

a NEXT Canada publication

GRIT

BRAIN DRAIN vs. GAIN

WAVING TO THE FUTURE

By Shawn Hewat

THE CALL OF THE VALLEY

By Cathy Han

A ROBUST COMPUTE ECOSYSTEM WILL ATTRACT AND RETAIN CANADIAN STARTUPS

By Graham Taylor

& more!

ED.06

SEPT. 2021

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By Kyle Winters

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Brain drain and brain gain has been a topic of conversation for many years. In Canada, we have a great education system which has enabled us to attract young talent and develop them into future leaders. The challenge Canada has faced over the years is, how do we retain the talent that we've nurtured? There are many factors that come into play, and while we're not all experts in the field, our choices impact the brain drain and brain gain flow in Canada.

With this edition, our goal is to give you some insight into why some of our alumni make the choices that they do. We were also so lucky to have Graham Taylor, Academic Director of Next AI, and recently appointed Interim Research Director of the Vector Institute, provide his expert opinion on what's needed to attract and retain talent in the Canadian tech ecosystem.

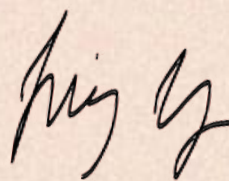
With over 750 alumni in our network, we interviewed both alumni who have moved to the USA, and those who have moved to Canada and chosen to stay here. In interviewing them, I was, personally, very inspired by their stories, what factors impacted their choices, and their opinions on the future of work.

One of my favourite discussions was with Guillaume Laliberte, Co-founder and CEO of Setter, where we talked about the need of brain drain in order to have brain gain in the long run. In his experience, one of the best ways to represent Canada, is to travel and live abroad, so that you have an outlet to export the best of

Canadian culture and import the best of another country's culture. This particularly resonated with me as I've moved away from Canada twice in my life - once to Hong Kong for 4 years, and once to New York City for 7 years - but I've always found my way back home.

For me, and for all the alumni we talked to, whether they've chosen to move away or stay, there's no place like Canada. For those who have moved away, they all see a path that could lead them back to Canada. They all have a desire to share their experiences abroad and give back to the Canadian tech community.

If you have a story or opinion you'd like to share on the topic of brain drain vs. brain gain, please reach out! Brain drain and brain gain is a fluid conversation, coloured by your opinions and experiences, so the team and I would love to hear from you.



JAINY TONG

Director of Marketing and Communications, NEXT Canada

NEXT

GRIT, Edition 06; Sept. 2021 **PUBLISHER:** NEXT Canada, Kyle J. Winters, CEO **EDITOR IN CHIEF:** Jainy Tong
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS: Kaleigh Donnelly, Naomi Heller **ART DIRECTION & DESIGN:** Olivia Tomic
COVER ARTWORK: Manuel Pasmino | NEXT Canada, 175 Bloor Street East, South Tower #1800, Toronto, ON
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BRAIN DRAIN

VERSION



Jainy Tong

*Director of Communications and Marketing,
NEXT Canada*

WHAT IT MEANS

Brain drain and brain gain references the movement of skilled talent from their home country. Brain drain happens when talent moves away from their home country to seek better opportunities, while brain gain happens when talent moves to a country because there are more attractive opportunities available. It's really two sides of the same coin - where one country experiences brain drain and loses talent, the other country experiences brain gain and benefits and grows.

THE PUSH AND PULL

With talent and innovation being some of the key pillars to success, it becomes a bit of a competition for each country to attract the best brains in the world. A number of factors impact the level of brain drain and brain gain a country experiences, some which will push talent away and some which will pull talent in. Factors include, but aren't limited to; immigration policies, quality of education, employment rates and perceived quality of life. In the tech ecosystem, access to capital and networks also play a vital role in pulling in talent.

RAIN SUS GAIN



CANADA'S SHIFT

Until recently, brain drain has been a challenge for Canada, with one study, published in 2018, stating that two thirds of recent software engineering graduates moved to the USA after graduating from top Canadian universities¹. It's evident that American tech companies love our Canadian graduates and they've been able to pull Canadian talent away for some time now.

However, there are signs that this trend may shift and Canada may be on the path to retaining more of our highly-skilled talent. In the past few years, Canadian-grown companies such as; Ada, Clearco, Shopify and Wattpad, have made global waves in the tech community, and people are taking notice. In 2021 alone, tech companies such as; Netflix, Wayfair, and Cloudflare announcing new Canadian headquarters.

CBRE's 2021 Scoring Tech Talent report, analyzes tech talent in North American cities, and they scored Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver in their top 5 'brain gain' cities. Toronto led the way with brain gain, graduating 26,338 tech degree graduates for 81,200 tech jobs, resulting in a need for 54,862 openings for new candidates. Montreal (+15,772), Vancouver (+11,256), Edmonton (+6,478), Ottawa (+5,466), Calgary (+3,466), and Quebec City (+2,364) also experienced brain gain.

THE FUTURE

It's becoming undeniable that Canada is a hotspot for tech talent, and with global remote working becoming more accessible, the future of Canadian brain drain or brain gain remains to be a hot debate.

A ROBUST COMPUTE ECOSYSTEM WILL ATTRACT AND RETAIN CANADIAN STARTUPS

Professor Graham Taylor ▶

Academic Director, Next AI; Interim Research Director and Canada CIFAR AI Chair Vector Institute for Artificial Intelligence; Professor and Canada Research Chair in Machine Learning School of Engineering, University of Guelph



NEXT provides many supports to its community of founders: funding, space and, importantly, access to renowned academics, a deep mentor network and a diverse alumni community. Still, every year we survey entrepreneurs asking how we can further support them. **Every year we receive the same message: startups need access to compute.**

It is no secret that progress in AI is bottlenecked by computing power. As AI's performance improves, in some cases to near-human levels, and its application reach expands into new industries, AI models similarly grow more complex, driving the demand for more compute. It is common to see early-stage startups in Next AI spending \$2.5-10k monthly on US-based commercial cloud computing. More established SMEs spend much more. This is a pipeline of government and private support for Canadian startups directly to US tech giants. **A robust home-grown compute ecosystem will be a key differentiator in attracting and retaining Canadian startups.**

In a recent [Globe and Mail Op Ed](#), my Vector Institute colleagues Garth Gibson and Ron Bodkin used OpenAI's GPT-3 as an example of the scale of compute needed in modern applications of AI. Estimates suggest it costs more than \$3.5M to train this model using an economical cloud computing option. But the compute bottleneck is not limited to top AI research organizations like Vector. In March, OpenAI claimed that more than 300 applications, many built by startups, are using GPT-3. While using a pre-trained model reduces some of that \$3.5M cost, deploying language models in specific do-

mains such as health or education requires significant additional training.

When we started Next AI in 2016, we were the only AI-focused accelerator in North America. Thanks to AI's outstanding successes, this is no longer true: founders have their pick of vibrant AI communities. In the previous edition of GRIT, NEXT CEO, [Kyle Winters](#) wrote [about](#) aiming "to be an employer of choice in this competitive ecosystem." Providing startups access to compute would give NEXT and other Canadian organizations a key advantage.

We have capable and willing partners: the CIFAR Pan-Canadian AI Strategy and Canada's three national AI institutes have united thought leaders with deep experience in compute for AI. Canada's New Digital Research Infrastructure Organization is restructuring the digital research landscape. But operating our own infrastructure is expensive and requires specific expertise to run and maintain. Meanwhile, most of our teams have access to some "free tier" credits from US-based cloud providers and spend out-of-pocket when those are exhausted.

