David: Welcome ladies and gentlemen wherever you may be listening around the world and thanks for joining me InTransition. The podcast dedicated to the practice of content marketing in government. My name is David Pembroke and I'm delighted that you've joined me again today as we explore how governments are using content marketing to strengthen communities and improve the well-being of the citizens.

Now as is our practice as you know, those of you who'd listened before we like to start with the definition of content marketing in government and it is. Content marketing is a strategic and measurable business process that relies on the curation, creation and distribution of valuable relevant and consistent content to engage and inform a clearly defined audience with the objective of driving a desired citizen or stakeholder action.

Our guest today is Mr. Joe Gollner who is known as the content philosopher. He joins me now, Joe thanks for bringing InTransition.

Joe: Well thank you David, thank you for having me.

David: Listen, before we dive in to the discussion rather than me tell the Joe Gollner story as to how you got to where you are today perhaps if you could just give us a part of history of that Joe Gollner story.

Joe: Okay. We just mentioned about content strategy is the nerdy first cousin of content marketing and within that extended family I'm probably among the most nerdy of those. So I do often say that I do take a particular interest in looking at the what we call "the technical nature of content" and why I do so is that I'm very interested in how we can improve how content is handled, how we create it, how we manage it, how we leverage it. And it's basically been the center piece of my professional career for over 25 years.

I'm fascinated by the ways that we cannot only protect the unique qualities of content but we can actually use technology to amplify them and help them get to more places and be that much more compelling and useful.

If we dial all the way back to the mid 1980's, as I described myself on occasion as being seriously in to content or starting my life as swimming in content, I

was for a period a reader at the Bodleian Library in Oxford and therefore literally sitting in the restricted section in Hogwarts with all the old tombs.

At the same time immediately after I was in the Canadian military where I was surrounded by mountains of different types of content, the technical content. Somewhere between these two experiences I became fascinated with what was common between a large book of drama or poetry and a massive set of technical specifications.

Since 1991, I've had effectively 4 successive businesses that are offspring of each other and the most recent one is called Gnostyx Research and many of my team members have been with me for a very long time. We work on putting in place the technical infrastructure that lets organizations do a good job of their content and to reap the rewards.

David: Now what are the building blocks of that infrastructure and approach that you take in terms of developing the appropriate content strategy?

Joe: Yes it's interesting. It's like a gelato or a delicious dessert. It's got some layers to it. At the very top level we have a what we call and recognize as constant strategy where we focus in on what content is really going to be best in fulfilling certain business objectives. This is really the plug or the interface with content marketing.

The layers below that, the first layer down we look at what's the process, what are the life cycle stages that we really are interested in facilitating. I run through them as content acquisition which basically boils down to how do we get our greedy little hands on the content the we need. Sometimes we license it. Sometimes we sit down and write it. Sometimes we convert it from something that we had before that had forgotten about. We also have then to look at how do we deliver it. How do we actually bring it in to the hands or get it to the eyes or the ears of the people that we want to share with and that's content delivery? How do we act on that.

Also in that life cycle we have an activity called content engagement. I think that plugs in nicely to your intro where it's a top tier building block and activity in my life cycle model is content engagement. How do we get audiences actively involved in not just using it and understanding how the content is being used but perhaps contributing providing us feedback, providing supplements to really become engaged and committed.

Then there is the fourth of the main activity areas which I call content management and that is putting the management infrastructure in place to facilitate all of these things and to make sure we don't lose anything. That's the life cycle layer. That's a centerpiece of all of our projects.

You may take delight or dread in the knowledge that life cycle model stretches in its structure all the way back to Hippocrates and the ancient Greeks. It's actually very closely modeled on the four humors and the four elements of the sublunary world of the earth. But in a more modern way it also aligns very neatly with say agile methods.

If we go to the next level down which is where a lot of our business in Gnostyx is, we then look at specifically what is the type of authoring environment we want to equip people with who are charged with creating the next generation of content that is going to be simultaneously and automatically delivered as a podcast, as an ePub, as a part of a content interaction within a mobile app wherever it needs to go and whatever format it needs to go.

One of the reasons I got interested in this field, where the capability to have a single source and from that to generate things like a Braille edition to make sure that we were being genuinely accessible which of course is a central interest in rightly so of governments everywhere.

So we did look at say under content acquisition, what kind of tools can we equip and this is a very interesting area. It is like how do you actually provide an engaging interesting work environment for people who create content when that content's gonna have to be many things, in many places and for many different uses. It's a quite a different challenge than sitting down with InDesign or Microsoft Word and composing in what used to be thought of as "what you see is, what you get" when we have multiple channels where we need a different type of environment.

Likewise on the delivery side we have a great attention applied to automation. That way we try to basically automate everything we get our hands on and what we can't automate we try to facilitate creatives getting involved to make it just perfect.

David: Now I'm very interested to actually get to that discussion around the technology and marketing automation but I'm also interested just to perhaps for you to reflect on the real changes that we're saying now that you know this ability to be a publisher and that you've been here at this game now for

25 years. Just where would you say the maturity and the ability of organizations particularly government organizations that you've worked for to be able to take advantage of the sorts of methodologies that you've outlined but to take advantage of that ability that they now have to be a publisher and to be able to go direct.

