

# Being an Entrepreneur in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Presented to ACE UBC  
ConnectUs Event

March 3, 2006

By Basil Peters

# Outline

- Being an Entrepreneur at UBC.
- The importance of Mentors.
- Where are the opportunities today?
- Globalization.

# My Start at UBC

- BCIT Diploma of Technology, 1973
- UBC BAsC Electrical Eng, 1977
- UBC Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering, 1982
- Elected three times to the Board of Governors
- Led the UBC Engineering Project to build an Electric Vehicle
- Also taught full 4 yr course in Electrical Engineering at SFU for 3 years

# UBC Electrical Vehicle Project

- Back in the 70's the UBC Engineers always built cars.
- Started as a way to avoid a summer job.
- Ended up as UBC's largest student project (then).
- Our project won 2<sup>nd</sup> prize in a worldwide competition by Intel.
- = Entrepreneur training.



ELECTRIC CAR . . . UBC engineers proudly display photographs

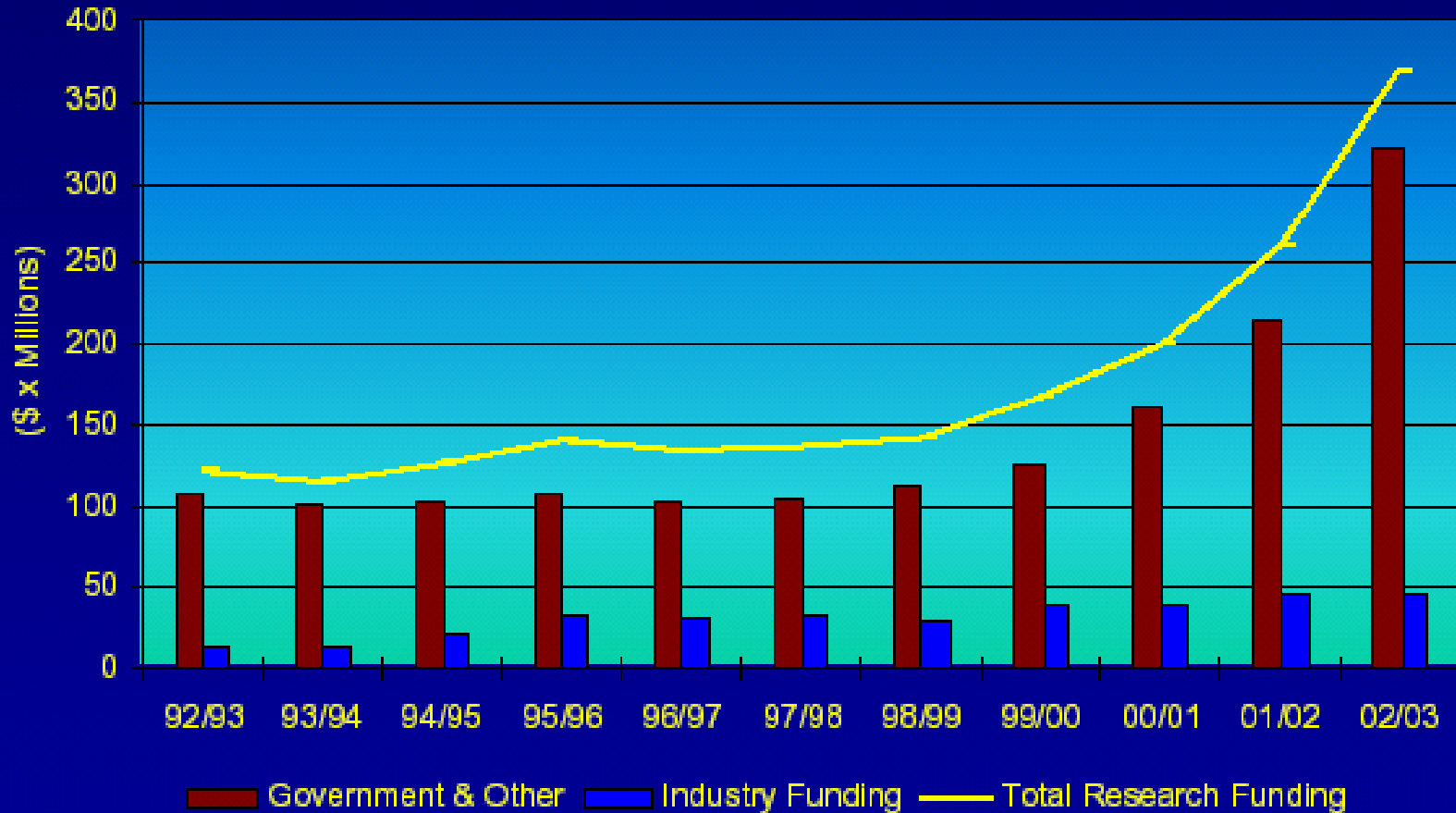
—Archie Kerr Photo

# Recommendation

- University provides wonderful of opportunities beyond the classroom.
- Yeah, I know you think you are too busy already.
- Get involved in:
  - Student projects
  - Student politics
  - Something outside your core department
  - Any activity to broaden your perspective