Gibson and Bodkin stress that it's "important to not default to a commercial cloud solution." I agree, the optics of subsidizing out-of-country cloud compute are very poor and do nothing to grow needed Canadian infrastructure. Furthermore, startups may be working with data that for reasons of privacy or security needs

to stay in the country. Turning to the burgeoning Canadian commercial cloud sector could be the best option for startups and accelerators.

At NEXT, we often use "dogfooding" within the accelerator, where startups become the early adopters of products and services of currently or recently graduated startups. By facilitating relationships and pilots between Canadian cloud providers and AI startups with growing compute needs, we support a national infrastructure that benefits researchers and government organizations who increasingly leverage AI to drive economic and social benefit for Canadians.

A new generation of privacy-enhancing technologies (PETs) has the potential to support collaborations among Canadian SMEs where previously not possible due to regulation or competing interests. For example, these technologies can leverage the effects of larger datasets without needing to pool or share data outside organizations. Vector's health-AI researchers have used PETs to enable multi-hospital collaborations. A stronger,

sovereign cloud is the backbone for such partnerships in the commercial space.

The Canadian research community through the Pan-Canadian AI strategy is expanding Canada's critical capacity in compute. By working together we support our AI-enabled startups who desperately need this resource. Partnering commercial and noncommercial infrastructure will ensure that Canada is the clear winner for founders deciding where to start or scale.

By facilitating relationships and pilots between Canadian cloud providers and AI startups with growing compute needs, we support a national infrastructure that benefits researchers and government organizations who increasingly leverage AI to drive economic and social benefit for Canadians.

Acknowledgement: This piece was prompted by conversations with Ron Bodkin (VP of AI Engineering and CIO, Vector Institute), Tomi Poutanen (Head, Layer 6 AI; Co-founder and Advisor, Vector Institute), Cameron Schuler (Chief Commercialization Officer and VP Industry Innovation, Vector Institute), and Michiel Vos (Manager of AI Startups and Scaleups, Vector Institute).



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BLENDING NORTHERN ROOTS WITH U.S. AMBITION



**Kerry
Roberts**

*Co-founder,
Everipe; Next
Founders, 2021*

▲
Kerry grew up in Northern Ontario, attended Laurier University and spent years working in consumer branding and research before she met her co-founder and creator of Everipe, Greg McMullen, from the Summerhill grocery family. Everipe takes fruits picked at peak vitality that have been freeze-dried so they never spoil, and create superfood smoothie recipes that store in your pantry and blend in seconds. Together, they are working to take the produce aisle to the pantry and help us all eat and feel better!



As I reflect and write this today, I'm back in my home country of Canada for the first time in two years, thanks to the pandemic, fresh from a run along the shore of Georgian Bay and wondering again why I've left this incredible beauty to make a life for my family in New York.

I believe that my story is similar to that of many. As my husband's career in packaged goods accelerated, it became clear that ascension meant relocation. We both grew up in Canada, received an incredible education here, and intended to stay, raise a family and live out our days. As technology made the world smaller, large companies realized they could centralize leadership and the corporate campuses north of the border became centers for the execution of US-led strategy rather than for autonomy and innovation.

Moving my own career as a branding consultant offered an opportunity for my Toronto-based firm to access and better service US-based clients. The professional and financial gains made the decision at that time, an easy one. We thought it would be a two or three-year adventure. As we approach 12 years living in the US, it's harder to see a path back to Canada before retirement.

When I consider our social network in New York, some of our best friends are also Canadians that relocated to the US for the opportunities. There's a surgeon who received a coveted internship and stayed, the Lawyer who went to Columbia University and was scooped up by a major NYC law firm, and the

consultant who got into an Ivy League school for his MBA and now runs the NY practice for a large management consultant firm. I'm betting not one of us graduated from University with solid designs on life in the United States. It's a bit unsettling to me that I benefited from a system that supports a more equitable path to higher education and am no longer contributing to that system. I reflect on the likelihood that my children, and my children's children, might now make their lives outside of the incredible country I still consider 'home'.

When it came time to choose where to launch my own health food startup, Everipe, with my Canadian co-founder, the United States with 10 times the population, one language, and a slightly less stringent regulatory body, made it an unfortunate no-brainer. We hope to grow the business enough to be able to invest in a Canadian expansion in the coming years. Programs like NEXT Canada with their focus on creating companies that start, thrive, and (most importantly) scale, here are critical elements to ensure that Canada can retain and attract talent. I question whether the pan-

demic, which has made work-from-anywhere possible, might further exacerbate the recruitment of talented Canadians who can continue to benefit from the quality of life in Canada, whilst earning the salary and recognition that comes from working at a large US corporation - making programs like NEXT that much more important as Canada continues to grow its presence on the world stage as a tech innovator.

As much as we miss Canada and treasure our visits, we are lucky to live in an incredible part of the United States just outside New York City. We ski on winter weekends, have access to the city for things like museums and plays, and still we live in a small town where everyone looks out for each other. What I miss the most, especially growing up on the shores of Lake Superior, is the access to freshwater lakes. My dream would be to one day have a cottage that we can spend the summer months at, an increasingly realistic prospect if 'work from anywhere' becomes a long-term reality.

One day, too, I would love for my own children to cross back over the border for their own big opportunity in Canada.



ADVICE FOR FOUNDERS

"In the earliest days, your personal network is invaluable and staying close to home can be a smart strategy. Working with and among the people who know you and your work ethic best, perhaps having the opportunity to fuel job creation in your community - it's hard to imagine anything more rewarding than that. Once you've proven that your business idea is a proven concept and ready to scale, there can be time then to plan for advantageous tax, labour, and regulatory environments."

CREATING A NEW CANADIAN ECONOMY WITH FIINTECH

A man with a beard, wearing a grey blazer over a black t-shirt with 'MANZIL' written on it, stands on a stage. He is gesturing with his hands while speaking. The stage is lit with purple and blue lights, and there are large, curved, illuminated structures in the background. The overall atmosphere is professional and modern.

◀ **Mohamad Sawwaf**

*Co-founder & CEO, Manzil;
Next Founders, 2020*



Manzil exists due to a convergence of my academic, professional, and personal lives.

As a Muslim born in Canada, I grew up with the understanding that interest, more commonly known as *riba* in Islam, and usury in the other Abrahamic faiths of Christianity and Judaism was impermissible. I would not have a deep understanding of this until I started working as investment advisor trying to attract a book of business through my community which was quite challenging. Not only was earning an income off of interest impermissible, there were a number of additional principles that needed to be adhered to and no institution offered these products. As a result, this whole community was excluding itself from participating in financial services.

In 2014 I pursued my MBA and I linked up with a professor who was teaching the only course on Islamic Finance at the graduate level. After expressing my interest, he took me on as his Teaching Assistant. Not only did I fully understand the foundations and principles of Islamic Finance but understood how to localize these structures (in theory). This MBA led me into a second Master's degree in Corporate Governance which then led me into a Doctorate

in Islamic Finance which I plan to defend in the next 12 months.

Manzil came about because I was constantly receiving complaints from my community that no one was listening to their need of creating Halal-certified financial solutions so I stepped up and took on the responsibility to solve this problem once and for all. After all, every other Commonwealth Nation has Islamic Finance except Canada. As a social impact financial institution (yes, finance can be fair and ethical) we seek to support individuals who want to balance their material needs with their religious obligations.

