

David Pembroke: Hello ladies and gentlemen, and welcome once again to In Transition, the podcast that examines the practise of content communication in government and the public sector. My name is David Pembroke and thank you very much for joining us. Today, a very interesting guest, not only someone who's got a fantastic background and career, but someone who has joined the contentgroup team and we're very excited to have her on board because I think she will bring an enormous amount, not only to the people who work here, but to the clients that we work for, but also for the wider community those of us who are all around the world trying to solve this problem of how do we improve the way that governments communicate effectively with citizens and stakeholders.

We've decided to change things up a little bit and I'm not going to go through the definition this week, because we did have some feedback from people saying, "We get it. We've got it. We understand what you're talking about." So anyway, we won't be doing that this week, but look it up "content communication" because there's no question that it is the future for the way governments will be communicating, taking this opportunity of technology now that the factors of media production and distribution have been democratised, you have that ability to be the media on the behalf of your government policy, your programme, your regulation, your service and what we've got to do is collectively work together so as we can build the skills so as we become better publishers in order for us to strengthen communities and improve the wellbeing of citizens.

So to my guest today, Petra Masinova has joined us all the way from the Czech Republic, but rather than go through a sort of line by line bio I thought why not bring her into the studio and have a conversation, not only about her background and what she's done, but also some of her insights about how things are changing and how governments can improve the way that they communicate. So Petra, welcome to In Transition.

Petra Masinova: Thank you very much. Nice to meet you all.

David Pembroke: Day one here in Canberra. Tell us how is it that someone of your background, and we'll come to that in a moment, but how did you come to be here in Australia and specifically here in Canberra?

Petra Masinova: I mean throughout the history I've been working all over the world, obviously ending up in Canberra, which is the farthest possible place I could end up. It's all caused by husband's being a diplomat, working in the foreign affairs of the Czech Republic and after living seven years abroad then living back in Czech Republic for 10 years, we got an offer to go to Australia and we thought, "Hm, Australia. You know, it's so far. It's maybe worth a try. There won't be any other experience of this type." And also I think Australia is getting better and better image whether in Europe .... definitely everybody are getting more and more interested especially in a way how Australians consider their values important and their values are really values of truth, it's not like just performing having values.

I must say that if it's something I really appreciate here apart of fantastic nature, weather ... it was snowing yesterday in Canberra, but it's still good, I think people are like a true, I just feel that the values they talk about they really believe in. It's not only environment and the way how they treat the planet, being so global. I think it is even how they talk to each other, how they trust to each other when they say something they really mean it. I think I was expecting a lot of things, but I wasn't expecting this to feel so strongly.

So I'm really happy to be here. Obviously when we arrived we were thinking about Australia, you know everybody on surf and waves and sea and hot weather. We came last year in September, it was raining. We ended up in Chifley, which was interesting experience for the beginning and even I think, "Okay. Where is Australia?" But now, I must say I'm really happy being in Canberra. As one of my very good friend, British diplomat he told me, "You get used to it and then you will love it." That's what I really do. I've been working in Sydney for more than half of year, was interesting but I'm very happy to be back.

David Pembroke: Well that's interesting. That observation, you don't often reflect on ourselves. Well because it's impossible you know you need someone with that external perspective to actually come and see, but it's nice that you would say those things about Australia. Obviously, I'm a very proud Australian, I love the country and I do think we have so many unique opportunities and the thing we need to do as a community is really to make the most of those opportunities and not to squander them by petty squabbling and other things that may go on, and not too far from here in the Parliament house on top of the hill. But anyway, we'll leave that for the moment, and just to ... maybe let's go back through your professional career. Where did this all start? Where did you grow up actually? Where was home?

Petra Masinova: I grow up in Pilsen, which is a city close to the west German borders. I'm sure Australian would know the "pilsner," the beer ...

David Pembroke: Pilsner! Yeah!

Petra Masinova: So it all started in Pilsen, there is still the biggest brewery in Europe and it's ...

David Pembroke: I grew up in a pub and one of the very famous beers in Australia was called "Resch's Pilsener" and it's gone now. They don't sell it anymore but in the 60s and 70s, it was massively, absolutely massively popular. My dad used to drink it and we used to sell heaps of it at the pub.

