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[Kathryn Buford](#) | September 4th

It's a well understood expression in business: Stagnation is regression; businesses either advance or fall behind. Creativity does not just give businesses the competitive edge, according to Rana Florida author of [Upgrade](#) and CEO of the [Creative Class Group](#) (CCG), it *is* the competitive edge. The one thing every business must know also holds true for technology firms: You can't afford not to be creative. This is the message of CCG, a boutique consulting agency that advises business and communities on harnessing creativity to address professional and local challenges. CCG was founded by acclaimed scholar [Richard Florida](#) whose research on urban innovation and landmark book [The Rise of the Creative Class](#) have been endorsed by several leading innovators and brands from rocker Bono to BMW.



Creativity pushes businesses forward. And, if you're not moving forward, then, well, why exist? In this intimate interview with Rana Florida, we discuss why creativity is the ultimate currency and how tech firms can invest in and spend it wisely.

To set the foundation, can you please share your definitions of the “creative class”?

The creative class is comprised of the classic knowledge-based worker, from those working in business and finance to healthcare and education. It also includes scientists and engineers, techies and innovators and artists and designers. In the U.S., the creative class is comprised of 40 million workers – roughly a third of the workforce – and generates approximately \$2 trillion in wages and salaries – more than two-thirds of the U.S. payroll.

Creative Class Group services are described as helping companies harness their innate creativity. Why should companies that are not artistically inclined care about tapping into creativity?

We have lived through one of the greatest shifts in our economy, from an industrial economy to one that is driven by creativity and innovation. Creativity is the new economy. Today's economic growth is driven by creativity, which means if we want to strengthen our competitive position in the world we have to tap into the creativity of everyone, from the creative class to those working in the service and working sectors. The basic logic of the creative age dictates that economic development will be driven by the use and development of everyone's creative capabilities.

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the new
economy.

- Rana Florida

In the technology business space, you see a lot of different companies offering similar and even the same products and services. For example, there are plenty data analytics firms. Would you say what ultimately distinguishes these companies is creativity?

It's their ability to clearly see, understand and effectively measure the problem or challenge at hand. It's also the ability to develop a data-drive platform and solution that accelerates innovations, sources a greater level of feedback and corrects or re-calibrates the solution based on real-time engagement.

Is creativity equally important across different levels of the organization? For example, would you say creativity in terms of marketing is more important than creativity in terms of internal organizational development?

Creativity is important among all levels of an organization. Thriving, successful organizations are those that spur creativity — not squelch it – throughout the entire organization.

The most effective organizations invest in people of all departments, from marketing to human resources, and give them the opportunity to develop and fully utilize their human talents and potential. This can range from developing new, innovative marketing campaigns to implementing a new HR system to garner greater feedback and engagement from the organization's workforce.

And, you have worked with a variety of businesses.

CCG has worked with companies around the world to design everything from teaching platforms to community and talent engagement strategies. We recently partnered with Zappos, one of the world's largest online retailers to develop a strategy for better engagement to its local community. Zappos understands the importance of retaining and attracting the best creative talent. We worked with their senior leadership team and local economic development officials to develop strategies for economic development and growth.

Is it safe to say the success of a company in highly competitive environments ultimately rests on creativity?

Yes. That's why it's important that managers and leaders create environments within their organizations that eliminate distractions for creative workers and help to spark creativity and innovation. Valuable, creative employees help to invent new technologies, develop increased expertise and stimulate thinking with organizations – all of which are critical for companies that want to thrive in a highly competitive creative age.

One of the workshops Creative Class Group offers is “Leveraging Location.” Isn't the promise of the “Information Age” that we have become so digitally connected that location isn't as important anymore? What makes location important to business strategy?

Businesses play a critical role in ensuring the economic growth of communities. Despite the digital rise, communities also play a key role in the success and competitiveness of firms — offering a range of assets and capabilities that affect business performance. In the creative economy, location plays an ever more important part in firm strategy and performance. For companies, this is more than just picking locations where costs are low. The right location can provide business and entrepreneurs with the access to key customers and clients, talent pools, R&D assets and clusters of other companies.


What is one of the most awe-inspiring creative occurrences you've seen in the technology sector?

The rapid rise of social platforms – from Twitter and Instagram to Kickstarter – help engage a greater and wider public. These collaborative models break down the traditional walls of the organization and encourage a wider audience participation.

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Learn more about Creative Class Group at www.creativeclass.com.

[Read an excerpt from Rana Florida's Upgrade in the Huffington Post.](#)



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UPGRADE is the manifesto for success."

—MARIO BATALI, critically acclaimed chef, restaurateur,
award-winning author, and television personality

UPGRADE



Taking
Your Work and
Life from Ordinary
to Extraordinary

RANA FLORIDA

CEO, THE CREATIVE CLASS GROUP

HUFFINGTON POST'S "YOUR STARTUP LIFE" COLUMNIST

About Kathryn Buford

Kathryn Buford is a PhD student in sociology whose research explores digital communities across the African diaspora, social entrepreneurship and the arts. Kathryn's work has been featured in various

online publications as well as the online magazine for Live Unchained (www.liveunchained.com), which features innovative arts, media and events across the world. Contact her at kathryn@liveunchained.com and follow her on Twitter ([@yeskathryn](https://twitter.com/yeskathryn)) for musings on creativity, technology, entrepreneurship and society.