
InTransition Podcast Episode 77 – Libby Coy - Transcript

David Pembroke: Hello ladies and gentlemen and welcome once again to In Transition, the podcast that examines the practice of content marketing in government and the public sector. My name's David Pembroke and thank you for joining me. Today we have a very special guest and we'll come to them in just a moment but before we get to them, as we do each week we 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 and/ or stake holder action, so there you go.

Today a podcast with a slightly personal and different twist. Today we interview contentgroup's graphic designer on her last day at work here at contentgroup after two years. We were delighted a couple of years ago that Libby Coy found her way from Los Angeles to little old Canberra, Australia. She was a graduate of the University of Southern California and she did some work with a property development firm in Los Angeles called CIM. They're located there on Hollywood and Highland. Anyway, through some circumstance Libby arrived on our doorstep and had wonderful skills. She has done so much fabulous work for us over the past two years designing brands, logos, infographics, reports for many of our public sector clients including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Defence, the University of Canberra, and the ACT government. As I say, it's Libby's last day with us today and I thought what a great way to say good bye than to have a conversation with her, not only about her time here, but the obvious and clear expertise that she has. Libby, welcome to In Transition.

Libby Coy: Hi David, thank you for having me.

David Pembroke: You're a little bit put out by this podcast thing. I sent it to you, I think yesterday afternoon, do you want to do it and you were like, "I'm not sure about that."

Libby Coy: Not something I've ever tried but I'm open to trying it just like everything here.

David Pembroke: Okay, very good. Listen, content marketing I suppose let's go back to your journey into content marketing and into contentgroup. I think I can remember back to those early discussions where we were talking about it and you seemed intrigued from the outset about this whole process of acting like a media company and producing assets on behalf of clients to tell their stories. Maybe if you could just reflect back perhaps over the last couple of years in your time here.

Libby Coy: Yeah, when I first got here I hadn't had much experience in creating infographics, designing for social media, things like that. I come from a very rigid background in design where I worked for one brand, one company, one logo so coming into

contentgroup was really exciting because there were a lot of different brands that we were working on. There was opportunity to work on something different every day and there's also the opportunity to tailor every brand's design to suit their particular needs. I think that's something really exciting about design is that it has their reasons that you design different things for different clients. I've really been able to explore that at contentgroup.

David Pembroke: How hard was that to adapt from that volume in one area but then to become dexterous and to be able to move in any given day to be working on multiple projects?

Libby Coy: Yeah, I have a bit of ... I'm all over the place a lot. I like to read two books at the same time, I'm that kind of person. It's kind of the way my mind works is to work on multiple projects at the same time.

David Pembroke: Yeah.

Libby Coy: Yeah, I enjoyed doing that and jumping into it.

David Pembroke: With your graphic design skills you're also a painter as well, aren't you?

Libby Coy: Yes. I look at graphic design from a perspective of almost painting on the computer, just using instead of my normal brush, I'm using my Photoshop brush or even just the text tools in design to create something on the page. Coming at it from that angle really helps me to have a lot of creative confidence when I'm designing. I think they're probably two different types of designers that you see out there. There are ones that come at it from a really strict background in terms of measuring everything down to the thousandth of a millimetre and then you have people that come from a very artistic, more probably messy perspective and just get it all out there and then create that way.

David Pembroke: You also had the benefit of formal education in design, didn't you?

Libby Coy: Yes I did. I did focus in ... My school, the way my school was is at USC it was very fine arts focused so even the design aspects they really gave us a lot of freedom to do what we wanted. They didn't want all of our work to end up the same at the end of the course, which is something that you see a lot in design schools. If they're very rigid everything ends up looking the same from very student.

David Pembroke: Yeah. When you were taught or going through USC, where was the emphasis in terms of design? What were they trying to bring out in you? What were they teaching you in terms of that challenge of telling a unique story around each brand?

Libby Coy: Right, so what they were doing was is they were bringing it back to starting from the basics, starting from the most creative point that you could which a lot of times they would have us draw everything out first or print out a bunch of

photos and then cut them up and take photos of that. It was very starting from that angle which they ... It produced the most unique work and the most innovative work I think.

David Pembroke: Then you ended up working in government.

Libby Coy: Which it's funny yes. It's actually very creative. I actually find it very creative to work in government.

David Pembroke: Okay.

Libby Coy: I do. I think that you actually have a lot of creative freedom. A lot of brands haven't been established yet which is really exciting. You need to do them quickly and a lot of people are open to really different things, it's not what you'd expect initially coming into it.

