

Girls in IT - breaking the geek stereotype

 By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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Dark rooms filled with Star Wars fanboys and Trekkies suffering from LCD tans, bickering in binary over the latest in gaming, software and whose hard drive is bigger... Where the only girls in the room sport tiny T-shirts and a large arsenal... in all their animated glory as desktop wallpapers and screensavers. This is the ultimate IT geek stereotype.



Slowly but surely, though, feminine wiles are becoming less scenic and more active in the IT industry. We caught up with Louise van der Bijl, self-confessed "Geek. Gamer. Girl." and founder of [The SharePoint Experience](#), to help us reinvent our ideas of geekdom and girls in the IT industry...

■ Tell us a little bit about your first computer and when the IT bug bit you?

A darling Commodore 64! Can you say "Circus", anyone? I was incredibly lucky as my mother was a computer teacher from my early years, so we were "up-to-date". I started with Logo when I was five, and by the time I was nine – I was already cracking Leisure Suit Larry 1!

■ Where did IT lead you from there?

I got my 386 on my 13th birthday. From there I was on BBS, Wolfenstein and Heretic. I coded my first website when I was 15, I played in my first Quake Tournament when I was 16. I now design and code websites for a living, so that bug bit hard.

I continued my passion through school (crawling through roves to lay cables) and studied my IT diploma at Cape Tech (I didn't finish) but went on to do my MCSD and started working for Dimension Data when I was 19. I have since done multiple courses, a lot of self-learning on sites like [Lynda.com](#) and [Pluralsite.com](#) and updated my MSCD. I am now a User Interface and User Experience Specialist. I specialise in Microsoft technology and my personal love, SharePoint.

■ How do you feel you fit the "geek" stereotype, and where do you break it?

Well, I'm a 35-year-old girl, for one! I was one of the first female gamers in the country, with my sisters-in-arms, FireIce and ShadowFire. So I also feel lucky as we were at the top of our game, even though there were three of us.

I am stereotypical because I have a server, a laptop, a RAT 7, three tablets and two cellphones. Because I can. I used to do the 90's LAN for a weekend with no sleep. Mayhem and Organised Chaos were my stomping grounds.

I feel I break the stereotype because I am an extravert who does not live with her folks or spend my work days in the basement at work (or home!), and I am not just part of the community but I interact on a social level as well. I am not a screen warrior, my personality online is as it is offline – even though this scares some people. I still answer to my gaming nicks (nicknames/handles).

❏ ***So you're a pretty hardcore gamer. How do guys react to having a girl on their team... or becoming your target?***

I have to admit I was more their target! In Counter Strike, I used to be the last team member standing because I would hide behind the crates.

I was a sponsored StarCraft player and then became Tournament director for Arena 77 for three years. I hope during this time I was able to give girls the courage to stand up and be counted. I got into organising competitions at an early age, and was part of many clans and still consider myself part of [CHKNHD](#).

Most of the time guys were happy to be KO'ed by a girl, or to target us girls. My best friend/housemate and I used to play StarCraft, Red Alert and such to see who would wash dishes.

My game will always be StarCraft; I was the team leader for the Omegas in World of Warcraft.

The nice thing about the later years is that the girl vs boy thing became less of an issue than good vs better. Gender will always be a factor, but now with so many girls rising in the ranks of pro gamers and serious gamers, we are seeing a shift. A very welcomed shift.

I play Ingress now, and am soon to be back in WoW.

❏ ***How do you feel you, and women in general, are changing the face of the IT industry?***

The IT market is still sitting with the masses in the male category, but us girls are seeing how we can not only match the guys, but better them as well. It is also changing, like gaming, to the focus on skills and not gender. Girls in IT are no longer princesses on pedestals and/ or not taken seriously. We have proven our worth and the shift is, again, fantastic to see. I don't want to be seen as a "great women who codes / a great girl gamer" but rather "a great coder / great gamer".

❏ ***What advice do you have for young girls looking to get into IT?***

Start early and follow your passion. Gender is no longer a deciding factor, be great and never give up. And wear lipstick, just because you can.

❏ ***Where can people connect with you?***

On Twitter I am [@synstalker](#), on LinkedIn I am here <https://za.linkedin.com/in/louisevdb>. My blog is www.sharepointdesigner.co.za and my email is louise@sharepointexperience.co.za

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