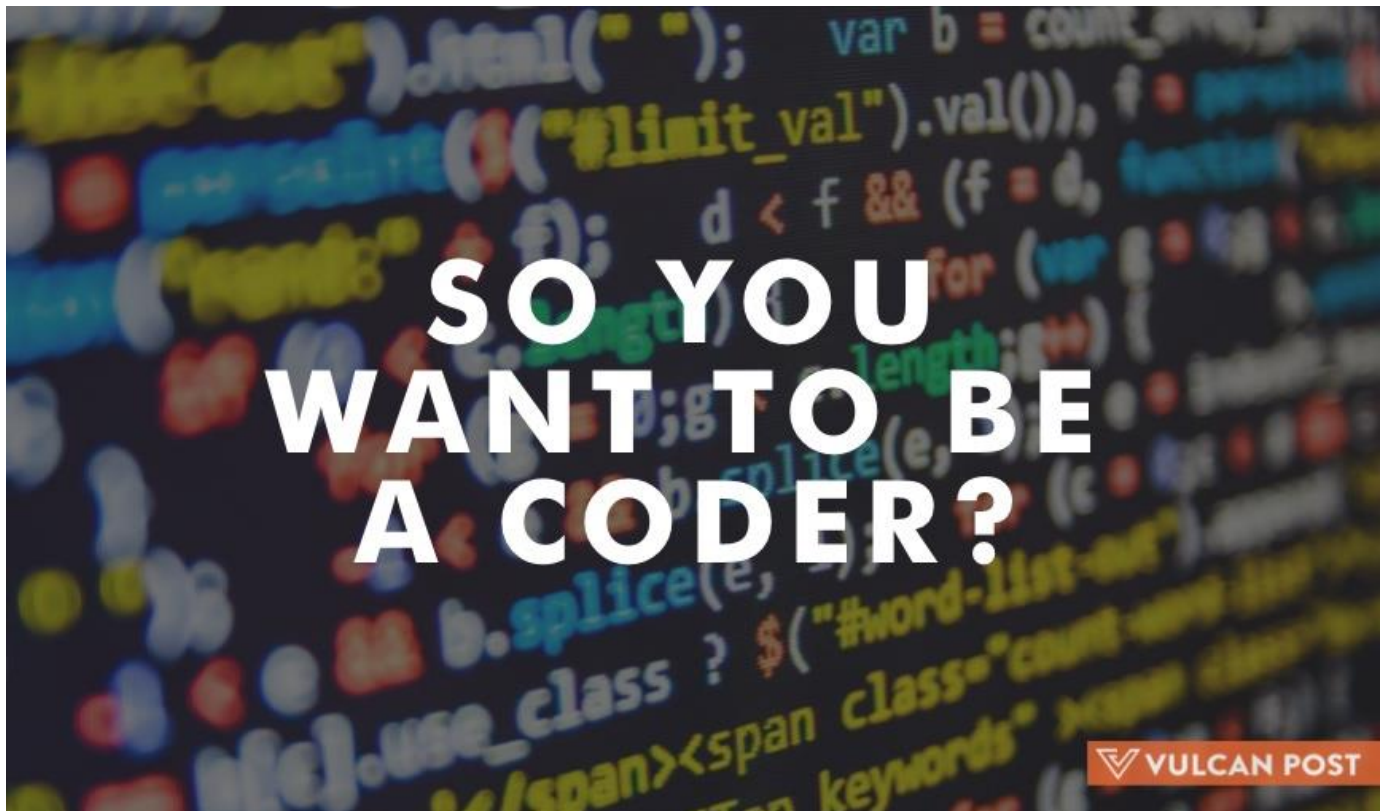
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Headline: After Teaching Himself To Code, Coding Lab's Yu Jian Is Paving The Way For Youths In S'pore

## After Teaching Himself To Code, Coding Lab's Yu Jian Is Paving The Way For Youths In S'pore

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BY DELFINA UTOMO



Black Eyed Peas frontman Will.i.am learned how to code. Basketball player Chris Bosh is a talented coder. Top fashion model Karlie Kloss knows how to code — she even created a scholarship for young girls interested to learn coding, saying that understanding code is important because “it’s the language that runs our world.”

