

Kyle Kesterson

Creative Technologist

Prototyping at the intersection of engineering, design, research and play. I help kids of all ages go from thought to thing.

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Base Bay Area & Quito, hybrid with travel, open to relocation

Profile

Nineteen years turning early ideas into things people can quickly hold and test.

300+ IP-licensed toys at Target/Walmart scale. A **motion capture engine** three-year-olds drove with their bodies. **Paper books** that answered a child's **voice with light and sound**, authored by the seven-year-olds it was made for. About a thousand **young people taught to build**.

Embedded early with:
Microsoft Kinect (2010–12)
Amazon Alexa voice-to-interface (2014)
IBM Watson voice (2015).

Prototyping methods

Sensor & device integration
(depth cameras, voice, smart lighting, speakers)

Housings & enclosures
around off-the-shelf boards

Moulds & casting	Vinyl
Laser cutting	Screen printing
Ceramics	Cardboard & paper
Illustration	
AI-Assisted coding	

In their words

"One of the most creative, hardest working, inspiring professionals I have had the pleasure of working with."

Gregg Spiridelis, CEO JibJab Bros Studios, creator of Netflix StoryBots

"One of the sharpest stars I've mentored. His mix of creativity and business perspective is rare and excellent."

Dan Shapiro, CEO, Glowforge

Creative career, 2007 to now

Funko *Toy Developer & Graphic Designer* 2007–2009

One of three original developers of the POP! line.

300+ products **60+ licensors**

Drawing to shelf in four to nine months. That line grew to \$7B and still growing. Before Funko: illustration, vinyl signage, screen printing, and a ceramics apprenticeship.

Freak'n Genius *Co-Founder, CEO & Product Designer* 2010–2017

Real-time mocap animation built on Microsoft Kinect.

11M users **30m videos**

YAKiT: No.1 iOS kids app at launch, one animated video created every 1.8 seconds. The first consumer markerless mocap animation tool and first iOS animation engine.

Campfire *Co-Founder, CEO & Product Designer* 2014–2017

Voice-triggered light and sound over paper books and playtime, built with IBM Watson and Amazon Alexa. Screen-free.

~40,000 families

Seven-year-olds published dozens of their own stories with the authoring tool. Helped introduce IoT to the consumer market. **Partners: LIFX, St. Jude's**

Demystified *Creative Technologist & Product Development Consultant* 2021–present

Creative pipeline up-skilling, education and rapid prototyping

Prototyping and internal tooling for creative studios. Including year long Experience House Mastermind, 2026: AI curriculum for creative professionals.

Felix & Paul Studios *Fractional Head of AI* 2025

Emmy-winning immersive studio · 30 AI integrations across creative, production and executive teams.

Earlier 2009–2017

JibJab Bros Studios / StoryBots (Netflix) *Creative Director & Product Manager* 2016–17
Conceived, designed and launched new initiatives, leading a 24-person team

Deloitte Digital *Interactive Designer* 2009–10
UI/UX designer and illustrator for first iOS apps for CNN, MTV and the US Army

10+ years volunteer teaching & organizing youth worldwide

YMCA · 2004–06 · Daily drop-in, a different group of 9–11 year olds every day
Startup Weekend · 2010–15 · 17 hackathons in Europe, S. America, and N. America
StudentRND · 2012–14 · 12 student hackathons, 50–80 students each
YouthCare · 2013–14 · Product development for at-risk youth in Seattle

Education & credentials

Cornish College of the Arts
Illustration & Design, 2004–06

Certified Claude Architect
Anthropic Partner Program, 2026

Lake Washington Institute of Technology
3D Modeling, AAS, 2000–04

Scrum.org
PSM III · PSPO III

TechStars
2x VC-backed founder, mentor

Awards | GeekWire Young Entrepreneur of the Year · Seattle 2.0 Designer of the Year, Curious Refuge's "World's Best AI Filmmaker"

Four selected works, and what was learned

01 · Hybrid physical-digital play



Campfire

Can light and sound make a paper book beat a tablet at bedtime, with no screen?

- Role** Co-founder, product lead, stakeholder management, brand, experience design.
- Stack** iOS/Swift, Watson STT, Levenshtein alignment, LIFX LAN UDP, Node authoring tool.
- Trade-off** Local network over cloud: light landed on the word, recognition stayed fragile in noise.
- Outcome** ~40,000 families. Kids with ADHD went still and stayed with the book.
- Next time** Ship the manual tap mode as first-class on day one.

02 · Creator tools for kids



Freak'n Genius

Can a three-year-old animate a character with nothing but their own body and voice?

- Role** Co-founder, product lead, stakeholder management, brand, engine decisions.
- Stack** Kinect skeleton to 2D cutout puppets. One C++ engine: DirectX 9, Xbox, OpenGL ES iOS.
- Trade-off** 2D with guardrails beat 3D done right. Ankles too wide and the puppet's legs vanished.
- Outcome** 11M users, 8 apps, 4 platforms, tens of millions of animations.
- Next time** Sensor-optional from day one, not on one platform holder's roadmap.

Full case studies, code and video
kylekesterson.com
See the work →

03 · Physical product at scale



Funko POP!

What has to be true for a drawing to survive sculpt, tooling, paint and packaging with the joke intact?

- Role** Toy developer, one of three original POP! developers. Packaging, Licensing & QC
- Stack** Sculpt, ZBrush, clay and 3D-printed prototypes, steel moulds, PVC injection and roto-moulding.
- Trade-off** A narrow material palette is what holds a \$10–15 SKU at mass retail.
- Outcome** 300+ products, 60+ licensors, 4–9 months concept to shelf.
- Next time** Sequence moulds so a licence lost mid-line costs one SKU, not the wave.

04 · Twenty years in the room



Teaching kids to build

What happens when you hand young people real tools and refuse to make the problem smaller?

- Role** Teacher, organiser, mentor.
- Stack** YMCA drop-ins. hackathon participants on off-the-shelf boards. YouthCare product program.
- Trade-off** Same tools adults use, on a Sunday deadline. Change mode every 8–12 minutes.
- Outcome** 17 Startup Weekends, 12 StudentRND hackathons, one Seattle Channel segment.
- Next time** Photograph the work. Most of it left the room with the kids.