David Pembroke: When you're having those first engagements with a particular client, what do you want to know as a designer that will then help you to go and create something inspiring that is going to help tell that story?

Libby Coy: I always want to know who they're targeting first of all because it's less about them than it is about the person that they're targeting. I always want to establish with them that they are not their target audience, I think that's very important.

David Pembroke: Yeah.

Libby Coy: I think really breaking down the viewer with them always helps a lot to come up with a good design.

David Pembroke: Do people manage with that message when you actually explain to them, "Look, you may have this preference or that preference but really it doesn't matter because your audience may not be looking for exactly what it is that you think is a great idea."

Libby Coy: Yeah, I think in theory people do want to see that but when it actually comes down to it sometimes they're not as happy with that.

David Pembroke: How do you take them on that journey to continue to remind them, to sort of draw them away from their own personal preferences towards what is a well thought through, well argued, well put together, visual identity?

Libby Coy: I think the best way to go about it is to go from where they're coming from, take them through their thought process, start from there, work with what they see but mould it towards the user. I never try to put my own idea on them, I think the client has the most important ideas, they're the one that you're serving so I think that you should try to work with them and bring them towards the user

rather than say that you have the perfect vision in your own head as the designer.

David Pembroke: How much information do you actually need to create the output? How much time do you need to spend with a client to be able to get that good insight which gives you the confidence to sit in front of your computer and say, "Okay, I'm good to go?"

Libby Coy: It's interesting, I think I work better with clients that I already know and have a relationship with.

David Pembroke: Okay.

Libby Coy: That actually really helps when going through the brainstorming process. If I don't know them already, I definitely like to get a feel for how they are, have a good brainstorming session with them and their team for at least an hour. Talk about it afterwards over email.

David Pembroke: You think that really maybe you're suggesting or are you suggesting there that design tends to get better with familiarity, as you come to know and understand the challenge, the task, the audience et cetera, that you feel that your design improves?

Libby Coy: Definitely. Definitely agree with that statement, yes.

David Pembroke: Okay, what advice would you give to someone looking to hire a vendor on a graphics project? How do they know what they want and get the most out of that relationship?

Libby Coy: I would suggest looking for someone who has a really diverse portfolio because I think that that signals that the designer doesn't have ... If a designer starts to develop a certain style in their work then they're probably not going to listen to you as much as you need them to.

David Pembroke: Okay.

Libby Coy: If you can start to tell they made this, they made that. That kind of thing. Then they're not really catering to the different audiences that they need to be.

David Pembroke: Okay. That's a really good insight. In terms of that portfolio, if I'm the client, I'm looking for diversity do you think that's important that I want to see that, but what else do I want to see in that portfolio and how much do I want to see from a particular designer before I can make a decision?

Libby Coy: You really only need to see about three or four pieces in my opinion, three or four projects. If you're working on a branding project, whatever project you're working on, you should try to look for work that they've done in that area or

request samples in that same area. That's going to give you the best idea of what and maybe also ask for the brief along with the specific work that they've made.

David Pembroke: What about that personal relationship as well because it is a client relationship as well, what sort of attributes should people be looking for in a good graphic designer beyond the obvious things of being reliable, dependable, and nice to work with?

Libby Coy: Yeah, I think just they should be a great listener. I think you need to have someone that you know is going to listen to you and be receptive to what you have offer to say and also who respects you and you trust.

David Pembroke: Yeah. I'm interested to know really and reflect on your journey because even though you're quite young there's been such a dramatic change in the role of imagery and visual communication even in the last couple of years. It continues to change at rapid speed. What are some of your reflections on the changing landscaping which designers are working?

Libby Coy: I think that you have ... There's a study from the University of Missouri and it said that it takes less than two tenths of a second for an online visitor to form an opinion about your website.

David Pembroke: Right.

Libby Coy: You're dealing with it's got to be really impeccable from the start, you've got to be able to produce a lot of work in a short amount of time but it has to be very quality.

David Pembroke: That question around really the changing nature of visual imagery and communication perhaps imagery's always been important but the fact now that everyone carries around a screen in their pocket powered by the super computer that it's very visual, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest.

Libby Coy: I think it's just that it's a visual medium. Everything you're working on is visual now. Not as many people are listening to the radio, not as many people are ...

David Pembroke: Are reading like they used to so the imagery has now come really to the fore.

Libby Coy: Yeah, it really has.

David Pembroke: Then how do you sustain that over time? In your previous answer you were saying that really what you've got to do is create quality impactful graphics but you got to create lots of them quickly to be able to put the bullet into the gun and start firing them.

