
InTransition Episode 13 - David Rawlings

David P: Well hello ladies and gentlemen and welcome to In Transition, the podcast that explores the practice of content marketing in government. My name is David Pembroke. Thanks very much for joining me.

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. Today, we're going to roll up their sleeves and get into the nitty-gritty of how to stand up on content marketing process in government.

Now I know that when the word marketing is used that some people in government turn-off. Marketing, we don't do that but that's not true. You do. You have to accept that you have the ability to be a publisher, you have the responsibility to explain programs and to explain policy and therefore, content marketing is for you.

As I previously defined it, it really is simply the future of the way governments communicate. It enables departments and agencies to explain their policy and programs on their own and other platforms and it enables them to go direct to the often very specific niche audiences they are seeking to explain their policies and programs to.

Well listen, a man who knows plenty about content marketing in government is David Rawlings from Landmark Media in Adelaide, Australia and he joins me now.

David hello and thanks for being in Transition.

David R: Pleasure to be with you David.

David P: David, before we get in to the content marketing discussion, let's introduce you to the audience. What the David Rawlings' story?

David R: Okay, well I guess I've approached communication in the very early days; I trained as a journalist and then went straight into corporate communication. A lot of my work nowadays with the work that I do with Landmark and also with content marketing Adelaide is in the online space. In connecting government clients, and connecting corporate clients, non-profits with their audiences using the web.

So I guess my experience is in communication in PR kind of nuts and bolts level in writing relevance to connect people with a message. And that's something that I've taken through to clients that I work with today.

David P: You have worked for a lot of government clients in this particular space. Let's just take on this issue of the name content marketing. What do you think of the word content marketing or the description of the business process of content marketing and how best do you think it can be communicated to government clients?

David R: I think you're absolutely spot-on in your intro that you used the word marketing to anybody in government and the instant though is of somebody who works for corporate marketing or a corporate communications team. I've had CEOs and executive directors of large departments tell me point-blank, "We don't market around here. We only communicate."

David P: Yeah!

David R: It is fascinating! What I tried to do with them is to say, look it's a two-way phrase. If marketing is too hard for you to get your head around, that's fine. Let's focus on the word content because there's so many in government; once they understand that their content isn't so much what they want to say, it's what their audiences need to hear. That's when they start to break through in terms of how they can use content marketing as a concept quite effectively.

David P: What do you see as the single biggest challenges for government in getting started with content marketing?

David R: One of the biggest challenges that I seem to face every week or note was a then across the table from the government client is the fact that they think that so much of the communication nowadays is still one way. It's uni-directional.

Even when they decide to set-up in social media or they set-up with a new website, what they tend to do is still believe that they can just shout at people that drift past on the web. That to me is the biggest challenge because social media is built as a conversation.

Interestingly, if you go back through some of the comments by Sir Tim Berners-Lee, he was the father of the internet not Al Gore, as previously claimed. Tim Berners-Lee said that the web as it is now with social media is actually what he intended it to be.

The Web is always supposed to be a connection and the communication. But somehow so many government departments seem to think that it's just

another opportunity to scream at people while they are sitting there watching. It's not that at all.

David P: But do you think that comes from perhaps the risk averse attitude? It's not so much that they don't want to listen but they're afraid that people may say things that either their minister or one of the minister's advisers or in fact some of their leadership might not like?

David R: I think that's one of the issues. I was working with one client the other day in Adelaide on what was a large media issue, a lot of people were unhappy. I was sitting down with their executive team and saying, "Look, let's prepare a way to deal with it on social media," and they said the leadership point-blank, "We are not going to talk about this on social media because we cannot control the conversation."

Thankfully that conversation turned around. As they were talking I opened my Mac Book and I flipped opened the 25 different Facebook groups that were already having that conversation.

I think that's often the thing is and that's what I see is it's a fascinating conundrum I guess with government because if you talk to anybody in leadership and government, they want to consult and they need to consult. But there's always a nagging thought on the back of their mind is if we ask people what they think, what happens if they tell us they're unhappy.

David P: How then do you go about this process of sitting in those meetings, you talking to very certain new people who is saying, "Look, were prepared to tell but we don't really want to listen." What are some of the things that you say or some of the things that you do to get them to understand that perhaps there's real value in listening to what is being said on social media and in other channels as well?

David R: I think the key word in all of that is the word value. One thing I find myself doing a lot is deconstructing people's mistake and conceptions about what this is or what this could be and that's just not government. I mean, that's corporate too.

