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## InTransition Episode 10 – Kim Ulrick

David Pembroke: Well hello ladies and gentlemen and welcome to In Transition, the podcast that explores the content marketing and government. My name's David Pembroke and I'm delighted that you've decided to invest some of your valuable time to spend with us today.

Content marketing is a strategic business process that involves the creation, curation, and distribution of useful, relevant, and consistent content designed to meet the needs of a specified audience in order to achieve a desired citizen or stakeholder action. It's a modern approach that combines the power of strategic communication planning with the distribution of online and offline channels.

Interestingly recently, we saw for the first time a request for quote from an Australian federal government agency seeking content marketing services, perhaps a sign of the times. If you'd like to find out more about content marketing for government, please visit us at [www.contengroup.com.au](http://www.contengroup.com.au) or if you want to learn more about content marketing visit the Content Marketing Institute at [www.contentmarketinginstitute.com](http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com).

Well today, our guest is Kim Ulrick the Assistant Secretary, Digital Communications, in the Australian government Department of Communication. She joins me in the studio. Thanks, Kim, for being In Transition.

Kim Ulrick: No worries. Thanks, David. It's a mouthful, isn't it?

David: Kim, before we jump in to the discussion, let's get the story. Where have you come from to arrive at this lofty position that you're in now?

Kim: Oh lofty. Thank you. That makes it sound so much more important. Look, I've got a background in government, in marketing, PR, stakeholder engagement and also policy. I'm one of those people that does cross-over the boundaries between communication and policy. And for me, I've always found that quite valuable because I can see the benefit of partnering with the business in a policy context to get the message out.

Funnily enough, landing in the role that I am now, I'll focus very much around how do we refocus the strategic policy intent of the department of communications to communicate that and engage with stakeholders in the public.

David: Okay so that's an interesting challenge and I think perhaps your department particularly has a remit for around innovation, so you are looking to push the boundaries. So what are some of the things that you're doing at the moment that are working for you?

Kim: Okay so one of the things we've embarked on is we developed a communication and a digital strategy for the department. In doing that, we identified a couple of things.

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One, we did a bit of a skills audit of the digital literacy of our own staff, and identified that while we're above average in some areas we did have some gaps and some areas of development. We've actually developed a whole digital literacy training program, and we're rolling that out across our department and that is something that our executive has embraced. Our own executives are getting mentored by some of our younger officers within the department, actually our graduate cohort from 2014.

We also have focused not just on social and digital channels but on things like our video conferencing, the use of our internal and external platforms and software so that staff can be really cognisant of how they can use those things and think about then how they might, particularly with social and digital, use that for an engagement and comms purpose.

David: Just going back to the audit, where were the gaps?

Kim: The gaps were really around things like not understanding fully how to use the whole range of social and digital channels and how you might develop content around those. For example, the department has a Twitter and a YouTube channel. In some areas, we got strong understanding around Twitter, in other areas we don't. Predominantly, YouTube is pretty low so, you know, how you might be able to use that sort of channel to communicate with different audiences.

Then there was just generally I suppose, a need to improve overall, the level of understanding around the suite of channels that could be used in terms of social and digital channels, just generally.

David: Is the intent of what you're trying to do is to spread the responsibility for communication more broadly throughout the department to be the responsibility of policy areas not just the communications area.

Kim: Well, yeah. Everyone in government in my view, has an obligation to explain policy to the community. And as part of the policy making capacity of the department, we need to engage with the community. So our view is that our team will still be, if you like, the support and advice. And we'll still do a lot of the content development, but we're trying to get the different areas of the department to understand that so that when they're in the early stages of developing a new policy idea or taking something up to government. They're thinking about how they might be able to use that consultation and engagement process throughout the policy.

So it's helping in that policy decision making and advice process but then it's helping them understand at what points we might do some of that work and what sort of content might be available.

So yes, eventually I would love to see the whole department writing different types of content. Probably for a while we're not there, so for a while it's about just building up understanding and our area in digital coms supporting them, but eventually that would be fantastic.

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David: As you go through that process at the moment, what are the lumps and the bumps that you're finding along the way at the moment?

