

7 surprising ways atlanta competes with silicon valley



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When it comes to deciding where to build and scale your startup, most cities look like an underdog next to Silicon Valley.

But then there's Atlanta. I moved to this city 13 years ago, expecting I'd be here for my four-year college career, then transplant to a larger market.

Instead, I discovered that Atlanta was the perfect place to grow personally and professionally, to collaborate on projects and, yes, to launch a business.

Related: Along the way, I've found that Atlanta has a lot to offer that the Valley lacks. Here are seven ways Atlanta competes with Silicon Valley:

1. Atlanta has a very real history of disruption.

Atlanta knows how to rebuild from the ground up: It is the only city in the United States that was burned down as an act of war (in 1865). Then, in 1917, Atlanta's great fire burned most of the city's core. Its resilience and ability to pick up the pieces and make something great out of nothing has created an ideal environment for bootstrapping entrepreneurs.

2.

Venture capital and customer acquisition here go hand in hand.

According to David Hartnett, serial entrepreneur and vice president of the Metro Economic Chamber, " While access to capital is essential to a startup, venture money is much more accessible to companies that can say they are already talking to and working with the UPS, Home Depot, Coca-Cola and AT&Ts of the world." VCs want to see traction in customer acquisition,"

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Hartnett continues. " That's what sets Atlanta apart: We have conferences, like , where our board members have a unique level of early access to the kind of corporate partners that will help them secure funding and, ultimately, revenue.

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3. The city can boast a " Fortune 500" density and those businesses' willingness to engage.

The access that startups in Atlanta have to enterprises is enviable and perhaps unparalleled. Atlanta has the third largest concentration of Fortune 500 companies in America; 424 separate Fortune 500 companies have offices here. What's more, a unique Southern perspective exists when it comes to big business lending a hand to smaller companies: It's part of the culture." It wasn't always this way, though," says Hartnett.

" For years, corporations were flying out of Atlanta to look for tech on the West Coast and in New York City and Boston, before the Metro Atlanta Chamber got involved and asked them to stop and look in their own backyard. Since then, the amount of corporate engagement in the startup community has skyrocketed." Related: Indeed, Atlanta now has 11 innovation centers, where startups and enterprise companies can connect and engage, as well as conferences like Venture Atlanta and , where investors, founders and corporations can come together to network and be the first to see the newest, hottest technologies.

4. The city's emphasis on revenue isn't just smoke and mirrors.

Atlanta stands out from other startup cities because its established companies and startup infrastructure focus on building businesses that bring in real revenue. Linnea Geiss, vice president of corporate development for NCR Corporation, and a board member for Venture Atlanta, describes this as a city where the entrepreneurial community invests in the most important things, which she lists as: " Revenue, finding real solutions to big problems and creating products that people really want." Geiss adds that these things encourage companies to grow sustainably rather than just rely on moving from one venture round to another. " We have a practical approach to building companies," she says. " This makes for some nice exits, as well as business leaders that can give back to the community.

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5. You can live a comfortable life here for less.

Atlanta is actually the number two major tech hub in terms of its cost of living as determined by cost-adjusted salary rates. With its population of 5.5 million, Atlanta is also now the ninth largest metro area. It boasts both low living costs and a high quality of life — with popular developments, such as the and — attracting a new generation of talent to the startup community.

Since 2000, metro Atlanta has grown by more than 1.1 million people - a 26 percent increase in 12 years.

6. Georgia is the No. 1 one state for growth of women-owned businesses.

As one of the fastest growing states for women-owned firms since 1997, Georgia now tops the rest of the nation in *growth* of women-owned businesses.

Making waves are such female founders as Jewel Burks of , a local startup. Partpic has been winning a slew of awards, including first place in Atlanta's Rise of the Rest pitch competition, in which Burks was awarded \$100, 000 by Steve Case, to close out her \$1. 5 million seed round. Lucienne Ide of , a digital health company focused on diabetes and other chronic conditions, is another another Atlanta female-founder success story.

Just this past spring, Cox Enterprises, the Atlanta-based communications and media conglomerate, reportedly made an investment in Rimidi, allowing the company to expand into additional markets.

7. The city is determined to make it to the top.

It's now well on its way.

Over the past few years, we've seen traction: Consider VMWare's \$1. 54 billion acquisition of AirWatch; the growth of startup hubs like and Tech Square; and company success stories like that of , which just raised \$150 million, at an \$875 million valuation. Says David Cummings, serial software entrepreneur: " Atlanta's entrepreneurs, business and community leaders are inspired and committed to putting the city on the map when it comes to successful startup companies. We've seen incredible growth over the past

couple of years, thanks to a city of big dreamers and dedicated doers. We're not slowing down.

" Silicon Valley certainly has undisputed strengths to offer entrepreneurs. But when it comes to your startup's locale, check out the class of innovators in Atlanta, whose " Southern" influence is fast turning national.