



STS Careers Podcast – Dr Emma Tobin talks to Marketing Manager, and former BSc History and Philosophy of Science student, Jake Higgins.

Jake graduated from the BSc History and Philosophy of Science course in 2011, and at the time of this interview was just finishing his role at Dyn as Marketing Manager. He now works as a Venture Partner for a venture capital and private equity company.

ET Welcome to our podcast series, which informs careers advice for science and technology study students at UCL. I am Emma Tobin, a Lecturer in Philosophy of Science and one of the STS Careers Officers, and I'm joined today by Jake Higgins, who works as Marketing Manager for Dyn, an internet infrastructure company, though he just tells me he's actually got a new position which he'll start next week. So he's going to tell us all about that exciting journey. So hi Jake, thanks for coming in.

JH No problem, nice to be back.

ET Good, so we'll start right at the beginning. So which degree stream did you do with us here at STS?

JH I did the History and Philosophy and Science stream. Yes, as you may remember, being my dissertation supervisor.

ET Yes, so tell us about it, tell us what you enjoyed and how you've used it afterwards, I guess?

JH Well, yes, I had the best three years, I absolutely loved the degree. I remember I stumbled across it when I was trying to decide whether to do Science or Philosophy, and I typed into their course search Science, Philosophy, hit enter, not expecting anything to turn up, and this course turned up. And I thought, oh wow, that's perfect.

In terms of how I've used it, well, I currently work and have worked in marketing technology products and often quite weird and complicated ones. So being able to get my head around science and technology, and communicate it in a philosophical argument or as social research. It's been invaluable.

But also I think there's a lot of creativity that comes alongside philosophy as well in terms of problem-solving. You see all the previous arguments laid out in front of you, and you have to think, okay, how am I going to come up with something new.

And often the same way, we're thinking how to out-beat our competition with a particular strain of argument, or to creatively use, looking at like budgets and all that kind of stuff. And how we're just generally solving those problems as a department.

ET Okay, so straight after you finished your degree, how did you come upon Marketing? So at what point did that become the career you knew you wanted to do?

JH It was actually when I was in my first year here. I had a realisation that in these modern times, you can't just leave university and expect to get a job straight away. I think you have to create a narrative around what you want to do and get some experience under your belt. So I used a website called enternships.com, which is internships, but with an E.

And I searched for stuff I had liked, and at that stage of my life, I was really into music and I found an internship at a record label. And at that, I was doing the marketing for the artists. So doing stuff like social media, YouTube and stuff like that. So I was leaving one day a week in first year down to Goring-upon-Sea or somewhere down south, waking up really early and doing that once a week.

And it was off the back of that where I thought, hang on, I could actually do this for companies. And I just went out there and started just pitching my services to anyone who

- would listen really and managed to pick up some clients and get some people on board with me, and started a small agency consultancy called Going Social which was using those skills that I had learnt to help, you know...
- ET I have no idea who did this during those years. That's amazing, really good. Yes, so just goes to show you can make your own destiny as well.
- JH I think yes, I think it's important, there's a lot of work at university, but there's also time to fit in other stuff, that's part of the deal, right. So there's always time to squeeze in stuff like that, I think.
- ET So what did you do immediately after you finished then?
- JH So after that, I stumbled across an article which was about this new programme which actually has quite strong links with UCL now, called the New Entrepreneur Foundation. And these guys were basically pitching for a year. You can get trained from UK's leading entrepreneurs, get to work alongside them and get a lot of courses under your belt.
- And I never thought I'd get in, but I just thought, oh, why not. And so from my second year or third year room, I ran out of electricity, but I was still just bashing out this application just in the hope that it would work.
- And went through lots of different interviews, business days where you had to like work in a group, come up with ideas, pitch it. And somehow, I managed to get through. And off the back of that then, that was straight after university, I was able to have that amazing year and work in a marketing function alongside a start-up and get a lot of training from Deloitte Accountancy all the way to negotiation and a lot of other cool stuff, yes.
- ET So what kind of people did you work with?
- JH So I worked for a start-up that, again, was an interesting piece of technology, which is creative optimisation. So we use machine learning and artificial intelligence in order to generate the perfect content for that individual user, and as I say, it really helps to be able to have done stuff like bizarre quantum physics and other stuff when I was here to get your head around that stuff. It takes the edge off definitely.
- ET So you're not so intimidated by stuff that's highly conceptual?
- JH Exactly, yes, and in a marketing function, working in the technology world, you're not required to be a Technologist, you're not required to be a Computer Programmer. You're required to understand the theoretical frameworks and the concepts that they're doing. But yes, that was it. Yes, so I was working for those guys, they were called Cognitive Match and they were just around the corner from here.
- So I was still here quite a lot bumping into old friends from UCL, and then doing the courses every other week. Then I managed to, the company I was working for got some investment. And I so went out and lived in San Francisco for three months.
- So I was living in San Francisco and commuted out to Silicon Valley. That was this time last summer. And so that was just an amazing experience, right, to be at the heart of technology.
- And if you put your STS glasses on and looked at what's happening down at Silicon Valley, it's just very fascinating. It's its own bubble of just so much investment and so much enthusiasm for technology, yes.
- ET Okay, and after that then, you went to Dyn. Is that true?
- JH Yes, so I came back from there when my visa ran out after a short bizarre trip across from San Francisco to New York on a series of trains, but that's another story. And I came back and yes, started up with Dyn who are based out in Brighton.
- And again, another heavy technology company doing DNS management and email delivery, all these other cloud infrastructure products that are vital but you don't often think about at all.
- ET Okay, so tell us then about your new position that you've got recently and how you've moved from Dyn to that position?