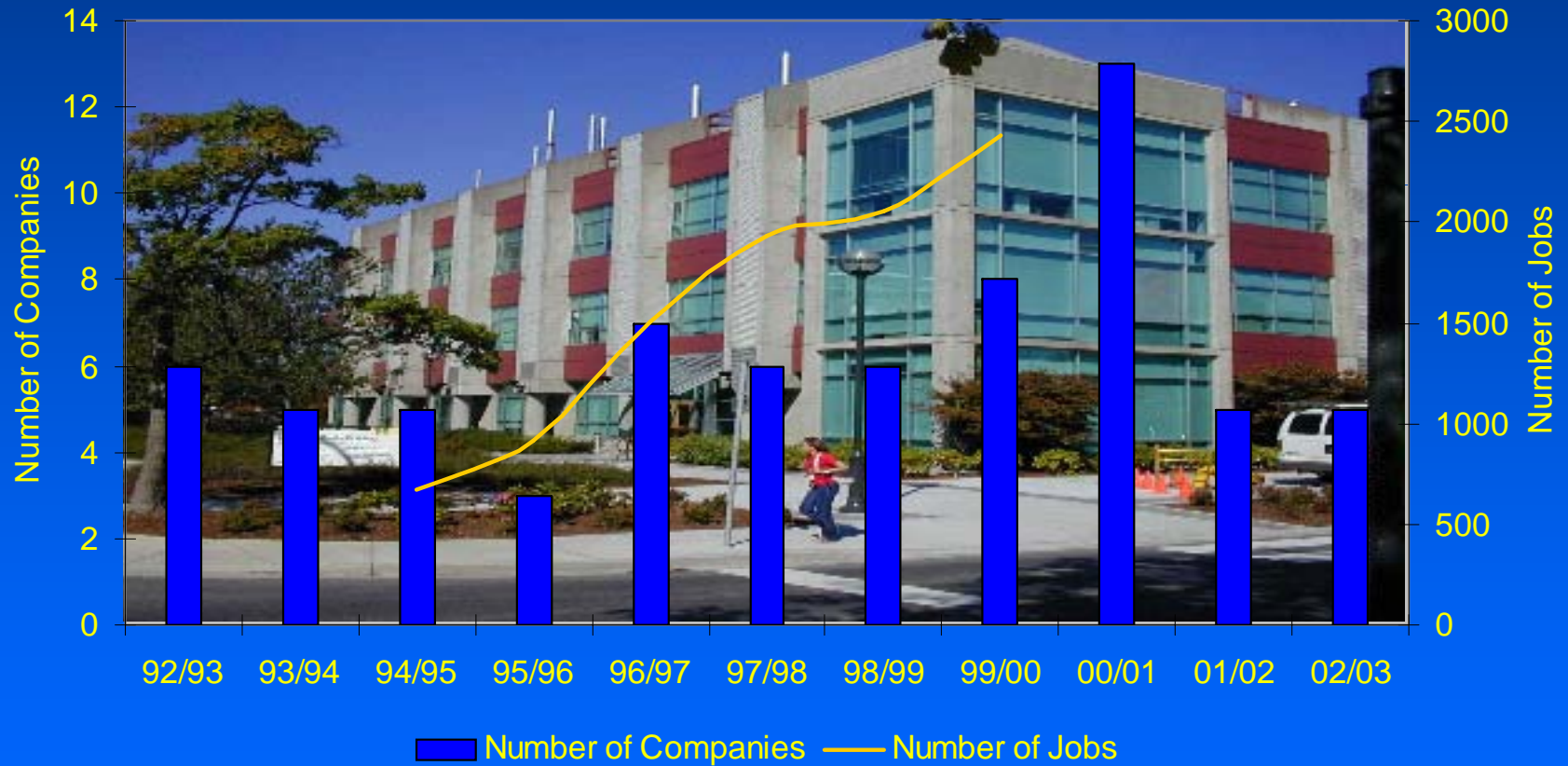


# UBC Research Funding





# UBC Spin-off Companies







Wardlabs

vector<sup>12</sup>



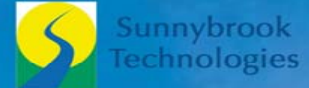
StrongWood



D-Wave Systems Inc. THE QUANTUM COMPUTING COMPANY



The University of British Columbia and Affiliated Hospitals University - Industry Liaison Office



M.A.L.



MICROLOGIX BIOTECH INC.



Prescient NeuroPharma Inc.



KINETEK





# Keep this picture in mind. I believe UBC's contribution is actually much more significant.

**Westport**  
INNOVATIONS INC.

**WebCT**

Corona Vacuum Coaters Inc.

**webnames.ca**  
securing internet identities



**D-Wave Systems Inc.**  
THE QUANTUM COMPUTING COMPANY



**The University of British Columbia  
and Affiliated Hospitals  
University - Industry Liaison Office**



**Sunnybrook  
Technologies**

*M.A.L.*

**E-ONE MOLE ENERGY**

**ANGIOTECH**  
Pharmaceuticals, Inc.



**MICROLOGIX BIOTECH INC.**



**Forbes Medi-Tech  
INC.**



**Biotherapeutics  
PROTIVA**

**ID  
BIOMEDICAL**

**XENON**



**NeuroMed  
Technologies INC.**



**KINETEK**

**NeuroVir**  
acquired by  
**MediGene**



**Prescient NeuroPharma Inc.**



**Response  
Biomedical Corp.**

**INTEROMEX**  
Biopharmaceuticals Inc.

**Synapse  
Technologies**  
acquired by  
**BIOMARIN  
PHARMACEUTICALS**

**ACTIVE PASS  
PHARMACEUTICALS**

**Radical Vision  
Therapeutics Inc.**



**ARC  
PHARMACEUTICALS INC.**

**PRECISION  
BIOCHEMICALS INC.**

# Case Study #1 – Professor

- John MacDonald was still a professor in here in Electrical Engineering when I started as a student.
- Started MDA with a friend who was an Engineer at the UBC computing center.
- (John) MacDonald & (Vern) Dettwiler
- TOP 16 B.C. TECH Cos BASED ON REVENUE (2003)
- 1 Creo inc.  
2 MacDonald Dettwiler & Assoc (2500 employees)

# Case Study #2 - Student

- I started Nexus Engineering with an E&E classmate, from the Electric Vehicle project.
- While we were both still grad students here at UBC.
- Grew to 7 companies, 350 employees in 6 countries.
- Second largest manufacturer of headends in the world.
- Sold to Scientific Atlanta in 1993 for \$\$\$.

# Recognized as Entrepreneurs

- At Nexus we won 9 awards for entrepreneurship

Including:

- Entrepreneur of the year
- Silver medal in Entrepreneurship from Canada Awards
- Business Leader of the year
- UBC and BCIT Alumni Awards

**Business**

THE VANCOUVER SUN, SATURDAY, NOV. 8, 1986 ★★★★★

## Nexus named top company



Nexus Engineering Corp. has been named B.C. business of the year by the B.C. Chamber of Commerce.

The Burnaby-based satellite, broadcast and cable television equipment maker received the award Friday at a Vancouver dinner.

It is the first year the chamber has made the awards, according to chamber chief executive Bill Goldie.