Petra Masinova: I mean pilsner ... here you can Pilsner Urquell, which I think is the best beer in the world still, being patriotic. But I really like the beer. But it's very funny about the city because it's very industrial city and plus there is this brewery so all the students would go through the brewery experience as a voluntary work during their studies. So I did too and it was interesting. I usually started ... I was like 18 something ... I started at 6 in the evening. I was able to drink

like 10 half litres of beer overnight, then I came home. Obviously I slept the whole day and then I ate.

The day started by me eating, then drinking the whole night, then eating again and sleeping. So in a week I gain six kilos and I stopped talking. I wasn't communicating with the parents at all, so they decided this is probably not the best way how I should start my professional career. They said that the brewery is not the good ... you know you just stop thinking then you just you know ... because I remember in brewery they told us, "You can drink anything. You just can't take anything at home." So it was really challenging.

Then from Pilsen, when I finished university I was studying in France for a while, the French literature and American literature and obviously French language. It was also because I grew up during the communist time, the communist period. I was 18 when the communist period was exchanged with a democratic play, let's say. Obviously I remember everything, which was interesting. My father was kind of persecuted all the time. He was never a member of the party so he was imprisoned a few times and we couldn't travel at all, so we've been closed in this soviet bloc. The first opportunity I got was to go to France and I was so amazed at how many things they have. Again, I put on weight by eating all the baguettes and cheese because I'd never seen it before, so it was interesting. But it was fantastic and I finished my university degree by being master of English and French literature.

Then because at the time, the Czech Republic or Czechoslovakia at that time was about to join the European Union, obviously the Minister of Foreign Affairs been looking for the people speaking English and French. There weren't much .... many ... because the generation of my parents they all speak Russian. I do speak Russian still but they've been just Russian foreign language'd. So I joined the foreign affairs practically on a basis of speaking foreign languages. I remember going for interview, they said, "This is for the European Union department." And I just had to buy a little brochure in the evening, read it overnight and went for the interview with looks a bit interesting from today's perspective.

But after few interviews I got the job and I've been the whole ... public service career I've been practically a diplomat, being involved with European affairs but on a communication side. I've always been in communication. I run the communication, I don't even want to say campaign but let's say information strategy about the European integration for the Czech Republic. I was responsible for introduction of the European Union and then I became a spokesperson of the Czechy representation in Brussels again during the time we joined. So I've been responsible vice versa to talking on behalf of Czech Republic to the other European countries. In Brussels, I went through a PhD in communication and European affairs. So finally I've got a degree in communication and been working for the government for 11 years on a different communication assignment.

David Pembroke:

What did you enjoy about working for the government?

Petra Masinova: I enjoyed everything actually because I never thought I would work for somebody else, I just thought, "This is how I am. This is what I should be doing. I should help the government to communicate properly to the people. To explain things properly, to educate them ... because I always thought education goes ahead of communication because education especially when we were joining European Union, there is so many populist voices. If you just communicate, it's like advertising you know, you say, "This or that brand is great" but then people taste it and think, "Hm, it's not that great." But if you educate them, it's very different. So, I don't know.

For me, it's always had a more values than just being in a commercial work and I never thought I live it. I just ... I don't know ... my father is very much engaged in a public service kind of thing so maybe I just picked it up somehow. It was also challenging because the system was changing from the communist to democratic so obviously the countries like ours, we've been unfortunately learning everything. We just took bad and good at the same time and we've been trying to shape the new society. It was very different to ...

David Pembroke: Wow what a wonderful challenge to try and imagine or find the path between as you say, like everything's coming in and you had to try to define which was actually the best path.

Petra Masinova: It was the time of Vaclav Havel being a president. I've been very close to him, I have few photos with him and it was fantastic time. Then we've been joining NATO as well, you know so a lot of discussions around NATO. There was a NATO summit at that time in Prague. So all was fantastic and I'm really grateful I had a chance to be there at that time. Obviously in public service, higher you get more political it gets. At certain point, working in a Prime Minister's office, I was kind of .... it was suggested to me that if I want to continue to grow my career I should be involved in politics. That was something I wasn't ready for. I'm not saying I would never do it, obviously there is a lot of cliché about politics, but I wasn't ready for that I was quite young and I got picked by a private sector very quickly.

