



By Emily Ruby

## Digi-Comp 1



Digi-Comp 1, c. 1965.

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Medicine & Science.

In 1963, most people knew nothing about computers. This very basic mechanical computing toy, the first of its kind, introduced children to computing principles such as binary programming. Made by E.S.R., Incorporated of New Jersey, the toy came in kit form and had to be assembled. The company produced educational toys, but was originally formed to market the Digi-Comp 1, invented by the company's founders, who were involved in missile research and engineering. Its sales exceeded 100,000 within the first few years on the market, but eventually suffered after the introduction of electronic toys.

With plastic parts and a box claiming that the Digi-Comp had the ability to compute "missile countdown and reentry," it truly represented its time. Generations of computer programmers remember the Digi-Comp and how it made the large electronic computers of the day more comprehensible. The toy has a cult following and many websites and fan clubs devoted to it. In 2005, one of its fans introduced an enhanced version.

## Mr. Potato Head

This particular Mr. Potato Head kit belonged to George Lerner, who invented the popular toy. He had trouble interesting toy companies in his invention in the late 1940s as war rationing still lingered in people's memories and playing with food seemed wasteful to consumers. The original kit, introduced in 1952 by Hasbro Inc., could have been called Mr. Vegetable Head, as it consisted of a kit of pieces that could be used on any vegetable from the kitchen. Parents complaining of rotting food, and in particular government regulations requiring the parts to be less sharp and therefore harder to insert into a real vegetable, brought about a redesign of the toy. On April 30, 1952, Mr. Potato Head became the first toy to be advertised on television and changed how toys were marketed. The kit became an immediate hit, with more than 1,000,000 sold in the first year. In the ensuing years, additional kits and accessories were added to the line. The company introduced a plastic potato body in 1964. Child safety regulations led to a larger body size for both Mr. Potato Head and his parts. Mr. Potato Head's fame has only increased in recent years with his inclusion in the popular *Toy Story* movies.



Mr. Potato Head Funny-Face Kit.

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