The awards for the best business achievements are a major thrust by the B.C. Chamber of Commerce to salute and enhance the image of the B.C. business community," said Goldie. "It highlights a select group of private companies which have shown outstanding achievements during the current year."

Nexus Engineering was the idea of a couple of University of B.C. electrical engineering graduates: Basil Peters, who is chairman and chief executive, and Peter van der Gracht, president.

In an interview Friday, Peters said Nexus Engineering will have sales revenues of between \$11 million and \$12 million this year. About two-thirds of the sales will be generated in export markets.

"We are absolutely thrilled about the award," said Peters. "It means a lot to us. We see Nexus as an example to other companies here."

Nexus Engineering got its start in 1982 when Peters, van der Gracht, Tom Holgate and Marc Phillips founded the company. Two years later, additional capital came from Discovery Enterprise Fund and Ventures West.

The company currently employs 135, according to Peters.

Other winners Friday were:

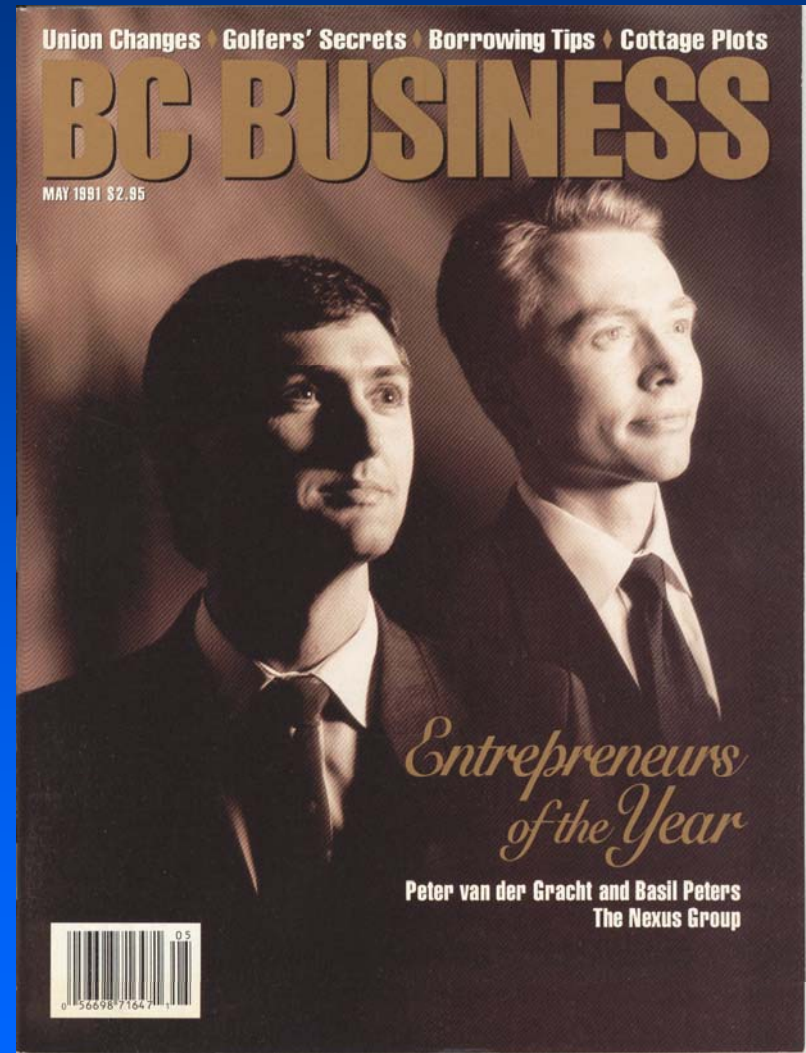
- Lamford Forest Products Ltd., New Westminster, in the category of business expansion and job creation.
- Western International Communications Ltd. (IXNW), New Westminster — community involvement.
- ASA Foods Ltd., Vancouver — agribusiness.
- Flag Shop, Vancouver — services.
- Landucci Lumber Ltd., Surrey — manufacturing.
- Solarsystems Industries Ltd., Richmond — exports.
- Lamford Forest Products Ltd., New Westminster — primary production.
- Agri Forest Technologies Ltd., Kelowna — new B.C. product.
- MacMillan Bloedel Ltd., Powell River division — quality of life and physical environment.
- Chai-Na-Ta Ginseng Products Ltd., Surrey and Lytton — new venture.

**AN EXAMPLE** for other companies is Nexus chairman Peters' hope for the company and the Chamber of Commerce award. Two-thirds of the company's revenues will be generated abroad.

