
InTransition Episode 30 Rose Cameron

David Pembroke: Hello ladies and gentlemen my name is David Pembroke and welcome to InTransition. The podcast that explores the practice of content marketing in government.

This week our guest is Rose Cameron. Rose is the director of Innovation Online and Outreach at Penn State University in the United States. Her work at Penn State focuses on building a student-centered innovation culture while working internally and externally to research and communicate innovative communication methods.

But before we get into the discussion with Rose, it's time as we do each week to look at the definition of content marketing as it relates to the practice of government communication.

Content marketing is a strategic business process that involves the creation, curation and distribution of useful relevant and consistent content in order to meet the needs of a specific audience to achieve a desired citizen or stakeholder action.

That's the definition and our guest this week Rose Cameron has a wealth of experience in the field of communication. Prior to her role at Penn State, she was the head of customer experience and planning at marketing and advertising agency, RAPP.

She's also worked at Hornall Anderson, Leo Burnett and Ogilvy & Mather that where she grew to be a global brand strategist and innovator who is certainly passionate about brand building. Rose, thanks very much for joining us InTransition.

Rose Cameron: It's brilliant to be with you, David.

David: Rose, I first kind of cross you as a regular guest on the BeanCast and I just love your contributions. I really do want to drill down into an insight that you made a couple of weeks ago in that discussion on the BeanCast. If I could recommend the BeanCast to all of our audience out there – great program.

Put together by Bob Knorpp out of New York City where guest as such as Rose look at the insights that come out of a discussions around what happens in the

world of marketing and advertising each week so we'll put that into show notes but high recommendation there.

But Rose I'm intrigued really about you as much as I am about those insights. How is it that you have made the journey from a child in Glasgow, all the way through to the director of Innovation at Penn State?

Rose: Great question. Nobody ever asked me that. I think that what you get with a lot of Scots and you probably know that there in Australia because a lot of us we've been there, is a great deal of ingenuity. It's everything from avoiding haggis, to surviving the UK, we are a pretty innovative lot and we always ask questions.

If you look at communities of Scots here in the world, you'll find a lot of people that don't just accept the norm. They said, "Well why is it that way? Is it really needed anymore and what do we need next?"

I think that a lot of what's driven me is that fascination and my interest in cultural anthropology and just being amazed by humanity and how far we've come, how far it's possible for us to go. That just led me to a variety of different careers where I could explore that.

David: I think the very best communicators have exactly that quality. They do have a fascination and a real love of people and trying to understand and engage and meet and talk with people.

Take us back to your childhood for a moment if you would, to really understand if we could about where you started to feel that this was your passion and this was something that you wanted to do as a career.

Rose: I've got a father who's an Engineer he's an Aeronautical Engineer with the U.S. Military with the Air Force and he retired after 38 years. I was actually born in the States raised in Scotland.

My mother has always been a therapist. That explains a lot, doesn't it? And she's also a poet and a writer so I grew up in the environment of people who considered education and knowledge to be the most powerful thing.

As a military brat, I travelled a great deal. As anybody who's listening to the show knows military brats are some of the most resilient people in the world

because you're dropped into a new environment every so many years and you're expected to succeed. You have to find your role.

You have to make yourself useful otherwise you'd be very lonely. That made me extremely resilient and very sensitive to things that I just consider to be the norm now.

I consider the fact that I can go into a room or place a room – figure out how to communicate with people, figure out “Okay these are the different ethnicities that are at play, the different religious beliefs that play.”

These are the different subjects that will be fascinating to them and immediately be able to have a discourse. I think that is really in many ways what drove me to really look at the area that I'm in because it made mega trends and mass of trends natural for me.

Having a global perspective just became natural for me because I was based in an aboriginal school, a range of a lot of kids that were kind of dumped there by their parents as they worked very dangerous jobs in the Congo, etc.

You just began to understand a different view of the world than say somebody who's had the luxury of being born, raised and married and had children all in a singular place.

It really gave me huge perspective, resilience and an understanding of how to work with people. I thought, “I really love doing this.” This is a strength, it's a natural strength now from conditioning and so I just continue to do it.

David: Sounds good but what have you discovered to be the universal truths about effective communication?

Rose: It's not about you – number one. Effective communication actually starts with listening. Don't try to tell everything all at once. Nobody's going to take it in the three-point rule.

Always contextualize things in a way that people can understand them. Don't try to talk in the academic sense. Talk to people as people and always contextualize it in a fashion that's emotive in nature so that people can connect not only with their brains but their hearts.

David: How difficult do you find that is for people to understand those very simple principles that you've just communicated now?