I've shared it with CEOs who told me, "We're not going to go on Facebook because I'm not an 11 year-old girl." So it's a case of saying, "Okay, let's break that down and just say what exactly we are talking about here? And let's actually get some truth to what we are discussing."

But the key to it is value, it's like any conversation you have in business. If I was to wander into any business and say, "Hey, you should be in social media," you really are captive to their feelings, thoughts and experiences on

social media. But if I walk in and say, "Look, if you engage with your costumers better you can take your sales ratio for one costumer sale per year to three," suddenly they're interested.

The same works with government. If you can show them that if they actually use social media as a research tool as much as a broadcast platform they can actually generate savings in tens of thousands of dollars in research or perhaps establish an Ambassador's program on that particular issue.

Once you start talking numbers with dollar signs in front, they often start listening. What I try do is talk less about isn't Facebook cool, isn't Facebook exciting, you know smiley face, LOL. It's more how can we actually use this tools to generate some value for what you are trying to do. Once you have that conversation that often breaks down the barriers.

David P: Okay, let's have a look at your process and the way you go about implementing content marketing which I said in the introduction is very much a strategic business process that uses both online and offline channels in that strategic business process. But how in fact do you go about standing up a program when you are engaging with a client?

David R: One thing I often do and this is probably during the years I've spent in PR is to work backwards. There's so many businesses that I've seen in a social media or web space they launch into a brave new world and then the first post is usually how it's exciting that to be there. And the second post is usually something that they've scrambled at the last minute because they realized it's been a long time since they've posted and the third post never arrives.

What I tend to do is work backwards and say, okay. Like for example with a government client, if you are dealing with a particular public issue, rather than say, "All right, let's start with what we're going to say." Let's go back and say, "What do you want to achieve?" and if what you want to achieve is to have real conversations with people well then there are platforms to choose to that. If you want outcomes where it's strictly about awareness or participation, there are ways we can do that. If it is about education perhaps will stick some videos up on Vimeo or YouTube if you have to. So I tend to work back and that often provides the greatest success.

It's frustrating to see organizations head out into a communication platform and you ask them if it's working and they don't know because they didn't actually start-out with an idea of where they were heading in the first place. So that's what I do with clients is to say, "Alright, let's look at the value preposition first. Let's look at what you want to achieve and then let's cherry-pick what we need to do and what platforms we need to use and what

messages we need to say so we can get there," which is as one client said to me last year, this isn't rocket science. I tend to think that it kind of ease it's just that if you do understand, you are a rocket scientist because there are so many companies that could benefit from reversing their thinking but they don't.

David P: How do you think that's ever going to change or do you see it changing at the moment that there is a greater acceptance of the fact that technology has changed the way that the world communicates and everybody is indeed now a media company or has the potential to be a media company and has that ability to go direct to engage with the audiences who they're seeking to where influence?

David R: I'm seeing that change already, just particularly with government. If you look around Australia, those state governments that are engaged effectively with their constituents are the ones who have people at the top who actually don't just use social media but they understand it. Down here in South Australia, a few premiers ago Mike Rann was instrumental in changing the way some parts of his government looked at the web of simply, because he was an ex-journalist so that helps, but he would regularly tweet headline to journalists so that hastened the rate of change.

But the one thing I find is the more successful case studies that are out there, the more that particularly government's departments are looking to almost emulate what's happening. We've seen that this fire seasons with the CFS down here in South Australia. With the emergency services up in Queensland, there's some excellent case studies to look to now. Where you can say, "Look, Instagram isn't just to show you what I'm drinking this Friday night, it is actually to track the progress of a cyclone or what damage or bush-fire."

I think it's slowly changing and that's probably driven by some of the success stories that are already out there.

David P: So content marketing really does require different skills and it's not simply outbound, media, or event focused. How does government go about preparing to communicate differently?

David R: I think it all starts with that understanding of this isn't just us broadcasting out. You mentioned before, what's the biggest challenge government faces. Another challenge that the government's faced I believe when it comes to online communication is online communication is happening as of five seconds ago. We respond instantly, we tweet feedback almost instantaneously, photos that are just been taken are automatically uploaded;

but the challenge with government is sometimes it has to go through 15 layers of approval before it actually hits the web.

I think it's almost that understanding, you know we're not in Kansas anymore Turner, I know this has very much changed. We need to change our processes to match the rate of change with the people that we had are talking to. It used to be like I've worked with a number of universities who have said for quite some time that their students know far more than they do about this technology.

