

Moon shots

4 WHO MADE IT

At Vancouver's annual six:forty event, speakers had six minutes and 40 seconds to describe their path to success

JANET STEFFENHAGEN

The path to success as a B.C. tech startup can be a circuitous one, and those leading the trail often prove that nationality, gender and personal history are less important predictors than the ability to see and seize an opportunity.

Karina Hayat had her first experience as an entrepreneur while growing up in Guatemala, when she and her sister began selling ice in their neighbourhood to help their hard-working parents. After her family moved to Canada in 1991 to escape political unrest, she found an abundance of opportunities, even though she spoke no English. These included collecting refundable cans and bottles strewn about after fireworks exhibitions in Vancouver and delivering newspapers.

Those early days in Canada were difficult, Hayat says, but they taught her an important lesson about becoming an entrepreneur: that it's OK to take risks and go outside your comfort zone, "because that is truly where the magic can happen."

Hayat is now president of Prizm Media, a company that uses technology, media and marketing techniques to connect customers with affordable health-care services and products.

She was one of four entrepreneurs to present their personal stories during a BC Technology Industry Association (BCTIA) event that was intended to shine a light on the individuals behind leading-edge tech companies in B.C. The event was called six:forty because the speakers were given only six minutes and 40 seconds to describe



Mark Cunningham, pilot, musician and motorcycle racer, has created multiple startups, including the Dunn & Bradstreet Cloud Innovation Center | RICHARD LAM

their path to success.

Richard Eaton, co-founder of Berlineaton management consulting business, offered an equally compelling story as he explained how his adventurous spirit shaped his vision about what it takes to become a successful leader.

His love of a challenge began when he was a youngster cliff jumping into North Vancouver rivers, and continued throughout his life as he became a mountaineer, a paratrooper with Britain's airborne and commando forces and a counterterrorism operative in Northern Ireland.

In keeping with his company's "Be Bold" motto, Eaton says those longing to become entrepreneurs must first identify their passion.

"You have to have something you're willing to live for – even better, die for. You have to make a decision about who you are and what you stand for," Eaton tells the audience.

The other presenters, Mark Cunningham and Jeff Sinclair, are equally compelling.

A serial entrepreneur and business wizard, Cunningham has been on the founding team of four successful startups in Vancouver. In 1992, Cunningham helped form Crystal Reports, the world's first Windows-based reporting tool, which was sold to BusinessObjects for \$820 million. In 2006, he founded Indicee, an innovator in the



then-burgeoning cloud-based analytics and business intelligence space. In April 2014, Cunningham sold Indicee to the venerable Dun & Bradstreet Inc. for an undisclosed sum. This formed the Vancouver-based Dun & Bradstreet Cloud Innovation Center, of which Cunningham is the founder and president.

In his spare time, Cunningham plays guitar in local bands, kitesurfs, cycles and pilots his own plane.

Sinclair, who was born in Australia, trained as a journalist but was enticed by technology and, after moving to Vancouver, co-founded Eventbase, a leading provider of apps for special events.

Sinclair and his business partner Ben West created Eventbase nine months before the 2010 Winter Olympics and were determined to build the official app for the Vancouver Games, even though they didn't have a contract. They were successful and won a licence, which started their journey of building apps for big events.

Their work was honoured later in 2010 when the company won the Best Mobile App trophy at the Canadian New Media Awards in Toronto.

Eventbase has created event apps for some of the world's largest gatherings, including three Olympic Games, the

Australian-born Jeff Sinclair co-founded Eventbase, which has created apps for some of the world's largest gatherings, including three Olympic Games

| **Chung Chow**



Counterterrorism veteran Richard Eaton is co-founder of Berlineaton management consulting business. Motto: Be Bold | BERLINEATON



Karina Hayat escaped political unrest in Guatemala to find success as president of Vancouver's Prizm Media, which connects customers with affordable health care | CHUNG CHOW

Sundance, Tribeca and New York film festivals and, most recently, the South by Southwest film conference and festival, which is now one of Eventbase's largest investors.

Sinclair's relocation to Canada brought changes in recreational pursuits as well, as he shifted from surfing to snowboarding. "Being a father of three young children and an entrepreneur, I don't get to do either as much as I used to, but it's still a fun ride," he says.

Sinclair is also co-founder of the Vancouver Canary Derby, through which business and tech companies raise money for cancer research.

Sixty-four showedcase the diversity of the B.C. tech sector, one of the top three contributors to the provincial economy, with more than 9,000 companies and with expertise ranging from information and communications technology to engineering, clean tech, digital media and the life sciences.

According to the most recent figures, the industry had revenues of \$23 billion in 2012, almost double what they were in 2002, and was the single fastest-growing sector in the province.

"We've really come of age," says BCTIA president Bill Tam, adding that the tech industry has been growing at two to three times the pace of the provincial economy as a whole.

Still, while B.C. has produced a number of dynamic tech companies – such as Hootsuite, Avigilon, BuildDirect, Global Relay and Vision Critical – most are small startups with fewer than 50 employees, Tam notes.

A recent KMPG report describes B.C. as one of the most vibrant startup ecosystems in the world. But it's a "powder keg in need of a fuse," KMPG concludes. 🐦