

**BUSINESS > TECHNOLOGY**

# Technology back in driver's seat in metro Denver



Paul Aiken, Boulder Daily Camera

This 2015 file photo shows Steve Dugas, left and Chris Chalstrom holding a quick meeting at the SendGrid offices in Boulder.

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Software and technology firms in northern Colorado are starting to hire like it's 1999.

Jobs in information technology and software (IT-Software) increased 9.4 percent last year, the best showing out of 13 industries key to the northern Front Range economy, according to the 11th annual cluster study from the Metro Denver Economic Development Corp.

“Software had a banner year this past year. Technology workers that are coming here. Millennials are coming here,” Patricia Silverstein, the study’s author, said at the Vectra Bank Annual Forecast Breakfast this week.

Across the past five years, IT-Software job gains are up 27.5 percent, with only the beverage production industry turning in a better performance at 28.1 percent.



Techstars Boulder is the most famous of several local accelerator programs that help launch entrepreneurs. Last year, information technology and software hiring exploded in metro Denver at a pace not seen since the early 2000s.

Those tech jobs, aside from paying above-average wages, are an important lure for millennials looking to relocate and start their careers. An influx of young adults has pushed up apartment rents and home prices in recent years, but also is refreshing the rapidly aging population.

“In addition to companies moving here, startup growth in Denver is definitely creating demand for IT talent and consultants across many industries,” said Andrew Butkus, Denver division director for Robert Half Technology.

Rising demand for [big data](#) services and the state's growing reputation as a [cybersecurity hub](#) are some of what is driving hiring in the metro area's tech sector, Bucktus said.

If the demand continues, it will represent a second act for the industry, which was front and center during the economic boom of the late 1990s, only to suffer crushing losses in the years that followed.

The first cluster study in 2007 showed IT-Software employment in metro Denver down more than 20 percent versus 2002. And then the Great Recession hit.

Employment in the IT-Software cluster fell from 45,900 in 2007 to 40,360 in 2010, even as the number of companies held fairly steady at just under 4,000. Slowly, the industry crawled back, although at a slower pace than the tech hiring recovery nationally.

Things changed last year. Metro Denver tech employment surged from 48,610 to 54,580, while the number of companies went from 4,810 to 5,180. The 9.4 percent annual gain compares to a 4 percent gain in IT-Software hiring nationally.

Telecom hiring, by contrast, remains dead in the water. Metro Denver has about three times the concentration of telecom jobs compared to the rest of the country. But job gains in recent years are fairly flat.

The 13 employment clusters that the Metro Denver EDC has tracked the past 11 years account for 24 percent of jobs in a nine-county region that includes Denver and Boulder. And while those clusters don't necessarily employ the most people, they represent a concentration of expertise that sets the region apart.

Metro Denver last year ranked second among major U.S. metro areas for its concentration in aerospace and beverage production jobs, fourth for clean tech, fifth for telecom and sixth for conventional energy jobs.

It ranks eighth for the concentration of IT-Software jobs, according to the study.

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Aldo Svaldi has worked at The Denver Post since 2000. His coverage areas have included residential

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