

## **Matt Small – Revolutionizing Employability: Simplicity's Mission**

Host: Maggie John

### **Overview:**

Matt Small joins us to discuss technology's role in preparing students for the workforce. With more than 20 years of experience in higher education, Small is deeply committed to partnering with the global higher education community to redefine student and institutional success by leveraging Symplicity's smart, innovative technology. Since becoming President & CEO of Symplicity, he has expanded the company globally with products and acquisitions in Latin America, Canada, Europe, Australia, and the Middle East. Small shares how he sees technology changing the way educational institutions prepare students for the workforce.

### **Highlights from our conversation include:**

1. Students are placing more and more emphasis on employability, and they want to know how universities will prepare them for the workforce and want opportunities to gain work experience through internships and experiential learning.

Symplicity helps bridge the gap between students, employers, and post-secondary institutions. The platform has quality jobs that are easy for students to find and apply to, leading to better employment outcomes for students.

### **MAGGIE:**

This is Magnet Network Live. We are live at the Distillery District right in the heart of Toronto. I'm now joined by Matt Small. He leads Symplicity, a company focused on enterprise technology for higher education. With over years of experience in

educational technology from his previous role at Blackboard, Inc., Matt is committed to addressing the skills gap between students and employers and leveraging technology to improve employability outcomes for students. Welcome, Matt.

**MATT:**

Thank you.

**MAGGIE:**

What has been your biggest takeaway so far over the past couple of days?

**MATT:**

Well, there's certainly a lot of very smart people doing important things and tackling big issues, and it's really been nice to level up and see exactly what people are doing around upskilling, training, helping students, very practical solutions, leveraging AI. And there's a real big focus on behalf of the government to solve these things. And these are real actionable, tangible things that are in place. It's not just talk. And the impact is quite impressive. So it's wonderful to be a part of all of this.

**MAGGIE:**

Is there something that you're taking away from the conversations that you've been a part of, Matt, that you're like, you're chewing on and you might take back to the shop and kind of tinker around with it?

**MATT:**

Oh, absolutely. I mean, you know, you leave thinking, oh, man, we're not doing enough and there's so much more opportunity. And we should also be thinking about these things. And, you know, everybody we talk to wants to partner and there's a lot of potential. Yeah.

**MAGGIE:**

So how do you see technology transforming the way educational institutions prepare students for the workforce, especially in addressing the skills gap?

**MATT:**

You know, there's a real transformation underway in higher ed globally, not just in Canada or in the U.S.. There's much more focus on student experiences and experiential learning, not just internships, but it could be projects, summer work, volunteer work, student employment. Students, when they go to university now, it's not like even years ago, you know, where they would go and say, oh, let me see the library and, you know, let me let me look at the majors you have. In addition to all that, students want to know what internships are available. Do you have a co-op program? Which employers are you working for? Or what's the impact my education is going to have on the jobs I can apply to, my salary, how long is it going to take, and these real practical things. And the universities and the students and the administrators and the governments are really focused on how do we keep up with the pace of change? How do we provide those opportunities to students? How do we match them? And then how do we make sure those students are actually getting the skills and competencies they need in addition to their coursework so that they're, you know, attractive to employers, so that they're useful to employers. They can differentiate themselves. You know, the jobs available by the time a student graduates didn't even exist when they started. And the university ecosystem really plays a pivotal role in making those connections. And it's life-changing for people.

**MAGGIE:**

Why do you think students have become more savvy in that way and asking some of those deeper questions than, you know, I was in university a number of years ago, Matt. I'm assuming you were in university a couple of years ago. So I wasn't as savvy to ask some of those questions about what my employability will be like in a couple of years.

**MATT:** Yeah, it's a great question. There's so many factors. I think when you talk to deans and provosts and CEOs of universities around the world, years ago, if you asked them for their top strategic initiatives, employability wouldn't have been one of them.

**MAGGIE:**

Yeah.

**MATT:**

And now it's number one. And it's being driven by student expectation, parent expectation, legislative pressures. I mean, whether you're in the U.S. or you're in Canada or frankly elsewhere, there's a debate about what is the role of higher education? What is the return on investment in education? Look at the costs associated with education. Are students going to study something that is disconnected from the workforce and then graduate with student debt and have to still find a job? And how do you take the great work that's happening on campus and actually connect that to career objectives? And how do you also address skills and competencies in addition to what you're studying? I mean, it used to be when people talked about student success, they meant retaining the student and their GPA. And now they mean career outcomes.

**MAGGIE:**

What role does employability software play in helping universities and colleges stay relevant in today's job market? And how can they better collaborate with employers as well?

**MATT:**

Well, that's like saying, how does software help businesses? I mean, it is you can't separate higher education from software. I mean, it's just part of the fabric of the higher education institution and what they're offering. Students are online all day and it could be in a class, taking a virtual class. It could be...

**MAGGIE:**

But that's a big change from, again, as you just alluded to years ago.

