
InTransition Episode 91 – Craig Hodges

- David
Pembroke: Well, hello, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome, once again, to InTransition, the podcast that examines the practice of content marketing in government and the public sector. My name's David Pembroke. I'm coming to you today from Cleveland, Ohio, Content Marketing World on the floor of the expo. I'm about to be joined by one of Australia's great content marketers. Before we come to him, just the definition as we start the program each week. 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 stakeholder action. There we go. Ladies and gentlemen, joining me is Craig Hodges, who is the founder and CEO of King Content, which is Australia's largest and, some would say, most successful, and certainly most awarded, content-marketing agency and certainly the reigning champions, number one in the world last year at Content Marketing World. Craig Hodges, you're back here again. Welcome to InTransition and congratulations on the success that you've had here over many, many years.
- Craig
Hodges: Thanks, man. It's good to be here. It's as crazy as usual. 5000 people. Trying to find everybody is a challenge. We're living and we're learning.
- David
Pembroke: What about that? What are you learning at the moment, as you come here sixth year in a row? What's changing in content marketing for you?
- Craig
Hodges: Look, I think, as we get into content marketing, the business evolving, there's a greater focus on return. There's more brands coming in. As more coming with their traditions and their methodologies, there's more challenges. There's more reason to adapt. We're learning to work with different brands from different sectors and trying to get their outcomes that suit their business.
- David
Pembroke: What are you finding in a lot of the projects that you're undertaking at the moment? What is necessary for success?
- Craig
Hodges: Look, I think, without fail, there's a necessity to have a strategy. You've got to know where you're going. You've got to know where you want to be. Now, there's those crazy stats that say about 30% of people embark who on a content-marketing program have a strategy. Those 30% are 60% more likely to have success in their program. It goes without saying you need that. That's a great starting point. I think you also need to have some sort of methodology to get a return on investment. There's too many white elephants in content marketing. I think that we need to have a plan and an outcome.
- David
Pembroke: Okay. In terms of putting those plans in place, setting objectives is often a challenge. Particularly in government and the public sector, it's often something that people don't want to be accountable to. They don't want to put that flag in the ground. When you're sitting down with someone and you're asking them for those objectives, how do you

encourage them to put the flag down in the ground so as that they can be accountable about the programs that they're putting together?

Craig Hodges: Look, I think, if somebody from a brand or organization, like government, is speaking to us like our companies, they're looking to change. I think they understand that the wheels are changing. The old-school way of advertising and push, push, push is moving on. I think that, when they come to us, they realize that they need to change their practices internally. I think stakeholders, internally, need to move. I think that the ship has to turn together. The biggest challenges we have is when you don't have that internally. Once they've come to us, there's a level of commitment. It may not be the greatest level but, if we've got that level, we need to grow that and start to get them to acknowledge that the way that we talk about audience first and maybe price and product second or third, they need to adapt to that.

David Pembroke: How do you build that or ... How do you undertake or encourage that conversation internally so as that you build stronger coalitions and deeper coalitions so as that they can understand and appreciate and, indeed, support the content-marketing programs?

Craig Hodges: There's no doubt you need great advocates internally. In all of our clients, we've got great advocates, those that know that there's a change, those who are emotionally and financially tied to that. I think that, if they're doing that, then we've got one person. It's far better than zero because, if you've got none, it's not moving forward.

David Pembroke: Okay. When you try to have those conversations, say with a CEO, what do they need to know or what do they need to see as a secretary or a dep. secretary of a department? How do people convince those types of people that this something they need to invest in?

Craig Hodges: Look, our approach is probably different than most. It's got to be a financial return. Every person at "C" level has a P&L responsibility these days. We've got to show them an outcome on that page. The bottom-right-hand corner of that spreadsheet needs to move right. That's what we work towards.

David Pembroke: How do you go about, at the beginning of those programs, describing the process or, indeed, the calculations as to how you're going to realize those benefits?

Craig Hodges: I think it's a journey. Getting in there, understand their business. Our strategy team gets up to speed and up skilled on their organization. A great journalist knows a little bit about a lot. They can write a lot of topics. I think strategists are the same. They get in, they use their experience, they understand the business, then we start to pull together our strategic approach to getting them an outcome on their content-marketing program.