ISLAMIC FINANCE 101

I've run dozens of workshops for students and professionals across the country teaching what I like to call "Islamic Finance 101". We've taken on many undergraduate and graduate-level students across many business schools to conduct capstone and other research projects related to Manzil and Islamic finance. We have also participated in many doctoral-level research and case studies to create great-

er awareness of Islamic finance in action in Canada.

Central to Islamic Finance is the fact that money itself has no intrinsic value; it is simply a medium of exchange. Each unit is 100% equal in value to another unit of the same denomination and you are not allowed to make a profit by exchanging cash with another person. A Muslim is not allowed to benefit from lending money or receiving money from someone.

Islamic finance is designed for Muslims but will appeal to anyone who agrees with the underlying principles of equitable distribution for everyone, the ideals of fair trading, spending of wealth judiciously, and the well-being of the community as a whole. In the wake of the most recent banking crisis, individuals may also be drawn by Islamic banking's approach to investment: you can only invest in real assets, not financial instruments that are based on speculation.

CREATING A NEW ECONOMY

As the only Islamic fintech in Canada, Manzil could not have been established without the assistance of legal, audit, and consulting firms. All of which, had zero experience structuring Shariah-compliant financing and investment products that comply with Canada's current tax, legal, and regulatory frameworks. This was highly specialized work that required years of research and development and consultations

with international Shariah advisors that understood how to create products within common law frameworks. All of these sectors have essentially created a sub-specialty of finance that can now cater to the needs of future Islamic institutions. Once these financing instruments are in place and well-capitalized they can run parallel to conventional finance and support sectors such as real estate, infrastructure, agriculture, healthcare, technology, mining, etc.

I believe there is a huge gain to be made as the Islamic banking sector develops in Canada, and in particular, Toronto, where a North American hub of Islamic Finance can be established.

On top of being a major financial hub in North America, Toronto is home to over 180 languages and approximately 7.7% of its residents are Muslim; double the national average. The principles of Islamic Finance are considerably compatible with Canadian regulations. The tenets of fair dealing, good faith, reasonableness, among others, are similar to their Canadian counterparts. Islamic Finance offers flexibility to accommodate Canada's regulatory landscape. Compliance with existing federal and provincial regulatory requirements with respect to monitoring, reporting, and other financial requirements will be applicable and is unlikely to conflict with the issuance of Islamic Finance products.

Since the financial crisis of 2007, Canada has been known for

As Islamic finance continues to grow in Canada, international talent will be imported to support its growth.

its financial stability (according to the World Economic Forum) and is also the second toughest jurisdiction to launch a financial services entity. Meaning, when we decide to expand our market, we're exporting best-in-class compliance, regulatory, and infrastructure.

All of these points lead to a perfect breeding ground for a North American hub of Islamic Finance to be established in Toronto.

ATTRACTING TOP TALENT

When a new religious economy is created in a secular jurisdiction, you notice gravitation from people who have studied this specialty and who seek immigration to a world-class city like Toronto. As Islamic finance continues to grow in Canada, international talent will be imported to support its growth until Academic institutions decide to establish Islamic Finance certificate and degree programs. These programs will need to have a focus on Islamic Finance product structuring and its solve for its potential impact within the Canadian tax, legal, and regulatory frameworks.

Manzil has been really focused on attracting talent with international experience within the Islamic banking sector both academically and professionally. In light of the Shopify's, Amazon's, and Google's of the world that are eating our lunch, we still find ourselves at an advantage because of the unique problem we are solving for this financially excluded demographic and many people want to align themselves with the social impact we are creating.

When you are in a niche market of 1.8 billion people, especially in a world where Islamic Fintech's are in their early stage of development as an industry, you get global recognition pretty quickly. This has made it very easy to attract international talent amongst the G7 or G20 countries.

Despite the red tape that is inevitably part of an immigrant's path, I believe Canada has always been an attractive destination for international talent and will remain as such for years to come.



ADVICE FOR FOUNDERS

"Don't underestimate how much effort is required to execute an idea. If this was easy, everyone would be doing it. Work ethic, quick decision-making, and execution are key to progressing in your startup. Many obstacles will come your way and your ability to navigate them will be the true test of what kind of entrepreneur you are."



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OSLER

GLOBAL AMBASSADOR

**Guillaume
Laliberte**

*Co-founder &
CEO, Setter
(a Thumbtack
company);
Next 36,
2015*



Before the pandemic, when Canadian founders would ask themselves “Should I live in Toronto or San Francisco?” the argument was pretty straightforward:

PRE-COVID, SAN FRANCISCO WAS APPEALING BECAUSE: 1) Fundraising conditions are better there, and being close to investors is helpful. Pre-launch companies can raise \$3M or \$15M+ USD valuations in the Bay Area, not something you see often in Canada. **2)** The startup network is unrivaled. Serendipity plays a big role in starting a company, and meeting the right advisor, partner, or investor at the right time can change the course that a company is on. **3)** The people tend to be a lot more ambitious and are at the cutting edge in terms of product and engineering.

PRE-COVID, TORONTO WAS APPEALING BECAUSE: 1) The overall lifestyle is likely better there. Even though downtown is expensive, it’s still cheaper than San Francisco. Infrastructure is generally better, from traffic to internet speed (yes, downtown Toronto has better internet than San Francisco!). If you have a family, healthcare and education are less of a worry in Canada when compared to the United States. **2)** Talent is cheaper, which means you can hire more employees or have more of a runway. **3)** Less competition means talent retention is higher and talent acquisition is easier.



But, as we all know, the conversation post-COVID is a bit different. Everyone is now used to building relationships over Zoom. While it's not quite the same, people have adapted.

Investors are more open to funding companies outside of the Bay Area. In fact, many are actively looking at cities like Toronto to get deal flow. Plus, two new technologies make it easier to move around: 1) cryptocurrency is making it really easy to move capital around the world, and 2) Starlink should make it easy to get high-speed Internet anywhere.

As a result, it is now easier than ever to work, fundraise, and build relationships from anywhere in the world. You no longer have to be in San Francisco to get access to the best startup people.

Many Canadian founders I know have stopped asking themselves "Should I move to San Francisco" and now wonder about "where in the world do I want to live?" This may seem like a small change, but it's not. The options today are not *just* San Francisco or Toronto; founders also consider Mexico, Costa Rica, Florida, the Caribbean, and in some cases South East Asia or Southern Europe.

So how should a founder think about where to live in today's environment? The country you live in and the one where you start a company are two different things. The best founders today look and think like global citizens. They design their lives around what they and their company needs.

When I think about where I should choose to start a company in today's climate I consider where my customers are and what jurisdiction is most favorable for my company. This is an increasingly important question in the crypto space, and that's why places like Miami, Singapore, Wisconsin, and Malta are creating favorable regulatory frameworks. And of course, where can I build a great team. Yes, remote teams can work, but in-person is still better if you want to achieve peak performance. Costs also remain a big factor here.

I also think about where I'd need to live to achieve my peak performance. Where can I get the best lifestyle for my family? Where can I learn the most and surround myself with a great tribe of founders? What kind of weather makes me happy? Both business and personal lens is important when making the decision of where to start a company.

OPT TO BE A GLOBAL CITIZEN

A realization I had after moving to different places over the past 10 years is that staying where you are can be detrimental to exporting your culture. Traveling and living abroad remains the best way to create networks that reach your city, and to represent your country, nation, or culture. People get a different, deeper appreciation for culture when they meet an "ambassador" of it. And in my experience, people who move somewhere to work eventually come back to Canada, bringing back with them a wealth of connection, knowledge, and values that would otherwise be hard to acquire.

