

Veterans still the boss at high tech firms

By JOAN WALTERS

TORONTO — Older males are overwhelmingly the chief executives of Canada's fastest growing high-tech companies, despite a popular notion that whiz kids are increasingly at the new economy's helm.

"Although we often hear success stories about fresh-faced entrepreneurs striking gold on the high-tech landscape, more than half of Canada's fastest growing tech companies are led by CEOs with a wealth of experience," said a survey released Wednesday by Deloitte and Touche.

In fact, three-quarters of the firms on the consulting company's Fast 50 list of Canadian technology companies are led by industry veterans between 40 and 60, with an average of 16 years of experience, not by a generation of new, young turks.

And there were other surprises in the annual survey, including the absence of a single entry from Ottawa, long regarded as a booming Silicon Valley North.

Instead, strong tech growth in Alberta, B.C. and other parts of Canada has spawned hot new firms to compete with Ottawa standouts from previous years — including Entrust Technologies, CrossKeys Systems and Chipworks in 1999.

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Top tech companies in B.C.

AimGlobal Technologies	Delta	computer/peripherals
ALI Technologies Inc.	Richmond	software
Bridges.com Inc.	Kelowna	Internet
DataWave Systems Inc.	Vancouver	communications
Intrinsyc Software Inc.	Vancouver	software
MDSI Mobile Data Solutions	Richmond	software
Pivotal Corp.	North Vancouver	software
Selkirk Financial Technologies Inc.	Vancouver	software
Total Care Technologies Inc.	Kelowna	Software
Xantrex Technology Inc.	Burnaby	manufacturing
B.C.'s SHOOTING STARS		
Stratford Internet Technologies Inc.	Vancouver	Internet
Uniglobe.com Inc.	Vancouver	Internet

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based on how the calculations of fast-growth are done," said Garry Foster, high technology director for Deloitte, which has issued its Fast 50 list of up-and-comers for the past three years.

"I'm up in Ottawa and talk to our people there daily and that market is absolutely hot."

Nevertheless, Ottawa firms are now eclipsed by the likes of Big Picture Technologies Inc. of Calgary, Stratford Internet Technologies of Vancouver, and InfoInterActive of Bedford, N.S., described as growing so

rapidly that they are, literally, "shooting stars."

John Reid of the Canadian Advanced Technology Alliance, noted that Ottawa's industry has a higher level of maturity than regions of Canada, which are just beginning to thrive.

"Once you've reached the size of a Cognos or a Corel or other (Ottawa-based) companies of that type, it's hard to maintain that fast a pace of growth."

The survey ranks the 50 Canadian tech firms with the highest revenue growth over the past five years, rates which

Fast facts

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF FAST 50 COMPANIES

- **Ontario:** 26 companies (52%) in 2000 vs. 31 companies (62%) in 1999.
- **B.C.:** 10 companies in 2000 (20%), vs. 8 companies (16%) in 1999.
- **Quebec:** 7 companies in 2000 (14%) vs. 6 companies (12%) in 1999.
- **Alberta:** 4 companies in 2000 (8%) vs. 3 companies (6%) in 1999.
- **Manitoba:** 3 companies in 2000 (6%) vs. 2 companies (4%) in 1999.

INDUSTRY SECTOR BREAKDOWN

- **Software:** 62%, down from 66% in 1999.
- **Semiconductor/Equipment:** 2%, down from 8% in 1999.
- **Other technology-related businesses:** 12%, up from 8% in 1999.
- **Manufacturing:** 6%, up from 4% in 1999.
- **Biotechnology:** 2%, same as last year.
- **Communications/networking:** 8%, up from 2% in 1999.
- **Internet:** 6%, up from 2% in 1999.
- **Medical/scientific/technical:** 2%, same as 1999.

frequently top 6,000 and 7,000 per cent. Contenders must have had 1995 revenues of \$75,000 and 1999 revenues of at least \$1 million.

The list was released in alphabetical order on Wednesday,

SEE TECH, F2

Western Canada representation in survey rises

pending final rankings to be issued in September. The top-growing company in 1999 was Sierra Wireless Inc. of Richmond, B.C., followed by TUCOWS Interactive Ltd. of Toronto.

The survey noted the number of firms from Western Canada was higher, with B.C. representing 20 per cent of the list, up from 16 per cent in 1999, and Alberta with eight per cent, compared with six per cent in 1999.

Quebec was also up slightly, with seven firms making 14 per cent, including ever-evolving BCE Emergis.

Ontario continued to benefit from the hot Waterloo-based companies Research in Motion, Descartes Systems, and Open Text Corp. The province accounted for 52 per cent of the list, down from 62 per cent of the list in 1999.

However, it was the generation gap that Deloitte chose to emphasize in its commentary this year.

"All CEOs of this year's companies are male, with more than half (52 per cent) between 40 and 49 years of age," the survey said. "Another 22 per cent are between 50 and 59 years of age."

Reid and Foster both noted — as did several CEOs — that shareholders are more comfortable with long-toothed older executives in new companies.

"It doesn't surprise me the CEO group is the 40-and-over talent," said Reid. "That's the sort of individual you want running these enterprises, with networks, experience, track records."

In Calgary, Michael Anthony, 52, CEO of Big Picture Technologies, notes that having an older executive is important to "harness the exuberant and talented group of younger employees" in such fast-growing firms.

"Most of the people who work for me are in their 20s and 30s," Anthony said of the e-commerce software company's work force. "These people are unbelievably bright but you also need someone who's been around the block because we can recognize trends, see developments and know the cycle."