



Opportunity Knocks

How Canadians are forging the path to
entrepreneurship in an ever-changing world

AN RBC® REPORT



Foreword

October is Small Business Month – a time to recognize and celebrate the vital role small businesses play in shaping our communities and driving Canada’s economic prosperity. Small businesses not only offer the goods and services Canadians rely on but also create jobs, foster innovation and strengthen local culture.

To all the small business owners contributing to our economy and communities – thank you!

This report offers a revealing snapshot of entrepreneurship in Canada today – what it looks like, what it means to Canadians and what challenges and opportunities owners face.

Our goal with this report is to provide a behind-the-scenes look into what entrepreneurs, both current and aspiring, are thinking and feeling. We hope their stories will inspire other Canadians to take that first step toward their business vision – whether it’s a bold leap or a gradual transition.

Starting a business is tough work, but we hope you feel encouraged and inspired to take the next step towards becoming an entrepreneur or growing your business. After all, the business owners we connected with to make this report think it’s worth it. Keep their wise words in mind as you start, manage and grow your venture. And, as always, we’re here – with advice, resources and more – if you need us. I hope you enjoy the insights and find this report both thought-provoking and inspiring.

Karen Svendsen

Sr. Director, Small Business, RBC

This report explores the following questions:

- What defines today’s entrepreneur?
- What are the motivations fueling their desire to start a business?
- What unique pathways are Canadians following to create their new businesses?
- How are current entrepreneurs finding opportunity in the face of a dramatically evolving, complex world?



About the Research



(Above) Some of the small business owners who generously contributed to the research (L to R): Ahmad G., Sumana J., Audrey B., Chris M., Drake S., Gabriela F., Hans M., Irene E., Kul S., Julie O., Kenneth N., James B., Veronica C., Kyla D., Mark P., Maureen M., Melanie M., Muhamad K., Sunshine T., Raju B., Roman B., Roula E., Smriti P., Ashley D.

At RBC, we love talking to entrepreneurs – and we know that they love to talk to each other. By sharing experiences, owners can improve processes, discover time- and money-saving hacks and gain the inspiration that’s sometimes needed to take their vision to the next level.

This report reflects research and conversations with existing and aspiring entrepreneurs, including the following sources:

The RBC Small Business Poll 2024

- The survey took place from June 21-25, 2024
- 2,001 Canadian adults (age 18+) completed the survey online via the Ipsos omnibus
- The sample consisted of two subgroups:
 - Business owners (n=333)
 - Consumers who don't own a business (n=1668)

The RBC Small Business Newsletter – September Poll

- 75 RBC small business clients responded to this poll in September 2024

Interviews with business owners

- RBC conducted 20 in-depth interviews from March to September 2024

A 2024 PERSPECTIVE:

Unlocking the Door to Entrepreneurship in Canada

Starting a business in Canada can be both simple and challenging. Simple, because the barriers to entry are diminishing – you can effectively start a business with an email address and a laptop. Challenging, because it takes a healthy dose of hard work and self-belief to launch a viable business, let alone a solid business idea and plan.

Either way, Canadians seem up to the task – even as economic factors throw up obstacles. In fact, the uncertain economic environment has proven to both compel people to pursue entrepreneurship and to spot and seize unique opportunities.

In the recent [RBC Small Business Poll](#), and through informal client surveys and first-hand conversations with entrepreneurs, we've learned that more and more Canadians are launching businesses out of a desire to make a positive impact. We have also learned that they are proactively seizing opportunities as they arise, and that many are starting small and scaling up gradually. In other words, starting a business in Canada in 2024 is personal, intentional and purposeful.

Starting a business in Canada in 2024 is personal, intentional and purposeful.

(Below) Gabriela Flores started [Tienda Movil Latin Supermarket](#) in 2020, and has grown it from an online delivery service to include two storefronts.