Libby Coy: I think that's something interesting to talk about is something that we do here at contentgroup now is we do train people how to use basic design programs and

Canva. We help them set up templates so that we can help you create a brand here. Then the next step is since we can't probably produce as much content as you want, we're going to train you so that you're able to produce that at the speed that you need to.

David Pembroke: That was one of your initiatives which I thought was great and obviously with keeping with our commitment of helping government and you help people by building capability. What were some of the challenge that you had in trying to put together that training course so that we could actually equip people to actually go back to their desks and be able to create graphics, maybe not to that high level quality standard that you need from having a degree and training and other things, but certainly adequate graphics that would have an impact?

Libby Coy: I think the challenge is just getting everyone in the course to be able to decide what are the absolute, the key messages from their brand, the key colours, how their message is reflected in their graphics and how to pull that imagery into Canva and make it consistent for future use. I think it's a lot about consistency and just reinforcing that it's actually very simple to make graphics and simple graphics really work. This is something that we're seeing a lot more and more. Just finding what your brand's saying and figuring how it's saying that through graphics and then pinning that down and plugging it into Canva.

David Pembroke: Did you find that people were confident by the end of the training that they felt that they were had reached the stage where they could produce graphic content that was worthy of and representative of the brand that they were working with?

Libby Coy: Yeah, that's the funny thing, I think the main thing that people took away from the training course was creative confident was that you have everything there you just need to feel confident enough to use it and go for it and not be scared that you don't know all of the answers right now. It actually can be broken down to be something very simple.

David Pembroke: You mention Canva and obviously that's an Australian company, Australian site that's doing wonderful things in the graphics areas. As graphic designer, what do you feel towards sites like that, that are really mass producing the product that you used to craft one graphic at a time?

Libby Coy: Yeah, it's a little bit scary that my job could be taken over by a robot in ten years. I think that's something ...

David Pembroke: Do you think that's the case though? I'm a, as you know, a big believer in design. I think that is so fundamentally important that I think there's always going to be that need for interpretation and sophistication and an eye that you're not going to be able to say, yes, it's nice to have a template. Yes, those templates can do the job but that's the meat.

Libby Coy: That's true, yes.

David Pembroke: You're always going to need some gravy, you're going to have to have some other things on the plate.

Libby Coy: Yes.

David Pembroke: You don't just want to be consuming meat all the time.

Libby Coy: Yeah, at the end of the day you're always going to need that innate visual sense from someone and someone who's leading creatively on every project, even if you can plug in algorithms to do things. It's still very important to have that eye. I do think that's one thing that will never go away. I'm about to go to Sydney to study web development, I think web development, maybe in ten years a lot of parts of it will be obsolete and you will be able to just get a robot to do that, very true. I think knowing how to design something and having a sense of that will always be valuable.

David Pembroke: Yeah. I think in the increasingly cluttered world there's got to be differentiation and if you're telling a story, if you're a government agency or not for profit or any other public sector organisation, there needs to be some coherence and some differentiation in the way that you represent yourself. While Canva can get you part the way there I think there's always increasingly going to be a demand for people who've got that eye.

Libby Coy: Yes.

David Pembroke: It's interesting we talk about that in, or used to when I was in the media. We used to talk about the cameramen, the videographers who had the eye. Some guys, yep they could get out there and do it but then the really good guys are the guys who had the eye.

Libby Coy: Yes.

David Pembroke: You could see. The vision would come back and you'd look it and you'd say, oh yeah so and so shot that because you can see just how, just that interpretation piece that you talk about.

Libby Coy: Yes.

David Pembroke: I think it'll be a long time before the robots can really create those emotional images which is really where you get that effective communication, if you can create that emotional connection.

Libby Coy: Very true, I think it goes back to the whole movement that says painting is dead but actually painting is not dead. You're always going to need those base skills,

that emotion, that ability to express through a basic form in order to succeed in the digital world.

David Pembroke: Yeah, no question. Part of your journey now post-contentgroup, although there'll always be a part of you here. Is this web development, it's obviously having come out of that really hard-core creative design school at USC which gave you all of the creative tools obviously applying that into an increasingly digital environment, you've felt that there's a part of you that is not quite there, is that, sorry ... Why did you make that decision?

Libby Coy: Yeah, the way I look at it right now is I would like to be able to paint online. I would like to be able to control the design of the webpage now.

David Pembroke: Right.

Libby Coy: I'd like to move to that stage and I think it's becoming increasingly important since a lot of content is viewed through web browsers. It is important in order to have a visual say in anything now to be able to work in that medium.