JEROLD GREEN



# Generating lots of media attention



Which generated several unsolicited proposals of marriage

# My first experience

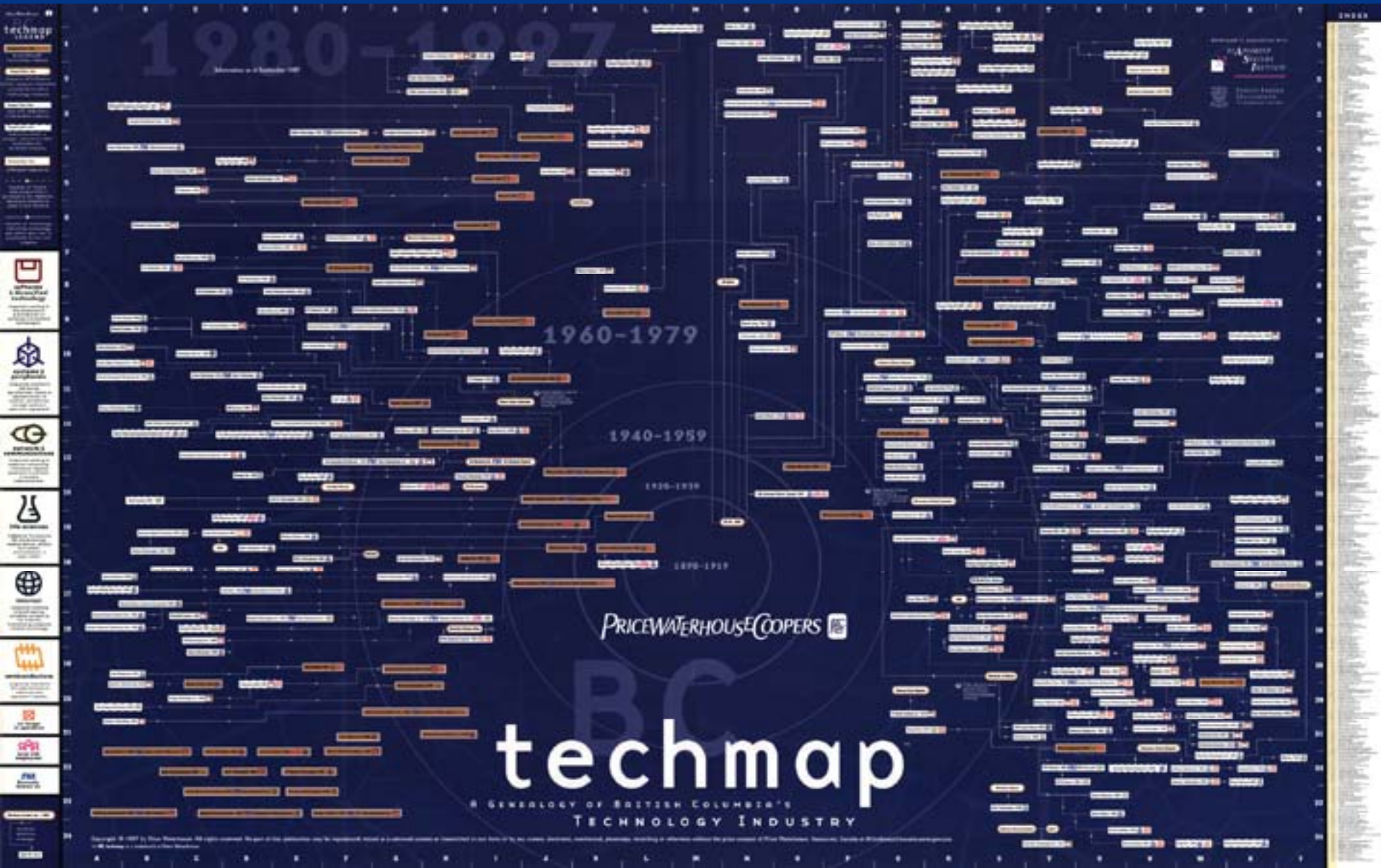
- Entrepreneurial experience.
- We were SO naïve.
- I now literally laugh at our original structure and financing agreements.
- Nevertheless, we grew to be #2 in the world.
- Single biggest reason: Our Mentors (please keep this in mind.)



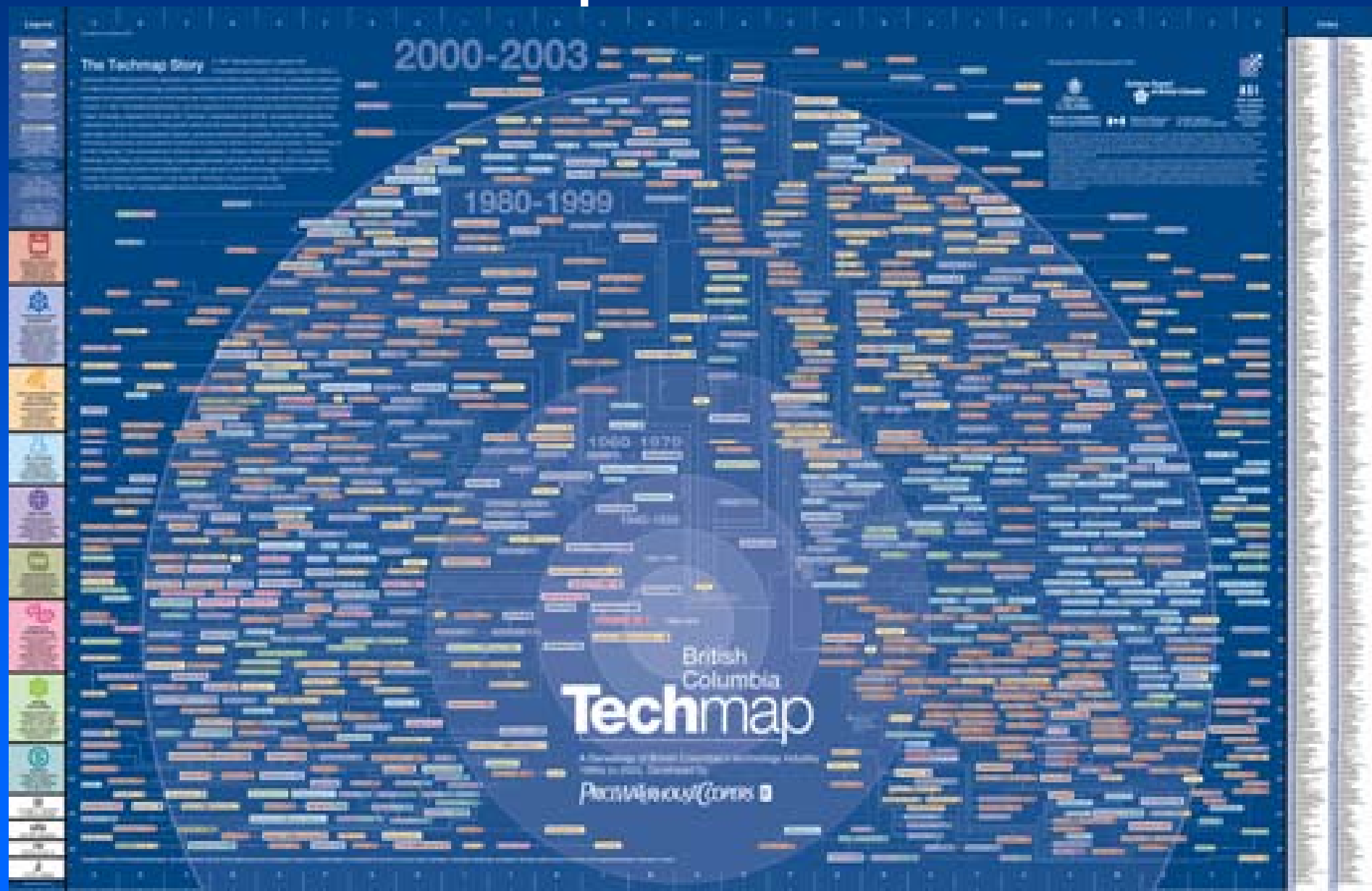
# What John MacDonald Taught Me

- When I was a young entrepreneur,
- John MacDonald, then still CEO of MDA,
- Told me how proud he was of the MDA Spin Out companies.
- I thought he was out of his mind.
- Because I was scrambling every day to hire more engineers and new grads.
- But now see that he was right.

