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## Toronto promotes its role as cluster of technology talent

It may not be the centre of the universe, but megacity has mega-successes

4/26/2007 1:35:00 PM By: Kathleen Sibley

When companies like **Adobe** and **MasterFile** want to find out who's using their images illegally, they don't hire a team of PR people to scan newspapers and magazines. Or at least, they don't anymore. Instead, they turn to the services of a Toronto-area company recognized as a leader in the field of image recognition.

The firm, **Idée, Inc.**, has developed software that scans a variety of media, whether print, disc or online, to detect where client images have been used even if they've been altered in any way.

“We started the company mainly to tackle one extremely big problem: how do you recognize and track an image even though it has been modified?” says **Leila Boujnane**, **Idée's** CEO. “If you take an image and it has been used, how do you find out where?”

The software works much like search technology for text, but instead of a word, an image is used as the key. “It comes out of the same field as biometrics and a lot of technologies used in the medical field for examining cells and things like that,” Boujnane says.

The company, which was founded in 1999 as a two-person startup – Boujnane and CTO Paul Bloore – has grown to a staff of about 21, and revenues have grown a thousandfold, largely due to the increasing need for companies such as clients Adobe and Masterfile to control their intellectual property. But the software has only been available commercially for a couple of years. The company was focused on R&D until about 2005, Boujnane says. Since then, “it has just gone mad,” she says of the uptake in business.

But **Idée** is hardly unique in Toronto.

The region is home to approximately 3,300 ICT businesses that employ about 150,000 people, and is North America's third largest ICT cluster (San Francisco and New York are first and second, respectively). That might surprise some who assume that Kitchener-Waterloo and Ottawa are the country's biggest IT hubs.

The city is quickly becoming the source of some of the most innovative technology in the world, although not quickly enough for some, which is why the City of Toronto is hosting Toronto Technology Week (TTW) from May 28 to June 1.

### *Big goal*

**Dave Forde**, chair of TTW, says the city has long been searching for ways to bring the area's diverse IT community together. It formed an ICT advisory committee comprised of not-for-profits, schools, government and the private sector, and put together a strategy to help transform Toronto into one of the world's five most innovative, creative and productive locations for ICT research, education, business and investment by 2011.

TTW, which will feature some 20 to 30 events, doesn't have a single goal or objective other than to provide a chance for industry members to **network** and learn about each other, Forde says. But he expects it will have far-reaching impacts as well.

“Celebrating the successes of local companies keeps them here, but it also keeps that global spotlight on Toronto,” says Forde.

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