I think that's very true in government as well. I think that there are a number of people who are already taking up the baton for causes or to generate interest in their particular point of view. And they are miles ahead of some government department, simply because they don't know it's there or they are afraid of saying something, or perhaps they just don't have the skill sets. I think it's about getting on the front fort now to say, "Look, everything's changed. We need to change with it."

I had a conversation late last year with one government department where I simply said to them, "Look, this isn't a matter of do we embrace this change or not." The change is here, the question is, "Do you do something with it or do you ignore it?" It's not a case of is it an option, it's actually how do we go about this new brave new world that we're talking to.

David P: What's your view about political offices with ministers, and minister's advisers and obviously their reputations are what they trade on in order to be elected and to be able to govern? Again there's risk aversion which is part of the government environment that we work in. What's some of your views on that and how indeed that can be challenged and that can be improve in terms of being able to communicate more effectively around the explanation of policies and programs?

David R: I think that's an excellent question because for my point of view, now I'm not a political animal who's looking to be elected at the next coming election so I don't necessarily have go through everything I say and do it with the fine-tooth comb; but one of the things I've said to a number of people down here in Adelaide when it comes to this is that, I get a genuine sense from talking to people that when it comes to politics, everybody is cut from the same cloth now. And what people are looking for is someone who stands for something or someone who has some personality.

To be fair to both sides of the political feds, we have two leaders federally at the moment, who are both under the microscope as who are you exactly? One of the things that I found fascinating which probably illustrates the point,

was the other day when Julie Bishop was on the Today show, and she answered a particular question that was asked by pulling a face which she said was an a emoji.

Now, any adviser on their soul would probably have a coronary on the spot, that their minister was actually doing something like that. But if you want a case study in terms of the reaction to that the very next thing that, I think what Karl Stefanovic said was, "That's why we love you Julie Bishop." Now if you sit back and analyse that just that little exchange, there's a personality that comes out that's beyond the political process.

Now to extend that back to your original question, I think there's room there to create not just an information channel but a personality of who you are. It's so difficult in the crowded media market place that politics operates in, to be who you are. We've seen that down here in Adelaide. We have seen it with Nick Xenophon who regularly outpolls the major parties on his own; and that's because he has a personality and he has a position.

So I would say again, don't jump in with both feet and your eyes closed but there are ways to use social media to actually give us an insight into not just want to you want to say but who you are. We live in a world with sound bites and sometimes social media can cut through with that, as can the web, as can other communication strategies as well.

David P: But how does that message ultimately embed itself across all areas of political offices? How do people get that confidence to know that as you are suggesting, technology has changed the way the world communicates and what people are looking for and expecting? But how does that message get through so it changes the behaviour and perhaps the risk profile through which minister's offices are managed?

David R: I think based on the experienced I have down here its baby steps, it's almost let's do one thing, let's do it well; let's do two things, let's do it well. I understand totally the challenges of being inside a system that says, "Don't step outside the lines, don't say this, and don't say that because we'll get caught out saying it."

I think it's almost going back to my other point about sitting down to government department heads. it's about trying to demystify this and say, look, yes we will be on Twitter for example if that's the platform you chose. But it's not to say, "Let's tweet every five minutes using the #Q&A so that everybody sees it." It's a case of saying, "Alright, let's use Twitter three times a week, five times a week, whatever it is."

The focus of what we're saying, I guess that's where content marketing and social media are converging. In my personal views, content marketing should always be at the head of social media. I've always cringed when I heard someone say that, you need to tweet every second hour otherwise you might as well not be communicating because that just implies you need to be focusing on quantity rather than quality.

Look, it's part of a communication strategy if a minister or an elected member or a head of a department has a strategy about how they're communicating with their electorate, with their constituents, with the people that they represent. It's almost a way of saying, alright, how do we then use these online tools to market ourselves using the content we put out, which is not just to tweet every headline that we've got. But how do we effectively respond to certain issues that are under our control. It's a case of making small steps and then building on that.

One of the key words that I've found over time with success in content marketing is the word momentum is you need to build and build and build and you got to start somewhere. So if I was working for a particular minister's office and was told point-blank, "You can't do this." It would be a case of sitting-down and saying, "Let's analyse why and if it's risk aversion let's move that to risk management," because risk aversion is not something that you can actually generate some success out of but managing and maintaining a profile on risk is.

David P: Okay, let's go back into government and perhaps if you might just give us a couple of examples of case studies that you've been involved in where you've been successful in implementing content marketing to promote either a government policy- sorry I shouldn't say promote because it's not their job to promote. It's their job to explain, but where you've been successfully able to explain a policy or program on behalf of the government client.

