

InTransition Episode 58 – David Pembroke

David: Hello, ladies and gentlemen. My name's David Pembroke and welcome once again to In Transition, the podcast that examines the practice of content marketing in government. Today we're going to try something a little bit different, but before I give you the detail just exactly how that's going to work I do as always want to start with the definition of content marketing as it relates to government and the public sector.

Content marketing is a strategic, measurable, and accountable business process that relies on the creation, curation, and distribution of useful, relevant, and consistent content. The purpose is to engage and inform a specific audience in order to achieve a desired citizen or stakeholder action or behavior. That's the definition of content marketing and I do think it's important that we still talk about it because as the weeks pass we are continuing to see criticism of content marketing, but often it comes from people who, I believe, just don't quite understand exactly what this process is.

What we're going to do this week is ... There is no guest, there is nobody to speak to apart from me. What we're going to do is have a look at a couple of things. First of all, we recently undertook a survey of our audience of our blog and there were a number of questions that came back. What I'm going to try to do today is answer probably the top five or six questions that we received. I haven't actually looked at them in any great detail, so I'm seeing them for the first time.

One of the things that also came out of the survey was about case studies and the importance of case studies. What I will do is go through a couple of my more favorite case studies that can probably give you some insights into the way we go about our work, but also to look at some of the challenges that you have along the way in terms of introducing this practice of content marketing into government and the public sector. Because I think as the days pass I am getting more and more convinced that this is indeed the future of communication as it relates to the public sector. We had been doing some presentations here in Canberra, Australia recently to the federal department of the environment, the federal department of industry. You can see that this notion of content marketing is really taking hold.

I think one of the biggest challenges around content marketing is going to be the change in skills and the need to acquire new skills. To be thinking much more like a publisher as opposed to the old way that we used to think which was very much about distributing our messages through advertising, through publishing, and through public relations. Taking that ability to get into the publishing business which is indeed the gift of technology which we all now have to tell our story in order that we can engage with citizens and stakeholders, so as that they are understanding what we're trying to do. That we can explain what it is that we're trying to do on behalf of our government and public sector clients, so ultimately, we can achieve the behavior that we're looking for which is ultimately what content marketing is all about.

To the survey which was great and we got some really good insights from people, so thanks very much if you are someone who did respond. It's always important that you get as many responses as possible and we did get a pretty high level of response

which has given us some really good insights into our blog readers. One of the things that they are looking for is really intermediate and expert advice in not so much the beginner's stuff that we've been getting into in our blog over the last year or so. That's a challenge now to us as an organization to lift the quality and the standard and the insight, so as that we are creating more value for our audience.

To the audience survey, question number one.

How do you make the business of telling our stories a priority?

I think that the way that you make telling our stories a priority is to understand what are the priorities of the organization in which you are working. To really look at the business plan, to speak to your senior executives and to understand where are their biggest problems, where are their biggest pain points. Then once you understand what those problems are then shaping your pitches around content marketing and the telling of stories in a way that will help them to understand that indeed this could be part of the solution.

Now it's not going to be the total solution. Obviously, the policies have to be in place, the services have to be well-delivered, but explaining to them just exactly how you could use content marketing as a way of achieving those objectives. Understand what the problems are, understand the things that are really keeping them up at night, and then understanding how it is that content marketing could work to help achieve or solve that particular problem or achieve that particular objective.

I would be communicating then through audience and the needs of the audience, so as that when you're looking at those problems trying to start those conversations with the senior executives about who is it that we're trying to talk to, what are their attitudes, where are they located, what are their issues? Try to get a broader sense of not just what it is that you want to say, but what is it that the audience wants to hear. To engage your leadership around that, so as that they're thinking very clearly about the fact that they need to engage with the audience around their particular issues. You may have your particular challenge and opportunity or objective that you're trying to achieve, but who is it that you really need to move in a particular direction that is going to help you to solve that problem. Really taking that design thinking approach of putting the citizen at the heart of what it is that you're trying to do and really speak to your higher ups about that.

Then there's obviously understanding once you've got that objective in place, once you understand who the audience is, where they're located, what time they like to get their information, in what form, on what device. Then just exactly what is the story you're going to be telling and then what's the best way to tell that story. Is it video, is it audio, is it stills, is it text, is it graphics and then looking at the various offline and online channels and putting yourself on the hook for measurement and evaluation. I think that really starts to get the attention of the senior executives.