Kim: Probably just understanding - sorry I'll step back one moment – it's probably just understanding why you might need to know about some of these channels. With policy development, traditionally it's done in a very sort of structured way. I'm not saying that won't continue but there's been, I suppose, a bit of a hurdle in just overcoming that there are these other opportunities and other ways that we can engage. I think that's one of the reasons we're doing the digital literacy training, is to just get that level of understanding and awareness out there.

I think once we start to roll that out more broadly, I think that will improve. We have a minister who's very socially media active, and -

David: You can say that again.

Kim: Yeah, but that does help because we have then a minister who supports that sort of work and is looking for us to explain things in simple ways through things like info graphics and short little explainer videos and stuff like that. Again, just getting people within the department aware of what we can do once we get over that hurdle. This literacy training is about making sure they understand a little bit better and then think about even the context of their work.

David: Just to go to that point about your particular minister, the minister for communication in Australia, a gentleman by the name of Malcolm Turnbull. He's an extraordinary content marketer. The way he produces communicates and he's built a massive audience for himself. How does that impact on the department when you do have a minister such as that who is so innovative and who is pushing the boundaries and is really going out there and creating - he's a one man media company.

Kim: I think for us it's positive because it means that there is, you know, it's fostering in some ways or helping to foster the innovation culture within the department. We do have an innovation network that organically grew up within the department as well and that network holds forums and they do things like an internal repeal day where they identified the things we could stop doing or reduce the way, or streamline the way we do things to make things a bit more efficient and looked at other ways of doing things which are a little bit more innovative.

It's definitely I suppose, helped the department in terms of maintaining that focus, having a minister like that.

David: So in all government departments all over the world, people are so busy being asked to do more with less. How in fact are you able to graft on the communications content marketing process to people who are already very busy?

Kim: That's a really good question and we are here within my area, digital communications, we're there to provide that support to the different business areas and policy areas of the department. But what we're hoping through our digital

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literacy training is that eventually that becomes part of the way that they think about their policy development and the decision making and consultation process, and that it's almost just something that is inherent in what our business areas are doing.

Obviously we're a little way off from that yet and our digital literacy is about initially raising awareness and understanding and my area is really still doing, I suppose, a lot of the content development with our business areas. But eventually, I would love to see it becoming part of it and just becoming part of the way the business is conducted.

David: Do you have hard and fast measurement in place that's going to allow you to be able to say, "Yes, we are achieving our objectives?"

Kim: For different parts of the work that we're doing, so for example, with digital literacy, we've got an aim that we will see a step change in things like, well for example, we've already had a 200% increase in staff accessing our linda.com playlist which we've sent out to everybody. That means that they can access these different playlists anytime of the day whenever they feel like they've got a bit of spare time.

David: How many videos would you have on your playlist?

Kim: Well we've got, out of the top 10 that have been viewed in the last couple of weeks. Seven of them on the linda.com are from our playlist. We've got quite a number of playlists. They're related to either social and digital work, or they're related to using Microsoft Office properly, or those sort of things. Other things we've done is develop spoke videos for things like for our video conferencing and the use of our internal platforms like our finance and information management systems. I'm not sure if I answered your original question, sorry.

David: No, but it's an interesting way that you've set that training program up, really drawing down on an existing platform which is a clever way to do it really.

Kim: I suppose on the social media site, we have metrics around the numbers of engagements that we get through our Twitter stream and stuff like that, and we want to build obviously, the community around the YouTube channel and stuff like that. We do have metrics around that.

In terms of content, obviously we're trying to be very proactive and strategic. We work really closely with the policy and business areas in the department and develop a forward calendar and try to schedule in as much as you can in what's often a very reactive environment. You know, what we think is coming through at a certain time and what sort of content channels we want to use to get that information.

David: So Kim, just how detailed were your editorial calendars as you rolled out the Triple O program?

Kim: Quite detailed. While I said we could have done a little bit more with planning and that is one of our lessons learned, we did actually sit down recently early with our

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business area and say, "Okay, what is this about? How are we going to do it?" And we thought really carefully about the timing around that, obviously had to keep checking back in. But we had a very, very detailed calendar in terms of what were the different audiences, all the different audiences we're trying to get to, what were the channels we were going to use, and what type of content would best meet those needs.

