

InTransition Episode 56 – James Kliemt

David Pembroke: Hello ladies and gentlemen and 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 delighted that you've decided to give me just a small slice of your week once again as we go through interviewing and talking to some of the most interesting people in content marketing and content anywhere in the world. Great guest today so stay tuned for this, this will be a great chat. As we do each week we begin with a definition of just precisely what content marketing is 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 an identified citizen or stakeholder action. That's it, that's what we're talking about and that's why we're here to day. If that doesn't interest you it might be time to find another podcast. To our guest today James Kliemt is the senior digital media officer for the Queensland Police Service. James created and maintains the largest police Facebook page in the English speaking world. He grew this Facebook page to three quarters of a million likes in a state with a population of just 4 and half million people. James has received many awards for his leadership in social media by the state government, the federal government and other independent sources.

He's also led award winning projects for police blogs and a real time emergency management website for the state of Queensland. Very accomplished and James thanks so much for giving some of your time today to join us in transition.

James Kliemt: Thanks for having me.

David Pembroke: James let's just wind the clock back to understand who is James Kliemt and how is it that you've arrived at the Queensland police.

James Kliemt: Through a very strange and mysterious and not direct path. Well I was an analyst at some point and they almost ran out of things for me to do. At 1 stage I think the sentence was, "You know something about this social media stuff. How about you write a paper on what Queensland Police could do with social media." I did that and I got a bit more intense and involved than I thought I would at first. Had all sorts of ideas and just carried them down into a paper and a PowerPoint presentation and went and talked to the people at the police media department. They got very excited and the director there at the time Kym Charlton got very excited about it.

She was wanting to move the agency to move into the social media space but didn't have the technicals or the background or the policy background to make that happen. When we got together we could make things happen.

David Pembroke: It's really interesting that you say that and maybe we'll just go off on this tangent to start with. I know it takes me 1 or 2 questions to find something to go off on a tangent. Interestingly I think it might have been ... Well it's been in the last couple of week anyway. In San Francisco there's a transport system called the BART. The Bay Area Rapid Transit, do you know about it?

James Kliemt: I know exactly what you're talking about.

David Pembroke: You know the story that I'm talking about?

James Kliemt: The story, yeah, absolutely.

David Pembroke: There was this story there were problems and the young man and I can't remember his name just off the top of my head but he got a hold of the Twitter handle and he started responding to people. The point that was being made in the podcast I was listening to the other day which I think it was For Immediate Release Shel Holtz runs it, a great podcast there. The point of discussion in that podcast was that it was not his expertise in social media it was his expertise of the topic and his ability to be able to talk to people about the topic that led to the powerful engagement. Because this person didn't have particularly great social media skills at the time but what he did have was a great understanding of the context.

You're saying that your pathway to this influential position you have in the Queensland Police is exactly that, that you were an expert before you were a social media practitioner.

James Kliemt: Absolutely. I always say that social media is like old blogs. I don't really consider myself ... I'm not one of those self-promoting social media butterfly type people at all. It's a series of tools. You have a bunch of objectives you need to achieve and it's a series of tools that you can apply in different ways to make that happen. I think the great thing in the BART example was that yeah he knew his subject matter really well and he talked to people in a really sincere, in a really engaging way that they hadn't been used to. Governments quite often say, "Your call is important to us and everything is always sunny here and everyone's always happy." He cut through all of that with genuine messages about what was really happening that absolutely exploded.

You saw the reaction that got all over the world. I think he's only been in his job for a year. He was saying this is the dialogue that we have internally in the office all the time and so it's more important for us to be honest with you than anything else. The results speak for themselves I think.

David Pembroke: Listen what was in that paper that got people so excited within the Queensland Police Force? What's the magic? Where is it? What is that magic secret sauce that you just had the water and it all just pops up instantly and worked?

James Kliemt: Look it's a range of different things.

