

The growing force of women in tech

While they comprise half of the U.S. workforce, women still hold less than 20 percent of all tech jobs. By comparison, women will represent 23 percent of the incoming 116th Congress.

Let's let that sink in for a moment.

Congress, by the numbers, is now more progressive and less of a "boys' club" than the technology sector. But while those numbers may feel surprising, diving into the background of

women and tech – exploring the early female tech pioneers and what the future holds for women in the industry – actually paints a picture that's far less bleak. Stay with us; it's worth a deep-dive.

The myth of the male tech genius

Take a look at the recent and current legends on the tech playing field and you won't find much gender diversity: Jobs, Gates, Zuckerberg, Page, Brin. And when you start to read about venture capital funding mechanisms and startup incubators, it becomes clear that the industry has a history of mythologizing – even fetishizing – unreasonable men of “genius” while shutting out other genders and skillsets. Unfortunately, the resulting lack of female role models is not only bad for the recruitment of women into the industry, but it also perpetuates the untrue stereotype that women can't cut it as tech leaders.

There's even a subset of men in the industry who would have us believe that there is something inherent, even biological, keeping women from entering and achieving within the sector. This sexist attitude is not only bad science, it's also costing companies dollars. In fact, there is evidence that tech companies with women in leadership positions are measurably more successful than those that aren't. A recent survey of over 20,000 firms across 91 countries found that businesses with women in their C-suite tended to increase their net profit margins. As for startups, Forbes has reported that women-built businesses bring in some 20 percent more revenue for half the money invested; they have over a third higher ROI when venture backed; and they generate 12 percent more revenue, overall, than male-run startups.

The numbers don't lie: women are good for business. And if the mythological male tech genius isn't lucrative for companies, maybe it's time for something else. Thankfully, there have

been women quietly paving the way in tech, all along. Let's take a look.

A gender equity model

While the current tech environment is far from ideal when it comes to gender parity, the road traveled by early female tech pioneers was inarguably even bumpier. The fact that many women, despite often overwhelming social obstacles, left indelible marks in their emerging fields is both a cause for hope and a model for a new type of tech industry still emerging.

Mathematician Grace Hopper, an early pioneer in coding, may

have been known as the Queen of Computer Code, but she never rose to Jobs-level fame. Beyond her achievements in coding, she also worked her way up the ranks of the U.S. Navy to become a Rear Admiral, becoming so indispensable that she was recalled from retirement multiple times, with Congress eventually granting her permission to work beyond the normal mandatory retirement age. “Amazing Grace” Hopper contributed to the development of UNIVAC, helped develop the COBOL and FORTRAN programming languages, and made enormous contributions to developing standards and improving computing throughout military and civilian practice.

Later in the twentieth century, American programmer and engineer Radia Perlman created the spanning-tree protocol (STP), a fundamental piece of network bridges and a foundational part of what would become the internet as we know it. The MIT-educated Ph.D. and author continues to work in the computer science field, refining and innovating on her earlier developments. She’s downplayed her contributions, saying, “In engineering, the point is to get the job done, and people are happy to help. You should be generous with credit, and you should be happy to help others” – an attitude some tech leaders could learn a thing or two from.

Supporting potential and diversity

Fortunately for all of us, people – both male and female – are waking up to the gender-equity tech problem. There are now organizations across the U.S. and the world actively supporting and educating women in the STEM field. A few notables include:

- Women in Engineering ProActive Network (WEPAN), whose goal is to transform the culture in engineering education, making the atmosphere and culture of engineering more amenable to women. They support a network of students at over 150 campuses across the U.S.

and reach well over half of the female engineering student population of the country.

- National Girls Collaborative Projects (NCGP) works to increase resources available to girls that will boost education and career interest in STEM fields. Since 2002, they've engaged 31 collaborative networks to make more and better STEM learning resources available in 39 states.
- Girls Who Code, founded by Reshma Saujani, an American lawyer and politician, has reached over 90,000 girls across all 50 states. According to Saujani, the organization has reached a tipping point in its mission to build girls' capabilities, careers, and communities in computer engineering—and is on track to achieve gender parity in computer science by 2027.

Charitable efforts alone won't solve the gender gap; luckily, they won't have to. In an effort to address the problem, build stronger organizations, and make more money, some tech companies are starting to work on the problem as well, making conscious investments in diversity and working to advance women into leadership roles.

Cloud-based CRM giant Salesforce, for example, embraces diversity as a core company value and has a Chief Equality Officer who oversees nonprofit partnerships that support diversity, audits of pay gaps, and other initiatives to ensure diversity and equality. And other power players in the tech field, like Dell, IBM and Intuit have scored high in elevating gender equality and diversity throughout their culture and policies as well.

The future looks (more) female

Institutions and businesses don't make change in a vacuum, and the fact remains that individual women within the industry have been pushing hard for reforms since its inception. At the age of 26, for example, programmer Samantha John founded Hopscotch to teach children to program games and animations of their own. British tech entrepreneur Kathryn Parsons co-founded and serves as co-CEO of Decoded, a London-based startup with a mission to teach novices to code in a day and increase digital literacy, including otherwise underserved populations. At the same time that these startups are helping build access to tech know-how, high-profile players like

YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki and Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg offer powerful examples for women in tech leadership.

Here at CallTrackingMetrics, we believe gender equity is a competitive advantage, and we're proud that more than half of our employees are female. Having a strong female team helps us attract talented women who may not feel at home at other technology companies. It also gives us an advantage in relating to our customer base, particularly in the advertising industry, where 85% of consumer campaigns aim to reach women.

It remains to be seen whether the current efforts and attention will be enough, in the long run, to counterbalance the undercurrent that lingers in the industry. But this year's changes to Congress serve as a likely indicator of things to come across all fields and industries, where women are working to shake things up. And, we're confident that smart and savvy businesses will follow suit.

About The Author

CallTrackingMetrics provides conversation intelligence to thousands of businesses, worldwide. From understanding which marketing campaigns are driving conversions to advanced call automation for contact center operations, we arm businesses with the tools to transform communications into actionable intelligence.

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