

JAMES RILEY | JANUARY 12, 2017

# Aussie women and VC: trending up

Venture Capital



**Julie Demsey:** Made a move from Silicon Valley to where the grass is greener

**After a twenty-year Silicon Valley** tech career, American Julie Demsey packed her bags for a new frontier, moving to a place brimming with startup opportunity and a vibrant supporting ecosystem. She came to Australia.

Now it's a truism that the grass is always greener on the other side, particularly for the cynical among us (I am talking here about the voices inside my head.)

But when we hear of entrepreneurs and experienced executives who move to Australia without a specific role to take up – just because they see great opportunity – it is worth taking a moment to understand the motivation for making this place their home.

For Julie Demsey, there is something about the support networks in the startup ecosystem here that is exciting.

She has taken the general manager's role at the female-focused accelerator Springboard Australia and says the support networks building around women here are interesting and growing. And have vibrancy.

She says this includes growing support structures for women in getting an entre to venture capital.

"I think the particular difficulties for women getting through the door to investors is the same as women find anywhere in the world," Ms Demsey said.

"But from what I have seen here, although it may have something to do with the circles I am running in, there is more success [for women accessing VC here] and there is much more support," she said.

Springboard Enterprises will be represented at the inaugural Women in VC Forum (events/Women-in-VC-Forum/) in Sydney on February, with legendary founder Kay Koplovitz the international keynote speaker.

*Ms Demsey concedes she is still in the honeymoon period of her whirlwind romance with Sydney and Australia. But still, there are some insights.*

While on holidays in Australia for a week in May last year, she attended a couple of ecosystem events (one that includes Springboard Australia chairman Topaz Conway) and saw enough to want to move here.

She had then left her job in San Francisco in late August and hit the ground in Sydney in early September with no specific job to go to, but with a great optimism for the ecosystem.

“I had heard [during my holiday] a lot of people here talking about Silicon Valley as the great Mecca, the best thing in the world in terms of where things should be going in terms of the startup scene,” Ms Demsey said.

“But I think there are some things that can be done differently. I wanted to see what I could do to help the startup ecosystem here to grow in a way that might be even more successful than Silicon Valley,” she said.

“What excited me was that everything seemed to be more sustainable to me compared to the valley in terms of the startup culture.

“If you look at the accelerator programs and the success rates here and the number of companies building businesses ... it’s good.

“In Silicon Valley, everyone is looking for their Unicorn. And when you find that Unicorn, you stick to them and don’t worry so much about the rest.

“What I saw here in Australia – especially at Springboard with its successes – is much more of a tendency to be maybe be a little more cautious upfront, but that means there is a lot more support in the system to help more companies grow.”

## **Women in VC**

*InnovationAus.com* will host the inaugural Women in VC Forum ([events/Women-in-VC-Forum/](#)) in Sydney on February 23, focused on pathways for connecting women to venture capital.

The international keynote speaker is US entrepreneur and businesswoman Key Koplovitz, the founder of USA Network and the cofounder and chairman of Springboard Enterprises. She is also managing partner at Springboard Growth Capital.

More than 200 senior executives and startup founders are expected at this forum, to hear first-hand how the venture capital space has evolved from a female perspective and what mechanisms the sector can put in place to encourage more women to join and stay actively engaged.

Speakers and panellists at the event include:

- **Kay Koplovitz**, Managing Director, Springboard Growth Capital (USA)
- **Laura McKenzie**, Chief Executive Officer, Scale Investors
- **Marty Gauvin**, Chair, Innovation Investment Committee, Department of Industry, Innovation and Science
- **Anne-Marie Birkill**, General Partner and Executive Director, OneVentures
- **Cath Rogers**, Executive Director, Airtree Ventures
- **Elaine Stead**, Founder, Blue Sky Venture Capital
- **Rick Baker**, Co-Founder, Blackbird Ventures
- **Topaz Conway**, Chair, Springboard Enterprises Australia
- **Jo Burston**, Chief Executive Officer, Rare Birds
- **Sandy Plunkett**, Founder, Innovation Clearinghouse

To find out more information about the [Women in VC Forum \(events/Women-in-VC-Forum/\)](#) and to book your seat, please visit the event website or the [Eventbrite page \(https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/women-in-vc-tickets-30103724049?aff=erelpanelorg\)](#).

The Women in VC Forum will sell out.

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