



Interview: Laurens Valk

By Hispabrick Magazine

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How did you get involved in MINDSTORMS?

The way I got started with LEGO® MINDSTORMS (LMS) was rather common, but what motivates me to use MINDSTORMS five years on is a more interesting story. But let's begin at the very beginning. As a young kid I always played with LEGO system and the 9V trains, inexhaustibly creating new layouts and little cities. As I grew older, I started saving for LEGO TECHNIC sets, which started to become more interesting. My first real TECHNIC set was the well-known #8421 crane from 2005.

Later that same year, I moved forward and purchased a LMS Robotics Invention System 2.0. I think I read about it in a brochure, but I don't really remember what drove me to buying this set. At the age of 13, I found it to be a very expensive set, but I soon found out it was well worth the price. And from that moment on, I never stopped playing with MINDSTORMS. Instead I became increasingly involved in this community, and 5 years later this resulted in a book I wrote about MINDSTORMS NXT 2.0.

How do you contribute to the MINDSTORMS community?

As I used the RIS kit more and more, I started creating my own inventions, rather than following the instructions in the box (around 2006 or so). At the time, I posted my findings and creations to a very basic website, but the responses were motivating, enough to keep me going.

Meanwhile, I started building robots with the NXT version of LMS, and I began publishing step-by-step building instructions of my designs so that other LMS fans could recreate the stuff that I made. I still find this a very fun thing to do, and other LMS fans tell me they appreciate it. Ultimately this led to the invitation to write on the NXT Step Blog (thenxtstep.com).

On this blog I met similar minded people and we all shared (and still do) our LMS knowledge with the community. Before I became a contributor, the blog members wrote the LMS NXT Idea Book. In 2008, the team (this time including me) wrote another book: LMS NXT One-Kit Wonders, a book full of building and programming instructions for robots that could be built with just the pieces in the original NXT set. It wasn't only fun to co-write this book, but it also gave me some insights on the process of writing a book.

Fast forward to 2009, when LEGO released the NXT 2.0 kit. Being a member of the MINDSTORMS Community Partners, I was lucky to have early insights in this new set, and to contribute a bonus model for the set, shown at the back of the NXT 2.0 box. I combined this opportunity with my recently gained book writing insights and I began writing my own book to cover this new set: The LEGO MINDSTORMS NXT 2.0 Discovery Book, A Beginner's Guide to Building and Programming Robots.

It took a lot (!) of time to get this book done, but I'm very happy with the final result, and recent customer reviews have shown that the public has much interest in this book. Basically, it's a complete how-to guide for people who want to get started with the MINDSTORMS NXT 2.0 or do more with this kit. It's not a book with just theory or just ready-made projects, but more like a workbook that combines explanations about programming with instant activities like building a new robot or solving one of the book's many robotic challenges.

With this book, I hope to make it possible for kids (and adults!) to have just as much fun with LEGO MINDSTORMS as I had when I just got started!

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