Rose: The ego is a nasty thing, David. It just gets in the way even with me but it's so easy to try and sound smart and use highfaluting words and all the rest of it.

The thing is if you don't teach and if you don't convey the information, it doesn't matter how smart you sound. You have failed.

The most important thing is to connect and connect in a way that's very true to yourself. That's very much what I put into my work with brands and what I put into my work with the university.

David: I'm fascinated there by that insight there around teaching. Because I think increasingly what we're starting to see is that the new marketing really is about teaching. It's about creating connection.

It's about transferring value between you and the audiences who you're seeking to influence.

Why do you think that teaching is now so important as part of a brand or a government's communication with the audiences and citizens they want to engage with?

Rose: We're living in a very different world now. That is a world in which every single individual at there has pretty much had some exposure to gaming. When you have had experience in exposure to gaming, you have been allowed to be central to the narrative.

If you think about gaming, you're constantly learning and your actions generate reaction etc. We are all in this world now where we feel it's our God-given right to be at the center of the narrative. That wasn't the case before.

I'm sure even when you and I were crewing up, you sat there and you capture make shot and you listen to the teacher and they were all knowing and you dictates that working to your essays and you moved on.

But now, you have a very different student where the student wants to query. They want to say, "Yes but that is true in this context but what about that context?"

And where they feel that just as much as gathering property and arts and cards and all of these physical manifestations of their success, they also want to collect experience and knowledge.

David: What you're saying there though is it's not just about students as in academic students that it's really about everybody that is seeking this wisdom and seeking this knowledge?

Rose: Absolutely because if you think about it David, Thomas Jefferson when he was in the United States he almost went bankrupt because he bought so many books. They thought that his library was like had every book of import in the world in the 1700s.

Now we realized that the world changes every three months. If you want to stay relevant if you want to be a perspective employee that has any elasticity, then you've got to constantly learn to keep up with this world we're leaving in now – it is not static.

That is a key element for people at there right now to stay young, to stay money-worthy. You have to keep learning because otherwise you're just left in the dust.

A wonderful woman once said to me because I asked here I said, "Advertising can be a very ageist industry," and I said to her, "How do you stay so relevant, so young?" And she's in her 60s and is just admired by so many people. She said, "Rose, just keep your mind open. As long as your mind is open, you're always young."

David: With that, this is a program that really is directed towards government communications and government seeking to engage and really government seeking to apply that precise insight that you've really just outlined very clearly.

What advice do you have to government and government communicators in terms of transferring messages to citizens? What do you think are the most effective ways that they can do to do that in this new environment that we live in that is now moving so quickly and changing so quickly?

Rose: I think there's one element that's don't pontificate. People have a very limited amount of time and really they do like information – they love it. But give it to them in the right chunks. Keep it interesting, give them things that they can share with others and contextualize it to their lives.

If you're thinking about very large debates that you're dealing with in government, don't try to blow it all right there in one individual piece. Feed it

out, contextualize it with real life stories of people and people maybe who are similar to the target that you're after.

Show them how the community associates with that and is critical to it because there are so many interdependencies that government has to foster, feed, maintain. And people I think have lost a lot of that.

We get so stuck on talking about specific legalities that we forget the repercussions of the impact of one decision upon a whole community not just an individual law.

How much David we talk about this law, that law, the other law and yet we may go to the level of the individual but we rarely go back up into the community?

If someone's always affected like this then the impact on the community is this – you can literally serialized different topics by explaining first what the definition of that topic is in a very brief three to five-point way then bring it in to a real life story of an individual or their family then contextualize it by its impact on the community.

And then along every single one of those narratives, tell people what they need to do to make an impact, to make a difference. Because so many times right now we're just going, "Bleh, here's the information."

We're not saying, "And this is what "you" – as an involved and they do want to be involved they do want to be engaged member of the community, this is what you can do."

That empowers people and then it creates change versus people who just feel guilty or very self-conscious listening to this and then just want to shut off the radio.

David: You've outlined there a very clear plan for somebody in a particular government program or area that might motivate them to communicate whatever it is that they've seeking to communicate.

But how would you then go about taking up that opportunity? How would you operationalize something like that?

Given that we are changing from a world where in government in particular very traditional approaches which have been focused on the media, producing

materials for the media and then engaging in major campaigns by buying advertising for example.

Now there is this massive capability that governments can take up where they can create their own video, audio, steal text and graphics and they can distribute that content through their own channels and through third-party channels as well and I can then measure and evaluate how effective that is.

What advice would you give to government in terms of that operation side of things? There is the big picture but then how do you make it work?