David Pembroke: We've got plenty of time, let's go through them 1 by 1 because I think this is really going to be the essence and the value that comes out.

James Kliemt: It was a long time ago now let me cast my mind back. It was looking at the bigger picture and particularly in relation to police. I actually did a lot of research about different agencies in similar situations around the world and found a bunch of great stuff in the US. I always say that the police and military are at the pointy end of society and a lot of other agencies ... police and the military are much more progressive in a lot of ways. In some ways they are much more conservative but in a lot of ways they're much more progressive than most agencies because they have to deal with situations where lives are literally on the line. Sometimes they have to cut through and just say, "We can't spend 6 months thinking about the policy to this we just need to do this now."

Certainly the US military had plenty of examples of say 9/11 and the war in Iraq and issues like that. Where they basically realized they did themselves an incredible disservice by not participating in social media. That they were letting everyone else have this conversation about them without them participating in it whatsoever. Also that you can't be a little bit pregnant with social media and I think a lot of government agencies absolutely try to be. They're in that space but they don't fully embrace it, that social aspect of it and that engagement aspect of it that's so critical to getting the mindset of your audience. We looked at that and said, "Look there are risks around social media but these benefits we get out of it are actually much more important than the risks of getting it wrong."

If we approach it in the right way and do it in a small scale or way at first and let it grow organically which is exactly what we've always done these really significant risk we can mitigate." The US military had all sorts of conspiracy theories about 9/11 and their motivations and what they were doing. They realized that that became the public dialogue and there were lots about how the nature of the mainstream media was changing and the way that audiences deal with media. That there was there awareness back then and this is ... I'm reading this in 2010 sort of thing. That the media are starting to look at social media and just report what's happening on social media as news which is then feeding back into social media.

If you get your conspiracy theories being loud enough for long enough they'll start reporting on that stuff. Again if you're outside of that conversation you can't influence that discussion at all. Then again there was a whole bunch of ... the Gov 2.0 report had just come out. There was a lot of noise being made by government at the time saying, "We want agencies to do this, we desperately agencies to engage." Then looking at lots of different instances when different technologies have been introduced. I often talk about the introduction of telephones into business and to government agencies. How telephones were the most terrifying things in the world and they were going to destroy everything

and they had to be locked down and offices would have a telephone and it was literally under lock and key.

You had to write in a little book if you want to ... you had to book in your phone call and who it was going to be with and what you were going to talk about and for how long and everything and that. Because people might just start telling government secrets on the phone and we won't have any control of it. Looking at those, bundling all of those arguments up and lots of different things about agencies that had gotten into huge amounts of trouble on social media because they didn't have a voice. There's just that idea that there's a vacuum there and if you don't fill it someone else is going to. Then there's all the stuff of course about emergency management and all this which was critical to what we were doing.

All of that stuff bundled into this would say, "Uh-uh" and the idea is that this is a progressive moving entity and where we're at now isn't going to be where we're at in say 5 years time. All of that just made an incredibly convincing argument that we really need to do this and we need to do it properly.

David Pembroke: That sounds compelling but did it ultimately ... and this is maybe a weird question but was it 5 pages, 10 pages, 20 pages? What scale was it?

James Kliemt: It wasn't huge, it was simply something I did myself. I think it ended up being about 40 pages but lots of that was pictures. There was lots of screenshots, just fill it up with pictures James, yeah. There's lots of screenshots of look at this and look at this, because you have to ... and I find that quite often with our social. You can talk about it but as soon as people actually see it and see that interaction and those sorts of things that they really get the implications of it. Because you're engaging people in that human level and sometimes you can be very academic about it and it all makes sense but when you actually see those things happen then it changes things in people's mind. Yeah, I'm a big picture person.

David Pembroke: Now, again you joined in 2010 and obviously you are in a position to start to convince and consult and to get this into place. You obviously got yourself started and up and running. What time after you started were you able to get your team together to start moving? Because I'm leaning towards the next question because I think you know what's coming next.