David Pembroke: Knowing you, I'm sure you've done lots of research about this in looking for the solution. What have you come up with in terms of a solution?

Libby Coy: A solution for?

David Pembroke: How are you going to get these skills? Who are you training with? What are you expecting to get from them?

Libby Coy: I've decided to go to a coding boot camp called General Assembly. This is an American school, we have a lot of them in the U.S. and this one is based in Sydney right now.

David Pembroke: Okay. I think they're in Europe as well.

Libby Coy: Yeah, they're all over the world.

David Pembroke: They're a big show now, General Assembly, aren't they?

Libby Coy: Yes. They're very popular.

David Pembroke: You, walking in on your first day, what are you expecting or what are you hoping for? Boot camp sounds a little harsh.

Libby Coy: It's every day from nine to five with twenty hours of homework a week so it's forty contact hours and twenty homework. It's a lot of time to invest. It's meant to accelerate your career, accelerate your skills. I'm expecting to be in a class with very diverse group of people, probably people that have studied maths and science already. Also designers and artists.

David Pembroke: You're coming at this opportunity from another direction.

Libby Coy: Yes, very different angles coming in for this but it's becoming increasingly important in all different respects to know web development.

David Pembroke: Okay. How long did you say you do this all?

Libby Coy: It's three months.

David Pembroke: Wow, so it's pretty intense, isn't it?

Libby Coy: Yes.

David Pembroke: That's a big load.

Libby Coy: Yes.

David Pembroke: Your expectations on graduation? What are you hoping that you're going to be able to have post that training that you don't have today?

Libby Coy: I am hoping to have the skills to be able to continue to learn and continue to figure out how to do web development. I know that I won't come out being able to do everything right off the bat but I know this will equip me with the ability to learn how if I can't figure it out right away.

David Pembroke: Will it be hard-core coding, do you think?

Libby Coy: Yeah.

David Pembroke: Writing out HTML code and all that sort of stuff?

Libby Coy: It'll be HTML, CSS, Java Script, and programs like Ruby, which is more of a back end.

David Pembroke: Ruby on Rails?

Libby Coy: Yeah, Ruby on Rails.

David Pembroke: Yeah, okay.

Libby Coy: It's doing front end, back end and user experience design.

David Pembroke: Okay, wow.

Libby Coy: Yeah, it's a full spectrum.

David Pembroke: Yeah. That will really equip you to have those conversations, won't it, really about the mobile experience and how you're creating mobile websites and making sure that the content's right for mobile. Then as you say the back end, the front end.

Libby Coy: Yes, exactly. I'm really excited to learn about the back end even though I'll be focusing on front end after wards, which is the design aspect. In order to design beautiful things just like contentgroup, you have to know why you're designing them a certain way, how to work with the program in the back end. How to work with everything else surrounding the design.

David Pembroke: And understand the language and the personalities and everybody else who goes into a digital creation team to be able to get those fantastic outcomes for whoever it is that you're working next time.

Libby Coy: Yeah, definitely. All about the team.

David Pembroke: Yeah. Tell me, what have you learnt the most in the last two years about yourself in the time that you've worked here?

Libby Coy: I think having creative confidence, the creative eye and the background in fine arts is so important as a designer. Google is your best friend. Google's been my best friend.

David Pembroke: In what way?

Libby Coy: It's surprising how many people don't know the answers to things and it's all there on Google. It's amazing what you can learn and pick up in a short period of time.

David Pembroke: What about your reflection on your time here? You're in a different country, a smallish quite government town as opposed to a teeming metropolis like Los Angles, it's such a different place, a different contrast, a different culture. What are your reflections on a girl from LA coming to work here in Canberra, Australia?

Libby Coy: Right, I think I really enjoy the working life in Australia and I think that people are more productive working a little bit fewer hours than they do in America is what I've seen.

David Pembroke: Yeah, that American thing where you work Sunday afternoons and then you work till late.

Libby Coy: Until you work 9:30 every night and all of that.

David Pembroke: We don't do that in Australia.

Libby Coy: We don't. We don't do that in Australia but it's surprising how hard people really work still here, which is probably not the perception from around the world.

David Pembroke: They think people are all at the beach.

Libby Coy: Right. Looking at the roos, yeah.

David Pembroke: Certainly the culture here at contentgroup is that we're very much sort of get to work on time and then hit it hard and hit it as hard as you possibly can as productively as possible and then it's full time is around 5:00 then you can go and have the rest of your day. The rest of your life and your family life and other things.

Libby Coy: That's the thing, you have another life. It's respected to have another life and that adds to your work. That makes your work more valuable and the time you spend here you work really hard.