Rose: Great question, I love this one. Where I would start is first you've got to get your days in order. You have to look at your calendar and say, "What do we think the critical elements are going to be at play this year? What are the topics we want to address?"

And then create a calendar around those topics that deal what I just mentioned – the content individualization, the community aspects. Figure out exactly what you want people to do.

If you're going to convey this to them, what do you want them to do? That means you've got to set up the infrastructure to take their responses. Not just push out the messages but also who are the partners you want to work with to network? Who are the charitable organizations that you're going to link in to this and when are you going to link them in?

There was a wonderful engagement motto that actually created that was talking about the currency of engagement. It wasn't just discounts what it said is, "Dependent upon the subject matter in the individual that currency of engagement could be entertainment but it could also be information, it could be tools, it could be monetarily-related, it can be community-related."

Build that spectrum and say for this piece of content we are going to invite engagement at this level or this next of engagement currencies. These are the partnerships that we need to set up who could benefit from this so that you have your whole calendar at play.

And even before you launch this, do that better and then what I strongly recommend the government is talk to the people. Before you start creating this content go out and see how it's really affecting people's lives, how they contextualize it, what their issues are.

Because your perspective as a person with power, a person potentially with money is going to be very different from those who are most affected by these decisions. You really need to understand how they think about health, how they think about economy, how they think about the definition of family.

Before you start pushing your messages out there, that quite frankly, you think are attuned to them because of some definition of your party but you may find that in the time between you last talked to them and now their definition of say family is completely different.

It is more to the friends you've collected, your partners, the children of those partners than is necessarily what we traditionally perceived.

David: What are the best ways of getting those insights? A second question to that just off that answer again is how do you build in the speed and the pace and the ability to be able to change and move quickly in organizations that are traditionally slow moving?

Rose: There are some great, great tools and technologies now that I've been playing with since about 1994. Originally they came out of MIT and now they are represented by some great companies like MotiveQuest or Blab.

And what they are or the ability to not only cluster major areas of debate but also do anthropological insights off of them and you can do those very much real time.

If people picture in their minds a screen in front of them where we'd say put in a topic. Give me a topic David, any government topic.

David: Say diabetes.

Rose: Okay diabetes. You put in diabetes and these bubbles will appear that actually have different size which directly relates to how many people are talking about diabetes in these terms. They will have different colors that's based on the volatility of the debate that's going on right now, "Is it hot? Is it pretty constant? Is it the green species?"

And then what will be within these bubbles are the topics, "How people are talking about diabetes? Are they talking about diabetes in the terms of pharmaceutical companies and how much money they're making off of insulin

strips? Are they talking about diabetes in terms of diet? Are they talking about diabetes with regards to children?"

There are so many different levels of diabetes, right? And what you can see in this new monitoring online anthropological systems is exactly what is being discussed online within context and the topics that are really volatile.

That is a wonderful way of saying, "Okay one of our primary things is going to be diabetes. But we're going to monitor this and as the topics arise, that's what we'll center the content on."

We'll talk about the fact that these seniors with diabetes can't afford the strips because the strips are \$250 for the packet and it's not fully covered by Medicare. That's where you can get those debates.

Additionally, there are more and more ways to record your constituents and invite them to give you their stories. If you say, "Okay this test strip is just really horrible let's reach out and ask people for their point of view on this," then they can record that video for you and you can share it with the world. It can be far more real time.

The challenge, David, is that these systems are not easy to implement. This is what I think about in terms of government – there's not a lot of people necessarily unless they are in their PR department whose job is to share a content and if you've got this massive marketing groups within those organizations.

How do you rescale those people? So that you can start decreasing the amount of span that you're doing in traditional and increasing the amount of actual content relay that you're doing.

So that you can do it smarter and smarter and have people monitoring these systems, feeding that choose the writers, the writers capturing it, the people pushing at the video request capturing that and pulling it back in.

David: What was some of those tools that you have been using for wall? You said Blab.

Rose: Blab – it's a company called blabpredicts.com. They do some amazing work. Another company called MotiveQuest both of those are in the United States.

Sure there's Radian 6's of the world but as anyone who can tell you who's been doing monitoring work using those types of tools – if you don't know how to do the right queries, there are so much data that you could get lost.

But I really think that the governments need to start looking at having systems like this that can organically watch the conversations that are emerging online. So that they're not imposing upon their people their own view of these issues but are rather addressing the people's issues around these topics.

David: We'll just do a slight pivot here back to the insight that really encourage me to give you a call to see if you would come on. It was the insight that you released a couple of weeks ago during discussion on the BeanCast and it was about the fact that yes the world is changing and it's changing dramatically.