It was actually quite a detailed part of our overall - it was a separate edition to our overall calendar. It was like an add-on, if you like.

David: So with all that feedback, Kim, how do you really go about then synthesizing that feedback and drawing it in so that you can improve the quality of the policy that's delivered?

Kim: Yeah, so that's where, obviously, you know, we're going to rely a lot on what the line area, the policy area, you know, deals with that information. From my perspective, it's about gathering it all. Doing, I suppose, a bit of analysis in terms of, through that, taking the Triple Zero one as an example, through that review as we were getting some of the responses coming in, we were pushing out, back out, via Twitter saying, "So far, X percentage of people through the survey are saying they want a smartphone app," or whatever it might have been.

We're trying to use as things come through, use that as a further call to action to gather more information. But obviously, our policy areas will then look that, analyse it, and put that up to the government in terms of policy advice, and then there'll obviously have to be a decision about what's practical, what's not, what's possible, what's not, what's short, medium, or long term in terms of delivering.

David: What were some of the other learnings out of that particular program?

Kim: I think we did pretty well for a first one. I think we could have probably done more with the stakeholders and probably packaged some different types of content back out to them to keep the momentum rolling, but we did use what we learned out of, as of, if you like, the review progressed and what was coming out of things like our survey, our quick survey, and pushed that back out for call to action. We could have probably done a little bit more through the stakeholder networks.

David: I think this hub and spoke model in terms of the capability, I think it's going to be the model. You're going to have effectively the newsroom at the heart providing those services wrapped into a content marketing methodology, delivering the sort of clarity between the two areas. What sort of set up do you have at the center of your hub?

Kim: A small set up? We have a group within what I call -

David: Small but dedicated.

Kim: Small but dedicated, yeah, and passionate. Small, dedicated, and passionate. But look, we basically have different types of services that we can provide. So we have people who are writers. I have people that can do video and photography and do

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post-production to a certain level. Anything sort of too high quality, we would outsource. I have really good design capacity in-house.

So depending on what it is that we're developing in terms of content, we do have a very small but a very good group of people with expertise. And we do just a lot of advice back to the line areas about what might work as well as there's a lot of conversation that just happens in terms of trying to get to a certain point and then develop the content. I also have a community manager who is helping on social media strategies.

David: Do you have technologists in your team as well helping you with your platforms?

Kim: Yeah, I have the web - what used to be our IT area, so the web sort of guys in my -

David: They've come across.

Kim: They've come across to me, which has been fantastic. So I have the publishers and I have the guys who understand how the web works. They're in my team. I also have a guy who's a digital strategist so he is looking - at the moment, he is pretty full throttle on our new internet project, but part of his remit is just to be across what's happening out there in terms of channels and technologies and what might be something that we could use.

We're looking at a new EDM. He's been coming up with options around that for us that we're looking to use. Having those bright people is indispensable. I'm not an expert on technology. I'm not an expert in everything. No one is, so you need that good mix of people who can bring expertise from different areas in.

David: Running that hub and the engagement with the line areas and the business areas, how do you go about doing that?

Kim: That's pretty much face to face. It's the old fashioned - it's a bit like an old journalist round. You know, we have people who we call content champions and they will work with different line areas so it might be about the national broadband network or it might be about postal reform, media broadcasting type issues.

We have a person who sort of has an area of focus and that will become the one-on-one - I don't want to use the word account manager because I don't think that's right, it's not really what we're doing. It's more about working with them on what's coming up and being the content champions.

David: But as the content champion, are they a member of your team or they belong?

Kim: Yes. No, they're in my team.

David: So they're embedded in those areas?

Kim: No, no. They're with me and they just have an ongoing relationship with those line areas, so they're on the phone with them talking to them all the time, and they will

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lead the coms - I mentioned those coms briefings - they would lead the discussions when we have the discussions with those relevant line areas. They'll have, they'll start it. I don't necessarily start it. They'll say, "Okay, last time we chatted blah blah blah," and so we have that regular check in at a broader level where I also bring in the digital strategists and the community manager as well as the content champion, and we sit down and we talk as a group with the business area and say, "What's going on," and yeah.

