

## Mathematicians are red hot: BRAINS OVER BRAWN: Knowledge-based economy hikes demand

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Illustration: Colour Photo: Tim Fraser, Calgary Herald / Aaron Pratt, a University of Calgary grad student, is living proof of the demand for mathematicians in a knowledge-based economy.

CALGARY -- Corner-office occupants beware: In the war for talent, there's a new contender vying for the title of hottest new recruit. But this highly calculating newbie is factoring into corporate strategies in a new way.

Mathematicians, it seems, are must-have additions to some company payrolls now that math is one of the key sources for innovation in a supercharged, knowledge-based economy.

With algorithms and sophisticated mathematical modelling techniques driving much business innovation these days, math is far more important than brawn, says Alberta Ingenuity communications director Mary Anne Moser.

"Thirty years ago, you'd snicker thinking a mathematician could be useful, but it's really changed because the drivers of innovation have changed," she says.

University of Calgary mathematics graduate student Aaron Pratt is living proof that the push to hire mathematicians outside the classroom is no urban myth.

Pratt is working part-time at Direct Energy's Calgary office doing data analysis of energy prices and predictive mathematical modelling while working toward his master's at U of C.

The job arose from a relationship struck in 2005 when Pratt arrived at Direct Energy under an internship program offered by MITACS, or the Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems.

MITACS is a national research network launched in 2003 to bring together top researchers and companies to solve industry problems in five of the economy's fastest-growing sectors: biomedical and health, environment and natural resources, information processing, risk and finance, communications and networks and security.

Last month, Alberta Ingenuity, which operates the \$1-billion Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research, upped its funding to \$150,000 to the program to place top graduate

students with, in this case, Alberta businesses.

Pratt says the internship has shown him that math grads have a career alternative to academia.

"[And] it's definitely help for me -- because it's hard to get your foot in the door in a lot of ways just with a math degree," he says.