

### **Tech training in Toronto**

*Toronto's tech job market has been growing over recent years, but there are not enough qualified workers. To fill this gap, private institutions are springing up, looking for recent graduates interested in training. I was one of them.*

By Emilio Barends

Last spring, I, like many other university graduates, found myself wondering what the heck to do with my life. I knew writing would lead me somewhere, but saying “I am an English major” couldn’t be enough. Before I could find a job, I had to find a new skillset.

The omniscient Facebook must have been aware of my dilemma, because I started seeing advertisements for [RED Academy](#) on my feed. It was a new private institution that had just expanded to Toronto (its headquarters and only other location is in Vancouver), offering courses in web development, user experience design and social media marketing.

So I started thinking: where does most writing end up nowadays? Online—on websites. And do I know anything about how websites work or are built? Not beyond what I learned in Grade 10 computer science.

I signed up for the web development course a few days later. I looked at what other institutions were offering in the Toronto area but ended up choosing RED anyway. This had more to do with tuition cost than lack of options. Other private tech schools with a presence in Toronto include BitMaker Labs, Lighthouse Labs and BrainStation, to name just a few.

What all of these institutions have in common is their focus on hard skills and hands-on projects. A graduate from one of their web development programs might not be educated on the history of the Internet or ones and zeroes, but she should be able to create a high-quality website or join a company’s web development team as a junior employee if she took the course seriously.

For obvious reasons, this was on many people’s minds when we started the 10-week part-time program in May.

“So will we be able to work for a company as developers after [this program]?” asked one of my classmates—another humanities graduate—on the second week.

“Absolutely,” said David Fudge, one of the course instructors.

In part, RED Academy chose this model to appeal to millennial humanities graduates who have no background in technology—many of whom are out of work or underemployed.

The other reason is to address the shortage of young tech professionals who have experience in their fields. Employers don’t want computer science graduates who spent

four years learning the theory but never put it to practice. They want workers who know how to code on day one.

My intention was never to become a professional developer (and so far I haven't become one). A more dedicated student could have developed a strong portfolio from the projects that we did, and the instructors and the school itself are well connected in the industry, so there's a real possibility of employment for those who are serious about being noticed.

But even though I haven't become the new Bill Gates, what I learned has been extremely useful as I develop my online writing portfolio (CSS opened my eyes to a whole new world). I went in looking for new skills, and that's what I came out with.

I also learned that you don't need years of schooling to join the tech industry. What employers and clients want most is people who are trained in getting the job done.