If you could define your challenge around the behavior that you're seeking to achieve and put together ... I'm now a much bigger believer in trying to keep the metrics as small as you possibly can to understand how it is that you're going to measure those behaviors and then pitch it to them in the simplest possible form. There is no doubt that people are so time poor. They are so busy. It doesn't matter which part of the government that you work in or what public sector organization that you work in your leadership is going to be busy.

You need to get straight to the point, you need to be clearly into their minds to understand exactly what it is those problems are and then to lay something out quite clearly, quite specifically, but accountably. How is that you're going to measure the impact of the activity because if you can start to speak in those terms to the senior executive I think you will start to get their attention. Certainly that's the way that we are getting people's attention when we talk about that accountability.

Okay, so question two,

How do you streamline content marketing in an environment of competing priorities and limited resources?

Look, content marketing is not necessarily the most expensive thing on earth. I think it can often be done with limited amounts of resources as long as you're consistent and as long as you're prepared to be there for the long haul and it's often ... and particularly when you're speaking to the more senior levels of government.

I had this conversation with someone the other day that often those senior levels of government are populated by lawyers and accountants and economists and financial people. They don't really tend to understand what it is that we do. They've often got in their minds oh, this is going to be really expensive. In fact, when you compare it to say an advertising campaign it's a fraction of the cost. Again the other day in this conversation I mentioned a figure and the look on the face of the person was, well, that's not very much. It's certainly not very much when you compare it to major capital television buys or radio buys or magazine buys. Content marketing can be very, very effective.

I think you need to get it across to people that just exactly what is content marketing, so to define what it is and the value that it's going to deliver. Then to start to look at where we talk about limited resources, to understand what is their view of limited resources and what is your view of limited resources and try to find where that point is. I think one of the other things about resources for content marketing is that it's not just the communications team who has a responsibility for content marketing. There are other areas in your organization where you're going to be able to get resources that you can use in your content marketing.

Policy people. There is massive amounts of information, high-quality information that is locked up in policy areas that we need to get out as part of our content marketing. In our web teams there are people who can do the data, who can do the analysis, who can really bring that part to the table as well. If you got some behavioral

economics unit maybe they can help you with some of the development of the [inaudible 00:10:40] that you need to do. If you have business areas bring them in to help you with the strategic side of things, to understand just precisely what are the problems that you need to solve.

Don't think that it just has to come out of the communications area because if you think that way you're never going to make any progress. You've got to try to sell these up the line as an organizational-wide opportunity and try to see and find where those resources are that you can put in place that can help you to solve that problem. Get up out of your chair, get around and start talking to people and you will find that they will, hopefully, if people can see what it is that you're trying to do that they will start to get in behind that content marketing program.

That really particularly for government and public sector organizations is something that we need to start to commit to and something that we'll never stop because our engagement with audiences is not so much around campaigns. Yes, from time to time we're going to want to talk to audiences about different things, but those audiences are going to be there. Yes, they're going to go through different stages in their lives when they want to talk to us about different things. For example, if we're in an industry department. We want to connect to business, we want to build a relationship with business through our content. Yes, again as I say we want to talk to them about the business agenda, the different elements of the business agenda as we go, but we want to keep talking to business people over time.

We want to build that engagement, we want to get those email addresses, we want to get that engagement going, and we want to keep talking to them. Lots of resources around. Try to widen your thoughts that it's not just the communications team and a limited amount of resources that we've got because the economists and the lawyers have squeezed us out and they don't appreciate who we are. Up out of the desk, let's go walking around and let's go and understand who is it that can contribute to those content marketing programs, so as that we can become much more effective in that.

Okay, question three.

To get an elevator pitch, what is it?

It's pretty simple really. It's about that bang, that real eight-second pitch that's going to grab people's attention. For many years Content Group's elevator pitch was we are in the business of telling our clients' stories in order that they can achieve their objectives. That was our elevator pitch, that was the end of it. We didn't say anything else after that. Again telling stories that often got people's attention, achieving business objectives. Really what you're trying to do with an elevator pitch is just to grab people's attention, so as that they'll ask you a second question.

Don't go on and on and on and on and bore people and try to give them the whole thing. Give them something that gets them interested. That's what it's about. That really is what you're trying to do with an elevator pitch is to grab someone's attention really fast because again going back to one of the other insights just from earlier that I

mentioned is that people are so busy, so busy, so wrapped up in what they're doing. If they are going to give you an opportunity that where it just opens up the door a little for you to be able to get in there. Think what is that you do and for what purpose and if you can really contain that that's a great elevator pitch.