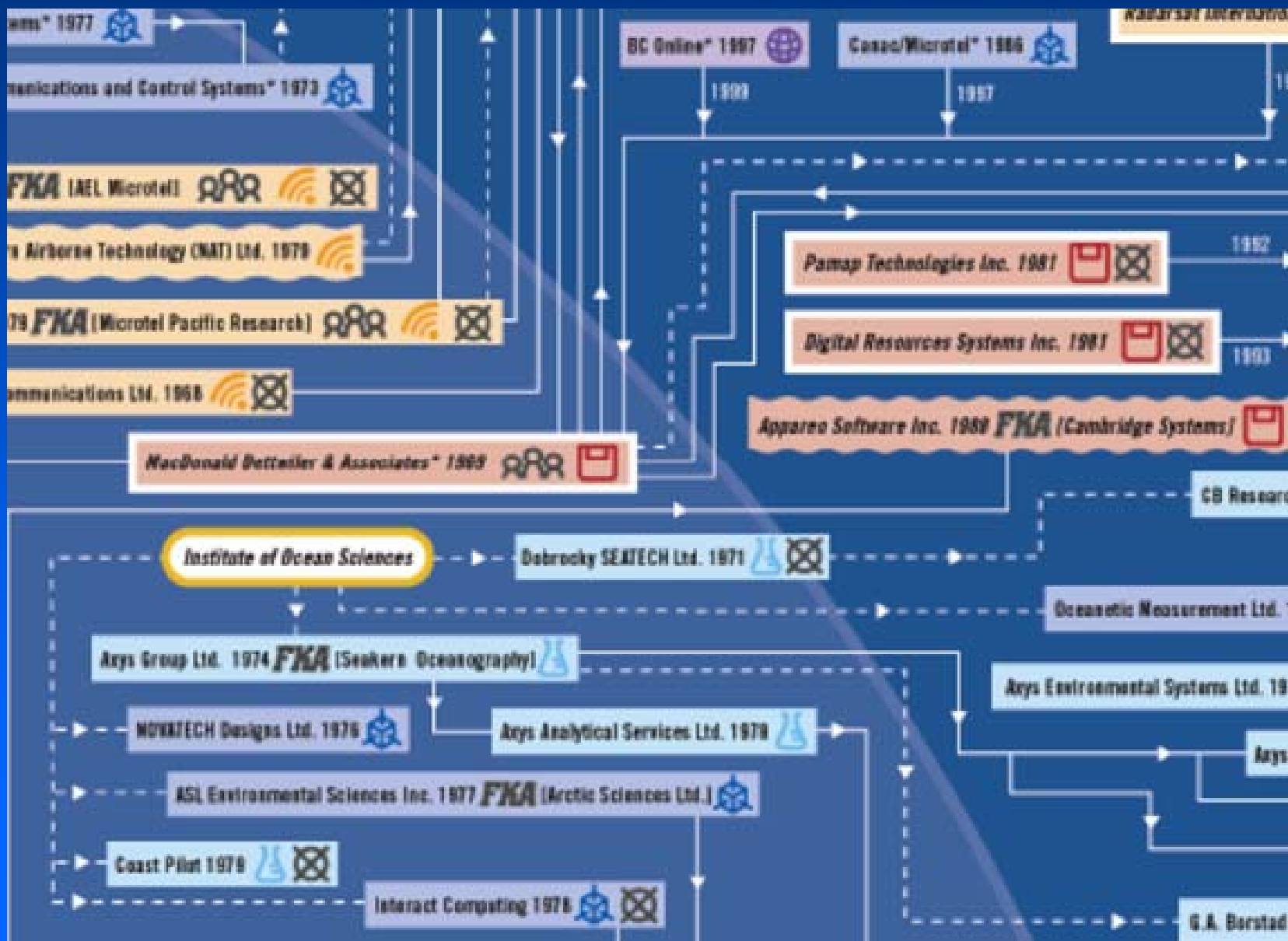
# BC Tech Map 1997



# BC Tech Map 2003



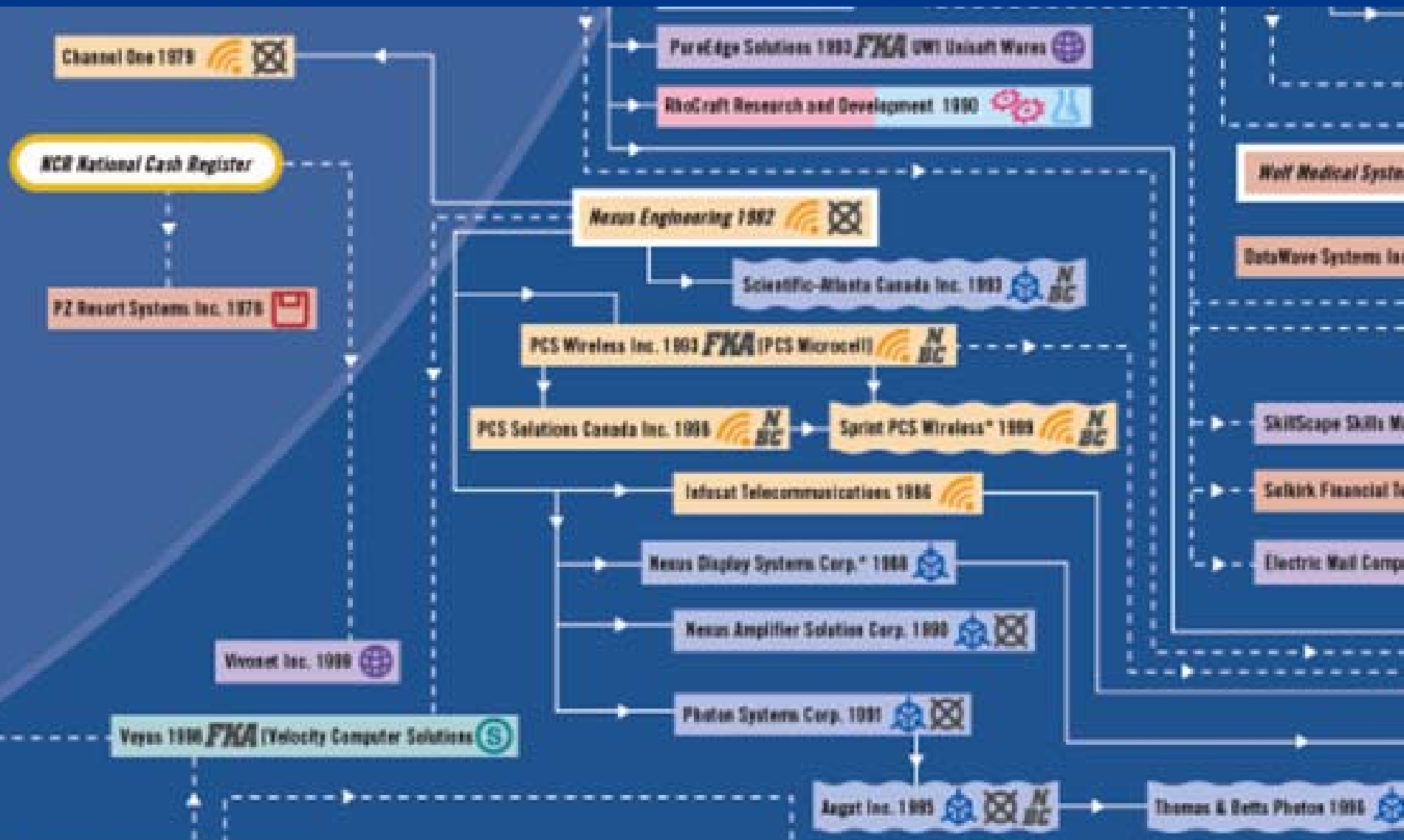
# BC Tech Map 2003 - MDA





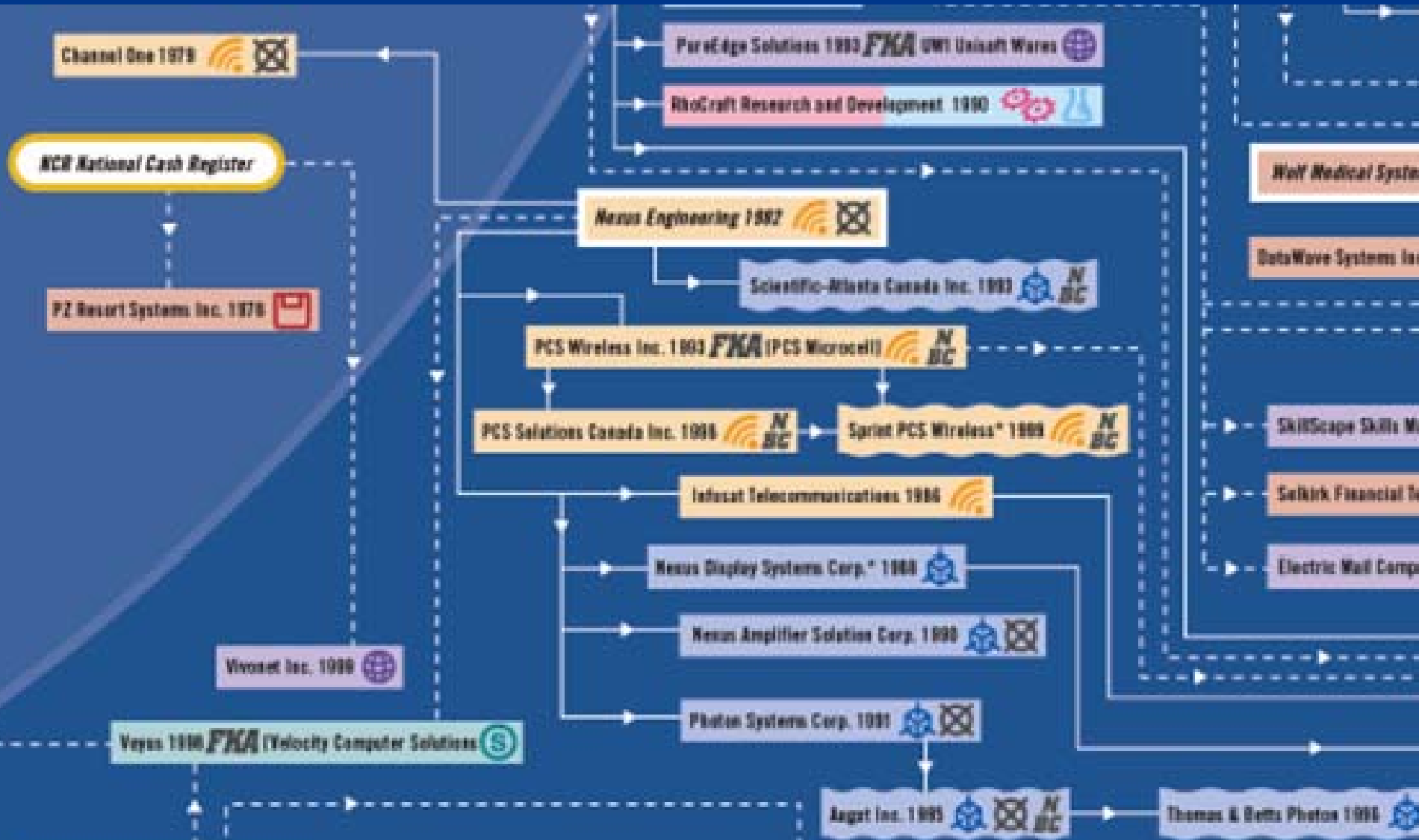


# BC Tech Map 2003 – Nexus

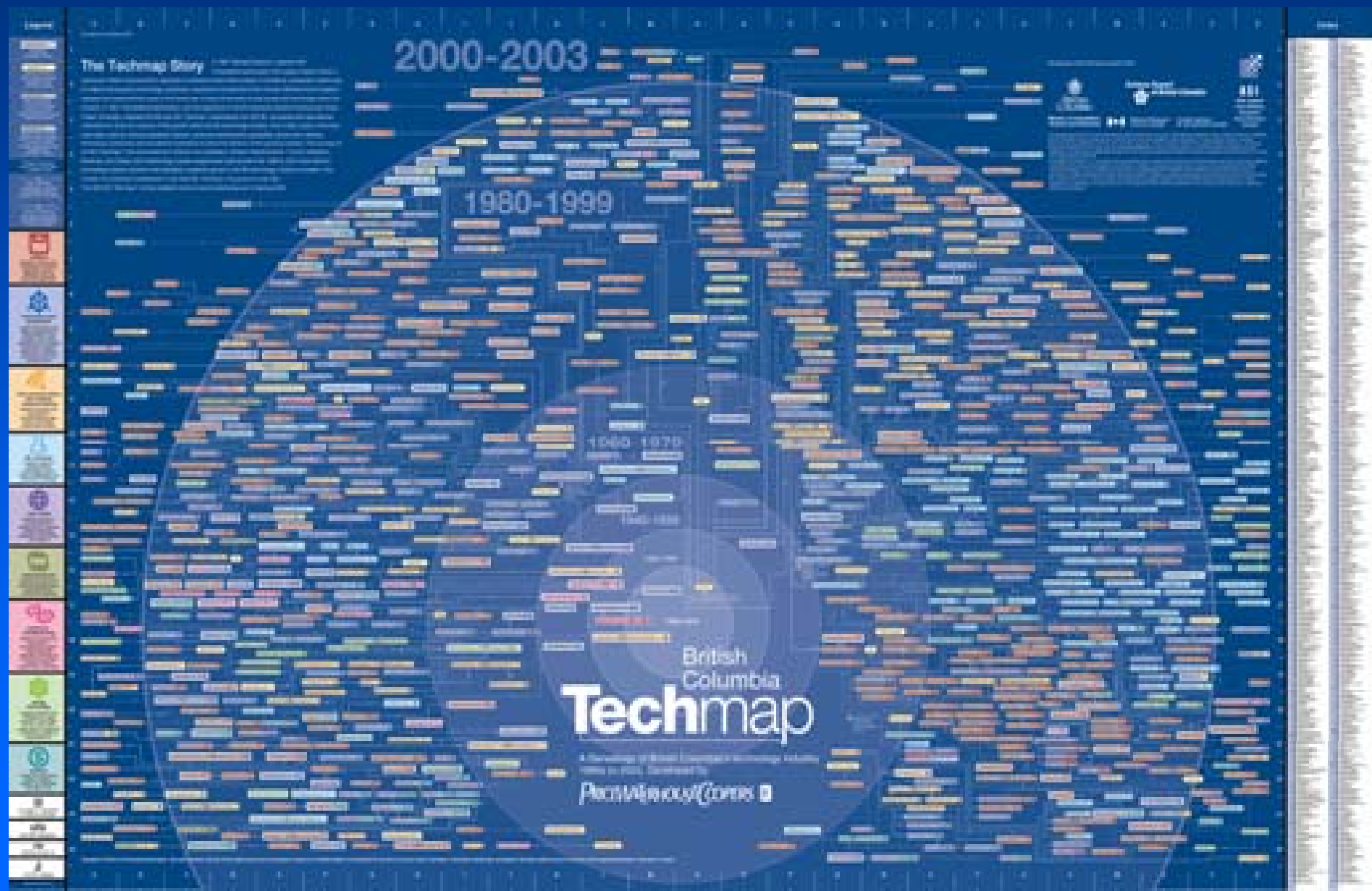




# Nexus is also a 'UBC Spin Out'



# Many of these started at UBC



# My Day Job Now

- In late 2002, I co-founded BC Advantage Funds.
- Now 3 funds with over \$30 million.
- Core part of our mission is to invest in university spin outs.
- And make entrepreneurial professors and students a ridiculously large amount of money,
- along with our shareholders.
- And have fun and put something back.

# Making University Millionaires

- BC Advantage Funds' first investment – UVIC spin out – Protox.
- Made Professor Tom Buckley a millionaire (public info).
- My most recent investment – Sensific – UVIC.
- Professor Tom Fyles head of Chemistry at UVIC.
- I have also invested in Brightside - started by Professor Lorne Whitehead, UBC VP Academic.