But the point that you made was that particularly in the United States and it is happening here in Australia and I know in other markets around the world, that there is a record number of agency of record of relationships that are up for grabs at the moment and it's the brands who are really considering their future and looking at that model.

Could you just give us a bit more insight around why that's happening? What's happening? And what's likely to be the future in terms of providing services to governments for agencies?

Rose: Wow, what we've been seeing about over 10 years ago P&G, that's Procter and Gamble made a statement about how they're going to start shifting their investment in media. I think in between now and then what we've seen from a lot of the majors so Unilever, these are the ones that are in the RFP right now.

Volkswagen, Ford, Unilever, P&G – all of these people right now have their RFP sold to media agencies and I think what they've seen is they've been beta testing things for about let's say the past five years, ten years.

They've seen how much or how little the agencies here have been able to accommodate some of their dreams, their what if's. They've seen the evolution of nothing new start-ups to being acquired by these agencies and very often being kilt as that acquisition occurs.

They've also seen their media companies taking kickbacks that they weren't aware of. We're still living here in a world, David, where they buy the media in

one bulk sum in the beginning of the year and they create advertising that fits that show.

If we remember back before the separation of church and state of the media agencies and the creative agencies, they both used to live in the same building. We used to take media and treat it as part of the creative product.

And then when they said, “Oh we’re not making enough money and we’re not making getting a greater efficiency of skill because we have multiples within this industry. We’re going to break apart from the agencies so we can make more money.”

What happened then is that creativity and the inclusion of media and the creative product broke away and it became just filling holes, “I’m buying these many holes and these many media pieces – a new agency, a new client are going to fill that with stuff.” And what we’ve now discovered in this age of content marketing is you can’t separate them.

We want to have this remarkable elasticity where we don’t have to buy a year ahead. We want elasticity that actually leverages the data that’s being created by the internet and systems where we can dynamically feed that content to where it’s needed.

We don’t want the limitations of this machine that we’ve essentially been paying for for all these years. What they found is even though they want that greater elasticity, a lot of the media hosts are not prepared or skilled enough to respond to it. They have these systems that they want to keep running and that it’s dangerous for them to break apart.

So I think what you’re seeing right as great many of these major companies saying, “Okay I’m done. I’m done with you. Agencies trying to show me that you know how to do this when you don’t. I’m done with you protecting your motto and your infrastructure.

“I believe that there’s something else out there. I believe that there are other agencies that are mature enough for me to invest in. And they won’t fold underneath the pressures of our organization and those are the people I want to talk with.”

David: That's fascinating. But it would seem also that I think even the most recent numbers they're still have the investment in traditional and legacy media at 85% or most is still going into what you've described as a broken system.

Rose: Yeah and they will continue to do that until they have enough data to prove that where they're investing their money it will not be so high risk, that they'll lose those leads or they'll lose that exposure, right?

They're going to have that safety net and maybe right now it's 85 and maybe the year after that it's 75 maybe the year after that it's 65 but it's going down.

David: How quick do you think it's going to change? Because my sense of the way that the world is moving and as you've described it earlier in this discussion, we live in a very quick world at the moment so that could move pretty quickly.

Rose: The only thing that's hampering people right now, David, is having really the measures of success having those well-defined. I swear to God that a great deal of the reason people have stayed in the traditional media is that everyone has agreed on what is a good and bad measure and you can justify your investment.

Right now with programmatic ad with content marketing, we're still trying to feel like, "Okay what is the norm for this industry? What are the norms? What is good? What is bad? Where is the basement? Where is the ceiling? How do we measure that? What are the key measures to have so that we can justify the investment in here versus there?" That really comes down.

David: It's going to be a fascinating time. Rose, I do want to be respectful of your time but I'm actually also very intrigued about what does the Director of Innovation Online and Outreach do at a very famous university in the United States such as Penn State?

Rose: I have a great time. I have the most magical job.

David: I was going to say it. That sounds like you could do anything you like.

Rose: Doesn't it! What I find is that and I really am blessed to have this job and be with the university where they'd said, "You know what? There is the day today that we absolutely have to get done. There's the support of the students that were absolutely committed to and the quality of the education that were absolutely committed to.

“And that cannot undermine our ability to also look forward and ensure that the quality of education we’re supplying is here for the next generation and the next generation and the next generation.”

That’s why they called me in and they said, “We need somebody who’s not just looking there and making sure the work has been done. But is also looking forward and saying, “What are we going to need next?”

And that’s really what I do. I’ve kind of open the windows. I let the fresh air in. I say, “How we consider this that and the other thing?”

