

Daniel Tisch – Trust and Technology: Building the Future at Magnet Network Live

Host: Maggie John

Overview:

Daniel Tisch joins us to discuss the trust factor when it comes to small businesses adopting AI. Daniel is President and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and a public policy leader with extensive experience in government and the corporate sector. As the CEO and majority owner of Argyle Communications from 2003 to 2023, he grew the firm into Canada's largest management-owned engagement and communications advisory firm. Tisch shares why trust is the biggest barrier when it comes to small businesses using AI and why technology goes further when supported by human skills.

Highlights from our conversation include:

1. One of the biggest predictors of success for a business is how they build a talent pipeline. Those who are working with schools to attract and train student talent will be poised to be more competitive.
2. Recognizing the limited resources of small businesses, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce launched an AI Hub to support the ethical adoption of new technology across the province.

MAGGIE:

We are back, Magnet Network Live, in the Spirit of York, at the heart of the Toronto Distillery District. As you can hear, there's a lot of chatter going on in the background. I'm now here with Daniel Tisch. He is a prominent business and public policy leader with extensive experience in government and the corporate sector. He was previously the CEO of Argyle Communications, a leading public relations firm, and he

specializes in reputation management, crisis communication, and building trust between organizations and their stakeholders. His work has been recognized globally, and he is a thought leader in the communications industry. Welcome, Daniel.

DANIEL:

Welcome. Well, sorry, thank you for the welcome. You can tell I'm tired here after presenting at Magnet Network Live, but what an extraordinary event. Congratulations to everybody involved. It's quite remarkable just seeing the way ideas and people collide in the best way here. And, you know, that we have a conference that has a really beautiful mix of, and a real beautiful balance between speakers kind of energizing people with ideas, but then giving people some space to mix and mingle and talk about those ideas with the speakers and with one another.

MAGGIE:

And I heard that the mandate for each speaker was to kind of give people something to go forward with, a nugget of tool that they can run with. What was that nugget that you gave the team that was listening in to you?

DANIEL:

Well, I focused on the issue of trust, right? And so if you think about the advent, for example, of Artificial Intelligence, right? You know, we hear a lot about AI from the standpoint of technology, but in the end, the biggest barrier, I think, to adoption of AI and the biggest reason that people in Canada see it as a risk more than an opportunity is lack of trust. So my argument was that trust becomes fundamental, that we have to combine Artificial Intelligence with human values, that getting that while AI promises a wonderful things, it promises business becoming more productive and workers becoming more valuable to get there and to get those benefits to yield that harvest. We need to ensure that there is a climate of trust, that people trust the technology, they trust how the technology is going to be used.

MAGGIE:

Do you think that will take a long time, Daniel, for us to get there?

DANIEL:

Well, I'm optimistic. I think that there's some wonderful work been going on here in Canada, right here between many of the people who are here at this event. And also because if you look at the history of technological adoption, initially there's resistance, there are barriers, there are concerns. I mean, think about the first time, maybe this wasn't your experience, but it certainly was mine, the first time that you use your credit card on the internet to pay for something. And I remember some people saying, never, I'll never do that, I don't trust it. Now it's just kind of a given, it's a fact of life. I'm old enough to remember when I was a little kid going to an ATM for the first time with my parents. And I remember my mother, when I got my first card, saying to me, you know, never use it to deposit money, only use it to take home money, right? But, you know, now that will be very quaint and old-fashioned advice, right? So I think it'll be the same, right? I think, but to get there, we have to see it not just as technological advancement, but a technological advancement that is guided by human values, by ethics, by guardrails, by standards.

MAGGIE:

Absolutely. Let's talk about businesses and what strategies should businesses adopt today to build a resilient and adaptable future that talent pipeline can face rapid technological changes.

