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# Standing out by going digital

Students are adding digital skills to their education plans in order to stay ahead of the technological curve. Digital literacy is widely defined as the ability to effectively and critically navigate, evaluate and create information using a range of digital technologies. It may once have been the domain of computer geeks but, in today's workforce, digital literacy can give job seekers of all kinds a competitive edge.

That's why Damian Matheson decided to add Ryerson University's new "digital entrepreneurship and innovation" boot camp to his resume.

"I was about to graduate with a BA and wanted a leg up on the thousands of other students graduating with a BA. I thought digital skills would set me apart from the crowd."

Matheson graduated from Ontario's University of Guelph, where he studied criminal justice and public policy with thoughts of one day becoming a lawyer. But he started having doubts about that career path and enrolled in the 12-week digital specialization program which Ryerson offers at both its Toronto campus and online.

At the time, Matheson's technical skills were limited to Microsoft Office and Facebook. Now, he's launching FoodStory.ca, an online service that will bring Toronto's farmers' markets into the 21st century by listing market event dates, showcasing products and even offering local delivery.

"Instead of handing out my resume, I'm actually accepting resumes," Matheson says. "You're only going to get ahead with digital skills. Without them, you're going to get left behind."

According to a white paper from the Information and Communications Technology Council, digital literacy drives commerce in all successful countries in a borderless digital world and underlies the 70% of the Canadian economy that is the services sector.

"Digital literacy is the fundamental requirement for effective participation in the world's economy ... it can be acquired, polished and wielded as a competitive weapon," the council says in the paper. "The Canadian workforce needs digital literacy in order to retain flexibility and mobility of career and job openings. A worker who is digitally illiterate today is a worker condemned to ever-shrinking choices of employment."

Recruiter Greg Arbitman, president of ReCareer in Toronto, says being digitally savvy is a "given" in today's economy. But it's not enough to have a great online profile. He encourages new grads to "go the extra mile or add extra value" in order to stand out.

Digital is making inroads everywhere. "Objects are now becoming digital — our bikes, our chairs, the desks we use," says Michael Carter, co-ordinator of Ryerson's digital specialization program. That raises questions about things such as socialmedia management and data storage.

Carter describes Ryerson's digital skills in the global economy course as a musthave skill in addition to reading, writing and arithmetic, says Carter.

"One-hundred years ago we needed to be able to read and write. Today, I suggest everyone needs to understand at least a little about what it means to be digital and be connected."

The course offers hands-on training to make students better digital communicators. Among other things, they make online videos, create informational apps and learn basic programming. A second course is offered in digital entrepreneurship and innovation.



"The key point in both courses is that the workplace is made up of individuals of all different skills, talents and areas of knowledge," says Carter. "To be digital doesn't mean you're just an artist or just a business person or just a programmer. You can be an archaeologist or an emergency room nurse and come up with digital ideas."