James Kliemt: Well medial departments are very unusual beasts and very reactive and very unlike a lot of other sections in government. Particularly again particularly police media and the military media and things like that so things actually happened really, really quickly. There was a couple of months of realignment and figuring out how things were going to work. A position was created that I got and went in and really started running pretty quickly. We always tell people and they recoil in terror that we launched our Facebook page and we didn't actually have a policy.

Which government people, some shriek, some drawing breath very quickly and their eyes were widened and those sort of things.

Again we realized that if we were going to write a policy we'd be sitting around for 6 months figuring it out. We did a completely soft launch we've never actually officially launched our Facebook page. We've never advertised the fact that's it's there or anything like that it was all completely organic growth from day 1. A very big part of our strategy is this iterative development. We just put things out there and see what happens and very, very cautiously approach any sort of content that we are doing at all. Of course as time is going on we've become more comfortable in our skins and understand who we are and what we are doing, but enormously cautious approach at first. Even though I'm saying "Yes we launched it without a policy." That was an absolutely deliberate decision.

That's not a cowboy choice of, "Yeah we'll just do it and it'll be fine." We very much realize that to make it work we were going to have to do that. To say that that 6 months after we launched the 2011 floods happened in Queensland and had we spent that 6 months writing policy we wouldn't have been there for that.

David Pembroke: Now that is exactly where I was going to land because I think certainly in Australia massively traumatic certainly for all of Australia and most particularly for Queensland. I think we watched collectively I think watched this unfold and this is where they really the reputation of the Queensland police and emergency services and yourselves have been made. Because you did such a brilliant job in being able to use technology and use these new platforms to be able to communicate. I'd really love to hear that story from the beginning from really what time ... Where were you? What time of the day? What sort of resourcing was in place? Tell me the whole story.

James Kliemt: Well it's kind of interesting and it was a ... I'm a doing air quotes right now. It was an interesting disaster in that it was actually quite slow moving at first because it flooded in Central Queensland. I wouldn't say minor flooding but not nearly as severe is what came later on for about 2 weeks prior to that. It was an interesting scaling up and that was looking back at that. That was 1 of the particularly interesting aspect to it was this validation of the model that we had been using this very reactive approach that we'd been taking and this pushing of the different boundaries. We'd set up a Skype number so that if there was a situation and something had happened in North Queensland or something like that and a police officer could call us in.

We could record that call and then put that out as part of the media release so that radio stations could get that. They wouldn't have to ring us and organize an interview and everything of that. We had the content there for them already and that's great. Then I was playing around with a laptop and a video camera and plugged them in and figuring out this live stream business. Getting it so I could have a laptop and a 3G modem and a camera and we could go different places

and stream live video from there. There was all of these different little aspects to what was going on that we constantly trying we would ... Again we weren't writing 20 pages of documentation about each thing. We were just trying it and seeing what worked and what didn't work.

The same with the content that we were delivering how we would approach these sorts of issues or these sorts issues and how were managing our community. All those sorts of things all those skills that we picked up either the 6 months leading into that. Really when things started to happen it was just those same things we were still peddling the same bike we just had to start peddling faster and faster. For those 2 weeks it was sort of ... I think it was the day after Boxing Day . I got an sms from the boss saying, "There are storms in North Queensland is it possible for you to come in and stream 1 of this ... We are going to do a media conference about it." I was like, "Oh." It was Christmas holidays everything like that but of course you just come in and do that thing straight away.

This is 2 weeks after we actually figured out how to do this live streaming from the laptop and all those sorts of things. Then all over suddenly they were daily media conferences and we're going and doing that and we are getting ... information is coming in to the team at a much higher rate than it normally would. The team was very much, this ... the ... When I say team it's not actually my team. It's the media team that was there before I was there doing normal mainstream media work but they were adding on. They'd send off their media release but we'd add on ... Let's just post it on Facebook as well and let's just look at the comments on Facebook and make sure that's all happening as well.

