

ADVANCING DIGITAL ADOPTION AMONGST WOMEN SBOs IN CANADA REPORT SUMMARY



Women SBOs are **20 per cent less** likely than male SBOs to integrate new digital technologies into their companies as they start, operate, and scale. As digital technology use is strongly linked to small business productivity and efficiency, this gender gap leaves women SBOs at a significant competitive disadvantage. By taking deliberate and collaborative steps to address this gender divide, Canada's private sector anchor companies, government institutions, and entrepreneur ecosystem can support women-owned businesses to reach their full economic potential, and increase their overall competitiveness.

DIGITAL ADOPTION AMONGST WOMEN SBOs

- **93%** of women SBOs consider technology to be extremely important or very important to the success of their company.
- Just **29%** of women SBOs consider themselves to be first or early adopters of new technologies, compared to **69%** of the overall SBO population.
- **94%** of women SBOs report they are self-taught when it comes to digital tools and skills.
- Marketing and sales (**85%**), operations (**68%**), internal communications (**62%**), and development (**55%**) are among the top uses of digital technology amongst women SBOs.
- Women SBOs are more interested than the overall SBO population to attend **workshops**, access **community initiatives**, as well as **interactive how-to guides** to aid their digital adoption process.
- Women SBOs take a careful and thought-out approach when researching and adopting new technologies: **37%** of women SBOs take **up to one month** to identify, adopt and operationalize a digital solution. Approximately **one quarter** of women SBOs take **up to three months**, and **21%** take **up to six months or longer**. **19%** take **one week or less**.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES TO DIGITAL ADOPTION AMONGST WOMEN SBOs

- Time and cost of maintaining digital technologies are the **top two barriers** to technology adoption amongst all SBOs in Canada, not just women. However, women SBOs are **19%** more likely to consider time as a major barrier when compared to the overall SBO population.
- Women SBOs are **16%** more likely than the overall SBO population to report online privacy as a key concern when adopting new technologies.
- Women SBOs are **20%** more likely than the overall SBO population to report a low comfort level with new technology tools as a barrier to adoption. Women are also **11%** more likely than this group to report a lack of awareness about digital technologies
- **46%** of women SBOs indicated they do not know where to go to learn about digital solutions for their business.
- Male-dominated **tech culture**, **marketing**, and **user experience** contribute to low comfort-level and awareness amongst women SBOs.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO INCREASE DIGITAL ADOPTION AMONGST WOMEN SBOs

- **Establish national targets for women in tech leadership:** An increase of qualified women in leadership positions, particularly within tech companies, will make it more likely that the needs of women SBOs when adopting new technology are addressed.
- **Support for women, by women programming:** Digital skills-building opportunities designed by and for women are in demand. While 78 per cent of women SBOs have not participated in women-centric digital technology skills building opportunities, 66 per cent report that such programs are extremely or very valuable.

- **Digital skills training & upkeep grants for women SBOs:** With incentives to upskill and maintain technologies, more women SBOs will become comfortable and knowledgeable of digital technology applications. It is important, however, that such incentives be made available to women SBOs of all ages. Such incentives will directly address the “cost of maintenance” barrier that 49% of women report as a top barrier to adoption.
- **Establish a women leaders marketing challenge:** By making a conscious effort to include gender diversity and representation in marketing campaigns, and by challenging others to do so as well, companies, government, and entrepreneur support organizations can address the low-comfort level that 28 per cent of women SBOs feel when attempting to integrate digital technologies into their companies.