Kit Building for New Amateur Radio Operators

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Heathkit - The old Heath Company was around for years – maybe 60 to 75. It changed hands several times during its illustrious career and, like a Phoenix bird, is rising from its own ashes and dust. The new Heathkit is called “Heathkit Educational Systems” and has a great statement about itself:

“Today, from its corporate headquarters located in Benton Harbor, Michigan, Heathkit Educational Systems (HES) develops and distributes technical education curriculum, courseware, and hardware to assist academic institutions, corporations, training centers, and 'self-study' users worldwide. Distributed through a network of both Industrial Education and Academic Education sales professionals, our proven products provide turnkey solutions to teachers, business instructors, and students in a variety of educational settings.”

The new Heathkit plans to provide a variety of kits for learning. The first kit is a “Garage Parking Assistant.” This kit will help a driver park more easily inside his/her garage. While this simple kit may cause us to scoff, at least it’s a start.

“So what’s the big deal about building a kit? I would rather just buy something ready to go and get on with it,” you say.

You can certainly do that. Not all hams have a desire to know how things work. But for those of us who are inquisitive and always wanting to learn new information and skills, kit-building is a great segue way into learning almost without realizing it.

Some Advice is in Order –

Start small. Don’t take on too big a project before you’re ready for it.

Find a project that interests you. There are projects from flashing Christmas tree LEDs to complete transceivers and everything in between

Find an Elmer if you’re not confident. A bit of advice here and there and a good dose of encouragement go a long way.

Think safety!! Eye protection may be at the top of the list. Use care with hand tools and especially those that produce heat!

Find a good place to work where you can spread out a little and tidy up afterward if you can’t leave a partially completed project spread out.

Be sure you have good lighting and good ventilation.

Benefits of Building it Yourself -

You’ll learn something new! It may be theory or skill or both but you’ll learn.

You'll learn or hone your tool-handling skills. Someone can tell you forever how to place a screw and nut where it belongs with a terminal under it, but it's not yours until you actually do it.

There's a lot of pride in talking about and/or showing off something you built yourself.

You can actually save money by building your own.

If the finished project requires setup or alignment, you gain that experience first-hand.

Some Pitfalls of Do-It-Yourself -

Mistakes!!! They can happen. Some are catastrophic and others minor. Most mistakes are caused by lack of attention to detail in the instructions. Fortunately, most mistakes can be corrected.

You may have to buy additional items such as screwdrivers, cutters, pliers, wrenches, soldering iron, etc. Fortunately, all these are reusable.

You can get hurt! It's easy to touch a hot iron inadvertently. It's also easy to nip your finger when trimming a wire with cutters. Safety and caution cannot be overemphasized.

Discouragement!! You spend the bucks for a kit, buy tools, and set up a workplace. After the project is completely assembled, it doesn't work! It's easy just to throw up one's hands and walk away. Here's where an Elmer has no substitute. Whether in person or by phone or radio, a bit of encouragement and guided troubleshooting will generally resurrect a dead project.

Where to Get these Marvelous Kits -

Fry's, Tanners, Small Wonder Labs, Velleman Kits, Altex Electronics, Elecraft, or make your own.
Find a project in QST or a similar magazine and build from scratch.

Let's Get Busy Building Something ! You'll have fun and learn a lot in the process.