The best governments in the world understand this. Singapore is probably the biggest success story of sending great people abroad and bringing them back to help push the country forward. NEXT Canada's very own Reza Satchu (Founding Chairman and Co-Chair, NEXT Canada) is one such example, moving to the US before coming back to Canada with a wealth of experiences to share with the NEXT network.

After all, it's hard to represent Canada if you never go elsewhere.

The best founders today look and think like global citizens.



ADVICE

"Regularly spend time in San Francisco because it provides more learning by osmosis and serendipitous opportunities. Choose a place where you can build a great life. Starting a company is stressful, make it as easy as possible on yourself. If you need sunny weather to be happy, go to Mexico or Costa Rica. And yes, Toronto is an amazing place to live with your family (when it's not on lockdown!)."

BONJOUR MONTRÉAL: CANADA'S STARTUP GEM



▲
Mathieu (left) and his co-founders (including Alexandre Vanier, CTO and Co-founder, pictured right) started helloDarwin (formerly B2BQuotes) in 2017 after realizing that close to 50% of business partnerships in digital marketing and website projects fail within the first year, and end without achieving the initial objective. helloDarwin helps to reduce that 50% failure rate with their proven matching algorithm and process, a 'human-in-the-loop' approach, and by managing expectations on both sides. Their web-based marketplace is designed to help businesses find the best service providers for their web and marketing projects. Ultimately, their goal is to become the one-stop shop for business services.

Mathieu Plante

*Co-founder &
CEO, [helloDarwin](#);
Next AI - MTL,
2020*

When we founded helloDarwin, the Montreal startup community was already gaining steam—we were in the right place and starting our business at the right time. We had access to an abundance of resources and funding opportunities that didn't exist even just a few years before (so I've been told). In Quebec, there's so much assistance available from the different governments, cities, etc. and the Canadian tech talent pool is incredibly high quality. Specifically, I'm thinking of Montreal's reputation as an international hub for gaming, AI, and tech in general.



Montreal, and Canada at large, has been rapidly improving on its reputation as a tech hub with plenty of high-tech and interesting job opportunities. Personally, I've found Montreal to be the best place to start a business for three main reasons: the ecosystem, access to talent, and supportive work conditions.

ECOSYSTEM OF SUPPORT

Since founding helloDarwin, we've had the opportunity to participate in three local accelerators (including NEXT Canada's AI-focused accelerator in the spring of last year) and be a part of an incredibly supportive local tech community. The fact that we've been able to access such amazing opportunities right here in Montreal—with top-tier mentors, peers, and proximity to cutting-edge research in AI—leads me to believe that the “brain drain” concern that has historically plagued Canada will soon be a thing of the past (if it isn't already). You don't need to go all the way to California anymore to get the education, mentorship, and financing your early-stage business needs; you can get all of that right here in Canada.

ACCESS TO TALENT

We are proudly founded and based in Montreal, with no plans to relocate the business at any point in the future (why would we?). We've created new jobs for Canadians—and have actually hired several employees from foreign countries such as France and Belgium and assisted them with their visa process to work here. We attract our international talent mostly through referrals, with the quality of life and work/life balance being a huge selling point.

FLEXIBLE WORK CONDITIONS

When COVID-19 first landed in Canada, we switched to working remotely and weren't sure if we should put hiring on hold. But as the pandemic dragged on and we learned to adapt to the new remote work situation,

New levels of freedom and flexibility and creating a great workplace and company culture will collectively address some of the common reasons Canadians might have previously chosen to seek out work abroad.

we managed to turn the distributed workplace into a positive experience. We continued to hire, and onboard, multiple new employees who have proven to be a huge asset to the team. We also made the decision to continue to allow our employees to work remotely if they choose to; with pandemic restrictions beginning to lift and workplaces re-opening, they now have the option to work: in the office, at home, a hybrid between the two, or even abroad. I think that providing employees with new levels of freedom and flexibility and creating a great workplace and company culture will collectively address some of the common reasons Canadians

might have previously chosen to seek out work abroad.

My personal opinion is that Montreal (and Canada more generally) is one of the best places to start a business right now. If things continue on this path, I predict that fears about “brain drain” will be a thing of the past, and conversations moving forward will centre more on Canada reaping the benefits of “brain gain”.

ADVICE FOR FOUNDERS

“Be patient and use everything that's available to you: loans, grants, expertise, mentorship, different programs and accelerators, the startup ecosystem, etc. Surround yourself with people that have already done what you want to be doing: mentors, other entrepreneurs, angel investors, investors, etc. They bring tremendous value to our local ecosystem and can help you avoid potential pitfalls.”

I'd also recommend surrounding yourself with experts to support your growth: legal, accounting, grants, loans, etc. You'll end up saving/making a lot more than the costs. Those types of investments go a long way and will help you grow in a more controlled way.”



WAVING TO THE FUTURE

Shawn Hewat

Co-founder & CEO, *Wavy*; Next Founders, 2021

Over the past couple of years, the landscape of work changed drastically. People used to choose where they worked, and that's where they lived. This is the underlying trend that's changing everything... because today, people choose where they live, and work wherever they want. Employees are looking for flexibility above all else when it comes to work, which is a huge driver for the talent acquisition and retention problems employers are currently facing. In Microsoft's 2021 Work Trend Index survey, the trends are clear: 73% of employees want flexible work options for the long term.

So, what does this mean? It means that where work happens is becoming a lot more hybrid. Offices will remain part of the workplace environment but as something that's op-

tional (or a 'perk') versus what's expected. Employers will continue to hire from a distributed, global talent market. And teams will continue to engage online as much as they do offline, which is what we're focused on here at Wavy. Providing the tools and technology needed to build company culture for a distributed team! We're looking to brands like Shopify, Deloitte, TELUS, Sun Life, Google, Spotify, and more as great examples of companies that are leading the way in what a digital by default future looks like.

My co-founders, Neshay Ahmed and Peter Kotzeff, and I started Wavy with a mission of helping people build relationships through shared experiences. We've always been focused on this problem space, but gravitated



towards a solution for team building as the world of work became more remote and distributed. Wavy exists to empower people leaders with the tools they need to plan, manage, review, and improve their company culture programs - wherever teams are located. We work with 100+ global clients in technology and enterprise to help connect their people through meaningful experiences, whether that's online, offline, or asynchronous. If that's something you're looking for, check out [joinwavy.com](https://www.joinwavy.com) to get started with your first event.

While we at Wavy are big believers that remote-first doesn't have to be remote-only. And that's especially important when it comes to company culture. Clients can use our Culture Management Platform to plan, manage, and review company culture initiatives, no matter where people are located. They can plug and play options from our marketplace, like an in-person picnic, online painting & planting

class, or a comedy show. Most importantly, people leaders will get data and insights on how their programs are performing over time, such as participation, engagement, satisfaction, and connection. Sharing employee feedback is equally important. That's often how we kick off new programs at Wavy - with a survey to learn about what team members are most interested in!

Building distributed company culture has to be more intentional and proactive than booking a 'one-and-done' event. We're working with clients to create their 'culture calendar', customize their programs, and improve things over time, based on results/feedback. Our marketplace has 'bookable events', which are starting to become longer-lasting than the live event itself. We're working on ways to help teams stay connected once events have finished, which is why I love the painting and planting experience as an example. Post-event, team members have a new desk

plant to care for and receive plant-care tips and tricks from Wavy. It's helping to create longer-lasting shared experiences, which is really at the core of what makes company culture great.

