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Walter O'Brien
Scorpion Computer Services

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Abstract

An interview with Walter O'Brien (hacker handle: "Scorpion"), known as a businessman, information technologist, executive producer, and media personality who is the founder and CEO of Scorpion Computer Services, Inc. O'Brien is also the inspiration for and executive producer of the CBS television series, Scorpion.

Keywords

STEM, STEAM, information systems, information security, computer science, communication, television

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An interview with the Scorpion:

Walter O'Brien

When did you first become interested in mathematics and science?

As a child, where my classmates had one question, I had ten questions. My teachers would sometimes think I was slow, but I was just thinking on a different level. I was deeply curious and I found myself being fascinated by the sciences. It was a lonely place to be at times, because most of the children could not relate. I was the second child in a family of five, and I always felt “weird” because of the way my mind worked.



Were there any pivotal moments in your childhood or youth that helped you decide your path?

I grew up as many other children did watching MacGyver, the A Team, and Knight Rider, and it is usually a bunch of odd characters trying to save the world, but while other children acted out those fantasies as macho male leads, I was looking into a computer screen, learning to hack into national databases, and exposing vulnerabilities. When I was nine I got my first computer, an Amstrad. I learned everything I could about the computer in the first three days, without sleeping,

eating, or doing anything but a sheer obsession to know this computer, I took it apart, I was fully absorbed and immersed in it. I created my first company ‘Scorpion Computer Services’ at age thirteen, which now is a massive company that does in fact help save the world, we solve many global threats. I have a think tank of experts and geniuses that work as one mega-brain. As a child I was just different to my peers and my commitment to learning more about manipulating information technology is what kept me motivated. When other children were delivering newspapers to houses on bicycles I was hired by Irish banks, they just started using computers so I would show them how to install software, troubleshoot technical issues, and I would frequently train staff members, sometimes during my school lunch breaks. This was such treat, their computers were of a higher quality than I could afford being from a humble family. These computers helped me gain greater skills that went beyond my own computer at home. I was in many ways training as a professional, I was just also a kid.

In your projects how do you see people in the arts and in STEM fields work together?

In my work I hire scientists and I also hire people from the arts. They work together, side by side. Now I am not saying any of the artists can ever do a scientist’s job, or vice-versa, but they help each other. The scientists need help with communication, public relations, and making personal connections with others, such as the clients on a project. The scientists are the problem solvers, they do the technical work in sense. More and more I see the need for better visibility, better images of science, more eye-catching projects to help people be interested in the sciences, back in my day, back in Ireland being the way I was teachers misunderstood me. I try to overcome my shortcomings by having people around to help with the skills I may be lacking in. My strengths give me a huge advantage in the work I do, and for many years that was more than enough. I have excelled and

established expertise. Working with people whose views and approaches differ from mine, help to inform me how the world works, because everyone exists on one realm, so interaction is inevitable.

What is your opinion of STEAM?

STEAM is way to approach disciplines from an integrative philosophy. The TV show 'Scorpion' based on me, glamorizes science and brings it into the mainstream.



The use of imagination and film making reveals and promotes the application of technology in solving social issues and saving lives is. The role models that are widely available to the next generation must go beyond celebrities that do nothing but pose in designer clothes. This show is uses the knowledge of the arts to bring to life the very real potential cybersecurity issues using real world possibilities, with characters that speak the language of science. This blending of fiction and cutting edge technology is useful, just like the tradition of science fiction in exploring possibilities that actual science has not yet addressed. This blending serves a purpose in creating through experiments that inform science. On another level the show also gives insights into how highly functioning 'geniuses' are the way they are, why their internal sounding board may be different, and sometimes soft skills, or social skills may be challenging for them. Due to the show, I have been associated with terms such as 'modern day superhero', and 'computer genius'. At the Comic Con festival I see many young individuals who are not looking up to supermodels or soap stars, but now looking up to individuals like myself who are celebrated for the use of their intellect, not the size of their muscle. The intellectual achievements alone are not enough to build a bridge to

these young minds, the imagery used in TV shows, in comic book festivals, in interviews, and magazine articles, all create a visual map of what it is like to be smart, celebrated and seen as something more than ‘just a nerd’. I read somewhere that the popularity of the show CSI inspired many to choose uncommon science degrees, I knew that TV was a medium that could reach the youth who were smart enough to do science, but just were not getting enough positive imagery about science. Scorpion is as much about being a loner, a freak, an outsider, isolated from others just because you are unique, it is about being true to who you are. We need more shows like there, where being a scientist is celebrated more than being a model, or a hunk in a cute jacket, we need shows where science can be hot, where science is the main story, not the sidelined bookish thing that the losers do but rather that ‘science is cool’, that is the message. This is where the arts, and STEAM have been most relevant for me. Going forward I believe those of us who excel in intellect will be the mainstream superheroes, as more and more youth see that ultimately it is mind over matter.