



Nova Scotia's Tech Sector's Got Talent...But Has Anyone Noticed?

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The picturesque shoreline dotted with a single lighthouse, the friendly locals, and great tasting seafood are just a few of the staples of Nova Scotia, but the province is also looking to make itself known for its information communications technology (ICT) sector. A meeting with the President of [ITANS](#) Jason Powell, the President of [InNOVAcorp](#) Dan MacDonald, and numerous individuals from Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency ([ACOA](#)) makes it clear that Nova Scotia is well positioned to nurture its growing tech sector, but will the rest of Canada take notice?

Looking out from the 14th floor of Dan MacDonald's Halifax office at InNOVAcorp, one can literally witness the growth of the ICT sector — in clear view is a technology innovation centre, a bioscience enterprise centre and a technology enterprise centre, all of which have been established in just the last 9 years by InNOVAcorp alone. The organization has worked with 70 startups providing incubation, mentoring and investment totaling over \$100 million leading to revenues of \$268 million. "There is no shortage of good ideas here," says Dan MacDonald. "With five universities and a teaching hospital, the technical talent in Nova Scotia can rival that of Toronto or Silicon Valley any day. If you need an academic or technology expert, it's no problem finding one in Nova Scotia."

Such expertise has led to significant technology development in niche sectors like Neutraceuticals, as well as more common sectors where there is significant activity across Canada, such as [Web 2.0/Cloud](#), [CleanTech](#), and [Healthcare](#). A sampling of those emerging companies in Nova Scotia includes:

- **Marcato Digital** — *Web-based management software for artists, artistic directors or managers and festival staff*
- **Kanayo Software** — *Decision support, integration and mobile computing solutions for the healthcare sector*
- **Progeny Software** — *Visual analysis and presentation tools for the professional and consumer markets*
- **Medusa Medical Technologies Inc.** — *Pre-hospital emergency and patient triage software for emergency data capture and emergency staff effectiveness*
- **Carbon Sense Solutions Inc.** — *Carbon capture and storage technological solutions and consulting services*

While there is no shortage of technical or academic expertise today in Nova Scotia, it is unclear whether the province will be able to attract enough youth into the ICT sector to enable continued growth. ICT is a word that has traditionally been associated with programming and other hardcore technology jobs.

Organizations like ITANS are now looking to use language like "digital media" more often when referring to the ICT sector in Nova Scotia. After all, it's a term that youth tend to be more accustomed to and that conjures up notions of blogs, YouTube, Facebook, iPods, and video games, which could potentially be more effective at attracting youth into the industry.

The increasing number of large enterprises setting up operations in Nova Scotia should also help provide the type of job openings that would attract youth into the sector, stimulate innovation, and provide greater visibility for Nova Scotia. Organizations that have chosen Nova Scotia as a location to expand their operations include [CGI](#), [RIM](#), and [Keane](#), to name a few. These companies are fueling growth in Atlantic Canada, which could lead to spin-offs as the knowledge that employees develop at those organizations is later applied to other business opportunities and startups.

For those who are attracted to the industry, there are organizations and local events that can help them grow their ideas. InNOVAcorp's [I-3 Technology Startup Competition](#) is open to any startup in Nova Scotia, and awards up to \$100,000 in seed investment and services to five winners. There are also Techsocials, ITANS' Techlounge, ACOA's Export2Europe trade mission, Biotech & Beer, and other local events that can provide critical networking opportunities.

Still, many of these local activities, industry initiatives and startups are unknown to those outside of Atlantic Canada. Investors and professional service providers are eager to find out what's happening on the East Coast, but are unsure where to look — anything east of Quebec seems to be a bit of a mystery. This speaks to one of the core challenges echoed by many in the ICT sector in Atlantic Canada — the lack of visibility and marketing among startups. Nova Scotia and the other eastern provinces are good at building their businesses within Atlantic Canada via word of mouth, but have a hard time expanding their reach any further. A lack of seasoned business experience is a key factor. Many companies have a hard time attracting key leaders with the business acumen, connections, and ability to raise funding that is needed to grow a company on a national or global scale.

Lack of VC funding is a concern in Nova Scotia, but one that most startups across Canada are faced with. Atlantic Canada does have some innovative government funding programs that can help emerging companies. The Atlantic Innovation Fund (AIF) provides funding to local companies, and attracts startups from other parts of the country to set up research and development in Atlantic Canada. Launched in 2001, [AIF](#) has provided over half a billion dollars to over 200 companies, but there are many more promising startups that need funding to grow.

Even though Nova Scotia's tech sector may be somewhat of a hidden gem today, the province and the organizations there appear to be working hard to help the ICT sector shine brighter. Watch out Canada — Nova Scotia's got talent, and if the companies there play their cards right, you could be hearing a lot more about them very soon.

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