I've been working in a European funds for the Arista Banks for a while. Then I got an offer to work for the biggest mining, hardcore mining company in Czech Republic, which just went for an IPO in London, Warsaw and Prague stock exchange. It was very different assignment, I've never went through a financial PR before, but it wasn't only PR it was even internal communications. So I've been .... at that time about 30,000 employees obviously none of them on Internet connection. I've been going down the mine, one kilometre down the mine very often, like every second week I went down the mine. It was fantastic. I tend to fall in love with my job so I did fall in love with this one. I am a proper miner, I have the uniform. I went through the whole traditional stuff with the miners. I've been drinking a lot again, because they drink a lot.

It was a great experience because you know when you work on multiple levels, you work from the financial perspective in London and Amsterdam, but you are also responsible for the internal communication and you

actually deal with people working in a company, you have to find the balance because the investors they hate the word "employers" they just don't want to hear about it. They just look at the numbers and vice versa, the chief operations officers they are really dealing with people, fatalities, you know the hard-working environment. So to find the balance, to communicate properly when you talk to the market and to your own employees because they are the biggest communication channel for the whole region, for all the stakeholders. It was really very interesting.

From there, as I mentioned before, I started when I was pregnant and I left the company when I was pregnant again, so there's a bit of difference between my two girls. I thought I will have a bit of rest but I got an offer very quickly to work for McCann Erickson, the McCann worldwide advertising agency and they were about to set up a PR division and the sustainability as I was involved a lot in sustainability reporting before. One of my first client was a Newton Media Group, which Australians would know like equivalent of iSentia here, it's a media intelligence business. They've been in a very similar stage to contentgroup at that time, they've been just about to grow and expand. They expanded within two years, we've been in nine countries including UK. It was a very challenging business. I was one of the first management for Newton Group because the owners still the ... and really ... very ... very much in charge of everything and I think it was also for them it was new to have a management. So it was very interesting how you perceive somebody who founded its own business. Then you pass it somebody to actually drive it. It was interesting from my point of view and I think for them too.

I was really happy because it was mixture of everything I've done before. We've been working for government, it was a lot of about communication obviously me working in big corporate, in government and agencies, it meant I was the typical client of a media intelligence company. They've been a bit of consulting business as well and they've been a lot involved in measurement. So they've been measuring the effectiveness of communication. There is a lot of discussions about how to measure communications. Obviously marketers would have their return on investment thing and communication is not that easy. There is multiple methods developed these days within America, UK, whatever. But it's not something all the clients would understand and being involved. So it was great and I really loved it, I loved the people. There have been a lot of technology involved, we had to shift from clippings of the press towards the social, which is challenging. Then you have all the startups around coming with the tech platforms and stuff. Very interesting ...

David Pembroke: You ended up also on the board of AMEC as well didn't you?

Petra Masinova: Yes I did. Again, it was a bit like foreign affairs when I started with Newton they said, "You have to become a candidate for AMEC" and I had no idea what AMEC means. I had to post my candidature, I had to argue that I'm the right person but I've got it and I must say that only the first conference of AMEC actually made me understand what this is all about. It's definitely the platform I would recommend and what is excellent is that it's worldwide

organisation so the people from South America, Australia, you know central Europe are really committed to work properly on the matrix, which is excellent.

David Pembroke: Yeah. And they've done some ... interestingly they've introduced that online version as well where you're able to input and be able to online and out it spits the dashboard that you're looking for, which is ...

Petra Masinova: I've been still there when this started and I like definitely us in London to meet Richard Bango, he's one of the author at the moment. He's a President of AMEC. He's a fantastic very clever guy.

Then from there, we are back to the beginning. My husband got a offer to go to Australia, so I just called John Croll saying, "Look. I'm coming to Australia. Would you like me to join iSentia?" So I've been working for iSentia for more than six months. It was amazing experience. The most amazing was that it's actually so similar. I just ... the second day I just felt nothing has changed, only I'm in Australia. Obviously you have some culture differences but it's not that difficult. It was also good for me that I find out that I am actually able to join any business all over the world. I've been travelling a lot within iSentia to Asia. So I've been Hong Kong, and Singapore meeting a lot of global clients around the world. So it was really great. Then I saw a posting on LinkedIn done by David Pembroke saying, "Do you want to be part of something big?"