RESULTS:

Highlights

More Canadians have started or are considering starting their own business in 2024 vs. 2023: RBC Small Business Poll



Aspiring entrepreneurs

51%

The proportion of Canadians who **have thought of owning a business** (51%) has increased significantly year-over-year – up 5 points from 2023.

15%

There is a growing desire among aspiring entrepreneurs to **convert passion projects** into a full-time business – up 4 points from 2019.

31%

Almost one in three aspiring entrepreneurs are **looking for ways to earn money doing what they enjoy** – a passion project or hobby.



Current business owners

15%

Small business ownership remains consistent with where it was one year ago (at 15%), despite persistent economic challenges that have gripped Canada during this time.

46%

Significant proportions of small business owners reveal they started their business **so they could stay home and spend more time with those who matter**, like children (46%) and/or aging parents (40%).

95%

Virtually all small business owners think the current **economic and market conditions are forcing them to be more proactive**.



93%

Do more meaningful work that aligns with my personal values

87%

Make more money

Motivation to start up

More Canadian small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs cite meaningful work (93%) over making more money (87%) as a motivation for owning their own business.

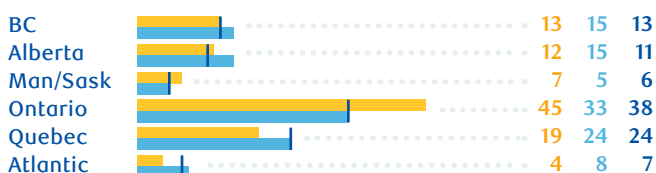
RESULTS:

RBC Small Business Poll 2024

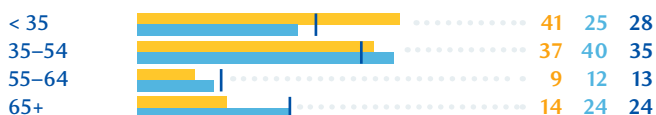
The changing face of business owners in Canada:
Entrepreneurs of today and tomorrow



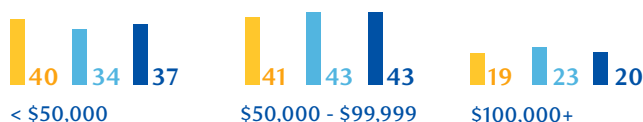
Where they live (%)



Age (%)



Household income (%)



Identity



Kids in the household



► **Ontarians** are more likely than residents of other provinces to be aspiring entrepreneurs.

► Existing business owners are over-indexed in BC, Alberta and Atlantic Canada.

► There are more aspiring entrepreneurs under the age of 35 than any other **age group**.

► While Canadians 65+ are less likely to be aspiring entrepreneurs, they make up nearly a quarter of the country's business owners. The largest segment of owners is the 35-54 group.

► A strong proportion of aspiring entrepreneurs have lower **household income** – likely due to their younger age.

► Generally, the household income of small business owners is slightly higher than the income of the general population.

► Many aspiring entrepreneurs and business owners have **kids at home** compared to the general population.

Passing the torch to a younger generation

The face of entrepreneurship in Canada may be shifting as demographic data reveals that today's aspiring entrepreneurs are younger than current business owners, with slightly more women than men considering the transition. The key motivators explored below may hint at the drivers behind these shifts and how the Canadian small business landscape could take shape in the coming years.

KEY FINDING 1:

The Pursuit of Purpose

Key motivations for aspiring entrepreneurs

Findings from the RBC Small Business Poll reveal that in recent years, Canadians have placed more emphasis on pursuing their passions and prioritizing flexibility in their work-life balance.

Compared to 2019, Canadians are less likely to say “making more money” is a motivation for owning their own business. Small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs cited meaningful work (93%) over making more money (87%) as their main motivation. What’s more, younger Canadians are even more likely to “strongly agree” that meaningful work is their key motivator.



“Vision beats startup capital; small consistent steps beat experience; loving what you do beats everything!”
(Roman B., [MADPI Global](#))

→ 93% of Canadian business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs cite meaningful work as an advantage to owning their own business.



