

Business and Keynote Speakers



Ian Heller
Founder & Chief Strategist, Distribution Strategy Group

Ian Heller is the Founder and Chief Strategist for Distribution Strategy Group. He has more than 30 years of experience executing marketing and e-business strategy in the wholesale distribution industry, starting as a truck unloader at a Grainger branch while in college.

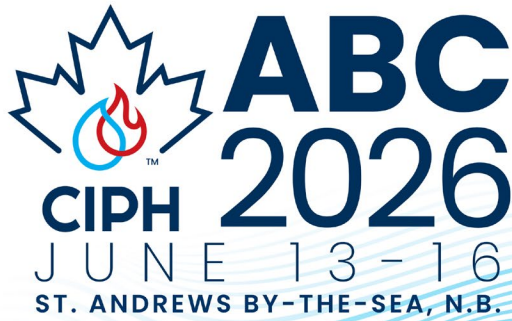
He's since held executive roles at GE Capital, Corporate Express, Newark Electronics and HD Supply. Ian has written and spoken extensively on the impact of digital disruption on distributors.



David Coletto
Founder, Chair and CEO, Abacus Data

Infinitely curious, passionate, and eternally optimistic—these are just a few words to describe David Coletto, the founder, Chair, and CEO of Abacus Data. With a career spanning over two decades, David has devoted his life to exploring what people think and feel about their work, their lives, and their politics.

He believes that understanding what motivates and informs people's worldview, we can create a more understanding, empathetic, and action-driven world. David is one of Canada's best known and most respected public opinion



analysts, pollsters, and social researchers. He works with some of North America and Europe's biggest and most respected brands, associations, and unions and is frequently called upon by news organizations, to assess public opinion as events happen. In [January 2024, The Hill Times recognized him as one of the Top 100 Most Influential People in Canadian Politics.](#)



Tareq Hadhad
Founder and CEO, Peace by Chocolate

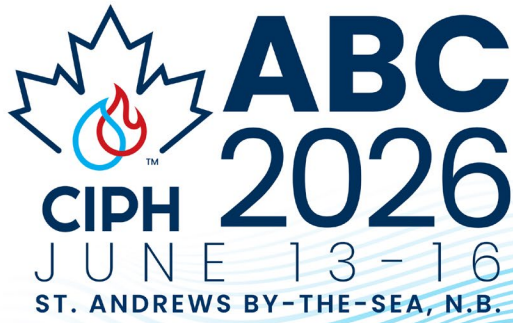
Tareq Hadhad is telling his story. He was a Syrian refugee and now living his new life with his entrepreneurial family in Canada's east coast. He is the founder and CEO of Peace by Chocolate, the recipient of the EY Entrepreneur of The Year 2021 for Atlantic, named one of the Top 25 Immigrants in The Maritimes, selected by Google as the National Hero Case, was

awarded RBC's top Immigrant Award and Entrepreneur of the Year in 2020 and Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal. All of this has happened since Tareq's arrival on Canada's East Coast in December 2015 as a Syrian-Canadian newcomer.

In 2012 the Hadhad's home and factory that housed the family chocolate-making business were destroyed which forced them to seek safety in other countries. A former medical student at Damascus University and long-time peacekeeping advocate, Tareq joined medical relief efforts after arriving in Lebanon. A new life began when Tareq and his family were welcomed to Canada on a community-based sponsorship.

Passionate about peace and entrepreneurship, his family relaunched the family business to recreate the chocolates they once exported across the Middle East and their story has turned into an international inspiring phenomenon.

Tareq and his family have a focus on job creation, utilizing a network of local community members and refugees from across Nova Scotia and Canada to help support the local economy. Now that their chocolates are distributed across Canada, they look to offer more employment opportunities as their business grows.



Rob LeForte
President, First Lake Solutions

Rob was born and raised in Nova Scotia where he began his career advocating for post-secondary students while serving on the Student Union at Dalhousie University.

His post-secondary advocacy experience brought him to Ottawa where he successfully led government relations efforts for the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA). During that time he advanced human resources and skills development policy, led intellectual property and research policy reforms, and built a strong network in Ottawa's political community. While working for CASA, Rob earned his Masters Degree from the Clayton H. Riddell Graduate Program in Political Management at Carleton University.

Rob followed up that experience by working with some of Canada's most effective advocates working at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities where he had the opportunity to work on housing policy development, infrastructure and public safety issues including policing and cannabis prior to recreational legalization. He went on to work at a leading national public affairs firm where he eventually became Vice President, having delivered billions of dollars in investments to client sectors, significant provincial and national legislative victories, and major regulatory reforms in sectors as diverse as health, construction, retail and supply chains, and skills development.

Rob takes pride in maintaining a strong political network across party lines and is committed to helping his clients align their objectives with the goals of government to achieve results. He is also a trailblazer in digital campaigns, having delivered social media campaigns as early as 2009 to leverage large networks of supporters. In 2017 he was an international finalist for PR News Magazine's award for the year's Best New Digital Tool for *Push Politics*, which he also co-founded.