I look from a context that is so not academia. I look from a context of working with McDonalds and working with IBM and Microsoft and then tend when strive right. Where I just see things differently because that’s not been my only world.

And then I have the ability to take all these wonderful networks that I’ve created over my career and say, “You know that reminds me of what so and so was doing over here in Chemical Engineering.” “Oh wow this reminds me of something that’s happening over in Portland right now,” or “This reminds me of that crazy guy that I met in an art colony over here.”

And connecting those pieces so that we can actually make a bigger and better world that people are more engaged with and where people are continuously learning.

And that they enjoy that learning experience so much that it doesn’t end at the end of a four-year university career but it continues on through all of their life and through their children’s lives so that we make this a better and better world to live in and that is what, David, is critical to me.

David: It sounds like you’re not just focused in the sort of business area, the marketing communications that you’re actually bringing your insights to the education across a wide range of areas.

Rose: From digital aesthetics to learning design to the technology of education – it’s all the way up to marketing because quite frankly I’m at a public university. Penn State is one of the top universities in the world but it’s also a public. It’s what they called our one land-grand university.

As such it doesn't have the money of the privatized institutions. In many ways I like that challenge because it's a deprivation strategy challenge. We're not floating around in a lot of money so it's like, "Okay let's not just throw money at it. What's the smart way of doing this?"

And that's why I actually got involved with the marketing department because Google recently really increased its rates here in the United States. We also have a horrible situation with the private education sector right now where some institutions haven't necessarily done their jobs correctly and students have called "foul".

So there are all these questions about online education that are primarily been driven by the private sector and what we've seen has declined in online university usage in the private sector. The growth sector is actually the public sector.

When you've got a universe of students who are gone shy and very shy of very hard, pressing hard sell, tight marketing how relevant this content marketing become? It's tremendously important. It starts really getting you to reassess your marketing makes and what is really helpful for students.

When students have actually said this year that they're looking more to Instagram to find their next university than they are in the university websites because they believe Instagram is going to show them a more real photograph or a slice of life of the university than the polished website will, that is a tremendous learning for all of us.

David: Indeed and also going back to one of your earlier insights around some of the challenges not only for government but for brands – non-government organizations not for profits, you identified very clearly that one of the challenges is the skillset of the people currently working in communications in those areas.

How are you at Penn State going to start to produce the graduates who are going to be able to work in the world of content marketing?

Rose: I'm so glad you ask that. Because one of the key areas that we're innovating a range right now is in the arena of engaged scholarship. That's what academia calls it "engaged scholarship".

David: What does that mean?

Rose: The students that means, “Oh my god commitment and more studying so they run the opposite direction.”

The real definition is practical application of what you’ve learned. It’s hands-on practice. If we’re looking what do you create when you’re at the university? David, what did you create?

David: Me as a student? I produced a whole lot of essays and verbal presentations and that was my output.

Rose: Looked spookily like content doesn’t it?

David: Yeah exactly.

Rose: One of the cases that we’ve been making is that a very large part of our content marketing engine can actually be generated by the students. They are our story. They are our legacy.

And quite frankly in many ways, they understand the media much better than some of the other folks who’ve been doing traditional for a very long time. So can a student help us learn more about this arena? Can they help us create that content? Can they help us keep it fresh?

A lot of what we’re looking at is not only reskinning the skillset of the individuals within our marketing departments but also incorporating students into our marketing departments for an opportunity for hands-on practical experience where they learn how to work with these systems and our people learn what’s important to them.

David: Fascinating. Rose, thank you so much for spending a bit of your time with us today. I think the insights that you’ve been able to provide our audience which is an audience of government communicators all over the world that they’ll be fascinated by that.

I think your insights particularly around the changing world and this notion of the impact of gaming and how that’s changing people’s attitude in the sense of teaching.

And then that really is at the essence of successful communication in this day and age that people are looking for information, they are hungry for information. If we’re going to be effective we have to create value, we have to know, we have to understand.

Thanks very much for giving us the insight in the some of those tools. I know people will be very quickly going away, I know I will – stand straight up to this podcast to go and have a look as to see how that can work. Understanding those insights, those core insights as you say that communication it's not about you.

It's about listening and don't think you have to be the most clever person in the room. Don't pontificate, keep it interesting – make it relevant. So so much insight there, so much value for the audience.

And thank you so much for giving your time to be InTransition today. And we will be back in touch so we can have a further conversation as you continue on what I think is going to be a fascinating journey into the future really as you look to explore different ways of educating students of the future.

Rose Cameron, thank you very much for your time today.

Rose: Thank you so much, David. You have a great time doing there in Australia. Be well.

David: Thank you.