“Make sure you LOVE what you do. If making money is the main purpose, it will be harder to keep the passion alive when times get tough. Keep networking, show your passion, and the money will come.” (Audrey B., [Cocoa Bistro](#))

→ 31% of aspiring entrepreneurs are looking for ways to turn their passion project or hobby into a viable business. This rises to 41% among the Gen Z population.

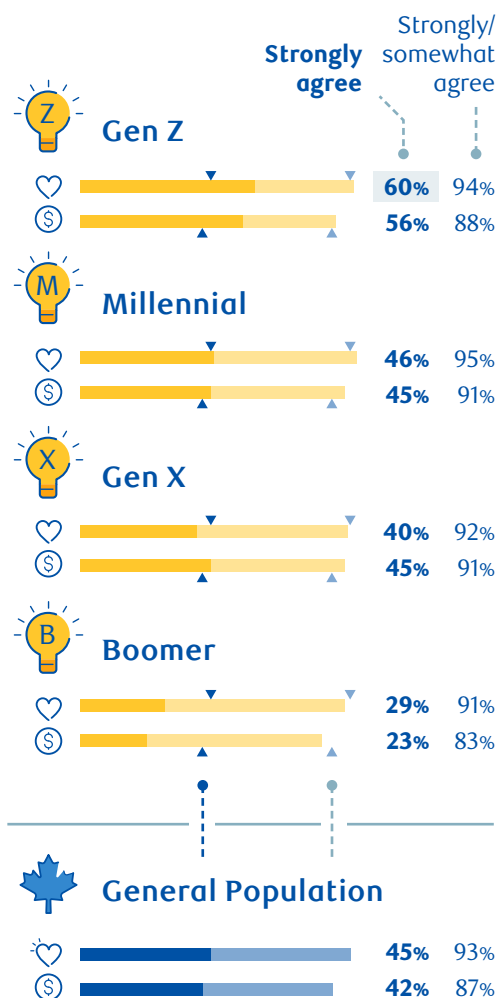
Key motivations for aspiring entrepreneurs



Do more meaningful work that aligns with my personal values



Make more money



The poll also highlights that a substantial proportion of small business owners launched their ventures to achieve more flexibility.

Findings from the RBC Small Business Newsletter – September Poll told a similar story, with many indicating that “loving what you do” and “giving back to the community” are primary motivators for starting a business. Many also shared that entrepreneurship offers the freedom to set their own schedules, leading to greater control over family care and lifestyle priorities.

The growing interest in entrepreneurship may be linked to the fact that many aspiring entrepreneurs have someone at home requiring care, as starting a business could provide the flexibility needed to balance caregiving responsibilities with work.

Members in the household requiring care



32%

General population



33%

Business owners



40%

Aspiring entrepreneurs

“Owning my business has given me a sense of purpose and control over my career and life that I never had before. I’ve found balance by combining my passion for woodworking with my role as a parent and entrepreneur.” (Ashley D., Willow & Ash Designs)



→ 46% of small business owners started their business to work and stay at home with their children. This rises to 63% among Millennials and 62% among Gen Z.

“Owning a business allows you to share your purpose with others, especially those you care deeply about. In my case, it’s my kids. I’ve always wanted to inspire the next generation of tradespeople and engineers, and my business gives me the platform to do just that.” (Muhamad K., Comfort Union)



→ 44% of aspiring entrepreneurs state caring for children is a key reason for considering starting a business – 59% of Millennials and 50% of Gen Z are motivated by this.



Spotlight

SUNSHINE TENASCO | Founder of Pow Wow Pitch, Her Braids and Quemeez

Sunshine Tenasco began her entrepreneurial journey out of necessity. She had lost her job because she needed to take her son to a doctor’s appointment. The experience inspired her to take the leap into entrepreneurship, creating Her Braids, a project that brings awareness to Indigenous clean water issues, and Quemeez, a baby moccasin company. [Read her story.](#)

“Entrepreneurship allowed me the flexibility to show up for work energized, and to work around my children’s schedule. If an appointment or event is happening, I don’t have to ask anybody for permission, or feel guilty about taking time off to be there.”