David Pembroke: Okay. What about content marketing? As you say, we're here in this vast hall. We have 5000 people from sixty or seventy countries around the world. Why do you think it is that content marketing is continuing to grow and to continue to be so successful?

Craig Hodges: Look, the old adage, "They money follows the eyeballs." The audiences are moving away from traditional media. They're moving to a media that's based typically in their pocket, on their phone. They're understanding the buyer journey better. They're going and finding the information, rather than waiting for the six-o'clock news, like we used to. If the eyeballs are there, the money will follow. The eyeballs are following content marketing. People don't want information pushed down their throats. They want to engage with a brand or with an organization that resonates with them that could add value. They've got to compete with their family, their friends, and everybody else. The reason there's 5000 people here is because the brands are starting to understand that and the industry is moving with that.

David Pembroke: What do you see as probably the next challenge for the content-marketing industry as it grows? What are some of the things that need to be overcome, indeed, for it to not just be 5000 people here next year, but maybe 6, 7, 8000 people?

Craig Hodges: Look, the one thing I think about now is the quality. There's a lot of bad content out there. There's a lot of great content. To be honest, I don't think there's that many major challenges facing the content-marketing industry. There's some really good people involved. There's some great brands, some great organizations. The challenges are for those not in content marketing. That's how I see it.

David Pembroke: Interesting. One of things today ... Probably the big thing that I've taken out of the morning session so far is, really, the advice everywhere now, from a number of the thought leaders, is to dial back the quantity and to lift up the quality as you're saying. Is that something that you agree with?

Craig Hodges: Yeah, 100%. More isn't better. Better is better. Let's make every piece of content the best content you could possibly produce. It doesn't mean doing ten a week. Why don't you do one? Why don't you do one a fortnight? Why don't you do one a month? If that fits with your strategic approach and is going to get that outcome in the bottom-right-hand corner, let's do that.

David Pembroke: Okay. How do you get found if you're not knocking on the door more often than that, that you don't have to have that cadence that is moving a little bit faster?

Craig Hodges: If you're audience knows your pulse, it may be once a week, it may be once a month, and if that's quality, they will find you and they will wait for that content and they'll react to that content. I don't think you need to be every hour. I think those BuzzFeed craziness and Gawker ... You don't need that. If you're a brand, get your rhythm, communicate with quality content that resonates with your audience, and you'll move them in the right direction.

David Pembroke: What are the biggest challenges to creating quality?

Craig Hodges: Having quality content creators. There's no doubt that, if you're in the industry long enough, you understand who does it really well and who doesn't. You've also got to have the content as the connector between the creator and audience. Having those two

things together works.

David Pembroke: Is that where journalists really fit in to content marketing?

Craig Hodges: It's interesting. Everybody talks about how the market's broadening. I sincerely think that some of the best storytellers on the planet are journalists. Why stop that? Let's continue that. They're telling stories on behalf of brands, rather than media organizations. The reason they can do that is the business model is different. Media organizations have appetizing subscriptions. Brand sell things and they enable this storytelling to thrive.

David Pembroke: All right, Craig Hodges. Thank you very much for joining us In Transition. A great pleasure, as always, to speak with you. We were lucky enough to go and see AC/DC last night here in Cleveland. That was a great thrill, wasn't it?

Craig Hodges: Good fun. Talk about storytellers Axl Rose and Angus Young up with the best of them.

David Pembroke: It was a great occasion. You couldn't write it. We were at this event last night. Craig Hodges says to me, "Well, are you going to come or aren't you going to come?" I said, "Come where?" He said, "AC/DC." Here we are in Cleveland, Ohio. It was a great night. We had a lot of fun. Certainly, Content Marketing World is a great place. Great people.

Craig Hodges: Great people. Very enjoyable. It's a great time of year to be in Cleveland.

David Pembroke: Okay, Craig Hodges, thanks very much for joining us InTransition. Ladies and Gentlemen, we'll speak to you again next week.