ADVICE

Starting a company is so hard and can often feel lonely (yes, even with co-founders). I feel so lucky to be a part of a tech ecosystem that's so collaborative and focused on lifting each other up. Across Canada, there are so many amazing programs, regional innovation centres, and fellow founders that are here to genuinely help you. Be sure to look into these options as you're getting started. Don't hesitate to reach out to folks who are in your industry and/or have started companies that you look up to! Usually, people are happy to chat and point you in the right direction.

TRYING CANADA'S STARTUP ECOSYSTEM ON FOR SIZE

Andrii Tsok

Co-founder & CEO, TRYON; Next AI - TO, 2018

Being a young family, my wife Nataliia and I traveled a lot. In each new country, I would buy her a new jewelry charm as a memory of that country, but we often had to wait in long lines to get a sales associate's attention and try anything on. During one of those waits, Nataliia mentioned to me that it would be great if she could try on jewelry at home, see it in close detail, and make her choice before going to the store and not having to wait in line for so long. In that moment, the idea of TRYON was born. Having already more than 10 years of experience—Nataliia in UI/UX, Nazarii (my brother) in mobile engineering, and myself in data science—we did an abundance of research to validate the need for virtual jewelry fitting and created a plan for starting the company.



◀
*From left to right:
Nazarii,
Nataliia,
Andrii*



THE ROAD TO CANADA

When we began to think about where we wanted to build our business, Canada stood out for three main reasons: it has a diverse culture with top AI scientists; there's plenty of government support for startups; and overall it is an amazing country to live in. We decided to apply to NEXT Canada's Next AI program which (at the time) offered Start-Up Visa support, and made the move to Canada where our true entrepreneurial journey with a lot of studying, experimentation and development began for us.

When Nataliia and I, first-time entrepreneurs, arrived in Canada in 2018, our whole life was changed. From day one at Next AI, our schedules were full of courses, events and meetings — all to help us learn as much as possible to start a successful company. We met with so many experts, advisors, scientists and other entrepreneurs that broadened our understanding of what being a founder means and what it takes to build a company. Not only did we receive knowledge and the needed financial support to build the company, we also received permanent residency status. Having PR was crucial for us and allowed us to work hard and focus on TRYON.

The culture of support and help in Canada's startup community has been invaluable to us. After the

Next AI program, we also became a part of the DMZ incubator and Accelerprise programs, where the first commercialization steps began. All these programs were crucial in TRYON's journey as they provided access to invaluable advice and support from the experts and community.

One of the best pieces of advice we received was to never undervalue yourself, your product, or your team. If your product/service is unique, it is usually worth more than you think. Do not be shy or afraid to put the price tag on your product that it deserves, even if you are a small startup. Do not lower your price and confidently back it up during negotiations. When we started commercializing our product, we tended to lower the price for our product, but we got amazing advice from our advisor who explained to us why it is important to charge the right price from the beginning.

WHAT'S TO GAIN?

A week or two after arriving in Canada, I started asking myself: Why does Canada provide all this help to new immigrants? Aren't they worried that newcomers will gain the knowledge and resources, then go back to their home countries?

Only after some time did we realize that by investing in young entrepreneurs that strive for success,

Canada creates a pool of grateful and devoted people, who not only want to continue building their business here but also to give back to the community. Not only that, people who are selected to participate in similar programs are usually skillful and hard-working individuals with expertise in specific areas. As a result, so many talented professionals have the opportunity to live and grow their businesses in Canada and, consequently, create a "brain gain" for this country.

Nataliia and I came to Canada with many years of engineering and design expertise, but we needed resources and support to implement our idea.

With Canada's help, we are now a growing diverse team of 10 people. We created a unique virtual try-on technology and work with the world's biggest jewelry brands. And we are proud to be a Canadian company creating employment opportunities and contributing to the prosperity of the Canadian economy.



ADVICE FOR FOUNDERS

"First, sincerely believe in what you do and why you are doing it. And second, don't forget about the work-life balance. When starting your company and bringing your amazing idea to life, the work-life balance and your health is often put on the back burner. Make sure you don't make this mistake. Stay active, get enough sleep, and look after your health when building the next world-famous company!"



RETAINING EMPLOYEES WITH THE POWER OF MONDAYS

◀ **Paula Bobosikova**

*Co-founder & CEO, WFHomie;
Next Founders, 2021*

I moved from Prague to Toronto in 2012 to study Architecture at the University of Toronto, originally drawn here because of UofT's outstanding academic programs.

As I progressed through the program and started to build a professional network in the city, I found myself surrounded by exceptional tech and business opportunities. I got to know people in Toronto's entrepreneurial community and I became excited about how fast it's growing and the amazing people it's attracting. I'm glad that I could stay in Canada after graduation to make the most out of it, and build my own business.

The idea behind WFHomie came to me while going through a company acquisition mid-pandemic (Nudge.ai acquired by Affinity in March 2020). As the world abrupt-

ly shifted from mainly in-office to remote first, and we returned from San Francisco back to Toronto to continue the integration process remotely, it made me realize how much of my startup experience was rooted in the daily experience of being in an office and collaborating closely with my teammates. I started to wonder how companies will be able to get new and existing team members excited about their mission and support them to be productive in a remote-first setting. Shortly after, my co-founder Reza Farahani and I noticed that many of our friends working remotely were on the verge of burning out and



were finding it hard to connect to their work remotely.

The early signs of the 'Great Resignation' followed and it became clear that companies are struggling with attracting, retaining, and engaging top employees. We wanted to crush the belief that work is "just work" and it's perfectly acceptable for it not to be fun — or rather, that it's ok for work (ie. 30% of adults' life) to suck. We think that Mondays are awesome and work can be highly enjoyable. That said, making remote work culture awesome as remote and flexible work is clearly here to stay, is challenging for people ops and HR teams, since there is no pre-existing organization infrastructure to support that at scale. And that's what we're solving with WFHomie.

A SHIFT IN PRIORITIES

The past 18 months were an opportunity for people to slow down and rethink their priorities.

Many of us realized that our current lifestyles — including where and how we work — might not lead to long-term happiness. There's a greater awareness of the opportunity cost of work, combined with a new focus on living life to the fullest.

Working remotely has closed the psychological gap between our careers and our quality of life. Now, people want and expect things like health insurance, wellbeing and home office perks, support for work-life balance, and great culture from their employers.

Another emerging need has been recreating the informal social interactions employees used to have at the office, remotely. Because they don't occur naturally, employees expect more effort and intentionality to be placed into finding opportunities to socialize remotely.

These new expectations come in at a time where demand for talent has never been higher. In 2019, up to 79% of CEOs reported feeling "extremely concerned" about the shortage of skilled workers. That's before the pandemic and the Great Resignation, which have made it much harder for businesses to retain top talent. Today, people know they have leverage on their employers — and alternatives.

THE NEW NORMAL

In general, I am not at all convinced by the push to recreate the office environment online. What's far from a fad, however, is remote-first work, flexible and results-driven work, and the emphasis on great culture.

More generally, HR Tech has gone from being seen as a cost centre to being recognized as a business imperative, and that's here to stay too.