**MATT:**

Absolutely. Now with generative AI, things are moving very fast. And the expectations of students have changed. And the universities have to keep up. And there's no way for them to do it as in-house developers or inventors. They have to rely on third-party software providers who are making investments on behalf of thousands of universities, which is very expensive to do. And you get a much better result. And students, they expect early on to engage with the university in terms of their

career. It's not like years ago where you swung by the career center in your fourth year and said, hey, what do you have for me? I mean, now it's day one, okay, what do I need to do to work towards an internship this summer after my freshman year? And okay, this is great. I'm taking all these classes. I'm very busy, but what are the things should I be doing to differentiate myself and how do I learn how to articulate what I want to do, what jobs are available for me, what's even possible out there, and what are the requirements for those? And software is the big connector.

**MAGGIE:**

Yeah. Is that because competition has just gotten to such a level where, as you said, you swung by in your fourth year thinking, okay, where do I want to go with the humanities degree or whatever you had? The competition level is just probably to a whole other level now.

**MATT:**

It is. And there are some employers who need certain hard skills and they will have campus recruiting teams and they will target students. And some students, it's kind of a natural pipeline to find a job. Those STEM jobs, engineering jobs, computer science, maybe consulting, medical, even via law school law or, you know, investment banking, accounting, those sorts of things. But, you know, half of higher education is liberal arts, which is terrific. And there's just as many jobs available for those students, but the pipeline isn't as clear. People aren't really sure what they do with that English major or the History major or what have you. And there are jobs and pipelines for them. They just have to be done in a... using software and AI to help connect them and discover what those are, and then also to round out those degrees with the skills to make them marketable.

**MAGGIE:**

How does Simplicity's role, you know, how does it work in all of this that we've been just talking about?

**MATT:**

So that's what we do. So, you know, Simplicity, we work with universities around the world, hundreds of thousands of employers on our platform, do millions of student

job applications every year. It's the platform of the university for anything having to do with employability. So it could be co-ops, it could be internships, it could be experiential learning, but also career fairs, info sessions, work groups. It's the CRM of the university for their employers. It's how employers engage with the university, promote themselves. Match with candidates, where they post jobs, where they register for events. And it's also how the university collects all of the employability data when students leave. Where do they go? How long do they take them? What's their starting salary? That factors into the rankings. It's very important to the university as well. And for the students, it's all the tools that they need. It's not just getting matched with those opportunities, but it's also doing pathways and helping them prepare. It is doing self-assessments and mock interviews and building their CV and their profile before they go out and post it publicly. It's how they manage their counseling sessions with the career centre. So it's quite robust. And anything you could imagine that has to do with employability is being run on Simplicity.

**MAGGIE:**

It's just amazing to see how technology has evolved, again, over the past just number of years, right? Again, I think about myself out of university. When did I graduate? I won't even tell you, Matt. But just so many more tools now available for students to do well, to be able to seek employment and make themselves marketable for whatever industry they're trying to head into.

**MATT:**

Yeah, there are. And there's a lot of sites available online generally that are wonderful. So people can go to Google or LinkedIn or WayUp or Indeed or any number of job boards. I think Simplicity is different because we are the platform of the university. So we have a very powerful job board within our platform, but it does a lot more. It's integrated with the student integration system. All the students are pre-populated on the platform. It is how the university runs their day-to-day operation related to employability with employers. There's millions of students on the system. And it's the university brand and name and their data, and it's kind of a private place. It's not like uploading your resume online where someone's going to take that money and go monetize the data and monetize it. In higher ed, you know, there's, as there should be, privacy guardrails around what happens with that student data. So they can do all of

that on simplicity in a safe way and consistent with the values of higher education. And what winds up happening is we create a much more relevant, higher quality pool of jobs with a much higher success rate for students. And so if you just get on the web, you throw your resume up there, you're in the ocean.

**MAGGIE:**

Right.

**MATT:**

And when the students are on simplicity, they're usually opportunities that the university is vetted and approved as a student job with employers that are looking to hire students from that university, so it makes it much better outcomes.

**MAGGIE:**

On that note, what innovations do you foresee that will further improve how educational institutions connect students with meaningful employment opportunities?

**MATT:**

So I'm sure everybody has talked about generative AI, but it is a thing and it's happening and we're seeing quite a bit of that. And it's not even so much, oh, how is that going to change? It's just how do you do it in a way that's consistent with the rules within higher ed right you just can't take a student's resume with all that information and throw it in to inform an outside model. There are ways to do it we ring fence that data and you get all the power of generative AI but in terms of how the students make their resume... instead of having university people actually sitting down and doing reviews there's... there's ways to connect students with opportunities and to connect employers with students everywhere. There's some really powerful stuff around even how you do mock interviews and how you prepare the skills that you need in order to get into certain professions and how do you find those opportunities and what skills do you need to work on and how do you document that and articulate. There's all this exciting stuff happening around AI within the ecosystem we're already in, and that's all real time. And it's, you know, you just have to pick your

punches because there's so many different things that you can do. You have to figure out what's the most impactful technology, and then you just have to prioritize.

**MAGGIE:**

It's exciting. And just to hear all of the tools that are now readily available for young people.

**MATT:**

It's really cool.

**MAGGIE:**

Yeah. Thanks so much, Matt. Thank you.

**MATT:**

Thank you very much.

**MAGGIE:**

That was Matt Small. He's the president and CEO of Symplicity.