- Also the founder of TIR and two other UBC spin outs.

# When should you start?

- Try hard not get a 'real' job first!
- Do it early in life.
- Being a student is excellent training:
  - used to working long hours
  - for no money (i.e. already used to starvation)
  - not yet risk adverse (because you have no money)
  - willing to roll the dice double or nothing every day (because you are too young to know any better)

# OK, but what about you?

- The real question is whether it's right for you.
- Should you even try?
- Shouldn't everyone try?
- No, it can easily ruin your life.
- How much is genetic and what can be learned?



# Some discriminating tests

- Hot stove test.
- Is the glass half full?
- See around the mountain.
- Perseverance.
- Work with teams.

# Characteristics of Entrepreneurs

- Lots written by VCs
- You may not like some of it.
- Sample characteristics:
  - first born
  - entrepreneurial family
  - incredibly persistent
  - intuitive
  - OCD
  - weird relationship with father

# Entrepreneurial Teams

- An individual can't be perfect.
- But a team can come close.
- There are exceptions (like Jim Pattison and Ted Rogers).
- Investors only back teams.

# Entrepreneurship is not taught

- It's learned.
- Universities are starting to try.
- But today, its still more of an apprentice program.
- Often entrepreneurs come from entrepreneurial families.
- I want to expand that subset.
- My belief: “All successful entrepreneurs have good mentors.”

# Mentors

- The most important controllable factor in your success.
- Ideal team includes some grey hair and some serious entrepreneurial scar tissue.
- Good ones not easy to find or to get sucked in.

# Why they might make you rich

- How it worked for us at Nexus.
- What it feels like after you make your first \$million.
- What's still fun?
  - vicarious business thrills
  - management - NOT
- Passages and symbiotic relationships.
- Could always use a few more \$million and what else would you do anyway?



