

“The Silicon Valley of EdTech, Salt Lake City, Utah”

Here are just a few, of more than can be listed, articles written about Utah becoming “the EdTech hub.”

EdSurge News
7/15/2016

Is Utah Edtech's Next Home State?

Jul 15, 2016

UTAH is playing host to a growing number of edtech startups: PluralSight, MasteryConnect, True North Logic, Agilix, Degreed and the School Improvement Network are all headquartered there. Now this: as of July 15, Utah is home to Zizzle eLearning, which teaches Chinese with pictorial lessons. The company is graduating from the Utah-based **Boom Startup** accelerator in a cohort made up of entirely edtech companies, according to a press release.

Zizzle CEO Lukas Lohove said of the Beehive State, "Utah is great for us because it has the highest concentration of Chinese immersion programs in the country, and the funding environment seems to be pretty good. All the funds are friendly with one another and collaborate."

Free Enterprise
By U.S. Chamber of Commerce
8/18/2016

HOW EDTECH STARTUPS ARE ENRICHING SALT LAKE CITY'S ECONOMY

TAKARA SMALL | AUGUST 18, 2016

Every startup hub has a unique reputation. New York City is known for its financial technology companies, Silicon Valley is king of apps and software, and Boston is driving innovation in the health care space.

But what about Salt Lake City? No, this city isn't pushing the limits of skiing technology as you might expect – rather, it's emerged as one of America's premier destinations for education technology companies.

Salt Lake City's edtech standouts include [Pluralsight](#), an on-demand education training website that raised \$135 million in 2014, which was the largest venture-funding investment for a Utah company at the time. Meanwhile, local technology company [Instructure](#), creator of an online course management system called Canvas, raised \$40 million last year and boasts clients around the world.

Nearby, software company [MasteryConnect](#) raised \$5 million from Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan, in 2015. The startup's platform helps teachers monitor student performance, assess content and share relevant information with school administrators and parents.

A 2016 report co-authored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and Washington-based startup campus 1776 cited the city's flourishing edtech sector as one of its greatest strengths. Growth in the industry saw [tremendous momentum](#) and ranked eighth out of the 25 cities surveyed. There's good reason for that snowball effect, according to [Rusty Greiff](#), managing director and general partner at 1776.

“Companies that bring in talent to support their growing operations sometimes end up pushing out executives who see an opportunity to start their own company,” Greiff said in an interview. “When you have so much talent in one place, sometimes that talent becomes restless and wants to start something of their own.”

He would know. Greiff has worked at education and e-learning companies—such as Sylvan Learning and Learnist—across the country for more than 15 years. He believes the number of edtech companies already operating in the area bode well for Salt Lake City’s continued development as an pedagogy-oriented startup hub.

“When there are companies that find their wings and become successful like a Pluralsight or Instructure, they create a new type of energy and opportunity for other startups,” he explained. “I don’t think it’s a surprise that these companies have a direct impact on the city’s economy. When you have highly educated, highly talented employees who relocate to Salt Lake City, it contributes to local innovation that pushes other startups to bigger heights.”

Meanwhile, the city’s tech community is making a conscious effort to capitalize on the huge demand for more tech-friendly tools in education. Last year, local accelerator [BoomStartup](#) launched an education-specific startup program to help the city’s increasing number of edtech entrepreneurs grow their businesses.

Entrepreneurs in the competitive three-month program received office space, early-stage seed investment and a host of services, including legal and financial help. Despite receiving hundreds of applications for its programs, the first edtech class last year accepted only eight startups.

“We saw a real need for education tech tools and that more startups were entering the space,” BoomStartup Program Manager Scott Campbell said. “We wanted to offer something unique.”

Sunny Washington, CEO of local startup ArduSat, is a [BoomStartup](#) graduate and one of the many edtech entrepreneurs based

in Salt Lake City. Her company sells an online education package that includes space kits, specialized curriculum and hardware. The package allows students to create their own experiments in outer space using commercial satellites and then analyze and share their data.

Last year, the company announced it had secured a \$1 million investment from Space Florida, a state aerospace economic development agency, and other investors to expand its platform.

