



# CARIBBEAN WOMEN IN TECH

*Interview with Ingrid Riley, Founder of SiliconCaribe and Rebel House Media.*

## **How do you perceive the current status of the Technology Sector in the Caribbean?**

In the Caribbean, we've done a very bad job of marketing technology. Technology is perceived as something that is difficult or something that is all about coding. Fortunately, this perception has changed, and we are now showing people the wide range of possibilities for careers and/or business opportunities. You don't always have to be good at coding or even technical to be in the tech industry, which is something that people didn't often realize in the Caribbean.

There are many non-technical jobs in the tech industry. You can transfer your marketing skills, organizational skills, problem-solving skills, managerial skills, project management skills to startups or established tech companies who often need these skills. In sectors such as e-commerce, fintech or crypto or AI, cybersecurity or business intelligence, there is a wide range of possibilities that exist. If you're a technician and a coder, or if you know about UI, and UX design, that's great. If you understand how to transform data into actionable business information, this is even

more fantastic. But even if you don't yet have those technical skills, you can still use other skills you have to start your career in the tech industry because it's not just about coding.

Additionally, businesses need to get clearer in communicating what type of digital talent they need through their websites and job advertisements. The focus should be less on people who have degrees and more on people who have other skills. For aspiring jobseekers, there are free and paid online courses that enable you to become equipped in certain digital skills that are needed by these companies.

## **Based on your experience, what are some of the challenges and advantages as a woman working in tech? What aspects are specific to the Caribbean?**

The field of technology is a very male-dominated field, and being a woman in this industry, there will always be some men challenging you. Often your knowledge is tested, and if you fail to make an impression in their minds you can be treated as if you don't belong in this sector. People also tend to

have lower expectations of women in this field. On many occasions you are treated as if you are not good enough, or in a condescending, misogynist way. However, I've sometimes used these assumptions to my advantage. When your rivals underestimate you, you can present a big, beautiful surprise to them and this creates a business advantage that they don't see coming.

Second factor is that women are socialized to be the helpers behind the scenes and people who don't necessarily speak about their achievements and successes. Thankfully, this is also changing. Now, people are talking about women in tech and girl bosses. The whole socialization of women transforming from how they tend to stay small about themselves versus simply opening their mouths and proudly sharing who they are and what they're doing is happening now. In sharing your stories and becoming more visible and vocal, you're giving other girls and women permission to do the same. I see it happening in the region, and across the world, where the more fearless among us are leading the charge. They are opening doors and creating platforms.

### **How can we promote a more inclusive society to strengthen the participation of women in the tech sector?**

How I got involved in the industry was quite accidental. I was born into a family that was proactive towards technology, as my family was an owner of one of the first Internet service providers here in Jamaica. Having internet access at home at an early stage of my life spurred my curiosity and allowed me to learn some things early. I also worked at a company straight out of college that got all the cutting-edge Apple computers, fast internet, and other tools to have its employees exposed and educated early.

More girls and women need to be exposed early and consistently to technology. Parents can expose their children early to digital tools, or send them to summer camps that expose them to different skills and enable them to better understand the environment. Schools can start to enable students to navigate securely and

smartly engaging with relevant apps and games that match their interests.

Women working in the sector should also share their success stories, start, join, and contribute to women in tech communities, to change the current stereotype that it is only men who can do well in tech. Women should not just be consumers of what is produced and provided, but we should also be creators, entrepreneurs, and investors. We should continue to do a better job of showcasing successful women in the tech industry and show the range of possibilities for our girls and women.

Through Silicon Caribe, we started an initiative called the Top 50 list of Caribbean Women in Tech in 2021.

This list sparked a lot of new opportunities, connections and raised awareness. This evolved into the CaribbeanTechWomen.com initiative, which listing profiles of Caribbean Women in tech around the world in the form of a directory of women. It will grow into a mobilization platform and community. Women should not fight for the limited piece of pie allocated to women, but network to expand the pie. We also need men as allies and many of them have been willingly helping. We need to educate and fund more women in tech and have incubators and accelerators that are focused on women entrepreneurs. Additionally, more women need to become angel, venture capital and private equity investors in tech businesses and also women-led businesses.

We need to continue to challenge the norm and create new standards. We often underestimate the power of media and visual images. We need to challenge producers of major tech conferences and events to invite more women speakers and make sure there are a number of women who are attending. I often see formal events which have



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**Ingrid Riley is a pioneering Caribbean Tech Startup Ecosystem Builder, Serial Media Entrepreneur & the Caribbean's Leading Tech Event Producer. Through her work, she helps Caribbean entrepreneurs, executives, and creatives get smarter about technology and business by providing them with information, events & community.**

90% men, and they throw in some women for color. At SiliconCaribe, we intentionally invited women moderators, panelists and keynote speakers at our events, which has been our strategy for the last 15 years in leading the change we want to see. In relation to this, I also play the role of a “fire starter” online by asking certain tough questions on male-biased newspaper business. I also publicly challenge event planners that only have men as speakers. This leads to discussions and has led to inspiring women to restart communities, become more vocal and visible and join in in challenging the status quo. I am hopeful for continued awareness and fundamental change.