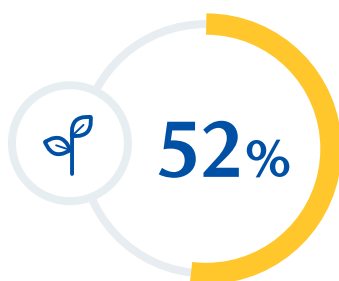
KEY FINDING 2:

Pathways to Starting up

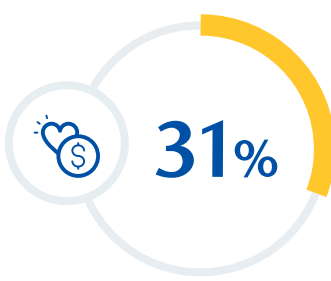
Aspiring entrepreneurs prefer to start small

Most business owners and consumers recognize an inherent risk in entrepreneurship – 87% of owners and 88% of consumers believe it takes a risk-taking personality to start a successful business. Perhaps it's this deference to risk that leads many down a cautious path towards entrepreneurship.

More than a giant leap into the unknown, starting a business in 2024 tends to begin with small steps – a side hustle, hobby or passion project that grows into a viable business over time.



Want to start small and work on building their business on the side until they know it can self-sustain and financially support them full-time.



Want to find ways to make money from a passion project or hobby.



Are exploring ways to transition from full-time work to contract or freelance work.

Spotlight

DRAKE SQUAREBRIGGS | Founder of Top Notch Golf

Drake Squarebriggs took a one-step-at-a-time approach when he launched Top Notch Golf, being a business of one for the first two years of his online-only golf equipment shop. As he generated sales and grew his inventory, he expanded to a brick-and-mortar store and added staff and services. [Read his story.](#)

“I started the business with \$80 a month [as] a business of one for the first two years. It’s easy as an entrepreneur to second guess yourself and wait for the perfect time. But in my experience, I just had to get started and work on the business as much as I could.”



KEY FINDING 3:

Seizing Opportunities and Adapting

Within challenge lies opportunity

Today's entrepreneurs know what it takes to not only weather dynamic times but thrive in them. Capitalizing on uncertainty comes down to listening to signals, proactively adapting to economic conditions and seeing the opportunity for growth and innovation that exist in the current economy.

In fact, Canadians believe small business owners must be proactive in response to current economic conditions, while a smaller yet significant proportion perceive the present climate as an opportunity for growth and innovation.

Small businesses in the current economic climate

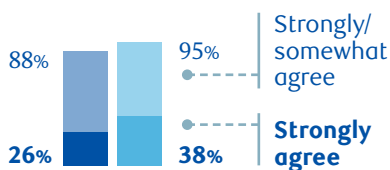


Consumers

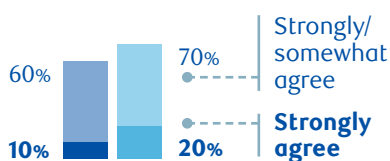


Small business owners

Current economic and market conditions are forcing small business owners to be more proactive in their long-term business planning.



The current economic and competitive landscape is serving as a catalyst for growth and innovation.



“Fail forward is such a powerful mindset for new owners. Embrace challenges and mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow. In business, you’re going to encounter roadblocks, but the key is to treat them as stepping stones, not setbacks.” (Kyla D., Foxy Box Laser & Wax Bars)



→ 86% of business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs see opportunity in today's climate – they are motivated to bring something new and exciting to the market.

“You have to be able to pivot on a dime and move quickly, without compromising your core beliefs and your core vision.” (Dan F., Dark Slope)



→ 95% of business owners believe they must be proactive in response to the present climate.