David: It sounds like you're marching pretty well there with your content marketing.

Kim: Yeah, yeah. Hopefully we are. In the future, I'd like to see that we continue to push that we've started.

David: I love the idea though that you're building the capability out into the line areas and this notion of not thinking that communications and content marketing is the responsibility of the coms area, trying to push it through that narrow funnel. As the world changes, as it has changed, it's just not going to work and you're not going to be able to get that speed, that agility, that responsiveness.

So if you can build that capability as close to the policy area as possible, you're really going to get some results with that. Hat tipped to you for that one. I think that's really going to pay off. So where are the challenges then?

Kim: The challenges are and you touched on that before is still time, everybody is resource poor and that's why I'm saying there's no way we're at the point where our business areas are developing content all the time. But I'm hopeful in the future that we'll get to a point where they're developing more of it. We are very much at the moment, doing a lot of that but we're also providing a lot of advice to them. As we build as I said, that sort of level of digital literacy generally also across the department, I think that will get us to a point where that becomes a more accepted part of what people do day to day.

David: An important sort of, related area of management of content is the content strategy challenge as well where we're looking at the governance, and the auditing, and the profiling, and how you deal with all of this. And I think for government this is a really important issue because the standards that government has to reach in terms of the management of content assets is at a very high standard.

What are you doing in that area in terms of trying to manage, and understand, and build a process that effectively manages all of those information assets that you're creating?

Kim: That's a really good question. I don't think we've really progressed probably as far down that path as we could at the moment. I'll be upfront with that. Because it's still predominantly centrally managed within our branch, it's not like as I said too much yet being developed by our business areas, we can sort of manage it internally. But we do have, obviously, we have clearance processes that we need to take into account.

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Our department is a lot smaller than a lot in government, so thankfully the levels of clearance are a bit lighter. Not as many which is great. In terms of being a bit more agile and responding to things, we've also set up things like with our Twitter account where we have our legal area will respond. We have certain categories and types of tweets, if you like, that we do. Some get approved at an EL2 level, others will get approved by myself and one of our legal staff.

We're sort of trying to break it down into what is acceptable in terms of the risk level, if that makes sense. I think there is a little bit of risk aversion in government, in probably most governments around the world. And obviously we are accountable and we have to be very conscious that, you know, we're spending tax payer's money, and as a tax payer myself I'm conscious of that.

But we're just trying to put things in place to streamline as much as possible and manage risk in a sensible way.

David: How important do you feel it is that you've taken these steps where others, perhaps haven't begun the journey of transformation?

Kim: I think it is really important and if I have one piece of advice, it would be get your legal team on board early. Talk to whoever is in your legal area and talk to your executive about what you're doing - your legal buy in and your executive buy in on this sort of journey is absolutely important. Really vital.

David: Because of the risk elements?

Kim: Because of the risk element but also to, if you can get them on board in terms of what you're doing, then you've got them halfway already there in terms of understanding the need to do this and being more willing to put in place things which streamline process is a bit easier and stuff like that. It's just taking them a little bit more on the journey.

We did a trial last year, like last year of our new internet, and we're still in the process of developing our new internet at the moment, but it incorporates an internal social collaboration tool. Very early on, we got our legal team involved in the trial, and that was fantastic.

They were able to see were there any potential issues around collaboration on documents or other things that we'd just need to be aware of in terms of this brave new world of internal social collaboration. They were fantastic and we just worked really closely with them all the time. For me, that's just some advice as an executive, you legal, get them involved early, keep them involved, and keep them going back to them about your progress as well on what you're doing.

David: What are some of those other things that people should - just the small things to get started. Where are some of the other quick wins in terms of actually doing as opposed to the process side of things that's going to get your program approved.

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Where are the places you can go to really get started and start to build some momentum?

Kim: I don't think you should be doing anything that's out of step with your departmental or your business objectives as an organization. Make sure whatever you're pushing forward is absolutely aligned. If it's not, then why on earth are you doing it in the first place? That's my first piece of advice.

The second would be, being really conscious of is there a nice little topic, an issue, or a project that you can do as a pilot. We've done a lot of pilots in the last 12 months or so, and we're continuing to do pilots and that's how we phrase them. It's a pilot, we're testing it, so a bit like that internal social collaboration tool? If it didn't work, we wouldn't have gone down that path into the future.