That was all just stepping up that level of involvement and then January 10 the big floods hit in the Darling Downs and there was terrible videos of cars bubbling down the street in Toowoomba and these sorts of things. Then that night I got another message from the boss saying, "There's a media conference at 8.30 or something like that tonight, can you get to Kedron ..." which it was about 8 o'clock or something like that at that point. "Can you get to Kedron to live stream that?" I raced down and live streamed that and that was the Premier and the Commissioner saying, "We've figured out that this water is actually coming for Brisbane." Then that next day was just an amazing day because the .. I think we made ... I think it's 144 Facebook posts in that single day.

It was just the information that was coming into police media and we were putting that straight out back to the public. We were doing ... I would do ... the Premier would do a media conference every 3 hours and were streaming that. We were also getting briefed constantly and we'd have the ... Kym would actually sit in with the Premier as she was getting briefed and Tweet information that the Premier was receiving at the time. We'd always talk about later on how she would Tweet something and of course it was rolling 24/7 coverage on all the networks. I could see the TV screens of all the networks around in the office. She would Tweet something and then 2 minutes later her Tweets would appear

scrolling across from 7 news, 9 news, 10 news, ABC the whole lot complete ... we always say complete with the typos and complete with the hash tags and everything like that.

It was just a dramatic scaling up of what these reactive model that we'd taken and as few links in the chain as possible. If an officer on the scene was reporting a non-controversial thing so in business as usual time a tree has fallen over on a road and the road's blocked. It's going to be blocked of couple of hours or something like that an officer can ring our coms and tell them that. We don't need any further ... A media office doesn't need any further approval to post something bad on our social media. That's a non-controversial issue that the confident people in our organization are reporting. If it was much more ... Slightly more significant issue or a much more significant issue that will get pushed up the chain but we ... The media staff have this responsibility and this trust that they understand our model.

Understand the way it works and can be the filter for that. They would just post if this area is getting flooded or there were supplies here or they've run out of something here they would all go on our social media and it just worked incredibly well. We spent those first 6 months building up to 8,000 likes on our page. Then the 2 weeks of the floods we were always very keen on getting to 10,000 and what message we were going to put up there. Then in the 2 weeks of the floods in North Queensland we jumped from 8,000 to 18,000 and the 10,000 just whizzed past in a blur. Then that day ... The day that everyone realized the water was coming for Brisbane it went from 18,000 to 100,000 in a single day which was a very, very surreal day of terrible things happening, bad luck.

Oh my God this stuff that we are doing ... This stuff that some of which I had written down in that document that 6 months ago was actually living and breathing and working. It was a remarkable thing. I don't think I wrote anything amazing in that document or anything all that. It was all sort of common sense and if you use social media for this, this and this and this it should work. Still at the same time actually seeing it work was just an incredible experience.

David Pembroke: When you consider the pressure and the stress and the volume and the velocity of this whole incident obviously there was a high degree of trust and skill within the team. When you reflect back now what were the other components that really helped to hold this show together as it was put under such duress?

James Kliemt: I think it was the strength of the model and terrific people and people who were really engaged with the idea and loved the idea and wanted to make the idea work. I think government in particular was very good at drawing up plans for how things should work and here's our policy and here's the way it's going to work. Without that human ... It's a bit like social media itself without that human spark in there and that camaraderie in the team and that spirit in the team that really fueled that. The people on the team understood what we were trying to

do, what we were all trying to do together and had that energy and that spark to make that happen was absolutely critical.

I wish it could just be a ... I just add water thing but you need to ... It's that and you need to have those different aspects in line and understanding the technology but understanding who you are and what you are trying to do with this stuff. Quite often after all of this happened lots of people would come to us and say, "Oh yes our department wants to have social media now. We don't actually know what we are going to do with it or anything like that but we just want to have social media." It was, we had a clear ideas on what we were trying to do with it and what the technology was and this culture of experimentation of it and also this cultural of excitement about it.

