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New Online Tool Removes Barriers to Employment for Immigrants

Written by New Canadian Media

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Mark Patterson, founder of Magnet job search engine, showcases how it can benefit internationally trained professionals during a Ryerson University forum, "Connecting New Immigrants to Employment".

Photo Credit: Shan Qiao

by Shan Qiao (@dmaomao) in Toronto

Your name appears as anonymous; future employers can only search your skills.

Canada's latest job network innovation [Magnet](#) aims to connect job seekers to employers based upon skills, preferences and talent needs. Foreign names will no longer be a barrier for immigrants.

Ryerson University founded the not-for-profit social innovation, in partnership with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. The

network was first launched in September last year. After several months' operation and expansion, the online job search engine aims to supersede giants such as LinkedIn with its unique filtering and matching functions.

Magnet is a way to combat being stereotyped when job seeking. Future employers can only view a person's skills online. Names will be listed as 'anonymous'.

Mark Patterson, the man behind Magnet, wants to let job seekers, especially internationally trained immigrants, know what "meaningful employment" the site will bring.

"One of the most important things is that it is a giant inter-connective network," said Patterson at yesterday's Ryerson University public forum titled "Connecting New Immigrants to Employment".

Magnet brings together five critical stakeholder groups in its work, including educational institutes, multi-level governments, the labour market, and the not-for-profit and industry sectors.

"It is the biggest community-based [job search engine] in Canada. We have 26 different colleges and universities; over 100 of community organizations in Ontario and across the country," continued Patterson.

What this means to new immigrant job seekers is that when they go to local job settlement agencies such as TRIEC (Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council), they will be encouraged to use Magnet tools and technologies while looking for employers.

Removing Stereotypes

For individuals like executive director of the [Global Diversity Exchange](#), and keynote speaker at the forum, Ratna Omidvar, who have "strange-sounding" foreign names, Magnet is a way to combat being stereotyped when job seeking. Future employers can only view a person's skills online. Names will be listed as 'anonymous'.

Omidvar shared some of her early job searching experience in the '80s after she came to Canada from her home country Iran, as a refugee.

"Ratna you must change your name. It's a very strange name. Strange-sounding name has less chance to get a job interview than Brian Smith, I was told," recalled Omidvar, who admitted she considered adopting a "usual" English name, but eventually decided against it, and advised other immigrants against it as well.

"1981 was a very difficulty time in Canada. It was a period of recession, jobs were difficult to find," cited Omidvar.

"We prefer to hire someone we know from an institution we respect as opposed to taking a risk on talents from overseas." Ratna Omidbar, Global Diversity Exchange

Things have not changed too much three decades later, as Omidvar stated that newcomers still experience significant hurdles

and bias when it comes to employment.

Omidvar said one reason why stereotypes with names still exist today is, "employers' unwillingness to take a risk."

"We prefer to hire someone we know from an institution we respect as opposed to taking a risk on talents from overseas," she explained.

"One of the reasons why Magnet is successful is because it is a large platform," she added. "It's not for one institution. It has many employers who signed to it. Because it focuses on competence and experience as opposed to names and where you came from. It has an added value in overcoming certain institutional barriers and individual barriers."

To date, the Magnet network has 26 university and college partners representing over 700,000 students, 60,000 job seekers, 3,000 employers, over 100 community-based partners and 25 advisory council members composed of leaders from a cross-section of relevant sectors. Magnet boasts that with its specific filtering and matching search engine, chances for employers to find suitable employees or vice versa are much higher.

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