Pick something out whether it's like the Triple Zero one that I mentioned, the case study before, pick something out that you can sort of go, "Okay, let's really just focus on this thing for this little while and let's see how we can make this work," and then go back and talk about it with people after and say, "This is what we've learned. This is what worked. This is what we could have done better," etcetera.

Then you'll sort of get a few runs on the board because you're not trying to take on too much, so just be really conscious of is there's some things that are really important to your organization, your department, your business that you could add value to in terms of either communication content or engagement aspect. Focus on that. Get that out the door, and then go back and talk with - internally about it to continue getting support for what you're trying to do.

David: What about, just to sort of pull ourselves up - let's go up in the helicopter and take a bigger view of where you see government communication not just in Australia but around the world, in terms of taking on this opportunity of content marketing that obviously the Department of Communications in Australia has adopted very clearly.

Kim: Sorry is your question about the challenges or?

David: Not so much the challenges, just your view. What's your view on -

Kim: Where it's going?

David: Not so much where it's going because I think we all know it's going in that direction, but how far are we on the journey?

Kim: We're not doing too bad. We're not fantastic yet. I think, as I mentioned, if I come back to it from our policy perspective, there's been a very traditional way of consulting with policy and sometimes that has not been as inclusive as it could have been. I think if we think frp, a department that's doing strategic policy advice as its focus, is its core focus if it's what it does.

We're not transactional, we're not delivering to the customers. We're actually delivering policy advice to government, but if we want to be inclusive in that, taking

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our example, then we need to look at how we develop content and use channels to do that as broadly as we can where it's of interest to the public.

I think probably we are right now at the leading edge in terms of developing that thinking in terms of the new website that we're developing which will have a new heavy site policy consultation page. We're probably a little bit further ahead than some of our colleagues in the federal government. Some state governments do some stuff really well. Victorian government's renowned for doing some really fantastic stuff. Queensland government through things like the floods and all that really used social media channels really effectively to keep communicating out to the broader public and online channels.

Internationally, obviously there's the UK Gov Digital Office which has done a lot of work around that. New Zealand's also been going through a fairly big digital transformation in the New Zealand government. Then if you think about the US, they have a great, when we talk about consultation, they probably do it quite well if you think about the way the people approach they've taken in the US government and how everyone knows that joke.

People petitioned to write the petition about getting a death star built and President Obama went back and responded on it. It was quite humorous but it made the case in point that people, we the people, could go to the government about issues, and if there was enough support behind it they would actually respond to it.

I think government's made great strides across the world but I think in terms of content, we're probably not utilizing as much yet.

David: But doesn't that get back to a capability question because people have got to transition from the world we'll use the media, we'll produce static content, to we've actually got to think about video, we've got to think about audio. We've got so many more arrows in the quiver that we really need those skills to get us from where we are to where we need to be.

Kim: I think so, but I mean even as I mentioned before, even in our own department, I don't have all of that in one person. So I try to bring in what I can across the team, but when we don't have it we ask contractors or other people to provide the service for us. I think if government's going to be smart about that they need to think maybe into the future.

If you take the Gov UK approach, are there pockets of expertise in different agencies and departments across the commonwealth government that essentially assists others either strategic advice or even providing some service. Is that a path we might want to take? I don't know.

David: But they already have started that in Australia, here with some of those shared services. Employment education's got a very busy shared services area.

Kim: That's right. Yes, it does.

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David: Obviously this focus that you have on digital literacy trainings is working for you. Are there any specific areas that are really working well for you?

Kim: It's still early days for us, but I think one of the things that has started to - we're starting to really focus on because we've got a new website coming at hopefully the end of April, early May. We've been really working -

David: The dreaded website project.

Kim: Yeah, we've been reworking all of the content and that's probably been almost the biggest part of the whole project. Put the build to one side, it's actually reworking the content. We've developed a new online content style guide and we've actually started training my whole branch, my whole team's been on the training so that we understand it ourselves and we've now been training different people across what I'm calling the super authors across the organization, so that they're aware of how to write in a different way because we have some very technical issues that we deal with.

