

Canada
Innovates

Part 1

Answering the call.
Government, investors & academics are serious about leading us out of innovation's backwoods

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When it comes to innovation, newspapers don't just write about it, they are pioneers of it. News organizations were among the first to embrace social media as the face of news changed, and new apps for smartphones are proving the dynamic nature of 21st-century newspapers.

In terms of traditional print, Metro has broken free of the mould used by many other newspapers. Our story selection and presentation are unique in the Canadian media landscape.

Today we've profiled the state of Canadian innovation and where the seeds of ideas are being sown. Governments are stepping up with increased innovation investment and the private sector is poised to jump on the opportunities — Canada is ripe for the next wave of social, cultural and technological innovation.

On Day 2 we look back at Canada's innovative past and show you today's Canadians who are making a difference. On Day 3 we look at some of Canada's failures — and a surprise guest tells us what we need to do to charge to the forefront of innovation.

Metro's contribution to this innovation comes in the way we'll tell the stories — we're putting design and information on a collision course. Whether these ideas embody the innovative spirit is something we'll leave up to you. Check them out, then email us at readers@metronews.ca or tweet @MetroNewsCanada.

Canada lagging in several key innovation indicators, including patents produced per capita,

export market share of electronics and pharmaceuticals, and technology manufacturing.

Later that year, the government assembled an expert panel from the academic and corporate worlds to solve the innovation gap. The result was a report entitled *Innovation Canada: A Call to Action*, a review of innovation over the past 30 years that provided a framework for repositioning Canada's economy.

"The budget last year, which was only maybe six months after the report, enacted a whole host of initiatives that were recommended in the report," says Tom Jenkins, the panel's chair.

Quoted



"I think overall we are still lagging in innovation. As a score, we're certainly not at the top. The Conference Board, the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity — they all show that we can do better, and historically we have done better."

Tom Jenkins is the executive chairman and chief strategy officer of Waterloo-based software company OpenText, serves on boards for a variety of software companies, is a member of several national academic councils and the chair of the Canadian Digital Media Council.

Talent

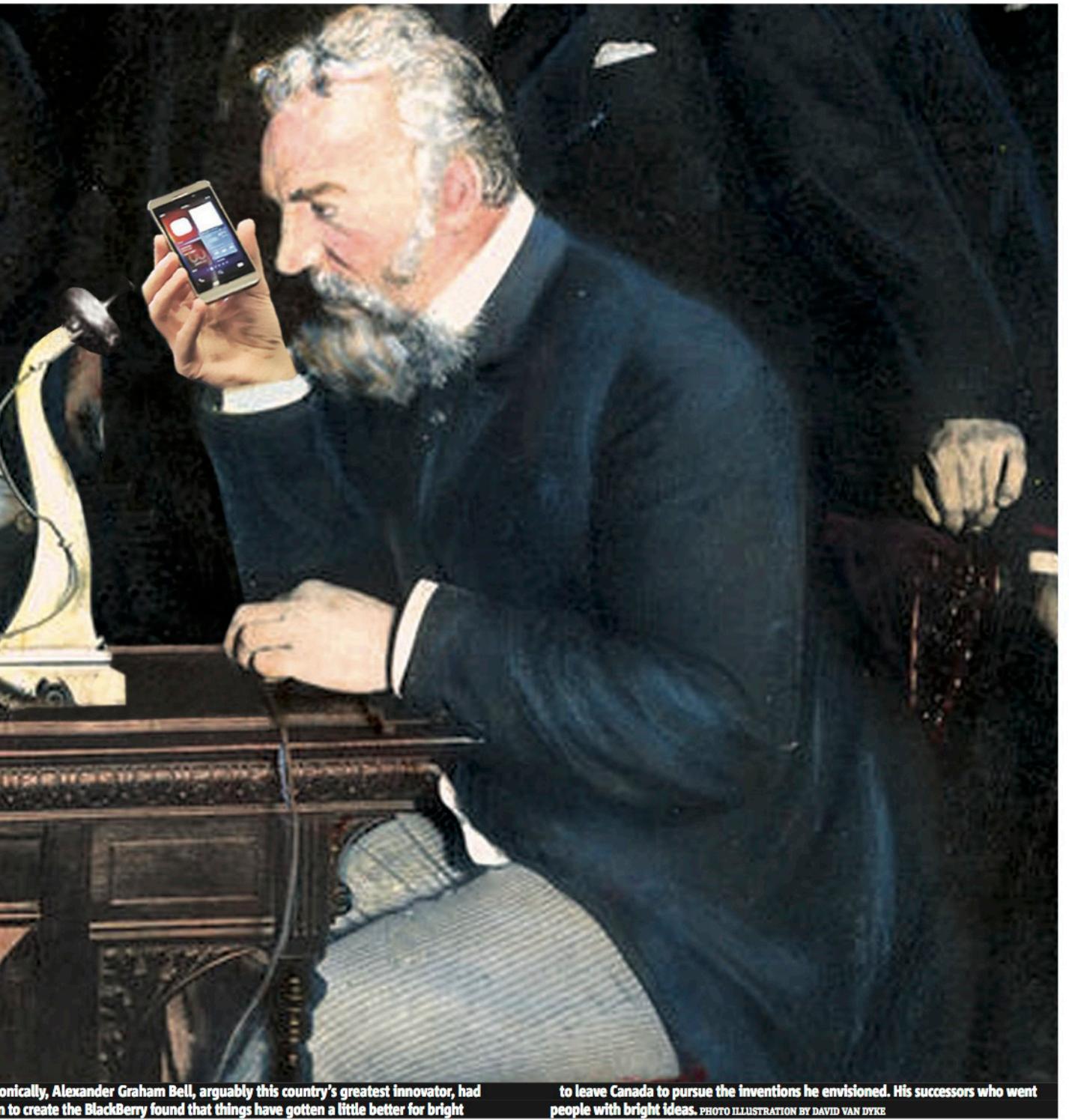
Canada's schools continue to perform well on a global stage, but now it's a matter of cultivating this wealth of intelligence and creativity.