David R: One of the once that springs to mind is probably a little different to what many people think of. I did some work down here for Premier and Cabinet. They have moved their Intranet onto an internal social media platform. So I was working with them to try this stuff across the board to better communicate to each other.

I believe that the content has a role to play to improve inter-agency communication as much as it has the outbound stuff. But that was a very good project in training several thousand people in improving their communication across the board. We're able to look at different ways that people could improve not just communications but process, taking some of the principles of social media to take even the basics of collecting a general

audience and meeting times and shaving two or three hours off that person's workload per meeting.

So, that was good to do in a sense that we were able to show value, we were able to see people not just putting more content out there to each other but also putting better content out there to improve relations between government departments. I'm sure some of your listeners will know that, just because you are in the same portfolio doesn't mean that you actually know who your brother and sisters are.

In fact in some of the workshops we ran, we had people who are actually had emailed each other for several years and had never met face to face. So it improved their inter-agency communication just simply through focusing on what the best content is, what the key messages are, or what you want from your colleagues as well.

David P: Any external programs that you've been involved in?

David R: Yeah, I mentioned the one before probably the best one was looking at developing a social media program for a government department down here who was in a lot of hot-water about a change that had been made it wasn't the department's decision. From an operational point of view, it came down from on high. Once we broke through the fact that as I've mentioned earlier, in our chat, this wasn't simply a case of let's hit in to Facebook and promote all of that great stories, it was a case of let's get in and engage with people.

We managed to get half a dozen of people who were part of the agitation that was out there in the public sphere to actually contribute to better debate, discussion, consultation in face to face forums and other such things like that. This was in the field of recreation and people were very passionate about something that they were about to lose. But once we got the idea through to those who were making the change that it's not that we're starting a conversation, we're just contributing and actually trying to connect with those people who are already having it.

I think the 25 Facebook pages of people who were very unhappy and once we got through that, it actually broke down some of the barriers. The online aggie baggie that was going on slowed down very quickly and eventually petered out, which is from the client's point of view what they're looking for.

David P: What's your view on the very important issue of the governance of the information assets that are created as part of a content marketing process? Government obviously has to be held to a very high standard in the production but also in the management, and the auditing, and the approvals,

and the processing and everything else that goes into those content strategies elements of a content marketing plan.

How difficult do you think that is for government to manage that process? Were they're able to really keep the content relevant, keeping it fresh? But also making sure that they are maintaining some really good health around their content assets?

David R: I guess breaking that question down into two, I think the one part of content marketing and communication that government does well particularly online is the governance side of things. Risk aversion will automatically lend you towards signing something off more times than you need to simply because you don't want to be off message that sort of thing. So when it comes to the approval process I think governments across the fact that they have to do it. I think the challenge is to shorten that timeframe so that we don't tweet about something that happened three days ago tomorrow because that's the only time that we could get it back.

I think the second half of your question, I think another challenge that we all face in the online debate is to keep things fresh and interesting. One of the things that I've worked with a number of companies now to do is to build into their content strategies not just who on our staff is going to write this but how can we effectively get our audience constituents, whoever it is that you are working with, and whoever is following you. How can we use that content as part of our content marketing as well? That's one thing that I think business focuses too much on content as what we have to say, but as you've mentioned in the intro, content creation is also matched by content curation.

So I think that's one thing government should absolutely be doing more of is not just working out with what I have to say, but relieving the workload with how can we use material that's generated by people out there in the web and use it for what we're trying to say.

David P: Yeah, no doubt. I think also the use of third party stake holder channels as well when the government does have something to say is a very effective way to reach more people with that relevant and valuable content that they've created.

David R: Completely, that's one thing that really underdone when it comes to content marketing. The one thing I've said to client in workshops or sitting down across the table from them, "Let's write it once and let's deliver it as many times as we can." And there's a general feeling of well we wrote it for our Facebook we wrote it for our, you know, it's our tweet.

The reality is you got so many stake holders in government that you can write your content once and see if you can place it in five different places, and then suddenly the reach is astronomical compared to what it would've been had you just put it out through one channel.

David P: Now question. Just in terms of that ability to be able to create really compelling content and having the skills to be able to produce high quality video, audio, stills, graphics, info-graphics, motion graphics, all of that really good interesting content that you do see around the web. How well prepared do you think government is to be able to produce that really media-rich engaging content?