“Part of the great thing about the city is that it has universities that focus on entrepreneurship and are strong in education, which makes it a perfect match,” she said. “There are so many talented people and experienced entrepreneurs who have worked in the space already here, so it’s easy to find the right type of people to start your own business from the ground up.”

CNBC

America’s Top States for Business

7/13/2016

A high-tech mecca rises to rival Silicon Valley

Andrew Zaleski, special to CNBC.com

Wednesday, 13 Jul 2016 | 9:00 AM ET

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Josh James remembers it like yesterday. At a business event in Silicon Valley a decade ago, he struck up a conversation with a venture capitalist about Omniture, the web analytics company James co-founded in 1996. Today, Omniture is the quintessential start-up success story: After going public in 2006, the company was acquired by [Adobe](#) three years later for \$1.8 billion. But a decade ago Omniture was just another tech company in [Utah](#), evidently the least likely state a venture capitalist expected a public company to be.

"He said he wanted to come visit me and the team and asked, 'Where are you guys at?' When I answered Utah, he immediately turned around and walked away without saying another word," James recalled.



John Pulsipher | Getty Images

Among tech founders, investors and observers, the consensus is that Utah's Silicon Slopes are buzzing with potential.

An investor would be crazy to ignore Utah today, where the Silicon Slopes — a stretch of cities along the Rocky Mountains, from Ogden in the north to Provo in the south and Salt Lake City in between — has emerged this decade as a hotbed of tech entrepreneurship, plucky start-ups and impressive software companies worth at least \$1 billion on paper.

Low taxes; cheap real estate; a pool of young engineering talent from the University of Utah, Utah State and Brigham Young; and a business-friendly environment have all converged to make Utah the [top location for tech start-ups](#), right up there with founding teams in Boston and New York in the East or Seattle and Silicon Valley in the West.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce [recently ranked](#) Utah No.1 in innovation and entrepreneurship, No. 2 in high-tech performance and No. 3 in economic performance in a study of all 50 states. The state also topped CNBC's [America's Top States for Business list](#) this year.

"It's not surprising to see start-up formation in Utah," said Ben Veghte, vice president of communications and marketing at the National Venture Capital Association. "There's a natural progression that's been happening over the last 10 to 15 years."

The state, in other words, has a record of successful tech businesses. Among tech founders, investors and observers, the consensus is that the Beehive State's Silicon Slopes are buzzing with potential.

It was Utah that gave birth to software companies Novell and WordPerfect in the late 1970s, followed in the 1990s by companies such as Ancestry.com, Omniture and Vivint Smart Home — first founded as APX Alarm Security Solutions in 1999. By the early 2000s a new crop of software companies would start up and grow big. Last year four such companies joined the unicorn club, including [Domo](#), the business intelligence platform James founded in 2010.

Even established tech giants have moved to Utah. [Adobe opened a 680,000-square-foot office](#) campus in Lehi, between Salt Lake City and Provo, four years ago. Three years ago [eBay opened a 241,000-square-foot facility in the suburbs of Salt Lake City](#) and staffed it with 1,800 employees.

[Venture capital funding, once sparse in Utah, has skyrocketed](#), from \$299 million across 34 deals in 2013 to \$732 million across 55 deals in 2015, according to the National Venture Capital Association. Most of that money goes to software companies in categories like sales, education technology, and smart home services, with the next highest portion of funding making its way to medical-device companies.

"It's exploded in the last five years," said Alex Dunn, president of Vivint, a Provo-based smart home technology service provider. "The amount of calls that I get from people I know, in Silicon Valley or Boston or New York, to be introduced to a company in Utah happens now every week."



Source: SimpleCitizen

(From left to right) SimpleCitizen co-founders Brady Stoddard, CMO; Aydé Soto, CTO; and Sam Stoddard, CEO

Vivint, which made \$653 million in revenue last year and counts more than 1 million people as customers, raised \$100 million in its first round of funding this past April. Contributing to the round were Solamere Capital, the firm co-founded by former presidential candidate Mitt Romney, as well as Facebook board member, PayPal co-founder and Hulk Hogan-lawsuit backer [Peter Thiel](#).

