

How Canada's AI Research Hubs Lured Facebook, Google and Samsung North

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Canada is on a shortlist of global artificial intelligence (AI) leaders, thanks to its bustling tech hubs supported by academia and industry, with the aid of government funding. In 1983, The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR) created a group called Artificial Intelligence, Robotics and Society. It was led by Geoffrey Hinton, a University of Toronto-based AI pioneer (Hinton now works for Google in addition to his duties at the university).

Others who are deeply involved in moving AI research forward include Yoshua Bengio of the University of Montreal and startup Element.ai and the University of Alberta's Rich Sutton. These academics have built some of the finest AI degree programs in the world.

In 2017, the federal government announced the Pan-Canadian Artificial Intelligence Strategy, a CA\$125 million five-year commitment to fund research led by groups centered around the pioneering scientists: the [Montreal Institute for Learning Algorithms](#) (MILA), The [Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute](#) (AMII) in Edmonton, and the [Vector Institute for Artificial Intelligence](#), based in Toronto. The Quebec government has provided \$100 million to its local AI community in Montreal and Ontario has committed \$50 million for Vector.

These announcements prompted Eric Schmidt, executive chairman of Google, to tweet last fall that Canada “quadrupled down” on AI with a smart mix of four key elements: government, universities, large companies and startups.

eMarketer’s latest report, “[AI Incubators: Why Canada’s Hubs for AI Research are Attracting Global Tech](#),” looks into what has steered global tech companies to Canada as the place to experiment and test their AI innovations.

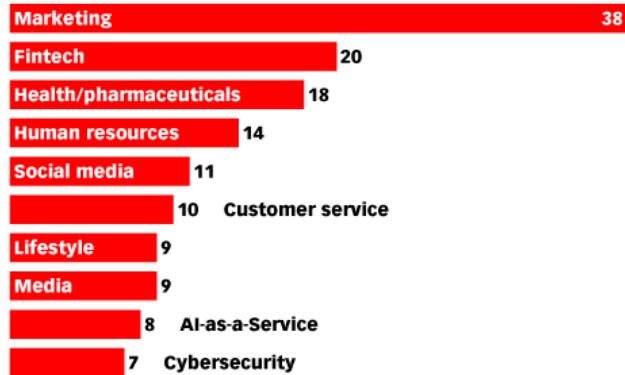
The city of Montreal has drawn significant investment from global tech giants interested in cutting edge AI research and talent. These moves represent a broader strategy by corporate leaders to establish close ties with academia, especially in advanced computing disciplines like AI. In the past few years, Facebook, Google, Microsoft and Samsung have all situated corporate research centers near the cluster of innovation emanating from the Universities of Montreal and McGill.

In addition to industry commitment to the AI scene in Canada, the political landscape in North America reinforces the sector’s strength. In 2016, there was a noticeable “brain drain” of AI talent from Canada to the US industry prior to the election of Donald Trump. But a survey of the membership of MaRS, the Toronto-based innovation incubator, reported that 53% of companies saw more international applicants in 2017 compared with 2016, primarily from the US. The Trump administration’s repeal of the International Entrepreneur Rule, which enables immigrants to grow a business for up to five years without visa expiry, has made Canada a more attractive place for skilled technologists.

Much of the innovation is being applied to the marketing discipline, the focus of many AI startups. According to “The Canadian AI Ecosystem: A 2018 Profile,” conducted by Green Technology Asia, marketing is the top industry judging by the number of AI firms in Canada. The researcher found 38 AI startups with a marketing focus, almost double the number of the next largest industry, fintech.

Marketing Is Top Focus for Artificial Intelligence Firms in Canada, 2017

ranked by number of firms



Source: Green Technology Asia Pte Ltd, "The Canadian AI Ecosystem: A 2018 Profile," Feb 12, 2018

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"The opportunity for AI experts is to simplify concepts like machine learning and contextual computing for non-computer scientists," said Hossein Rahnema, CEO and founder of Flybits, a Toronto-based AI fintech firm. "This allows people to focus more on use cases, like in marketing and customer engagement, rather than worrying about algorithmic and IT complexities."

eMarketer PRO subscribers can access the full report now.

Report by Paul Briggs Oct 09, 2018

Artificial Intelligence Incubators

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eMarketer

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