Companies came to realize that their success depends on their employees - therefore in order to stay competitive, they have to be able to attract, retain and continuously engage their top talent. A part of this is rooted in the shift in emphasis from successful onboarding-only, to investing effort also into providing continuous opportunities to connecting with peers and leadership, building trust, and actually supporting people to be able to care about their work.

Some challenges that we've noticed companies are facing when it comes to attracting and retaining talent is that the capacity to invest in employees on either side of the border differs for employers.

In our experience thus far, Canadian companies are hesitant to invest as much in compensation and culture as our US counterparts, simply because there are tighter budgets. Unfortunately, skilled employees then face a difficult decision about whether to leave Canada or not - and when to come back, if ever. That's why it's crucial for Canadian businesses to get creative when distinguishing themselves other than through financial metrics — through an emphasis on their mission, impact, values, or greater inclusivity at work.



ADVICE FOR FOUNDERS

"Shoot your shot. Stop planning and start testing. 'Launching' your product isn't a one-time opportunity. Just put up a website, link a form, start collecting user feedback, and talk to as many people as possible. No amount of passive research in the world will make up for talking to potential users, understanding their pain point, and getting them to pay for your product or service. I believe that's the most effective way to understand if what you're working on creates value. Entrepreneurship isn't glamorous (there are easier ways to get rich faster with less effort), but definitely exhilarating, fulfilling ride of constant learning and getting outside your comfort zone. You'll never be 'ready' — as Reid Hoffman said: 'If you're not embarrassed by the first version of your product, you've launched too late.'"



THE CALL OF THE VALLEY

▲ In conversation with Cathy Han

Co-founder & CEO, *Levro*; *Next 36*, 2011



Tell us about your venture and what you're working on?

I recently launched a company called Levro, a multicurrency bank for global businesses. We allow businesses to hold 34 currencies in one account. We are building new financial infrastructure to support international business. Imagine if there were only one currency in the world, how that would change the flow of commerce around the world? That's what inspires us. It's a big, challenging idea with so much potential to change the way businesses around the globe can interact with one another.

Prior to Levro, I co-founded a company called 42 Technologies. We saw a big opportunity to improve access to data for those without technical backgrounds. There was a big problem that the industry itself was not built to solve, so we built 42 Technologies to create a product for the end consumers of data. I love challenging B2B problems and data businesses provide a lot of that.

If you're spending time on a company, you may as well pursue the tough thing. The time will pass anyway.

What's been your experience with accelerator programs in both Canada and the USA?

In 2011, when I got into the Next 36 program, it wasn't necessarily considered "cool" to build a startup. There weren't many reference points and my peers didn't really have any experience building companies. I just remember Reza saying, "Be uncomfortable. The hallmark of a good entrepreneur is the ability to

make decisions with limited information." The only way to learn how to build a company was to start one, and so we did.

A couple of years later, we got into Y Combinator, which is what initially brought us to Silicon Valley. The partners and founders gave us the core set of guiding set of advice on how to build a startup. They taught us to focus on the right things and gave us an incredible set of peers to learn from — our batch included the founders of Cruise, Flipkart, Algolia, Unbabel, etc.

I credit both the Next 36 and Y Combinator communities with teaching us how to think about and work on building big companies with lasting impact in the world.

Why did you choose to stay in San Francisco to build your business?

I love the energy here. The first time I visited, I went to Coupa Café in Palo Alto and I heard startups getting funded and companies doing deals at the tables next to me. The community here was like nothing I'd ever seen. People were open to connecting and always talking about big ideas, it's an amazing place to be to get inspired. From a business perspective, for a fintech product, Silicon Valley was the right place to be because of the access to experts and networks. The pace

of this industry is like no other I've ever seen and a lot of the innovation is starting in the Valley.

Canada is home and my family is there. For this phase of my career, as we build out a global business, I'm sure we'll have a presence in Canada sooner than we think. When we look at locations for our international offices, Canada is the top contender for our first office outside of the US.

Having lived in both Canada and the USA, in your opinion what are the biggest advantages that the USA has over Canada when it comes to entrepreneurship?

There is such a strong community of startups in the Valley that it sets the bar very high for new companies that are getting started. Risk tolerance is another big advantage entrepreneurs have here. You know there will always be more ideas, funding, and opportunities, which allows you to dream bigger and go for the impossible ideas rather than the realistic ones.

The best thing about Canada is how kind and supportive the people are. Given that, we need to push our entrepreneurs more and give them the support they need to build world changing ideas. Instead of waiting for another company to do it, think, "**Why not me?**"

ADVICE FOR FOUNDERS

"Surround yourself with other founders, partners, and advisors who will push you to choose growth over comfort. The influence of peers can't be understated, they shape the way you see your company and the world more than you could imagine. You are talented and capable of more than you think you are. Don't be afraid, you can do it!"



Q & A

with **SANDRA
ODENDAHL**

◀ Sandra is Vice President, Social Impact and Sustainability at Scotiabank, and a NEXT Canada Board member.

It's admirable that you're so active within your communities and it's evident that your mission is to create positive change and do good in the world. To date, what would you say has been your biggest accomplishment?

Thank you! It's hard to pick one thing, and I have always had an amazing cast of people to work with and to support me. Before joining Scotiabank, I took the helm of a small not-for-profit called Carbon Management Canada. We worked with both the government and private companies to pilot and test technology for carbon storage and provided advisory and consulting on climate change strategy. We did great work, and I was able to ultimately secure multiyear funding for the organization. Another thing I am proud of is the work that my team at Scotiabank did in 2020 to launch and implement ScotiaRISE, Scotiabank's social impact strategy.

In terms of a personal achievement, one of the most difficult things I have done was completing my CFA while on maternity leave, with both a newborn and a toddler. Not recommended, by the way! It was hard, and it truly takes a village. I'm very lucky to have a great partner who jumped in, helped with everything, and supported me through the journey.

What project are you working on that you're excited about?

I'm currently working on mapping Scotiabank's pathway to net-zero and to craft what it means for a bank to enable a net-zero economy. As Scotiabank is a provider of financing and not a direct emitter, we need to understand what our clients are doing, what other countries are doing, as well as what oth-

er regions are doing. The project requires many contributors from across the bank to work together, so it's very exciting.

What do you like to do in your free time?

Pre-COVID, travel and karate would have been on the top of my list. Since COVID, it's been hard to practise karate by yourself on Zoom. I was pursuing my black belt and am looking forward to getting back into it!

I also serve on several not-for-profit boards. I enjoy being around people working on issues that are different from what I experience day to day. And of course, spending time with family is important to me.

In your opinion, how can Canada attract top talent?

I think that attracting top talent from outside Canada requires the right things to be in place on a number of levels. I really like what U of T President, Meric Gertler, has to say on this - Canada should create a 'talent moonshot', one that's strongly funded and co-ordinated across the public and private sectors. He talks about rallying behind one goal: recruit the world's most outstanding scientists, engineers, artists and scholars to develop made-in-Canada solutions to global challenges, working alongside those who are already here.

It's not something that can be done by one company in a vacuum. For example, research suggests that attracting top talent from overseas requires a progressive immigration system, evidence of a strong economy and attractive social policy. In the engineering profession, foreign trained engineers need to know there is a path to licensing, so in

Ontario we've see Professional Engineers Ontario offer a number of supports to help foreign trained engineers get their P.Eng licenses in an efficient manner.