"Utah has a long history of tech innovation across software, networking and internet infrastructure, but it's probably in the last decade when all this started to take shape," said Nick Efstratis, managing director of Epic Ventures, a Salt Lake City-based venture capital firm that has been doing deals in state for 16 years. Among its investments: Ancestry.com, InsideSales and AllianceHealth Networks. "Now Silicon Valley VCs look at this as a market where people know how to build big outcomes," said Efstratis.

[California](#) is still king, however, with Silicon Valley and the San Francisco and Los Angeles metropolitan areas alone pulling in some \$30 billion across more than 1,000 funding deals in 2015, according to data from the National Venture Capital Association. The venture capital markets in Boston and New York City also eclipse the size of the funding market in Utah.

"Obviously, it's smaller than some of those really big markets," said Sam Stoddard, co-founder of Provo-based SimpleCitizen. "But there's just this entrepreneurial spirit in Utah. It was really, really easy setting up a company, because there was already this network of successful entrepreneurs who had been through this before."



Weston Colton | Vivint Smart Home
Vivint's Innovation Center in Lehi, Utah

That's a point of pride for companies like Vivint and Omniture, who were operating for years without venture capital before taking funding or being acquired. In the Silicon Slopes, bigger companies operate for years, pulling in customers and revenues, before taking a dime of funding — or being recognized as a good candidate for venture money. For instance, research software company Qualtrics, one of the newest unicorn companies in Utah, was chugging along for a decade before taking \$70 million in Series A funding in 2012.

New co-working spaces, such as [Camp 4](#) in Provo, that have popped up over the last five years provide business support and cheap early office space for incubating that entrepreneurial spirit. And big companies, either homegrown giants like Vivint or other tech companies, with satellite offices in the state, now provide the career opportunities many people in the tech industry look for.

"I think the perception was, in order to really achieve a high level in your career, you have to go outside of Utah, and that is what has changed now," Dunn said. "Now we're able to get people from Boston and California and New York because now they have an opportunity to be involved in tech and reach the pinnacle of their professions."

The cultural amenities aren't half bad, either. Dunn said the region is ideal for people who love to camp, ski and mountain-bike and are interested in raising a family.

Local talent pool

The Mormon religion also plays a part in the state's start-up success. The religion's influence in the state has helped concentrate entrepreneurial talent, since graduates aren't inclined to move far from where they have grown up. And while a culture that emphasizes family life over business priorities — say, being home for dinner every night — creates some conflict in the fast-paced world of tech, entrepreneurs and start-up boosters said the Mormon Church is a great proving ground for would-be tech founders.

"Our religion is very well known for its self-reliance and its focus on being self-reliant and providing for yourself when you can't rely on other sources to help that," said Jeff Brown, assistant director of the Rollins Center for Entrepreneurship and Technology at Brigham Young University. "We have this built into our DNA a little bit — this need to kind of push forward and push the envelope."

Take SimpleCitizen's Stoddard, who is Mormon and co-founded his company before graduating from Brigham Young University in 2015.

Still, start-ups in Utah have been flirting with Silicon Valley more and more. SimpleCitizen, which is trying to streamline the application process for obtaining a green card, is now spending the summer at Silicon Valley-based accelerator Y Combinator, although the company plans to stay put in Provo.

"Raising the capital's obviously important, but at the end, it just so happens that Utah was a great place for the business," he said.

"Utah has a long history of tech innovation across software, networking and internet infrastructure, but it's probably in the last decade when all this started to take shape." -Nick Efstratis, managing

director, Epic Ventures

So big exits like Omniture's have helped place Utah on the map, and knowing that the state is fertile ground for launching and growing a tech start-up has helped keep young entrepreneurs in the state. What's more, Utah's preeminence as a tech hub has received help from creative branding and state-sponsored economic measures.

