

THINKTECH LEADS THE WAY

To Digital Transformation for Calgary Businesses

BY RENNAY CRAATS

Today's businesses have the unique challenges of finding customers in an increasingly technological landscape. For the past 10 years, ThinkTech Software has helped clients reach prospective customers online and convert that connection into sales.

The world is only a click away, and ThinkTech has earned a reputation for being an effective and reliable partner that helps clients attract those clicks to grow their businesses. And if there is one thing this technology-driven marketing services company knows, it's growth. ThinkTech has enjoyed exponential growth itself since it started in 2012 and it has helped more than 500 clients in a variety of industries across the world and across the street grow along with them.

"Over just the last year, we've grown substantially. We went from being almost entirely remote working to having an office in a co-working space for about nine months and then in February of this year, we moved into a space downtown in the Edison," says Russ Altman, director of Business Development for ThinkTech.

ThinkTech now has a team of around 30 professionals dedicated to meeting its clients' digital marketing needs from locations in Calgary as well as India, where founder Avnissh Gupta is from and continues to focus much of his philanthropic attention. Management is carefully growing the team as it strives to recruit smart, forward-thinking tech-minded people to join the digital transformation services team. Transformation is key and encompasses the culture of the company; ThinkTech employees are called transformers and upon being hired are gifted a transformer toy figure for their desk to keep the concept top of mind.

These staffers continually learn new strategies, improve their skillsets and evolve with the changing market to ensure they are providing the best solutions for clients. And whether ThinkTech is creating a digital program for the client's internal marketing team to implement and manage or assigning one of its experts to handle that program's execution, the firm becomes an important part of its client's team.

TECH

Digital Transformation Specialists

"We're even seeing shifts in the way they write their job applications," says Woods, whose nearly decade-old company focuses on building gender diversity in technology through career-pathing, events, services and partnerships.

"Even things like number of years experience – some companies are even removing that altogether as there are so many folks pivoting. It's not about the number of years experience. It's about what value do you bring, and do you believe in the work we're doing?"

Many in the local tech space believe this dimensional approach to hiring is what's putting Calgary on the talent map. In a 2022 report from CBRE titled Scoring Tech Talent, Calgary ranked 28th among the Top 50 North American markets for the second consecutive year.

The report, which ranked markets according to their competitive advantages and appeal to both employers and tech talent employees, noted there are over 40,600 tech workers in Calgary. That included more than 7,400 tech jobs being added from 2017 to 2021.

In addition, the report ranked Calgary placed fourth in terms of tech talent concentration.

Industry experts say it's an encouraging start in reaching the finish line of tripling Calgary's tech sector over the next 10 years – a goal set by tech and innovation accelerator Platform Calgary.

Vanessa Gagnon, director of community at Platform Calgary, says she's encouraged by the persistently strong demand for skilled workers from the nearly 1,000 tech-enabled companies currently in the city.

"There are so many companies that are actively hiring because they need people who can help grow the business today," she says, pointing to IBM's new Client Innovation Centre and RBC's Innovation Hub as examples.

"And that's where Calgary is lucky because we have a lot of skilled individuals, whether they're coming from other sectors or they're already part of the tech community. There's a lot of opportunity here."

In fact, a 2022 report by the Information and Communications Technology Council of Canada anticipates technology employment will pace the provincial labour market in the coming years.

Titled A Resilient Recovery: Alberta's Digital-Led Post-COVID Future, the study's authors report that, "the province's digital economy remained resilient and thrived" even through the pandemic. Moving forward, they singled out financial technology, health tech, clean technology and agtech as the subsectors that will likely lead employment gains in the province.

For Woods, part of the solution to growing Calgary's tech talent pool is encouraging those already within it – specifically, women in intermediate-level positions who she says are leaving tech careers at a much faster rate than their male counterparts.

"To add a little more context to that, we saw women's enrollment in like computer science peak in the 1980s at around 37 per cent. Today, we're at 19 per cent," she says.

Woods attributes high attrition numbers to women feeling underserved in supports to continue advancing their careers. In many cases, they didn't see other women in leadership, so they cut ties instead of spinning their tires.

"So, we've come up with things like career pathing," which matches mentors with mentees to provide women with real advice for navigating the tech industry.

Chic Geek also hosts several events throughout the year, including Connect Her, a women-in-tech summit earlier this year that brought together more than 250 women together for an evening of networking and learning. Woods notes more than 500 connections were made at the one-day event, which sold out in less than two weeks.

"We know that talent is the number one kind of successor to tech companies doing well," says Woods. "And so, what we're seeing in Calgary is some really great pockets and communities of diverse talent groups. Chic Geek is an example of one of those diverse talent networks."

