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Women Technologists and Entrepreneurs, #WhatSheTechs Was Created For You

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Criseida Rico. Photo Credit: Sam Vargas

By Courtney Gabrielson

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Criseida Rico knew she needed something like [#WhatSheTechs](#) during a former day job at a software company.

"I struggled with my voice being heard," she said. Rico, who now serves as a marketing communications lead at ROVE, wasn't sure if it was because she much younger than her colleagues or because she was a woman of color, but regardless, she felt she "didn't mesh well with the culture" of her organization.

It wasn't long before she realized she wasn't alone. [One figure](#) indicates that less than 20 percent of tech jobs are held by women.

"[Tech is] an industry that touches on every single part of our lives, and it's mostly the men who are making the decisions — even down to the products that we use," she said. "If we continuously have just men running these things, we're not bringing in that perspective that a woman is trying to offer."

"You are capable of so much; you don't know until you unleash that power."

Coupled with her experience on the job (and at tech conferences, where the line for the ladies' room was curiously much shorter than for the men's), she realized something had to change.

The result was #WhatSheTechs, an online platform with a simple goal: "To bring awareness and empowerment to women in tech," Rico told Charlotte Inno.

It achieves that in a few different ways, including various social media platforms, distinctive style and a robust online store.

The cornerstone of the brand, however, is its editorial content. Under the heading, "real women, real stories," readers can find interviews from [personal style bloggers](#) to [e-commerce entrepreneurs](#), mostly in a conversational, approachable Q&A style.

"We ask intriguing questions: How did she get into tech? What inspires her? What are the pieces that she uses day-to-day?" Rico said. "[We want readers] to become inspired by the words that she's saying, and give them the opportunity to be her for the day."

To that end, #WhatSheTechs offers links to the featured woman's outfit and favorite products. Rico explained that part of the site's mission is to bridge two worlds she loves: fashion and technology.



Criseida Rico. Courtesy photo.

"In regards to being a woman, we are awe-inspired by fashion," she said. "That outfit that you wear one day can impact a board meeting or an interview," and #WhatSheTechs can help readers "find the tools and pieces that you need to be inspired offline."

The e-commerce element of the site, which has allowed Rico to avoid seeking outside capital for her work, was the result of #WhatSheTech's continuous growth. Now, the site boasts a viewership of about 10,000 a month, but Rico is less concerned about the numbers and more about something a bit more intangible: impact.

This focus has resulted in a brand that readers resonate deeply with, and Rico said she often gets messages of support from women who were searching for the community and inspiration her brand offers.

Regardless of the groundswell, the next chapter for #WhatSheTechs is yet to be written, Rico said.



Imagery from the #WhatSheTechs website. Courtesy photo.

"I have not sought out any funding, and I have not looked into venture capital ... mostly because I still want to be able to control [the site]," she explained. However, "I'm only one person; there's only so much I can do. I am going to have to take this to the next level, but I am going to have to think long and hard about what that looks like."

If anyone can figure it out, Rico can. After all, #WhatSheTechs is a one-woman show. She pursued the education she needed, through self-teaching and through avenues like [Tech Talent South](#), to get it off the ground.

She joked that her tech education began back in the MySpace days, when users had to learn coding basics to make their site unique.

"You can teach yourself almost everything," Rico said. "All it takes is a little bit of passion, a little bit of focus and the skills to hone in on what you want to work on."

But when she tells her own story, it's clear that she's been blazing a trail for a long time.

"Being here in Charlotte as a minority woman ... I'm the first in my family to go to college, the first in my family to start a venture with no funding," Rico said. "[I want to say] to younger girls when they're young that, hey, they do have opportunities to go full force."

It's a message she works to emphasize not only on #WhatSheTechs, but also when she works at [Circle de Luz](#), an organization aimed at empowering young Latin American women.

"You are capable of so much; you don't know until you unleash that power," she said.

Editor's Note: [Read more](#) about a recent #WhatSheTechs event, where new beauty startup MAZE launched.

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