The moniker Silicon Slopes grew out of a [website and nonprofit](#) of the same name formed in 2008 by Domo founder and CEO James to start promoting the state's growing tech ecosystem. At the state level, current Gov. Gary Herbert, in office since 2009, has been active in pushing a tech-friendly agenda: Legislation passed last year allocated nearly \$20 million to the Utah Science Technology and Research Governing Authority to support university research at Utah State and the University of Utah, as well as technology innovation.

"We're in that virtuous cycle right now; we have momentum, and it's just going to continue to grow," said Troy D'Ambrosio, executive director of the Lassonde Entrepreneur Institute at the University of Utah, which is opening a \$45 million dormitory and work space this fall for student-entrepreneurs.

For early pioneers like James, seeing the growth and excitement surrounding the Silicon Slopes vindicates the years Utah's start-ups spent toiling in obscurity.

"We now have top-tier VCs coming to invest in the state, because they see the successes we have here," he said. "You don't have to be in Silicon Valley to build a successful business."

— *By Andrew Zaleski, special to CNBC.com*

Education Week
Education Week's Blogs
5/14/2015

Smart Cities: Salt Lake City Is a Growing Innovation Hub

By Tom Vander Ark on May 14, 2015 5:00 PM | [No comments](#)

Didn't know Salt Lake City was becoming an EdTech hot spot? It's still news to some well informed locals. Here's a baker's dozen of the EdTech companies on the western front of the Wasatch:

- [Agilix](#) (Provo) is a leader in personalized learning. Check out the [Buzz platform](#) and watch for an exciting update in July.

- Canvas by **Instructure** is the fastest growing learning management system in higher education (and powers the HigherEd institutions in Utah), with just as many K-12 users. See a **platform review** and watch for possible IPO later this year.
- **Imagine Learning** (Provo) and **Truenorthlogic** (Sandy) were both acquired by Weld North last year.
- **MasteryConnect** is the leading formative assessment platform.
- **School Improvement Network** is a leading provider of online professional development.
- **Education Directions** , a Cicero company, provides professional development and planning.
- **eLearning Brothers** (American Fork) provides e-learning assets and software training.
- **Waterford Institute** was an early leader in game-based adaptive early literacy.
- **Management & Training Corporation** (Centerville) runs Job Corps sites and correctional facilities.
- **Achieve Today** (Provo) provides experiences and apps that support personal growth.
- **Assessments.com** provides behavioral screening in juvenile justice and education.
- **Knod** partners with employers to provide students with real world experiences and a degree for a total of \$13,000.

Lumen Learning , which **raised \$2.5 million** last month, is a Portland-based company that helps colleges and schools replace commercial textbooks with open content providers. Co-founder David Wiley is still based in Utah.

Utah is home to almost 4,400 technology companies that raised nearly \$1 billion in capital last year. There are few EdTech investors so most startups need to work east and west coast networks.

BoomStartup (SLC and Provo) is a lean startup accelerator founded in 2010. More than 40 companies have graduated from the program and have raised more than \$15 million in seed capital.

The **Eccles School of Business** at University of Utah has a particularly strong entrepreneurship program with a focus on value creation.

Schools to visit. We've profiled a couple great SLC area schools.

- **Career Path High** (Kaysville) at **Davis Applied Technology College** is a flex blend linked to job training.
- **American International School of Utah** (Murray) is a new K-12 blended school with a great performing arts department in a converted mall.
- **Innovations Early College High School** , Salt Lake City School District, is blended learning program attached to the **SLCC** South City campus (see **feature**).
- **Itineris Early College High School** (West Jordan) is also affiliated with SLCC. About half of the students graduate with an AA degree.

There are a variety of online high school options including **Mountain Heights Academy**, which launched in 2009 with a commitment to open content.

Smart Cities Summit. Last week we hosted a small gathering of EdLeaders at **the Leonardo**, a science, technology and art museum on Friday to discuss **Smart Cities that Work for Everyone**.



Participants noted several things heading in the right direction:

- The state is well served by broadband. **Utah Education Network** is a statewide broadband and broadcast network established by the Utah Legislature in 1989.
- Utah scored one of two top grades on the recent **Digital Learning Now state policy report card**.
- More than a third of Utah students are engaged in personalized learning thanks to the leadership of Sen. Howard Stephenson.
- Despite (or as a result of) the lowest funding in the country, there is a can-do attitude and a focus on efficiency among educators.