At the company level, in my own experience, hiring talented people in my current role and previously when I ran a small carbon tech company, I have heard again and again how much it matters to people that inclusion and sustainability are high priorities for the company. Maybe it's because I've always worked in environmental and social impact area, but colleagues in other areas of work mention the same thing. People want to work for a company or organization that they are proud to talk about at the thanksgiving dinner table!

What advice would you give to young and aspiring entrepreneurs?

Well, I'm going to start with a disclaimer as I have never started my own company. But, based on what I learned running a very small tech-based company for a couple of years, and being involved in funding and advising early-stage companies in the sustainability area, a few things come to mind:

1. It starts with identifying a problem or an unmet demand, and recognizing a gap in the market so you can create really great solutions.
2. Surround yourself with great people. Get advice and mentoring from experienced entrepreneurs and business people.
3. Be prepared to pivot! An experienced serial VC investor once told me, "when I read a startup's business plan, the only thing that I know with 100% certainty, is that whatever is written in that plan, will not happen."

ASK A FOUNDER

► We chatted with some of our alumni to learn about their favourite thing about working remotely, where in the world they've relocated to (or *would* if they could live anywhere) and more!

HAVE YOU RELOCATED DURING YOUR ENTREPRENEURSHIP JOURNEY?



During peak COVID last year, I moved back to my home city of Hong Kong to take a breather and work 12 time zones away from Montreal. It was a much-needed break, and now I have my mind fully refreshed and a renewed sense of motivation.

IF YOU COULD LIVE ANYWHERE, WHAT CITY WOULD YOU CHOOSE?



New York City. A city is only as great as its people, and New York has attracted the most fascinating, diverse and talented people from all around the world.

FAVOURITE THING ABOUT WORKING FROM HOME?



It's normalized video calls as a sufficient replacement for in-person meetings. When you don't have a budget for air travel and you're pitching to companies in Berlin, the Bay Area or in London, this makes all the difference.

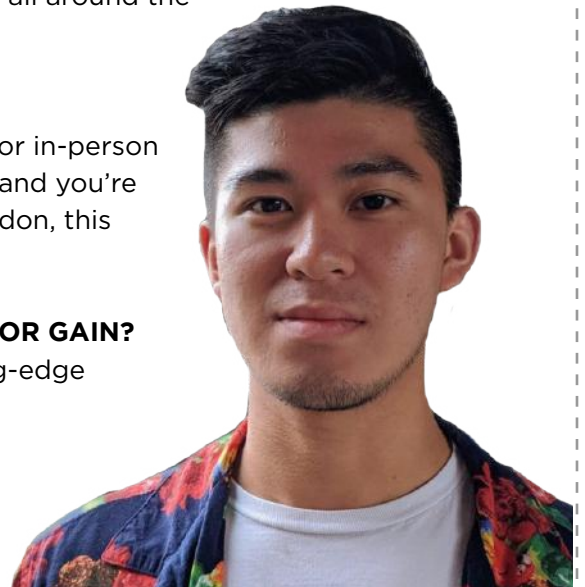
IS CANADA EXPERIENCING MORE OF BRAIN DRAIN OR GAIN?



Gain because of the growth of tech sectors and cutting-edge research.

BORIS BUT ►

Co-founder & CMO, Mixonset; Next AI - Montreal, 2020



HAVE YOU RELOCATED DURING YOUR ENTREPRENEURSHIP JOURNEY?



I have never had to relocate for my business, as we can fly to events, trade-shows and retailer meetings, without having to move.

IF YOU COULD LIVE ANYWHERE, WHAT CITY WOULD YOU CHOOSE?



I would be hesitant to leave Toronto, out of the places I have lived and visited. The multicultural food scene is pretty tough to beat. The hippie in me wants to move to Costa Rica and open a smoothie shack on the beach though.

JULIA KIROUAC ►

Founder & CEO, nud fud Inc.; Next Founders, 2019



HAVE YOU RELOCATED DURING YOUR ENTREPRENEURSHIP JOURNEY?



Yes many times, I initially relocated to San Francisco after finishing Next 36. I have been working remotely for my own business(es) since 2017 having lived and worked in over 30 countries.

IF YOU COULD LIVE ANYWHERE, WHAT CITY WOULD YOU CHOOSE?



Buenos Aires. Best combination of access to amazing nature, food, nightlife, and affordability. Also helps being in a similar timezone as the United S.

FAVOURITE THING ABOUT WORKING FROM HOME?



The freedom to work from any location and during my preferred hours of the day. I usually work out of local co-working spaces.

IS CANADA EXPERIENCING MORE OF BRAIN DRAIN OR GAIN?



Brain drain before COVID-19. Though I expect more brain gain post-COVID, especially in a more remote-first world where there is less need to move to San Francisco/the US. Flexibility to work remotely, access to online communities, and seeing peers succeed living locally in Canada.

MARTIN OCHWAT ▶

Co-founder, Dundas Life; Next 36, 2014



IS CANADA EXPERIENCING MORE OF BRAIN DRAIN OR GAIN?



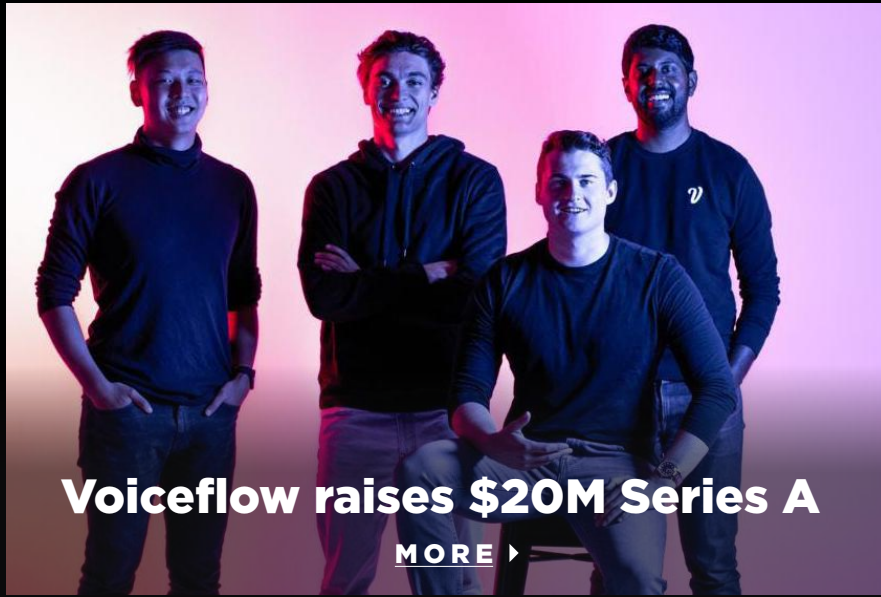
I assume there is still some drain due to the high cost of living in Canada's cities, lack of mature investments in certain sectors, and small consumer market, but that is just a hunch. Likely my biases and all the activity I see happening in the US in my industry for investment and for more scalable revenue.

HAVE A QUESTION FOR OUR FOUNDERS?

Ask your question via the form below for your chance to have it answered in the next edition of GRIT.

