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Google smartly reaches out to girls

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AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The internet giant is sending a signal of their commitment to gender equality in the tech industry by encouraging girls to learn how to code.

HIGH TECH is a man's world. But Google wisely recognizes that the gender gap in tech begins at a very young age. That's why the tech giant launched a \$50 million campaign to send young girls a key message: Your smartphone, your apps, and games you love such as Candy Crush and Farm Heroes are all made with code and you can learn how to write them, too.

Gender imbalance at Silicon Valley's startups, venture capital firms, and big Web players is staggering. Google recently disclosed that only 17 percent of its tech staff are women, while the figure at both Yahoo and Facebook is no better: Their tech workforce is 15 percent female. Google's own research identified the two top reasons why women don't get into computer science: lack of encouragement and exposure. Thirty years ago, 37 percent of all computer science bachelor's degrees went to women, but today that percentage has dropped to 12. Google's initiative, called Made with Code, aims to introduce girls to computer programming via fun and easy coding projects online, through partnerships with entities like MIT Media Lab and TechCrunch, and by supporting established programs such as Girls Who Code.

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Learning the basics of computer programming is increasingly becoming a foundational skill, one that perhaps should be taught in elementary school alongside English and math. A top female executive at Google put it best: "Nowadays, coding isn't just a skill useful for working at a tech company; engineering isn't just for engineers. Interior design. Medicine. Architecture. Music. No matter what a girl dreams of doing, learning how to code will help her get there."

Indeed, exposing young girls to computer science may or may not set them up for careers in high tech. But Google's financial commitment to Made with Code is a reassuring step toward developing a solid pipeline of women in high-tech careers.

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