"We've been able to grow Instructure from a handful of employees in 2011 to more than 550 employee this year because Utah has many smart, interesting, talented people," said Mitch Benson, VP of K-12 at Instructure. "The challenge Utah faces is to keep up with the demand since many tech companies are expanding their presence and drawing from that same pool. This is why the STEM Utah program and others are vital to the future of success in Utah."

Energized by the convening, Agilix CEO Curt Allen (photo) said, "Together we can help make Utah a model."



EdPolicy. Twenty years ago Governor Mike Leavitt proposed competency-based **Western Governor's University**. It opened in 1997 and I joined the board in 1999. Leavitt was also an early leader of the early college movement. We **launched a network of early college high schools** together on September 11, 2001.

Having left the Smarter Balanced testing consortium, Utah has the opportunity to lead the way on a next generation state assessment system.

With Florida, Utah received top marks from Digital Learning Now in the most recent [state policy report card](#). Utah's 2013 Student Achievement Backpack (UT SB 82) is featured as an example of a portable student record. To learn more, [read the DLN State Policy Profile for Utah](#).

For more on Utah, check out:

- [Education Innovation Clusters: Help is on the way!](#)
- [DLN Report Card: Student Achievement Backpacks in Utah](#)

Getting Smart
10/19/2014

Education Innovation Clusters: Help is on the way!

By
[Guest Author](#)

-
October 19, 2014

Education Innovation Clusters first appeared on nextgenlearning.org

By: Joseph South

An Opportunity

A couple of years ago, I realized that Utah (*yes, Utah*) had the potential to become a significant education innovation hub.

The state had two highly regarded instructional design/learning sciences graduate programs, a forward-leaning state superintendent who was in the process of replacing paper textbooks with digital materials statewide, the first open high school which used Open Educational Resources (OER) exclusively for its core curriculum, several educational technology companies that were getting national buzz (and have since garnered millions of

dollars in investments), a network of researchers interested in studying innovative school models, and an exploding tech sector that earned the area the nickname “Silicon Slopes.”

Yet despite these assets, Utah wasn’t really on anyone’s map. Every time I would name a company or a leading EdTech thought leader from Utah, people would say, “Really? In Utah? I had no idea.” Worse, even within the area, I found that entrepreneurs, schools, researchers, and funders were only vaguely aware of each other.

Diving In

A few of us decided to change that. Taking advantage of the U.S. Department of Education’s annual bus tour, which came through Utah that year, we spent our nights and weekends putting together the first “Accelerating Learning Innovation” conference in Salt Lake City. We had only six weeks to plan it and had no idea if anyone would come. To our delight, it was by all accounts a success: over 200 people participated.

And they were the *right* people. They were the very entrepreneurs, funders, state and local school leaders, teachers, and university researchers that we had hoped would attend. We had amazing discussions. New connections were made between people who lived within 30 miles of each other and had never met. Powerful ideas were disseminated. Most of all, people said we *had* to do this again.

Losing Steam

But the effort stalled there. Those of us who had planned the conference needed to shift focus back to other priorities (like our day jobs!) We had some leftover funds from the event, but no structure or plan for how to use them to move forward.

Most of all, we didn’t have the answer to this question:

How do you motivate people with mutual interest in education innovation but divergent missions and incentives to work together when the exact benefits of doing so are unknown?

We didn’t even know what to call what we were doing. And it wasn’t like there was an instruction manual to tell us what to do next.

All of that is changing!

New Resources Coming

I now know that what we were trying to create was an education innovation cluster and that similarly-minded

people have started them in cities throughout the country—some very successfully, some still picking up momentum, all further along than our valiant initial attempt.

An education innovation cluster is a geographic concentration of interconnected organizations that work collaboratively to develop and nurture education technologies and breakthrough learning practices.