DANIEL:

Right. Well, yeah, that's, this is a huge challenge. I mean, you know, the, the Ontario chamber, one of, I think our, the assets we bring to the table is that we don't just represent big business. We don't just represent small business. We represent all business in every sector, in every community in Ontario. And so that gives us a really good vantage point to sort of understand some of the challenges. The number one challenge that I've heard about from our members across Ontario this year is talent. So it's developing, it's retracting talent, it's retaining talent, it's developing talent, it's upskilling talent. And part of the challenge small businesses in particular face is they don't have the time, they don't have the resources, they don't have any, they don't, many, most don't have an HR department, right? And we also have in an economy that's very dependent on small business, we have a lot of people, the average age of a small business owner in Ontario, it's fairly advanced, right? These are generally folks

who are over and they may or may not be ready and willing and open to make big new investments in technology and productivity. So what do they need to do? Well, more than anything else, they need to be thinking about their talent pipeline. And I see some, you know, encouraging partnerships that people make, the business people make at the local level through their local chamber, connecting them to resources and advice, you know, that they may not have in house. I see tremendous partnerships with Ontario's outstanding post-secondary institutions. So our colleges, our universities, and I'd encourage employers to look very carefully at those sorts of resources in their community because, you know, the institutions increasingly have, are in the business of creating partnerships with local business that are mutually beneficial, that help give graduates, that help give students and grads work experience that's good for the business and also good for the student in their career. So those are a few things that I think are predictors of success at the local small business level.

MAGGIE:

Let's circle back to AI where we started our conversation. How do you foresee AI and automation reshaping the way businesses communicate with their stakeholders?

DANIEL:

Well, what I think that... What we need to think about, I think, is just how AI, first of all, can make our existing business processes more effective. That's really the very first step. That's the baby step, right? But I think I see a lot of businesses right now beginning to think about that and starting to use it to make processes more efficient. So you talk about stakeholder communication. Well, obviously, you know, something as simple as generating a customized communication to your stakeholders, right? You put in some key facts in, in, in chat GPT and it can generate, you know, a really good letter, you know, you know, so, so you have to spend less time composing and you can spend more time on the higher value activity, which is of course, you know, customizing it and, and, and sort of developing and managing the relationship with the stakeholder rather than, crafting the minutiae of the letter. So that's a very simple example. But I think where the opportunity becomes more transformative is when we're not just looking at adapting current processes, but we're completely

redesigning processes that actually take the technology and use it in ways that we haven't ever thought about before. And I think that's the exciting part of it.

MAGGIE:

Is that a challenge for small and medium-sized businesses?

DANIEL:

Yeah, it's a huge challenge. And that's why at the Ontario Chamber, one thing that we're trying to do is we launched our AI hub earlier this year. And so we have, in fact, TMU is involved in it, and we're delighted by that. And so with the hub, so we've got the academic sector, we have business leaders, we have big companies like Microsoft and Google, for instance, stepping up and building this with us. And there'll be a policy dimension to it. What I think is exciting is there's also going to be a program dimension to it, where we're actually, the plan is to develop programs and products that we can actually use to help small businesses get smarter about how to use AI effectively to make their businesses more productive and their workers more valuable, as I said before.

MAGGIE:

You know, going back to what we started off talking about, Daniel, when it when it came to trust, when you're talking to small, medium sized business owners, is it a lack of trust when they're coming to learn from you in the chamber? Or is it just the lack of finances, the lack of skill set to be able to step into that world because it costs more? You know, things were working the way they were for so long. What's the barrier?

DANIEL:

I think there are several barriers. no question access to capital is one barrier, right? So the business, so there are different ones. There's, I think the business owner has to have a growth mindset, right? And a desire to grow. And let's face it, there are a lot of businesses that are very successful. They're happy to stay small and the business owner doesn't necessarily want to grow, right? Or maybe the business owner is in the mode where they plan to sell in a few years. And so their challenge is more about succession planning, right? But that's certainly a barrier, right? You know, there's transition coming in the business, right? And not a willingness to invest. For those who

do want to invest, access to capital is often a barrier, right? Another barrier might be access to knowledge, right? Just not fully understanding the opportunities and how to access them. And I guess a final one that I'd highlight would be access to the right skills, right? So do you have the right technological skills and do you have the right human skills, right, within your business that can help you actually, you know, go digital if you're not fully digital yet and start to use these technologies that are available to you?

MAGGIE:

All right. We're going to call it there. Thanks so much, Daniel.

DANIEL:

My pleasure. It's always great to be part of these dialogues and to have them in person rather than, you know, on Zoom calls. Right.

MAGGIE:

I'm tired of the Zoom calls. Me too. Yeah, let's ban them forever. That was Daniel Tisch, President and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.