# Mentors – The difference between success and failure

- A good Mentor's most important contribution is:
- To prevent the entrepreneurs from blowing up the company.
- Seriously.
- In my first company, our angel investors / mentors / directors literally prevented that a dozen times.
- In my own investments, have done the same several dozen times.

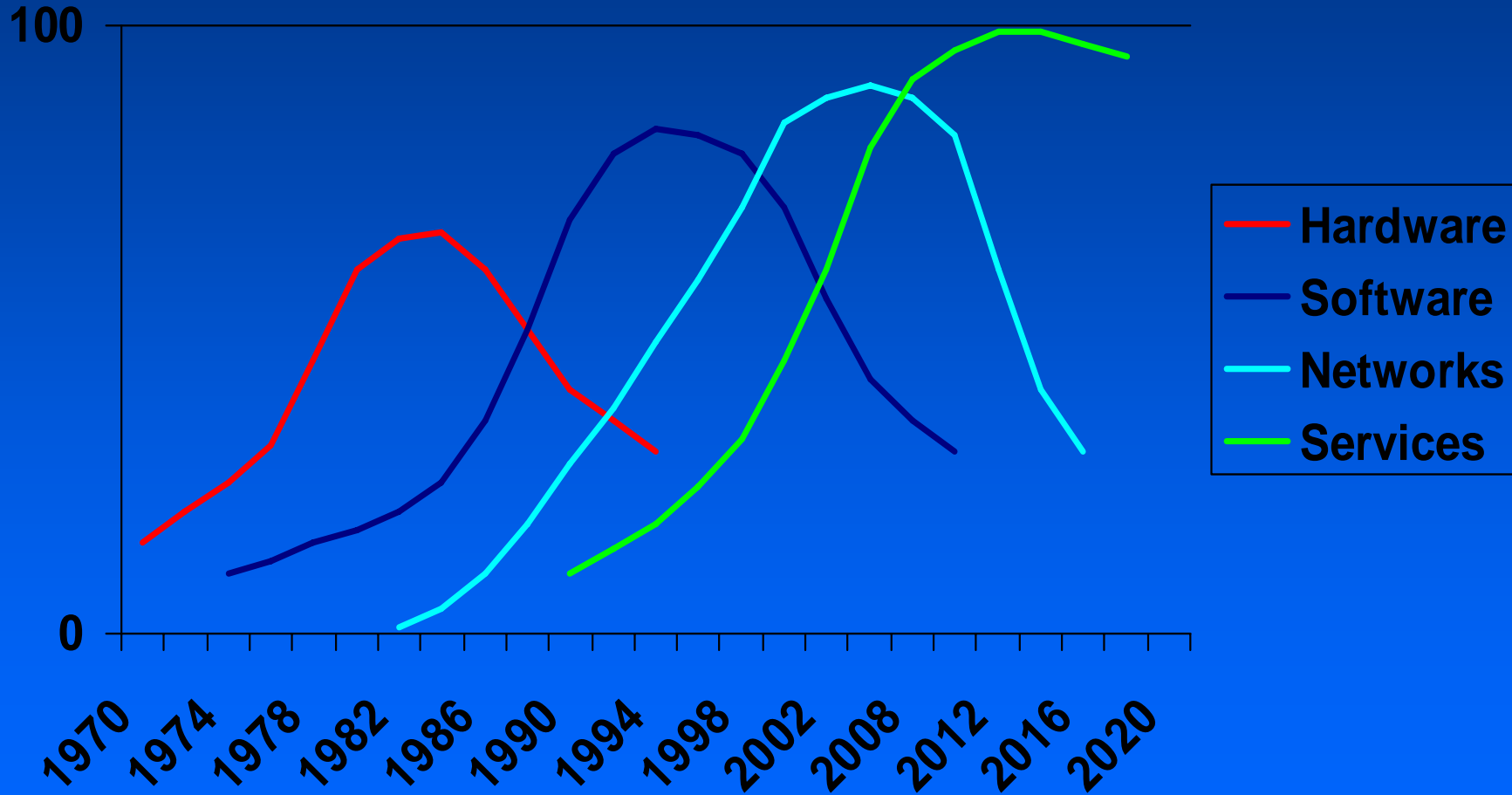
# How can they do that?

- It's experience.
- For example, many companies fail because they run out of money.
- That almost never happens to experienced entrepreneurs.
- Even a founder with an IQ of 160 can't learn enough, fast enough, to have the experience.
- Every successful company I have seen has mentors / good directors.

# Right Place at the Right Time

- Its hard.
- You have to get both things right.
- It's mostly luck when you are young.
- Just can't accumulate the knowledge to consciously position yourself.
- That's what old guys always say.... (remember the stove)

# Eras of Opportunity



# 200 Fatal Mistakes

- Probably about 200 common mistakes that entrepreneurs make in the first few years.
- Unfortunately, most are fatal.
- Most companies try to make a dozen or so.
- They are not in a book or CD.
- That's another reason why chances of great success are so small.

# Some good news

- The mistakes can be learned.
- The hard way (common path for entrepreneurs -  
remember the stove.)
- Go broke a few times (Jimmy and Ted almost did  
a couple of times.)
- There is a much better and faster way.
- MENTORS.



# Other important lessons

- #1. Do not run out of money.
- All investment capital comes with costs and conditions that are worse than you can possibly imagine (and that you probably won't understand until its too late).
- You have to sell what you make.
- 199 other lessons for another day.....

# Globalization

- The world today is a much smaller place
- Due to two technologies:
  - Air transportation
  - Telecommunications
- In my father's day a trip to Asia took two months to plan and two days to get there.
- For me, a bad travel week is when I cross the same ocean four times.

# Globalization and intangibles

- In the 20<sup>th</sup> century we learned that companies in Asia could produce physical goods more efficiently.
- That was OK because North America became a knowledge-based economy.
- At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are learning that people in any country can create intangible goods as efficiently as the Americans.

# What it means for you

- If I see a business plan to dominate the market for something in Canada, I hit delete.
- Very simply, your only option today is to be one of the best in the world.
- Luckily for us, that is very doable from here in BC.

# My hope for you

- I hope that some of you start companies.
- Sooner rather than later.
- With others from UBC.
- Build a team.
- Find some mentors.
- Raise some capital.
- Make a ridiculous amount of money.

**Good**

**Luck!**