At a recent gathering in Pittsburgh hosted by [Digital Promise](#) in partnership with [The Sprout Fund](#), an amazing group of innovators gathered to launch a national movement around the idea of education innovation clusters. They came from all over the country, representing communities as diverse as Nashville and New York City, New Orleans and Chicago, San Mateo and Providence. Among them were several nonprofit leaders whose organizations were selected by [Next Generation Learning Challenges](#) to serve as innovation hubs in its [Regional Funds for Breakthrough Schools](#) initiative.

It appeared that each of the attendees had been trying to do very similar things, but with limited awareness and support of others outside of their geographic area.

We agreed to collaborate on an education innovation cluster ‘cookbook’ that would draw from the experience of more established clusters to help those just getting started as well as those who are more advanced and growing. (The cookbook is on track to become available later this year—stay tuned for details!)

In the meantime, you can learn more on the [Innovation Clusters](#) page on the [OET website](#).

A Few Tips for Beginners

While we wait for the cookbook to fully bake, I wanted to highlight a few tips that were shared at the convening. These insights would’ve been really helpful to me when I was in Utah and might be helpful to anyone considering launching an education innovation cluster:

- **Start small.** Many of the clusters started with informal lunch or dinner meetings where like-minded people would regularly gather to share experiences and needs. Over time, these grew organically into larger gatherings and cross-collaborations.
- **Create a directory.** It can be surprisingly difficult to discover which organizations are working toward similar ends. A simple web-accessible directory can help people find each other and stimulate additional networking. See the [Pittsburgh Kids + Creativity Network](#) directory for inspiration.
- **Focus on local needs.** While your organization may have a mission with regional or national focus, you are most likely to get traction with other non-profits, researchers, educational

institutions, and entrepreneurs when you are solving a problem that affects you all, and those tend to be local issues. Use proximity of purpose as a glue to bring disparate organizations together.

- **Go in together on a grant.** Once you have discovered each other, built trust and found common ground and mutual interest, cement the relationship by working together on a grant proposal around an issue that you are all passionate about. This will help to align and formalize your efforts and, if successful, increase both your visibility and your impact at the same time.

Next Steps

The U.S. Department of Education and Digital Promise have recently established a partnership to actively encourage and support a national cohort of local education innovation clusters. The first step will be releasing the Education Innovation Cluster Cookbook later this year. The next step will be creating a national directory of local education innovation clusters in order to speed up adoption of successful approaches, and to share ideas that scale.

A series of national convenings will follow, where members of these clusters can gather to inform each other's work, and contribute to additional online materials to help clusters everywhere take the next steps on their journey. If you would like more information about how to become involved in this movement, please send a note to innovationclusters@ed.gov.

We look forward to a future where many more innovation clusters start, grow, and thrive. I personally will be keeping my eye out for Utah.



EdSurge News
11/4/2015

8 Startups Ready to Join the Salt Lake City Edtech Hub

Nov 4, 2015

BOOM GOES THESE STARTUPS: Utah's technology accelerator, BoomStartup, is wrapping up its eighth program—and the first cohort dedicated specifically to education companies. The following eight companies will pitch their wares during a Demo Day

event on November 5 in Salt Lake City, a growing edtech hub that also houses high-profile companies including Instructure and Pluralsight. (Admissions for the event is free; [register here](#).)

BoomStartup provides a 12-week program and offers startups up to \$20,000 in seed funding, mentorship, as well as IT, legal and financial services. Since its beginning in 2010, the accelerator has graduated 100 companies (across all sectors) that have raised a combined \$25 million in follow-on funding.

The eight graduates in this edtech cohort include:

- **7 Generation Games**: Engaging games that help students learn math
- **Circll**: The traditional fundraising coupon book on an app
- **CrowdSchool**: Project-based learning made easy
- **Emotuit**: Understanding how you learn
- **iFlipd**: Pay-as-you-go eTextbooks
- **Imaginie**: Crowdsourcing platform that helps students prepare for writing examinations
- **WriteWell**: Writing app that helps students conquer the blank page
- **Zamenhof**: Online language tutoring service for brick and mortar language schools