David Pembroke: Yeah I think this is absolutely key because I think a lot of planning that's done in government and the public sector is that traditional waterfall design were laden with assumption and we assume, we assume, we assume and we wait until here is our plan let's do it. Whereas obviously what you have done is that agile let's test and learn, let's get to a point, lets launch it, let's see how it performs if it does, if it doesn't whatever. Test and learn take the learning's because I think this is the key thing now around publishing is that we all now perpetually live in this test and learn environment. What works today may not necessarily be working in a week's time because of whatever behaviors might have change within the community.

Interest may have change, channels may have emerged. I think there's only 1 way these days and that really is to get into that mindset of being able to understand what you are trying to do. Make your best guesses as you can along the way but get to implementation as fast as you possibly can and then see what happens from there.

James Kliemt: That's absolutely it. There are some fundamental things about our Facebook page that we've always done that we are really challenging right now. We are looking at changing our approach really significantly to our Facebook page just because things have changed and you have to reactive to it. I know that there was so many things that happened in those days that we talked about many times afterwards. Knew absolutely that there'll be no way on earth that if we were sitting in an office somewhere 6 months prior trying to guess what might happen and what the implications would be ...

David Pembroke: Exactly.

James Kliemt: We wouldn't be anywhere near it. I love the story about there was a little old lady in North Queens and who got cut off in the floods from everything except their landline phones. She had no communication with the outside world aside from that. She would ring her daughter who was in Brussels and her daughter would look at our Facebook page and tell her what was going on. How has a policy post could you imagine that? As policy person in 2010 how could you

imagine that? There hundreds of scenarios like that. Police on duty were told that if your communications go down just look at the Facebook page. We had no idea that was going on.

ABC Radio just read out our Tweets whenever we Tweeted, we had no idea that was going on. The rules were completely different and the rules changed all the time. If you think you can treat it as a standard government process then I'm sure you'll tick lots of compliance boxes but whether you'd actually do this stuff well I think is a different matter altogether.

David Pembroke: Just a quick one before we go just a final question about obviously wonderful experience you've learned a lot. You say now that you are going to change and I imagine it's not just your Facebook page you are obviously doing streaming you are doing ... I imagine all sorts of different contents. What are the changes that you are seeing that are going to help you to be successful today and say for the 3 to 6 months? What are some of the things that you've seen and then what are you doing to make the most of those changes that you've seen through your experimentation?

James Kliemt: It's really interesting, the thing that I think is really ... We don't know what we are going to actually do. I think the thing that's really interesting at the moment is Facebook Live. I think Facebook incorporating live streaming into Facebook itself and being able to notify this audience that something's happening. This audience that's already signed into the service it's not like a separate propriety streaming service where you'd have to create an account. We can send alerts to people that we are streaming something live, but I have to create an account for this that they are not using at any other time or anything like that. The ubiquity of Facebook and the ability to do that on the fly that is incredibly interesting and we'll possibly change things a huge amount.

We may well move the our streaming to that when it's a fully robust platform that can do some of the other things we needed to do which it will do. I think that's a really interesting opportunity for lots of different agencies to do things. How again? I wish I knew. We'll poke it lots and we'll find out what works and what doesn't.

David Pembroke: James thank you so much for telling us some stories and to share that wonderful story about the success that you've had there in Queensland it really is a world leader acknowledged as such. I think you've really given that insight there that this notion of simplicity, testing and learning. I think we all live in this ongoing science experiment now. We all need to take that attitude towards their content that let's see if it works, let's test it, let's have a look. Let's have a look at the results and then let's move forward from there but let's also adapt to just and move forward from there to deliver those outstanding results to the audiences that are seeking information, education and entertainment from us.

James thanks again much appreciated for spending some time with us today. To you audience, thank you once again for coming back this week and we will speak to you again next week, bye for now.