Our elevator pitch now is very much tied up with our mission which is we are in the business of helping government and public sector organizations strengthen communities and improve the wellbeing of citizens through effective content marketing or we'll sometimes replace that with communication, so again that's what we do. Hopefully, that's of interest to the people that you're talking to. Bang, you've got their attention. They'll ask you a second question and away you go.

What I'll often find that don't talk about yourselves when you're going out, talk about other people. You learn so much more when you ask questions and you listen to people because that's where the insights will come. If you ask questions about some of the problems that you've got often the people that you're talking to will be able to give you those answers. Listen a lot more than you talk and you'll learn a whole lot more.

Okay, so question number one, two, three, four is:

What's the most efficient way to curate content?

Man, I don't know. Look, I find that we are ... I've gone off curation a bit at the moment and I know that I shouldn't. It's not my responsibility here at Content Group, so I don't really pay as much attention as I should because we've got so many strategic things going on at the moment. I think one of my big insights really is around ... The world's getting narrow, okay. I think that's a key point is that we've got to think that the world is getting narrow.

The broadcast era is finished and we are now coming into the narrow-cast era. I think that we can see that the broadcast era is dying particularly in the mainstream media where we see the death of the broadsheet. People are now in control of the information, the education, the entertainment that they receive, when they receive it, at what time and on which device. They want information that is specific to their particular needs. This is where I think we all need to get to which is around this notion of getting narrow.

Interestingly, just Content Group's experience. It was only about maybe 15 to 18 months ago that we decided that we're going to stop trying to be content marketing for everybody. We're going to be content marketing for government and the public sector because that's our passion, that's our interest. It supports our values, it's obviously in the town that we come from which is Canberra here in Australia which is the capital city.

I was a journalist for 10 years in current affairs, political affairs, and it's where my interest is and it's where the interest of the people who work here. We decided that look, let's get out of all the other stuff and let's just focus in that area. Now to be

perfectly honest we still do work in other areas because we're not quite at the escape velocity that's got us entirely into that government public sector space, but increasingly we're focusing on being narrow. When it comes to the curation of content and the understanding of that audience that you're seeking to serve I think you've got to be narrow. You've got to be really, really as narrow as you possibly can.

When you think you're being narrow try to get even narrower. Try to get even narrower, try to even get as narrow as you sustainably can be because I think that's where your success is going to come. It's where just people who are looking for that specific content will come back time and time again because this age of personalization where people are looking for that content that meets their needs is making it much more demanding. I think if you're out there with a broad message you're going to struggle, so if you can get as narrow as you possibly can. Understand that audience as narrowly as you possibly can and then curate content for that particular audience.

Really try to find the great sources of content for those people and really to be walking in their shoes and to understand that audience, to survey that audience to get some insights as to what it is that they're looking for. Then to be able to create it for them or curate it for them, I should say, and create it for them on a regular basis, so as that you turn up always adding value. You turn up in service of your audience. It's not about you, it's about them because they're in control. That's the way it works these days. Unfortunately, you might like to think that you're fantastic and they're going to come and see you, but they'll only be interested in you if you are solving their problems. Get narrow, curate around those narrow interests and I think you'll have a lot of success.

Okay, so the final question that I've got here is:

Are there any new and emerging legal issues around content marketing?

Happily I'm not a lawyer, so I'm not sure that I could offer any specific legal issues around content marketing. I don't know, as a content marketer ... I'm a former journalist, former marketing guy who's interested in telling stories, so as that our clients can achieve their objectives. Any legal issues tied up in that hour is to make sure that the information that you put forward is true, so don't put stuff out there that's not true. Just operate to that highest, ethical level and particularly in government and public sector we have to hold ourselves to the absolute highest standards.

If you are an agency like we are who work for government and public sector we're getting paid with public sector money. We got to make sure that we do everything as ethically and as transparently as we possibly can, so we don't put at risk the people who we're working for. I think legal issues really ... I think if you stay in those broad areas of your own behavior as ethically and legally at all times and then in terms of the creation and the curation and distribution of that content. Making sure that you are doing things the right way, presenting information factually, don't twist, don't

spin, don't get yourselves into any gray area because again content marketing's a marathon.