So I thought, "Yes, of course I want."

That was it. So here ...

David Pembroke: Right! So here you are. Here we are on a Monday morning having a conversation. What do you see as the big opportunities that are coming in terms of this ... I always return to this central challenge of how do we improve the effectiveness of government communications so they can strengthen communities and improve the wellbeing of citizens? This is the mission of contentgroup and I think that whenever we keep that at the heart of what we do, you can't go too far wrong because that's really what drives us on a daily basis around that mission. But when you hear that task and that challenge, given all of that experience that you have and that you bring to the table, what are some of the things that come to mind for you that are the opportunities and potential for government to improve the way they do things?

Petra Masinova: I think there's many answers to that. Definitely what makes communication difficult to governments, is that there is the politics involved and the messaging is changing quite often. It doesn't mean that the structure of messaging cannot remain the same and again, the education should go ahead of whatever communication which goes. I think there's many things. The first one would be the challenge of the communication channels because as you mentioned in the beginning, the world has suddenly changed from publishers being just the one head communication to the audience and suddenly the audience has started to publish and the

publishers have to follow, which I think is a fantastic challenge for the government. It's a real challenge because it's not easy to do so. I think they are getting it step by step and trying to understand how to use the social networks to communicate to people and what is important what the messaging should be, etc. That's one challenge. The second is that to use the proper language and simplicity as mentioned as well. Sometimes the government people are too much within themselves. So they don't perceive the rest of the world in a right way.

David Pembroke: Yeah well they presume everyone understands what they understand.

Petra Masinova: Exactly.

David Pembroke: And I know this often ... I was in a meeting not that long ago, and I won't mention which particular government department it was in, but it was quite comical. There was a discussion going on and there was acronym after acronym after ... and people conversing in acronyms and I had no idea what they were talking about. At some point, I had to pull them up and say, "Well sorry but I've got no idea what you're talking about." It wasn't deliberate and it wasn't in any other way other than they weren't considering the audience, which was me. They were trying to explain something to me but then they didn't realise ... they didn't think about it from my point of view. They just thought about it from what they wanted to tell me.

Petra Masinova: Exactly and it's from the point of content and it's also from the point of the interest because sometimes the government people will think that obviously they are involved so they are interested and the audience is also interested. But sometimes, the topics are completely not interesting to them and won't play any specific role into the citizen's life unless the content is presenting in a way that they get the interest. So to raise the interest about certain things, I think it's a real challenge.

David Pembroke: It is. And also the other thing I think people, particularly in government, need to get their head around is the fact that, as you mentioned before, the preponderance of new channels and choices and people can apply their time and attention to an infinite number of areas of particular interest to them. Why would they listen to you? Why government are they interested in what you've got to say? It's a challenge I think, or an opportunity I think more so, to get government to understand that they do need to sit in the shoes of ... walk in the shoes of the people who they're talking to to really get that.

We're seeing much more of that, you know design and co-design and design thinking in a pickier description around is popular. People are now starting to understand that they do need to do this citizen-centric stuff. So I think that's a big opportunity I think from a content point of view, that a lot of that discovery is going to be taking place ... is taking place and then there's the opportunities to say, "Okay well if they're the insights, what do we now need to do in terms of crafting a story that is going to capture that attention, drive the education and then help them to understand how they may participate or not participate."

Petra Masinova: Exactly. When you look around the world what is happening, you know the challenges are amazing. It's not only domestic issues which for politicians would be always the most important because the domestic politics would always influence the communication or whatever big topic. But it's everything what is happening these days to be able to communicate it properly, not to mislead people, not to .... you know simplicity is a very interesting part of communication but it's not always simple to actually explain simple. So I think there is a lot of challenges and from the contentgroup point of view, I think it's great that the models contentgroup is working on, are the models applicable to all governments? It's nothing local. It's really something all the governments are needing.

You know from the European perspective, one of the latest example would be the migration politics of German government. The latest statement of Mrs. Merkel was, "I'm still behind my decision. Whatever it took my political points I'm still behind it." It's such a shame it wasn't communicated properly from the beginning. You know they just missed the chance and the thing with the government is, if you miss the chance there is no way back. Whatever you say the second day, it's over.

