

FASTCUSTOMER

500startups

TESTIMONY of Stephanie Hay

Co-founder, Fast Customer

Resident Mentor, 500 Startups

Before the

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade

On

Where the Jobs Are: Moving the Economy with Mobile
Apps

Good morning. My name is Stephanie Hay, and I've been an enthusiastic leader in the tech community since moving to Alexandria from Ohio nearly 10 years ago.

In 2003, while working in communications at George Mason University, I began building websites and creating templates to simplify how 30 departments managed their content online.

Imagine, being able to publish content on the internet instantly from anywhere – this speed and flexibility had me hooked.

I left Mason for World Championship Sports Network, where I got my first taste of startup life – 2 AM working sessions from my couch, coordinating with remote teams in Manhattan and LA. Changing priorities. Fast.

In 2010, after several years in project management at agencies, I started my own consultancy. I also became more involved locally, taking board positions with the Art Directors Club, speaking at DC Tech and RefreshDC, and co-organizing the DC Lean Startup Circle, which today includes 1,200 entrepreneurs.

In short, tech is my livelihood, and I've created jobs because of it, too.

For example, in 2010 alone, my first year in business, I hired five people as subcontractors. I co-launched Workspace Design Magazine. This monthly online publication about the evolution of work now employs three people.

I also founded NovaCowork, a group of nearly 150 entrepreneurs who meet each Wednesday at Iota Cafe in Clarendon, where companies have been launched, jobs created, and partnerships formed. You're welcome to attend.

In fact, the startup I co-founded in 2011, Fast Customer, came from one of those meetups. Paul Singh, Aaron Dragushan, and I built a mobile app that -- with a single tap -- connects you directly with a human in customer service at more than 3,000 companies. We're using mobile technology to change customer service calls for the better, and we've hired eight people to help us.

When we decided to raise money, 500 Startups – an accelerator and fund in Silicon Valley -- led our seed round. I am now a resident mentor there, as well, coaching startups on everything from pitching to positioning.

I mention 500 Startups because it's revolutionizing the venture capital world by deploying smaller sums of cash faster, and it's actively working to involve more women. Nearly a third of its portfolio includes women-led startups, three of the six partners at 500 are women, and this week, they're launching a campaign to bring

more women into the angel investing community through coaching and educational programs.

That organizations like 500 Startups are committed to taking on this challenge of supporting female founders with useful apps – and that I can be part of influencing that future – is invigorating. Plus, with more women like Facebook’s Sheryl Sandberg and Yahoo!’s new CEO Marissa Mayer leading the way, I further my own resolve to catapult other smart women into decision-making positions within tech.

Of course, I’m here today because I believe you can help, too.

Earlier this year, I spoke with Jenifer Boss, a tech-savvy woman whose job with the DC mayor’s office is to identify new innovations fit for public-sector applications.

Fast Customer is a DC-founded company that already connects callers to agencies such as the IRS, which generates thousands of calls annually. Surely, we could not only help agencies better connect with their people, but politicians with their constituents. Again, the possibilities are endless.

However, we – like Instagram, which just sold for \$1 Billion – operate without a dedicated enterprise sales staff. So after a few promising conversations about how we could modify Fast Customer for real-world pilots in the public sector, we were

then placed into the standard procurement process required of any vendor who wants to do business with the government.

This was startling, because *they had approached us*. Yet we – and they – were hampered by procurement rules that couldn't accommodate new products like ours.

We could not demo an out-of-the-box product with clear public-sector features because it didn't exist, so we were forced to end discussions.

The contrasting reality is that we already were in talks with telecom giants in the private sector, including Verizon, Comcast, and Telstra. These companies recognized the innovation and Agile process in which we mobile startups work, which meant we could continue building, learning, and iterating at the speed of mobile – the speed of our world today.

That we might expand internationally before we could meet rigid expectations in our own backyard is discouraging. But we believe there are massive opportunities to be realized if government removes barriers that hinder our mobile companies and brilliant people from engaging with the public sector.

What can we do together to find compromise and more quickly bring mobile innovation into our government? Thank you.