Here in Singapore, premier programming school Coding Labs also believes in starting them young. The school is led by Ian Lam, co-founder of cohesion.sg and bubblesoccer.sg, and Kong Yu Jian, 3-time hackathon winner. It is catered to children and youth to give them a formal education in programming and imbue in them the skills needed for them to create their own innovations. They started the school after seeing that there was a lack of coding schools for youths, even as the demand for programmers increase.

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“We’ve always believed in the power of technology to effect positive change in the world. Coding Labs’s aim is to furnish adolescents with the skills of programming and computational thinking, as well as to fuel in them a passion for technology, eventually enabling them to solve problems for the betterment of our world,” Ian said.

### ***Autodidact Mode***

Yu Jian had taught himself programming when he was 17, and still studying in Meridien Junior College. After he was done with his A-levels, he went head on into it and created a 3D puzzle game by learning to program in C#, JavaScript, and how to 3D model and texture for that project. Even before he began his National Service, Yu Jian had managed to get hold of teaching resources from the Singapore Management University, and was taught proper programming practices in Java.

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Image Credit: ibtimes.co.uk

He told us, “Throughout my NS stint, I didn’t want to let my mental capacity stagnate, and thus participated in hackathons, with a few friends. We won a few of which I’m glad to say. Throughout these hackathons, I picked up multiple lessons along the way, not all of which are programming in nature: the ability to pitch and present a product, understanding IT systems and the understanding of the ecosystem of business IT to name a few.”

His learning journey, he said, was a tough one with multiple challenges that included the lack of accessibility to learning resources, the lack of a mentor and even the lack of understanding best practices.

### ***Code Red***

According to Ian, coding is especially important for people to remain relevant. The way it is now, traditional businesses are beginning to realise the power of computer technologies in their business models and are willing to spend top dollar in hiring the right individuals with the right skillsets for the job. With programming experience, that’s going to give you an edge over others.

Ian adds, “Given the increasing number of successful disruptive business models out there in the market, there is one thing that is definitely common: the use of technology. Think AirBnB, Uber, or maybe even a more relevant local example, GrabTaxi? Any aspiring entrepreneur or technopreneur, will find it in their best interests to pick up coding.”

In fact, he feels that anybody with a passion for technologies, or intending to solve problems in the world, should pick up coding. Learning coding is just like learning a new language. Programmers have many career routes, and are definitely in demand, no matter the economy.

### ***Youth Group***

Being in charge, Ian has seen that youths are becoming more exposed and smarter. Entrepreneurship is another trend that he noticed in youths and he feels that knowing how to code

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will allow them to test out their ideas cheaply instead of hiring a developer. "Learning how technology works also helps our youths appreciate the work that was spent coding the applications around us," he states.



Image Credit: ibtimes.co.uk

When finding the best way to teach coding to students, Ian reveals that it is challenging to craft a syllabus manageable for youths to pick up, while at the same time remaining relevant to Coding Labs' vision.

I ask about what might surprise some people about coding, and Ian says, "Coding can actually be fun! Once youths get the hang of learning the basic programming languages, they will begin to enjoy programming their own projects. There is no greater satisfaction than to finish a project. And better still, the project is deployed for thousands, maybe even for millions to use."

### **Level Up!**

Currently, Coding Labs has plans to organise their own coding competitions and hackathons next year which will be targeted at youths. They share that they already have sponsors who have indicated interest. Ian explains that the competitions will be focused on solving deep rooted problems in industries and also the society at large.

"Definitely, we are intending to have multiple different forms of technologies taught to students as well. The bigger players in the technology spectrum that we foresee are Cloud Computing,

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Internet Of things, as well as Artificial Intelligence. These are some of the technologies we intend to bring out as courses for students in the future," he comments.

Who knows, maybe in the future, when parents are deciding on their kids' future occupations, 'Programmer' or 'Coder' will be just as highly regarded as fellow doctors and lawyers. We can only hope.