I think you know ... I mean we don't need to talk about U.S. these days, it's getting really interesting, but there is a lot of challenges and I think the government in here so far ... I met few people ... I think they are very interested. They know more and more they should consider communication as one of the most important part of it. They should be good in measuring their efforts, I think not being afraid because sometimes you measure, the results are no good and then you don't know what to do with it. It's something also which ...

David Pembroke: But that takes courage doesn't it? You know where people have to sit in front of a ... in Australia it would be a Senate Estimates Committee and people to be able to say, "We invested X amount of money and the results didn't work."

Everyone says, "Test and learn. Permission to fail."

But I had a conversation with someone not that long ago, they said, "It's great. You can have permission to fail until you fail and then when you fail everyone gets nervous."

But then again, I would agree with you that there is that commitment from senior levels of government in Australia at a municipal level, at a state level and a federal level and bipartisanship as well. I think they all understand that these changing worlds requires experimentation and they have to be able to give the people who work for them that permission to experiment because if they don't, they're not going to be effective.

Petra Masinova: I think it's a bit like with the miners, the employees of the public service are suddenly becoming one of the biggest publishers of the government's effort. So you shouldn't forget that you have a lot of public servants who are

around talking to someone people about how things are developed and what are the plans, etc. It's something to get involved as well.

David Pembroke: It's one of my greatest frustrations also, in that there is obviously contestability around maybe 5% of what goes on, but there's the 95% where government is actually a force for good. There is so much being done that is positive, that is locked up inside government because they are communicating inefficiently and ineffectively. I think that's our task really, from our point of view is to give them the skills, give them the knowledge, give them the confidence and give them the frameworks where they can do it for themselves. This isn't about us coming in and doing it for them. We have to build that capability in these organisations so as they can better serve their political masters because that is the task.

Well listen Petra, this will be the first of a few conversations no doubt. Welcome to contentgroup, I think it's going to be a ... yeah, we're sort of sitting on the edge of a pretty large opportunity. We get to go to Bali in September to present to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, our research project with the ANU. ASEAN [inaudible 00:29:15] they're looking for ways to better communicate, you know what is this bloc? Who are we what do we stand for? What do we want the world to know? We submitted our research project and they said, "That sounds good. That sounds something interesting for us." So, that's a huge opportunity.

I was in Singapore last week, you're familiar with the opportunities in Singapore. Then later in the year we'll be heading over to the UK to continue our conversations with our good friends in that part of the world as well to try to get them to see the way we're seeing it I suppose and to bring this evidence-based model towards governments over there because I think if we can improve the capability of government ... and I know we can, it's there to happen. There are so many smart people working in government and we're not splitting the atom here. This is the other thing someone said to me the other day when I presented the model.

He said, "Well that's not very complicated."

And I said, "Well no. That's the point."

The point is that it's not very complicated but it's just a slightly different way about how we can make the most of this gift of technology to be able to direct.

Petra Masinova: Absolutely. I think in Asia, particularly, I think they would be really very interested. I think they are still struggling with the communication from the public service because the culture is so different, the politics is so different. It's very differently perceived by the citizens to [inaudible 00:30:46] comparing to old democratic system. Exactly to gain the trust ... I mean to become an influencer as a government, it's very difficult because who really trusts in government? How much people are engaged you know when you look at Indonesia or Thailand, Malaysia? The systems are changing and I'm sure they will be very interested. Actually I think even Chinese government

might be very interested because I think China is really suffering from the point of view how they communicate to the people. In Asia, it's more about education. I think Europe, U.S. would be more about really bringing innovation to the communication systems, but Asia is very much about education I think they will be amazingly interested.

David Pembroke: We better get to work. There's a lot to do. So thanks very much Petra for joining me today.

Petra Masinova: Thanks for having me.

David Pembroke: Thank you very much audience for turning up once again. We really do appreciate the fact that you turn up each week to have a listen. About this particular task, and it's a very narrow, very niche sort of audience but I know that there's many of you out there who enjoy this particular challenge because it does sit with a great purpose underneath it all. Thank you very much for joining us again this week and for now, we'll be back at the same time next week. But for the moment, it's bye for now.