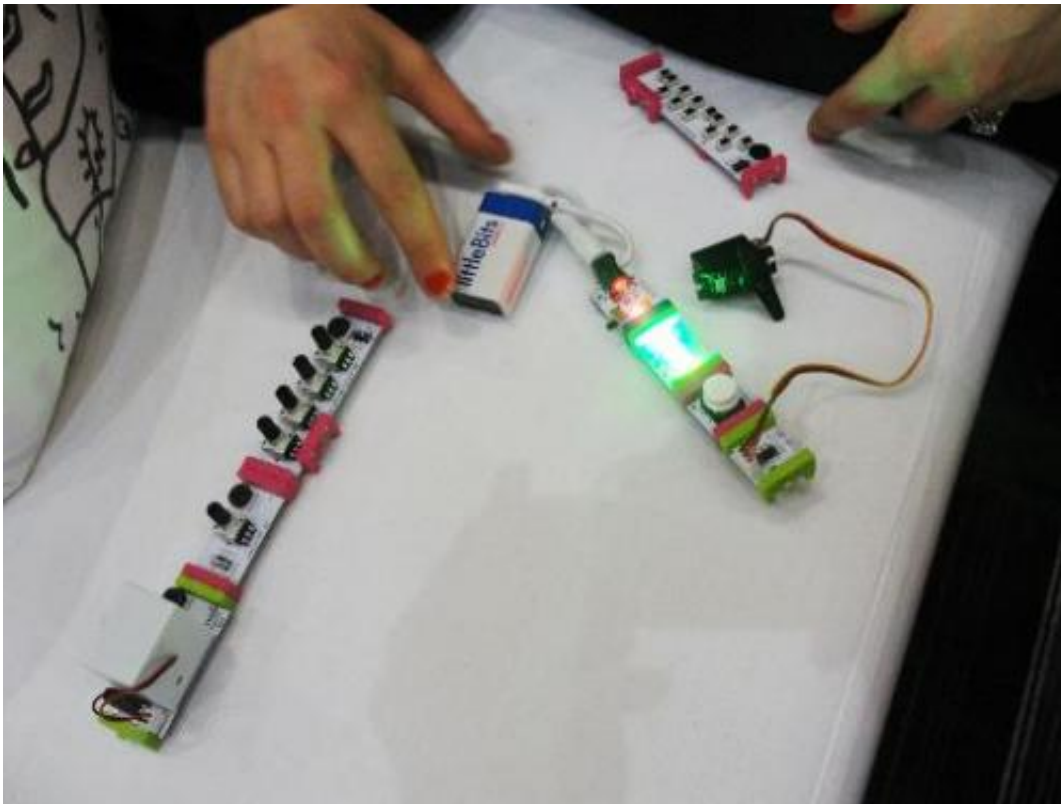


Electrical engineering is child's play with littleBits

March 22 2014, by Glenn Chapman



Ayah Bdeir, founder and chief of startup littleBits, works with one of her creations March 21, 2014 at the TED conference in Vancouver, Canada

Ayah Bdeir is out to make creating Internet Age gadgets as fun and easy as playing with LEGO blocks.

The engineer behind littleBits kits that make a game of piecing together

modular circuitry used a Technology, Entertainment, Design (TED) conference to debut a piece to the puzzle that lets creations talk to the Internet.

"It is about allowing people to understand electronics which govern our modern lives and to let people become creators and makers," she said of her motivation to start the company behind littleBits about two years ago.

"The Internet of Things is too important for it to be governed by only big companies telling you what you should purchase."

Generic items ranging from jewelry to door locks, cars or household appliances are enhanced with computer chips to go online for information or instruction under the Internet of Things

Bdeir's kits come with arrays of rectangular modules with buttons, lights, buzzers or other little bits that can be stuck together to create working electronic devices.

It is simple to make new creations, even for those with weak geek skills. LittleBits blocks are magnetized so that modules can only be stuck together in ways that will work.



Ayah Bdeir speaks onstage at Engadget Expand NY 2013 on November 10, 2013 in New York City

- Innovate and create -

Two basic rules of play are that magnets are always right, and that one always needs a blue and a green piece for success. Pink pieces are optional.

"On the one hand, you can play and learn about electronics," the littleBits chief told AFP while snapping together modules on a cushioned sofa at TED, the conference renowned for innovative minds that ended on

Friday.

"But on the other, you can invent and prototype without being an engineer or a programmer."

She spoke of users snapping together creations ranging from window displays made of littleBits and craft material to hardware prototypes entrepreneurs have used to pitch investors.

The addition of a "cloud" module to link module creations to the Internet opens the door to using littleBits to create such gadgets as wireless speakers, smart thermostats and security systems.

The module is expected to be available later this year.

"You can really start to prototype complex things with no engineering knowledge whatsoever," Bdeir said.

"Kids, entrepreneurs, artists or anyone else can invent with electronics the way they would invent with LEGOs."

Kits were such hits when the New York-based startup introduced them that they sold out in two weeks.

LittleBits are now available in scores of countries and used in about 1,800 schools, according to the company.

Kits range in price from \$100 to \$200, with "bits" also available for individual purchase.

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