

Small Business Spotlight:

Valerie Song | CEO and Co-founder AVA Technologies Inc., Est. 2016

Life Story

When Valerie asked her three-year old niece where the tomatoes on her pizza came from and she said “grocery stores,” Valerie knew young people were in danger of becoming even more disconnected to their food. A business graduate from UBC’s Sauder School of Business, Valerie worked in the organic food marketing industry, her first foray into gardening and knowing where good food comes from – it’s also where she found inspiration in the company’s motto: “Leave the Earth better than you found it.”

AVA Technologies Inc., launched by Valerie and co-founder Chase Ando, is a budding start-up from Vancouver trying to help people eat better while reducing food miles. AVA (Automated Vertical Agriculture) creates smart home products starting with AVA Byte – think Nespresso machine for gardening. By using modern technology, AVA wants to help the world get growing by unlocking access to the freshest, organic ingredients at home, all year round.

Who inspired you to become an entrepreneur?

A turn-key moment was when I was working for a beer company. During a sales session one day, I asked a business owner when he knew that he wanted to be an entrepreneur. He told me it was when he started losing productivity at work and didn’t enjoy it anymore, he knew he could do more. It really jogged something inside of me. A few weeks later I quit my job to start AVA.

Who is your role model?

With both my parents running different parts of their company, I gained a lot of respect for my parents. It doesn’t matter if you are a man or woman if you have the hustle, the skill and the willingness to learn then you can do anything.

What do you see as your greatest accomplishment to date?

The greatest and also the toughest accomplishment to date with AVA would have to be our fundraising. It’s something that we are very proud of and worked really hard to get there. In June, we raised our \$2M USD round through a local venture capital firm. We had to push



through and get over the fear of not getting investment and be bold to ask for what we needed. We pitched for \$1M, and they offered us \$2M – that has been the proudest moment to date.

Looking back, what advice would you give to other aspiring young female entrepreneurs from your experience?

The best thing you can do for yourself is to just go do it, practice and surround yourself with people who can support you in getting there. You need to create your own opportunities. Don’t just wait for them to come to you.

Tell us a little known fact about your company.

AVA was named after the AI robot from the movie Ex Machina.

Where is your favourite B.C. destination?

I recently did a hike at Joffre Lakes near Squamish, B.C. which was just breathtaking with the pristine water and the views. When I got to the top, I held out my hand with some of my trail mix and birds came down to eat it. That was my Disney Princess moment, it was amazing.

The Bottom Line

- AVA employs 7 full time employees
- 2018 SBBC Award Winner – Best Innovation Award
- AVA Byte is currently in production, with pre-purchased orders to ship later this year and the next batch will be available in store and online in Canada and the US
- AVA looks to expand globally – U.S.A, Asia, EU and UK

[Read the full interview](#)