We are opening up the opportunity to create long-term, sustainable relationships with people over time through the creation of the content that is of value to them. To be patient you don't have to ... If people want to push you through and say oh, just get through it just ignore it and don't work for them. Again if you're not going to get that level of support, if people aren't going to give you the time to get the success through your content marketing then maybe don't start. Don't put yourself into any situations where things are going to get a bit gray. Gray's a bad place to be. Make sure it's nice and clear and create great content and I don't think you'll get into any legal issues whatsoever.

Okay, so they were the top six questions that came out of that survey and again yeah, fantastic. It was a great exercise for us and we really appreciated everyone who gave us that feedback. If you were one of those people thanks a lot for that. If you've got any other questions you might like to send in please do so. We'll certainly be surveying regularly into the years ahead. I think one of the things that you do have to commit to is getting the insights from your audience, getting that data. Then once you get the data then understanding what the data's telling you, so you can continue to create value and delight for the audience that you're looking for.

One of the things that people really do want to see more from us and we're really going to put much more of an effort in the weeks, years, and months ahead is trying to find the case studies, so as that we can talk to you about case studies. When we've got those case studies you can see how we went through those particular challenges and the opportunities and really discuss about what the scope of those case studies are. Then to think about what the solutions that we'll put in place. Then to own up to the things that didn't work.

If you go onto our website at www.contentgroup.com.au you'll see that this is our template and we talk about the things that don't work and didn't work. I think it's important that we do that for ... We're aspiring to the highest levels of authenticity and transparency and it's true that things aren't going to work. We put it out there the things that didn't work, the things that did work and then the results that we achieved as well.

I think one thing, probably an insight that as I wind up to a couple of examples here of case studies is that we've invested recently pretty heavily in a data science capability; research, analytics, data. It's funny when you let the scientists into your organizations particularly for an organization like ours which is heavily based in the journalism humanities type. We're the tummy compass people who this is a great idea and we're going to go for it. Since we've invited the scientists in, we've let the door and in they've come, they ask all these really difficult questions and they don't like to go away without a good answer.

One of the insights I've had recently, particularly in content marketing is that it's like one, long science experiment and that's the way we have to think about it. That at any given point in time when we've gone through the steps of answering why and understanding the objectives, understanding the audience, and then making our choices, understanding the story we want to tell, but then making the choices around video, audio, stills, texts, graphics. Making the choices about offline, social, online, whatever the channels are that you've decided to based within what you're trying to achieve and the funding envelope that you've got and then understanding the measurement and evaluation that really all you can do is make a judgment that at that point in time that's our best guess of what we think is going to happen.

That's all it is that you're trying to do for whatever period it is be it a month or three months or six months. That the publishing program, the editorial calendar that you're putting in place is just that, it's your best guess based on the information that you've got, based on the evidence, based on your experience. Don't get me wrong, certainly experience comes into it and the tummy compass does come into it, but so too do the facts. What you're doing is really operating a whole series of science experiments, so what you'll do is come up with your calendar, run your calendar, measure and evaluate your calendar.

At that point you'll start to think, okay, what changes do we need to make based on the performance. What are the insights, what other inputs can we get in to understand our audience a little bit better. Then you'll make your judgments about what's the next mix of channels and content that you're going to make and then you'll start again, so it doesn't stop. That's really the way to think about it. I think is that it's one, long, continuous science experiment where you make your best guesses and then off you go.

Just to a couple of case studies and there's some interesting ones and they're probably at different stages of their lifecycle, but there's some pretty good ones here. The first one I'd like to talk about is a program that we've done called Alive and Well. Now our client is the regulator of farm safety in New South Wales, an organization called WorkCover, so their responsibility is for farm safety. Now yes, they're the regulator, the policemen in that particular area and yes, they do have powers to be able to go on and to issue fines and to do other things. They can go and see where your chemicals are and how they're being stored and if they're not being stored correctly obviously they can take some remedial action there. Or indeed how your safety equipment is maintained or what level of understanding of practice do you have around safety on farms.

What they decided to do about 12 months ago was to take a slightly different approach to it which was, okay, we're the regulator. Yes, we're the policemen. Yes, we've got these powers. How can we use content and how can we use content marketing to be able to educate people on farms, so as that they can be more safe on farms. It's the people who work on farms, it's the people who live on farms, and the people who visit farms, so they're quite separate areas there. We went through a content marketing, planning exercise with them which was to understand why we're

doing it, so we answered that question. Then into the objectives and obviously it's about trying to reduce the number of injuries and to reduce the number of deaths on farms, so that's the behavior that we're looking to change.