Ask us anything

NEXT COMMUNITY NEWS



Voiceflow raises \$20M Series A

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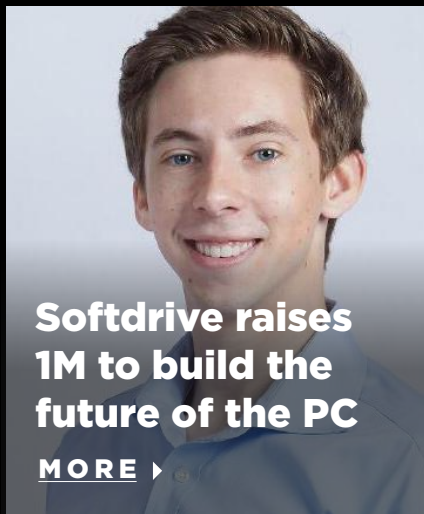
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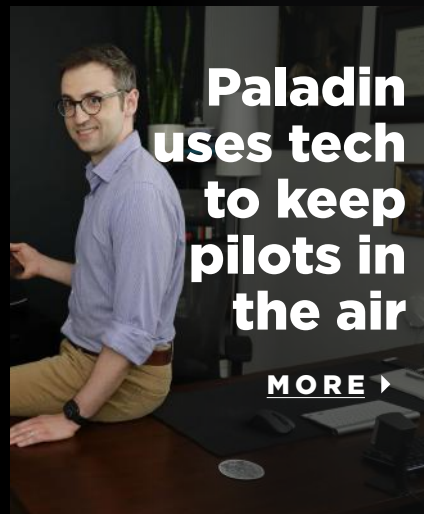
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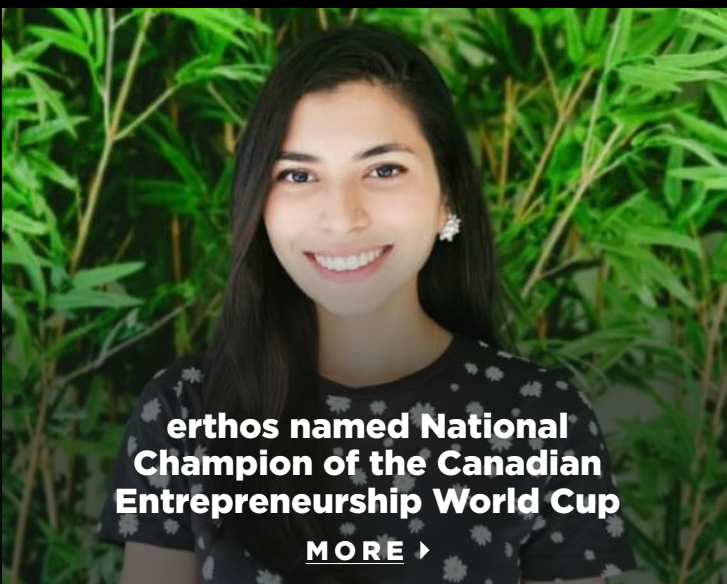
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erthos named National Champion of the Canadian Entrepreneurship World Cup

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3 traits that can help children become more successful

By Nadeem Nathoo

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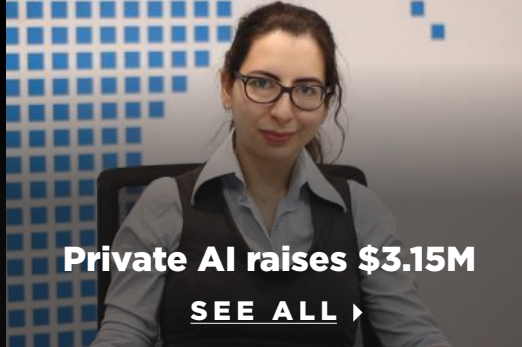
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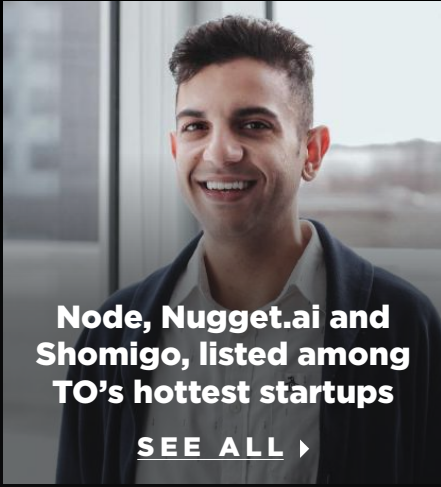
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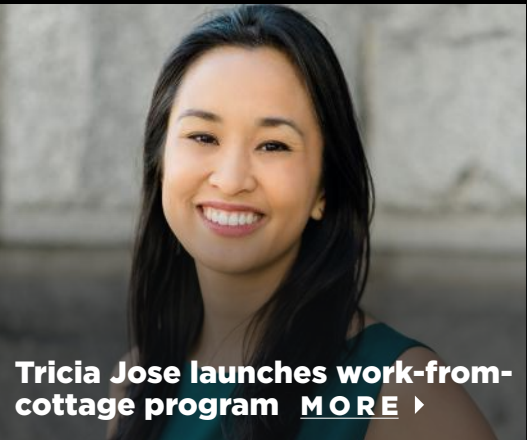
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Tricia Jose launches work-from-cottage program [MORE](#) ▶

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Climate tech is hot, but VCs can't forget about water

By David Lynch, Founder & CEO, Klir

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10 VENTURES TO WATCH

Who are making waves
at home and abroad



Kyle Winters
CEO, *NEXT Canada*

To date, we have supported 800+ entrepreneurs who have launched over 400 ventures. Some entrepreneurs have chosen to focus on the Canadian market, while others have chosen to focus on outside markets. Regardless of their location, I have the utmost confidence that each one of our alumni will be successful. Here, I have spotlighted 10 of our alumni ventures which have been making headlines both at home and abroad.

Proto

Proto (Next AI - Toronto, 2018) is the leader for inclusive chatbots and multilingual contact centre automation. [Learn more >](#)

Validere

Validere (Next Founders, 2016) is transforming the energy industry by making critical product quality data available, accessible, and actionable. [Learn more >](#)

Erthos

Erthos (Next 36, 2018) is replacing single use plastics with their compostable, plant-powered, environmentally friendly solutions. [Learn more >](#)

MinervaAI

MinervaAI (Next AI - Toronto, 2020) is an automated screening platform for anti-money laundering compliance programs. [Learn more >](#)

Lumen5

Lumen5 (Next 36, 2013) empowers global teams to create engaging and eye-catching social media content in minutes. [Learn more >](#)

Airudi

Airudi's (Next AI - Montreal, 2020) state-of-the-art HR software solutions super-charge your business and make people a priority. [Learn more >](#)

Lux

Lux (Next AI - Montreal, 2020) is a space robotics company that specializes in high-altitude platforms for Earth observation. [Learn more >](#)

Flashfood

Flashfood (Next Founders, 2018) partners with grocery chains to sell surplus food at significant discounts for its users, and reducing store-level waste. [Learn more >](#)

Sensequake

Sensequake (Next AI - Montreal, 2020) is a leader in structural health monitoring for new and existing buildings, bridges and infrastructure. [Learn more >](#)

conversationHEALTH

conversationHEALTH's (Next 36, 2016) platform is purpose-built for the life sciences industry to engage patients, consumers & healthcare professionals. [Learn more >](#)

**DISCOVER MORE
ALUMNI VENTURES ▶**

The background of the page is a vibrant, abstract collage of patterns. It features various colors including blue, red, yellow, and green. The patterns include binary code (0s and 1s), geometric shapes like hexagons and squares, and organic, flowing shapes that resemble stylized leaves or flames. The overall aesthetic is modern and tech-oriented.

NEXT

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a more prosperous and competitive
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education and community to aspiring
entrepreneurs across three programs
(Next 36, Next Founders and Next AI)
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