David Pembroke: Yeah. Certainly as a leader of the organisation I'm very keen on that because I do think it gives people perspective. It gives them time to decompress. I know myself, I can't stand it, I've got young family. I like to, when I leave here, I go home and I have a family life and so I can close the door and leave it all behind but knowing that I get up first thing in the morning, really early and get my day started and go as hard as I possibly can but by night time, it's time to okay, let's ...

Libby Coy: It's good balance, yeah.

David Pembroke: Let's enjoy the rest, you know. There's so much more to life than just our work.

Libby Coy: I agree.

David Pembroke: What about Australia? We've had so much fun with Libby, the language, the slang, the bugs, the snakes. Being able to tease her about things because it's so funny, isn't it? Americans and we do have lots of listeners in America, are just so freaked out by Australia and all the crawly things and the snakes and the spiders and everything else.

Libby Coy: Yeah. It's pretty funny. When I first got here, I did see quite a few spiders and now my perception of them is, "Oh, it's just another spider, it's just a spider, it's fine." That's really changed, I've really acclimated to the culture. I've never seen a snake. There are kangaroos everywhere. That's not a false idea of Australia.

David Pembroke: It is pretty funny, isn't it? I've got some good mates from the states and one of them was here not that long ago. We're driving through the suburb in Canberra, you don't see them in Sydney or the capital cities in the main parts but in Canberra you do. They're actually everywhere. He just couldn't get over it, he's like, "My god, there's another." I was like, "Don't worry we'll drive for another,"

"Over there and they're here and they're there." The accent's a funny thing too. You get teased from our end but then you've got your Australian accent that you've developed.

Libby Coy: Yes, basically just no Australian can pronounce the letter R. That's how it works.

David Pembroke: Actually I was at Content Marketing World last year and this lady said to me, "You know that you all sound like pirates. You speak like pirates." I thought that was pretty funny.

Libby Coy: I could agree with that. I think my favourite moment in the office was when Ben, the videographer was saying to Dave, "Bob called you," and Dave goes, "Bob?" He goes, "No, Bob," and I said, "Barb." They could not figure out that they can't say the letter R so I had to translate for them, it was pretty funny.

David Pembroke: What about your time here in a small agency working with government? We've loved having you but what are your reflections on your time being part of the team here?

Libby Coy: I've loved working here, it's like a family. We call ourselves the contentgroupies. We really bond together. I've enjoyed coming to the office every single day. I'm going to really miss it.

David Pembroke: Yeah, we set that vision for contentgroup to be the world's leading content marketing agency for government and public sector by 2020. We're sort of 2016 on the edge of it, what are your thoughts about that vision?

Libby Coy: I absolutely think it will be accomplished. The amount that we've grown just in the past two years and it's just going at the same speed. I can totally see it getting there.

David Pembroke: Okay.

Libby Coy: It's such a solid idea. There's a lot of integrity in the company and people are working really hard towards that goal.

David Pembroke: Yeah. I think vision's such an important thing, isn't it? If you can land on a place where you want to go and describe it and talk about it and talk about your mission about helping government and live to the mantras, live to the values that we've got. I think that creates that momentum that people have got certainty about what they're trying to do as opposed to scrambling from next task to the next task. If you're making progress to where you're going to I think it makes a big difference. I think that's a lesson in communication really for anybody that gets your vision clear, gets your mission clear, gets your values clear and then be consistent about those things. Then everything will fall from that. All of the ideas, the strategies, the tactics, and everything else. If you don't have that roof on the house you're going to struggle every day of the week.

Libby Coy: Yeah, contentgroup is a perfect example of that. It's amazing.

David Pembroke: Excellent. Libby, thank you so very much for all of the hard work over the last couple of years. It's been so much fun to have you here, you've made such a great contribution around the office. I know everyone's going to be very sad to see you go but you'll do great things when you move on from here. Thanks very much for the great contribution. To all of our clients, I know I speak on behalf of them when I say thank you for all the hard work that you've done for them. On behalf of all your team mates here at contentgroup, I know I speak on behalf of them when saying thank you so very much. Good luck with it all. Thanks very much for making such a great contribution.

Libby Coy: Thank you so much, David. I've really cherished the years I spent here. I've really developed my own vision and you're very inspiring and your company is extremely inspiring and I can't wait to follow you and just see where it goes.

David Pembroke: Okay. We'll see where we go from here. Anyway everyone, thanks very much. That's the great Libby Coy moving off to great things and thank you very much for your time again this week. Really appreciate it and we'll be back at the same time next week. Bye for now.