David R: Certainly some of the government departments that I've been working with, they're really on the cusp of it. We're currently working with one of the departments down here with an issue of aboriginal employment and developing of a series of videos and just telling the stories of people who have found an apprenticeship, found work, moved into a field that they want to work it as a result of the great work done by the department. That is brilliant.

We are working with them not to come in with almost the eye of the advertising agency or the eye of the commercial television producer and saying, "We need to tell this clichéd story." We are simply talking to people and that is what almost is compelling.

One thing that I often say to governments is, "You already have the stories to tell it's just working at how you're going to tell them." And I'm seeing a lot 2015 for us and 2016 will be a lot of video. Story-telling is absolutely at the forefront of working with communication is going but I was actually going to say is here now.

But the one thing with government is they probably already have the stories to tell it's just a case of how do you tell that story. Now video does not have to be \$75,000 video production, it depends on what you are trying to get it to do. But if you can get people to tell their own stories and then edit that together into a content program, it's compelling stuff. We have as human beings listened to other stories for generations and it hasn't changed simply because Facebook cropped up.

David P: Exactly. Well, David thanks very much for giving up some of your valuable time to be with this In Transition today. It's a fascinating part of the transformation of communication in the government sector. I think there is a lots of great things going on not only in Australia but around the world. But there's so much more to do and I think the other really interesting thing out of

all of this is that where we are today, it's going to be a different place in 6 months, 12 months, 18 months, 2 years.

So all of us who are in this story telling paper are going to have to continue to change, to innovate, to adapt, to adopt to change. We're never going to stop learning and isn't that a nice place to be?

David R: It is actually. It keeps it fresh and I think that is the thing, there is no formula in a sense that once you cracked it you just sit back and every piece of content that you produce from then on is absolutely brilliant. You're always learning, something is always different. The fact that the online space changes so quickly means that you have to stand on your toes which I think makes it really exciting.

David P: I think it's a great point that you make also around the fact that governments are so content-rich. There are so many stories that are out there that need to be identified. We need to get from the big macro, this is the program and it's saving two billion dollars to show me where is the story behind that unbelievably, unimaginable big number that really doesn't mean anything. The story will mean everything to me but the number means nothing.

David R: Absolutely right. I was chatting to a guys, one of my government clients late last year and basically said, "Your big challenge is to turn camera around," because all of their content as the minister said, that the department feels, if they turn their camera around, that is what is going to compel people to engage with them, by talking about the impact of what they do, which in a lot of cases is some fantastic work which often sadly goes unrecognized.

David P: Well David where can people learn more about you and the work that you do, and how might they be able to get in contact with you?

David R: Probably the best place is we have a group of professionals down here looking after content marketing right across the spectrum copy, video, design. So if you head to www.contentmarketingadelaide.com Google us if you need to and we're there. I'm happy to chat to anybody that would like to, even if you just got question arising from today, happy to start a conversation that's what communication is supposed to be about nowadays.

David P: Fantastic! David thanks very much for giving us some of your time. All the best for a very busy 2015, 2016 and beyond. And thanks very much for being In Transition.

David R: Pleasure. Thanks for having me David.

David P: There you go ladies and gentlemen, David Rawlings from Content Marketing Adelaide, with so many value bombs throughout that conversation there to really think hard about. I think, really that point at the end where he said to government communicators turn the camera around, find the stories, bring meaning to these ridiculously large numbers of these programs that are in place. Find the story, bring it to life, play it straight, play it clear, communicate it, and communicate it, and communicate it.

Use the value and utility of social platforms but don't forget also the power of events, the power of advertising, the power of public relations. Content marketing is about working both the online, the offline and the third party. But also remember it's always got to be connected to your objective.

David took it and explained it to us, starting with the end in mind what are you trying to achieve and why? What is your content marketing mission statement? Why are you creating this content to achieve what purpose?

You must be able to justify that and verify it at any point in time. So when you do make tactical decisions, people may come up here and say, "Why you doing that?" Well, if you've gone through their process correctly, you will know why you are doing a particular tactic.

Also don't forget the measurement and evaluation. Put yourself on the hook for some numbers up front. So you can report against those numbers so you can bring some real validity, some real clarity and importantly accountability around the public sector money, that is being invested in content marketing because that's absolutely critical. This is tax-payers money and everyone involved in government communication needs to be very careful with how it is spent.

So a great conversation from David Rawlings. If you are involved or interested in being in contact with him, he has given you those links to be involved. Thanks again for being involved In Transition podcast this week. A great interview with David Rawlings. Thanks very much for joining us and we'll be back again next week.