Underneath that there are some content marketing metrics in terms of understanding whether or not the message is getting through and whether or not the content that we're creating is resonating with the audience, whether it's being viewed, whether it's being understood, how it's being reacted to. There are a range of metrics that we've set up underneath that. Essentially, the way we're working at the moment is we've got a platform that we're working on which is Alive and Well and that's a website.

There's quite a bit of video on the site although we've recently gone through a refresh, so there's a bit more blog content on there. We're running a few of social channels, Facebook and Twitter. We're trying to keep those as limited as possible. We're trying to drive as much activity as we can back to the website, so as that we can get people on our home turf and get those conversations happening where we want those conversations to take place. We have set up those metrics and we're working through that. We're doing a lot of creation of content going out into the regional areas and understanding how those things are working.

One of the big things at the moment actually is around ... A lot of the content we're creating is around four-wheeler bike safety. Obviously, one of the biggest maimers and killers on farms are four-wheeler bikes which are very effective in managing activity around the farm and also they're a bit of fun to drive around on, but they can be horrendously dangerous. In New South Wales which is the state of Australia where we're looking to create this engagement with people who live, work, and visit farms we're coming into this big activity now where we're going to be doing a lot more content around four-wheeler bike safety.

Looking to work with third parties as well, third-party media channels, so as that we can get that content moved out in and around through those media channels. Also, working with third-party influencers, the associations, the farmer's federation, the wheat growers, the rice growers and the different people, so trying to use that content marketing tactic of third-party distribution of content and that's going pretty well. That's a work in progress at the moment. Yeah, it's a group project and I think we're working reasonably well on that one.

One of the insights that we've got so far probably though coming back in terms of one of the things that we need to learn is that we were probably talking to people early days very much around farm safety, but we were talking to the people who are already being safe on farms. One of the insights again that came out of our data team was why don't we talk to the people who actually are not safe on farms, aren't they the ones that we need to talk about. We're looking at some ideas around what's some content that can capture their attention and then have that safety message in it. Maybe some motorbike content that will be really good for them for when they're racing their motocross bikes and other things at the weekend, but then we can get a

safety message in there at the same time. We're looking at some of that stuff as well. That's a really good project and we're really enjoying that as well.

Just one quick one before we go. We've just picked up the ... In here in the ACT as well we have a municipal government. It's the Australian Capital Territory government and we've just picked up the climate change project. We're just at the finishing of the draft plan. The reason I want to raise that as bit of a case study is that what we were able to do was to get the communications people, the policy people, and the program people altogether as we went through the content marketing planning process, so we had everyone in the room. It wasn't just the comms people, it wasn't just the policy people and it wasn't just the program people, we had them altogether at the same time.

Certainly yet it was challenging at times. At one point this very busy policy person jumped up, "Oh, I haven't got time for this. This is all indulgent wankery. I don't care about this," and they stormed out of the room, but that's fine. It's a bit of a grind getting through these content marketing processes because you're asking a lot of what seemed to be repetitive ... Obviously, the policy people are very important and they've got lots of important work to do. What we were able to do over about a three-week period is bring just about everyone along for the ride.

Now we're close to our editorial calendar. We've got resources. We've got resources not just from the comms team, we've got policy resources, we've got service area resources. We're using some of the budgets of the service area to be able to amplify our content and so we've got everyone rowing in the one direction. We've got really good agreement around the objectives, we've got some good agreement around that measurement, we've got some great agreement about how we're going to use all of these different people. I can keep you up to date on that case study as it rolls out over the next little while.

There you go, a podcast of a different time, of 34 minutes and 57 seconds. I didn't think I could talk for that long. There you go. Listen, yeah, as I say that's episode 58 and we've done it quite a different way. Let us know if you think that's of value to you. I think probably next time we'll maybe spend a little bit more time getting into a little bit more detail about some really specifics around how we solve some of those problems in the case studies and some of the challenges that we come up against all the time and some of the problems that we face all the time and some of the things that we're not doing so well. Hopefully, I gave you some insights into some of the things that we're struggling with as well.

Listen, thanks a lot. Thanks for being interested again to turn into In Transition. If you do have any insights or if there's anyone you'd like us to talk to or anything really, just send us a note. Send an email to newsletter@contentgroup.com.au and if you'd like to go and sign up for the newsletter that would be great as well. Thanks again for giving us a little bit of your time this week. I hope that was of some value to you and we'll speak again next week. Bye for now.