Nearly 150 years later, inspired Canadian scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs continue to head south to have their dreams realized.

A 2010 report by the Conference Board of Canada gave our country a D grade for its innovation efforts and a ranking of 14 out of 17 developed countries (below Austria and Denmark). They defined innovation as "the ability to turn knowledge into new and improved goods and services."

Progress has been made on the former through simplification of the Scientific Research and Experimental Development tax-incentive program (known as SHRED).

The latter has been considered through the Canadian Innovation Commercialization Program (CICP), which awards



Ironically, Alexander Graham Bell, arguably this country's greatest innovator, had on to create the BlackBerry found that things have gotten a little better for bright to leave Canada to pursue the inventions he envisioned. His successors who went people with bright ideas. PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID VAN DYKE

Suzie's path of innovation

Suzie could be your average Canadian. She is intelligent, creative and motivated. She doesn't mind her job, but is constantly day-dreaming about building something she can call her own. Suzie has ideas, but she's the only one who knows them. She has plans, but doesn't know how to carry them out. The entrepreneurial road can be daunting, but if Suzie can follow five steps, she could end up with exactly what she's been dreaming about. STEPHEN BALDWIN/METRO



Conception

A great idea can come in an "a-ha" moment or through weeks of brainstorming. Ideas come in all shapes and sizes and can be original or improvements to current concepts or products. Who hasn't thought, "That would be so much better if..."? Thoughts will be swirling and questions will arise. What purpose will it serve? How will we execute it? Is there a market? Just don't spend too much time coming up with the company name.



Collaboration

Ideas begin to take shape when people with a common interest or goal work together. Everyone's got a unique perspective, and incorporating everyone's input on a product or service can be painstaking — but necessary — as the idea percolates. Breakthroughs are the result of hours of tedious work. Having someone to help carry the burden and responsibility can allow you to get where you need to be faster and more effectively. For those who can't find their entrepreneurial soul mate, meet-ups and forums can help.



Funding and incubation

Venture capitalism and angel investors are emerging as popular avenues for funding. These investors are willing to bet big on great ideas, often for a piece of the company or its profits. Small business can also look to available grants and loans offered by each level of government. Incubators and accelerators provide new businesses with the resources and mentoring needed to grow. Both often provide funding, but their real value is in helping you develop your idea in a collaborative setting.



Experimentation

This varies depending on the idea or application. Web startups will launch a beta version of their site, while others require a more tactile approach (e.g., testing/demonstration in the targeted industry, trade shows/showcases, etc.). This stage allows kinks to be smoothed, and in some cases forces you to start from scratch.



Marketing

This step is often overlooked, but it's as important as the others. You've put together something fresh and innovative, but no one knows about it, so no one cares. Researching and seeking out those people who can influence the success of your innovation is critical. The way you present your business will say a lot about what you do and how you do it. Done right, you can allow the innovation to speak for itself.

Startups

Canadian innovation: A cautionary tale

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Canada's track record for supporting innovation is good — but it could be better, experts say.

More available capital, resource support and a dash of bravado might be what it takes to push our creative envelope to the max.

Small-business consultant Mark Evans believes the investment community looks at the big-ticket items at the expense of overlooking niche innovation.

"There are not enough sources of seed capital, and a lot has to do with the investment mentality that prevails with big investors who are more conservative. We're happy giving money to companies that want to dig holes in the ground (minerals, etc.), but it's a different game when it comes to other investments," said Evans, a former business journalist, turned consultant, with past credits in the Financial Post and the Globe & Mail.

It's a big step for a government that has been criticized both at home and abroad for living in the past, and with the infrastructure in place, it's now on the private sector, and the next generation of entrepreneurs, to take advantage.

Regardless of the outcome, Canadians can find comfort in the axiom that tolerance breeds innovation. But in this game, according to Jenkins, getting too comfortable can mean falling behind.

"It's the nature of innovation that you cannot rest on your laurels. Because innovation by its nature is constantly changing and constantly challenging countries or companies to keep up. This is not a snapshot, it's a treadmill."



Business Association.
"We need them for our economy to continue to grow."

Wilmot's organization was established by the government in 1996 and provides youth between 18 and 39 with much-needed startup capital and access to mentors, who offer business advice, guidance and collaboration.

The government and private sector are stepping up with more credit and support for innovative small businesses across the country.

The final step, according to Evans, is believing we're

innovators. Canada has long been an innovative nation, but we tend to shy from the limelight.

"Canadians are too modest and humble for their own good compared to U.S., who are always ready to declare themselves as the best or No. 1," said Evans.

More online

Canadian innovation has given the world so much, but do you know how much? Try our quiz on Canadian inventions at metronews.ca/inventionquiz