- JH Sure. So it's a company that's just got investment from Seedcamp, who are involved quite a lot in the London technology scene. I'd recommend anyone who's interested in following them and seeing what they're up to.
- They give quite a lot of advice to people who want to get involved in entrepreneurship or technology. And so they were looking then to expand out their commercial team, and they just hired a Sales guy and I got approached via their Recruiter if I was interested in the position. I was looking forward to getting back to London as well. I had been in Brighton for just under a year, which is a lovely place, but a lot of my friends and family are back here.
- So took the interview with those guys, met with some of their investors, went up to Cambridge to visit them where their technical office is going to be. And yes, moved very quickly and signed the deal just the other week.
- ET Oh, that's exciting. So you said earlier when we were talking that this is a different move. So it's from a big-scale company to a small-scale start-up. So could you tell us a little bit about the challenges that you face in taking a role like that?
- JH Yes, well, you're going from, I was working in about a 30-person strong marketing team to being the only person. So you have to switch your thinking a bit, and I think it's exciting to do that rather than being a specialist in a bigger team. You're doing everything and you're doing it on a much smaller budget. So you have to be much more creative and you have to do a lot more graft yourself really, to start off anyway.
- But the nature of the product is quite viral if it gets going. So hopefully, that should do a lot of the heavy-lifting for me as long as I can light the fire. But yes, it's going to be a completely different experience and yes, really rolling the dice. But I feel like I don't have too many responsibilities right now. No kids or anything. So it's best time to do it, and yes, I'm looking forward to it.
- ET That's great, it's really exciting, congratulations, fantastic. Tell us, another thing I'd really like to know is like in interviews, if you're asked about your UCL degree, so how do you sell it, what would you say are the main skills you've gained from that degree?
- JH I think it really sells itself in a lot of ways. It shows you're able to apply yourself for three years about stuff that was quite complicated. As you know being my dissertation supervisor, I got quite into the philosophy of Physics, which is what people are always interested by and almost puzzled by.
- And I think if you can show you had the interest in these kind of things alongside having some work experience under your belt, it tells a very tight story about someone who is passionate about applying themselves in one way. But also has got some experience working with people in a work environment.
- When people do ask more about the degree, I touch on some of the points I touched on already about being able to hold quite complicated arguments in your head, being able to look at the social history and social studies of technology itself as a movement. I remember being in here and having a talk from the Director of Privacy at Facebook in one of Simon's classes, and I did an essay on activism on the internet and how that's changed.
- And so those stories are very easy just to dive into and in interviewers love that, right. And then the actual philosophical side of it also is very creative and goes hand in hand with a lot of stuff I've been doing. So yes, it's been very easy to sell really, and because of its slightly idiosyncratic nature, people always have an interest and do want to hear what you have to say about it.
- ET Okay, great. Well, unfortunately, that's all we have time for, but thanks very much for coming and to talk to us and congratulations again on your new position. Okay, thank you very much.
- JH Thanks a lot, it's lovely to be back. Cheers.
- ET If you want any more careers advice, don't forget to check our website, www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/sts-careers. You've been listening to Emma Tobin, the Careers Officer at the Science and Technology Studies department at UCL. This podcast has been

recorded as part of the STS careers podcast series. Many thanks to Sophie Osiecki, our Public Engagement intern for her help with recording today. Best of luck with your ongoing careers planning

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