Building these strong relationships with clients allows ThinkTech to provide custom solutions tailored to clients' needs and goals. ThinkTech can help clients create buzz and develop their brand on social media platforms, drive traffic to their website using search engine optimization and create effective digital advertising featured on popular platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, Google and Tik Tok. The company also offers incredible resources through its partnership with Hubspot, a CRM platform that allows clients to compile marketing, sales, content management and customer service information gathered through website forms and chatbots in one place. Not only does centralizing their marketing, sales and other processes into one application save time but it also provides meaningful marketing analytics to ensure clients are making the most of the tools available to them. ThinkTech's marketing and sales automation strategies are helping clients streamline their business processes, enable and leverage data collection and save money.

"We started out doing a lot of digital marketing, web development and SEO digital advertising and then we moved into more mainstream marketing and more digital adoption when we became Canada Digital Adoption Plan (CDAP) advisors last year," he says.

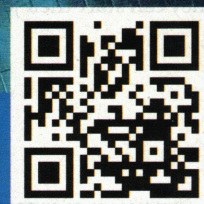
The company is proud to help clients evolve their business with CDAP, a government initiative that facilitates a digital transformation for privately-owned small and medium-sized enterprises in Canada. Through tools, training and support the CDAP helps businesses become more competitive in today's tech world. ThinkTech is a certified digital advisor that helps applicants navigate the program by crafting a digital adoption plan for them as well and then helping to execute the plan in a strategic way.

"We essentially do an audit of a business from a technology standpoint and then we put together a list of solutions to help them use technology to tackle problems and challenges that they are dealing with in their business. The government program then reimburses 90 per cent of the cost of our services for creating that plan," he says.

The priority is to elevate clients' companies however they can, even if that means recommending a service that ThinkTech doesn't provide. While some other advisors focus the program only on the services they can execute for clients, ThinkTech has a different strategy.

"We take a more holistic approach. When we're going through an organization's digital landscape, we'll try to figure out anything that they might benefit from or that would solve a problem for them. Then we'll incorporate that into their digital adoption plan and help find them a partner that can execute that for them," he says.

Their focus has always been their clients, and with expertise in SEO, B2B industrial marketing, website maintenance and the gamut of digital marketing and automation, ThinkTech is providing a strategic digital road map to drive clients' revenue growth in today's high-tech world.





Meanwhile, Gagnon points to additional organizations that are focusing on “rescaling or upscaling” workers to meet current and future demand for skilled workers in tech. She singles out Higher Landing, a Calgary-based career counselling service that helps workers market themselves for career changes.

Gagnon also points to EDGE UP (Energy to Digital Growth Education and Upskilling Project), a multi-stakeholder program launched in 2019 to retrain displaced workers from the oil and gas sector for in-demand jobs in areas such as data analytics, software development, cyber security and more.

“So, there’s a lot of activity and things going on. People are paying attention,” she says.

“It’s just about opening their eyes to the opportunities so they can start their journey into understanding what it

“THE NUMBER ONE FOR ME IS TO SHOW AN INTEREST IN THE TECHNOLOGY,” SAYS KHMJJI. “FOR ME, ITS REALLY ABOUT THAT PERSONALIZED INTEREST – AND HOW IT CONNECTS WITH WHAT WE’RE DOING.”

might look like for them to be in tech. Because, again, there is no shortage of opportunities.”

Looking ahead, Khimji expects Propra will continue to experience “sustainable” growth over the coming months, leading to a need for everything from software developers to customer fulfillment. His advice to standing out to a prospective employer?

“The number one for me is to show an interest in the technology,” he says. “For me, its really about that personalized interest – and how it connects with what we’re doing.”

Gagnon adds it’s important to make those important connections.

“It’s about getting your story out. That’s why we have things like Tech Talent Tuesday, which includes a networking component in which you can meet with the person who’s on the other end of that automated resume submission,” she says.

Gagnon also points to Discover Tech, which takes place May 5 at the Platform Innovation Centre. The second annual expo and fair co-hosted by Platform Calgary and Tech West Collective will feature more than 60 startups that are hiring, as well as post-secondaries and different skill-building organizations.

“It’s career fair meets tech expo,” says Gagnon, noting the one-day event will also feature live demonstrations, panels and more.

“Attendees will be able to meet with companies who are either hiring full-time roles, internships, co-ops. Last year, we had more than 1,500 people come through the building, and we heard of folks being hired as a result.” **B**

ABOVE: KYLIE WOODS, FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHIC GEEK.
PHOTO SOURCE: CHIC GEEK