“Building a business takes time, and success doesn’t happen overnight. There will be challenges along the way, but each one is an opportunity to learn and grow. It’s important to stay focused on your passion and keep pushing forward, even when things get tough.” (Ashley D., Willow & Ash Designs)



→ 70% of small business owners believe the current economic and competitive landscape serve as a catalyst for growth and innovation.

Spotlight

ERIK WIGGER | Founder of FullMoon Autoworks

Erik Wigger started out as a solopreneur, doing window tinting, paint protection and other automotive film applications. When he took his business to Orleans, in the heart of car dealership territory, FullMoon Autoworks grew steadily, taking on more staff as they attracted more clients. When the owner of the unit he was subletting was looking to sell, Erik found a way to purchase the property. [Read his story.](#)

“I was a sole proprietor for a while, but we incorporated our business just over two years ago before applying for a mortgage. Our books looked really good. When the landlord who was selling the property was on a time crunch, we were able to make things work out quickly.”



“Focus less on having a successful business and more on how your business can solve problems and help the people around you. Solving real people’s problems will result in a successful business.” (Micah B., [Criterion House UI/UX Web Design Agency](#))

→ 39% of business owners – and 47% of Millennial business owners – started a business after being laid off.



“My advice for new business owners: Your idea is great, but it will evolve. Embrace a flexible mindset rather than a fixed one. You’ll gain clarity by taking action, so dive in and do the work – especially alongside others. Build a supportive business community to share the journey, because entrepreneurship can feel isolating without it.” (Sumana J., [Jeddy Wellness](#))

→ 57% of aspiring entrepreneurs are motivated by a desire to supplement their retirement income.

Canadians still favour supporting small businesses

One of the silver linings of the pandemic was the “shop local” movement – as global shipping and supply chains were disrupted, local businesses opened their doors (sometimes figuratively) to shoppers in the community.

Since then, buying locally remains a trend – Canadians haven’t forgotten the service local businesses provided during tough times and recognize the value they continue to add to their communities.

Where to Go from Here

Ready to get started? The resources below can support you on your entrepreneurial journey.

There are many facets to successfully starting, managing and growing a small business, beyond financial planning. As an organization deeply rooted in supporting and empowering small businesses, RBC has made it easier for Canadian entrepreneurs to navigate every stage of their business growth with unique solutions that go beyond traditional banking products and advice. Solutions offered by RBC and its collaborative partners include:

- **Ownr®:** For entrepreneurs in Ontario, Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia, this is a quick and affordable way to register and incorporate your business online, while automating important legal and compliance filings.
- **Moneris®:** Whether you're in-store, online or both, Moneris has you covered with a full suite of unified payment solutions, 24/7 support and on-site field services. As an RBC merchant, you can get access to your money the next day, every day, at no extra cost.
- **RBC Insight Edge™ for Small Business:** A dashboard solution that offers subscribed retail businesses with real-time data insights around customer trends, competitive benchmarks and market intelligence to support business decisions.
- **Xero®:** Xero offers online accounting software that helps RBC clients run their small business, with features like invoicing, bill payments, payroll and bank reconciliation. To make accounting even easier, business owners can sync Xero with their bank, automate tasks, collaborate in real time and connect it to other apps they use.
- **Futurpreneur®:** For entrepreneurs aged 18-39 who want access to business resources, financing and mentoring. Futurpreneur Canada supports young entrepreneurs with an expert business mentor for up to two years and resources to help plan, launch, manage and grow their business.
- **The Founder's Journey Online Course:** This free virtual course – offered by Western University's Morrisette Institute for Entrepreneurship, RBC Future Launch® and The Globe and Mail® – guides participants through the journey of successfully starting and growing a new venture.

Are you thinking of starting a small business in Canada?

Take a look at [50 Ideas and Lessons Learned from Real-Life Entrepreneurs](#) for inspiration from some of today's successful business owners: rbc.com/50ideas



Access these and many other solutions, including business tools and advice, at rbc.com/startingabusiness.



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