



# Research, reach, and revenue: How 3 Canadian startups grew with digital

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Look out Silicon Valley—Canada’s startup scene is on the rise. Canada is a hotbed for innovation and marketing talent, and the rest of the world is taking note. Here’s a look at how digital marketing helped propel the growth of three Canadian startups: SkipTheDishes, Universe, and MaxSold.

think with **Google**

Unless you've been in hibernation for the last five years, you've probably heard about [Canada's booming startup scene](#). Major startup successes and hundreds of new businesses have popped up. The [Canadian government is doing its part to appeal to talent](#) and make the country an attractive place for entrepreneurs on the verge of creating the next big thing.

One thing successful Canadian startups seem to have in common: their ability to make the most of digital marketing. The startups we're focusing on here have made innovative use of digital marketing during three major growth stages: **researching** to find customers, **reaching** those customers, and growing with those customers to accelerate **revenue**.

Those three steps are clearly applicable to Canada's next generation of up-and-coming startups, but larger businesses with legacy marketing programs would do well to take some notes too.

## SkipTheDishes finds untapped markets by researching search trends

[SkipTheDishes](#) didn't get its start in Silicon Valley, Montreal, or Toronto. No, the online food delivery platform got off the ground in Winnipeg, and now it's a highly successful food delivery player in Canada and the U.S. Midwest. How did SkipTheDishes pull that off, especially in the stuffed-to-the-gills food delivery space? By looking at the data.

With the help of its agency [Tribbute](#), the startup monitored [search trends](#) to uncover untapped and underserved markets across Canada. Knowing which markets were searching for food delivery the most—at what times and on which days—allowed the company to prioritize high-potential, smaller-market geographies before it rolled out to more populated areas. The startup's search and display campaigns were targeted to customers who lived within narrow delivery zones, and ads were served at optimal hours throughout the day. Google data and [AdWords](#) tools also helped it find new customers and people more likely to convert.

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These efforts to find [high-value customers](#) paid off quickly—and helped the company set itself up for long-term success. The initial campaign drove a 73% increase in web traffic from Adwords between Q1 (January–March) and Q2 (April–June). After seeing what worked in the smaller markets, the startup expanded to serve more than 40 new markets in less than four years.

“We had to be scrappy and nimble since day one. No charge tools like Google Trends helped us unlock opportunities and find market gaps that were the foundation for our early growth plan,” said Andrew Chau, co-founder of SkipTheDishes.

## Universe grows reach by turning clicks into conversions

[Universe](#), a Canadian marketplace for event creation and discovery, faced an all-too-common problem. The Toronto-based startup was getting plenty of clicks and visits to its site—but they weren’t always the clicks it wanted. Lots of people were coming to the site to purchase tickets, but that wasn’t Universe’s only objective. The company also wanted to grow the number of DIY event organizers using the platform.

After diving into its [Google Analytics](#) data, the startup realized that it needed to change its acquisition approach to achieve its objectives. Instead of asking first-time visitors to “create an event,” a high-commitment task that involved setting up an account and selling tickets to their own events, the site would simply invite them to sign up for an account.

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Breaking out the two registration paths allowed the startup to [retarget](#) people after they had been to the site and signed up for an account. Once customers were familiar with the platform, encouraging them to come back and create their own events was that much easier. This small tweak in the process—informed by analytics data—ended up being pivotal for Universe. The company increased its number of signups by 5.2X between Q1 (January–March) and Q2 (April–June), and increased the number of listings created by 4.5X quarter over quarter as well.

“When we were just starting out, we relied largely on instinct for the first couple of weeks,” said Jacqueline Madison, senior marketing manager at Universe. “Once we were able to get some data flowing through the system, we started noticing trends immediately. For us, the story within the data allowed us to map out a better way to reach new customers and continue to re-engage existing ones.”

## Ontario’s MaxSold quickly expands to new regions with a proven formula

[MaxSold](#) is a downsizing and estate sales company based out of Ontario. The company had made a name for itself in Canada and was ready to expand its services globally, including all 50 U.S. states. The company grew by not just simply investing in digital, but doing it intelligently.

As MaxSold expanded into each new market, the team used a templated approach that was tried-and-true in one market before making a few changes to localize to the new one. The team monitored what got clicks, engagement, and conversions in each particular market, and then poured resources into what was working. Keywords that worked in Ontario might not work in the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, or the best time of day to serve ads might be different. The team focused their energy on quickly identifying small tweaks that would have an outsized impact on conversions for each market, rather than developing each market organically.

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Based on this approach, the company quickly expanded coast to coast into 17 states and three provinces. MaxSold efficiently accelerated their growth 5X—allowing them to launch in new regions in months instead of taking a year—and drove a 160% increase in sales in new markets between 2015 and 2016.

“Our strategy for expansion highlighted the importance of testing based on a model that’s been proven to work,” said Sushee Perumal, CEO of MaxSold. “Being able to see what people care about—based on what they search for—really helped drive our messaging and reach far and wide.”

## Leaning on digital and data to drive growth

Marketing-savvy startups can gain insight into their customers (and potential customers) by going to the data first, using tools like [Google Trends](#) and the [Consumer Barometer](#). Those insights can lead to marketing experiments on the best ways to reach and connect with ideal customers. And the experiments can be honed to develop a strategy to fully scale the business.

The startup scene in Canada is likely to attract more talent, creativity, and big ideas—and get more competitive. Startups will need to get crafty with the digital tools and resources available to them. These three start-ups had humble beginnings, but they’re great examples of how a young company can take advantage of search trends, customer data, and a test-and-scale approach to carry their visions and their businesses forward.