While our stakeholders probably understand the technical jargon if you like, the broader public may not and if again we want to be inclusive we've got to make it accessible.

David: Just a final question, and thanks very much for spending some time with us today. I think the insights around what the Department of Communications are doing in content marketing are really instructive and it's great to see that we have an agency here in Australia that really is demonstrating how it can be done. It's not without its challenges. Let's not be -

Kim: We're not perfect but we're getting there.

David: Exactly, but at least following that strategic approach. This is the thing. Tethering any content marketing program to the objectives, it's absolutely fundamental that you do that. You cannot do things unless they are working back towards an objective. But last week on the show, we were speaking to Carmel McGregor and Carmel made the point that - about coms that really, over the years, coms hasn't been valued particularly highly and the person who is in charge is the last person who's walked past the door and oh, you'll do.

In this age now where communications is so fundamentally important than it's ever been, because the fact that we're all now in the publishing business. We are all now in the receiving business. What are your views about the communication profession within the Australian government?

Kim: I think it's probably a valid point that Carmel made in the conversation with yourself. It's a bit of a vexed one and I think it's a bit mixed. It depends on almost the department and agency you're working. I would hope, and I think sometimes where sometimes the issues emerge are where some of the coms people can be almost so

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vehement if you like, in their pushing views or opinions forward that can get the backup of the different business areas. I like to think that we're working partnership.

I think again, because I've worked in both a policy context and I've worked in a communication context, I can see both sides to that. I would hope that that changes over time while as you say, everyone's publishing and all that sort of stuff, there is still real value in having that strategic communications advice.

I think we can work very much in partnership with your business areas then you will be valued and it's something that we're quite cognisant of ourselves within our own department and making sure that we're not being seen to be obstructive and that sort of stuff, but we are still providing very professional advice.

It is hard, I do think, to be fair. I think it is a bit mixed and has been a bit mixed in the past.

David: What's interesting in the UK, as part of their reform program where they've adopted their content marketing approach, part of their remedy was to in fact recognize communications as a profession which that's got to be a good thing and perhaps that could happen here.

Kim: Absolutely. I think that's set up - I can't remember what they called it, a council or something like that. Yeah, that's correct. I think that's a fantastic idea and I think also having potentially pockets of expertise that become renowned, if you like across the public sector in Australia will help others to be able to realize yes this is the profession and there are people who do know what they're talking about. And they can add value to the way that we do our work.

I think the UK idea is definitely worth some merit.

David: Maybe that digital literacy training is something that could be rolled out across the whole of the Australian government.

Kim: We're happy to talk to anyone.

David: Open for business! Well Kim, thank you. Thank you so much for spending some time with us today. Your insights are wonderful. It's great to speak to somebody who's there on a daily basis. I think the listeners of this podcast who are in the business of content marketing in government will take a lot from it. Thanks very much for speaking to us today.

Kim: No problem. Thanks David.

David: So what about that? Fantastic insights from someone who is sitting there every day working through it. I think probably a couple of the key things I'd like to highlight out of that are if you're going to get started, understand that you've got to go and understand the objectives. What are those objectives that your department, agency, branch, whatever it is, what are those areas that you need to tether your content marketing plan to.

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Then when you do your planning, think very clearly about working back towards those objectives. So at any point in time, if anyone comes and asks you about a particular execution or tactic you can say, "We are doing this because it is helping us to achieve one of the corporate objectives that are in place."

I think the advice of Kim to get your executive involved, go and make friends with the legal team, I think that's also a really fabulous advice to really get this sort of program started. Just great stuff there from Kim Ulrick, and I know Kim is very interested in assisting people who might like to be involved.

She can be found in LinkedIn and Twitter and all the other places as well. So be sure to make contact with her and follow what's going on at the Department of Communications as an exemplar. So if you do want to get something up, you do want to stand up a bit of a program, you can start to point towards the Department of Communications and say, "Hey look. They are doing that over there. They're doing it effectively. They're doing it effectively in policy development, so why don't we try it here?"

So great stuff from Kim Ulrick. Thanks to her and thanks to you for once again being involved. I'll speak to you next week.