Joe: Yeah I do a fair bit of work with the Canadian Governmen. It's an interesting set of examples or projects there because on one level there's a massive drive as there has been in the UK that I'm quite aware of and perhaps may as well be in Australia but basically to revamp the sort of online presence and to really rethink how communications are undertaken with years of accrued materials and years of accrued practices are becoming very top heavy. There is a great deal of energy and tossing off the accumulated materials and getting back to basics.

Certainly with my projects with the Canadian government, there is a great deal of excitement about what we can now do. In particular, back to everyone is a publisher now, one of the immediate and probably most interesting outcomes of that, is that everybody is a publisher and then they look around and say, "You know, if everyone is a publisher, I can create networks of publishers, of collaborators who in fact may cross many government boundaries, may be straddling all jurisdictional lines and for the purposes of what the citizen is interested in. We can actually put a much more coherent and integrated story together than we could individually as a local and isolated individual publishers.

So to be honest, my most exciting projects are ones where the individual ability where everyone can be a publisher has actually suddenly found their kindred spirits and said, "We can do this and we can actually paper over in effect these great chasms of jurisdictional boundaries and get to an integrated experience for the citizens."

I'll use one example, for several years we've been working with the Canadian Department of Agriculture. And of course Canada is like Australia, a federation. We have provincial governments who have their own ministries of agriculture. And then you can drill down and eventually you can have suitable local districts and you can have all sorts of layers in the government hierarchy.

But there is one farmer, and that farmer is battling pests or wants to expand their operations. They want to know what requirements will fall upon them

from some level of government and what services are available to them. They really like to see that as an integrated picture.

So what we did is that we worked on a project where we knew people from the province of Manitoba and the province of Nova Scotia and the Canadian Federal Government could pool individually published content and basically provide an integrated experience.

As soon as we did that, then they started syncing, almost like heart cells starting to synchronize their beating that they realize we have to synchronize many of our content practices because the feedback we are getting through usability tests from public feedback on the AGPAL portal is stirring us resolutely towards aligning our language and story.

It was explosively, almost frighteningly effective. Before long, literally within a matter of months, our project went from being a small, sleepy, undertaking both technically and from a communications perspective to being the talk of the Parliament of Canada. Suddenly we were turning up all the reports that you want to be turned.

So there is one speech from the throne, when your project is mentioned glowingly in the speech from the throne, it is generally a very good place to be and there are other reports you want to avoid but that's one you desperately want to be in.

Lo and behold, that's where we found ourselves and that was without us being particularly clever at promoting the project. It was the farmer community was so vocal in their support and so relieved that being able to go to one place and very quickly find everything that applied to them in a way that was completely understandable. It had literally been made in plain language, a very clear taxonomy based on what farmers do as opposed to what governments do. The effect was absolutely shocking, but in a positive way.

David: How did you overcome at the very early stages of that project the territorial nature of municipal governments, state government, federal government, "This is our responsibility. Sorry we don't need you." those traditional boundaries that people throw up between each other?

Joe:	Excellent! I have ran into this. I have worked in very similar projects over the last fifteen years in health care and depending on which of those areas of business you are in the jurisdictional sensitivities are even sharper.

Healthcare for example or Education once very challenging. But in these cases, at the end of the day because it actually didn't entail any business change, there was actually no change in the jurisdiction. It was just that, let's help people find everything, so we told provinces and other agencies, "this is just a good way to be found, so if you have any form of search engine optimization interest or activity, this is one good way to be found because there will be other agency, namely the Federal Government promoting this as one stop shop."

Even our most politically isolationist province, Quebec, agriculture is a huge part of the Quebec economy and they came to the table and they only spoke French with us but they were very interested and after a while they realized this is no threat and this would actually be a disservice to our own farmers to not make our material and everything else easily available. So they signed on which of course was one of the reasons we got such high visibility because that was almost unprecedented.

So it was one were work was done to show that there really was no any surrender that it was genuinely about what can we martial for the benefit of the citizen wherever they are.

Another little story when we were in Nova Scotia and we showed and used usability testing quite relentlessly and ruthlessly on this project to determine what was actually working. We eventually refined the discovery experience to be extraordinarily successful by the judgment of my colleagues and the usability testing business when people are scoring in the high 90s on task completion, then you are close to perfection. But when they left our site and actually start to interact with some materials from the province of Nova Scotia, the jarring change in language from natural language and citizen-centred to government speak was all more shocking and encouraged farmers into more colourful language.

To this day, I will never forget the minister from the province of Nova Scotia, hearing us play some of the feedback because we recorded this usability, particularly farmers exploding with anger and played them for this minister and he started to change colour, he started to literally look-grey because he

was physically mortified. And at the end he just said, "Is our content really that bad?" And they said, "Yes it is". The part I really enjoyed was when he said, "We're going to fix this starting today."

David: What are the elements that have to be in place to really get a broader take-up of the practice of content strategy and its relationship with content marketing?

Joe: I do see that there is a broad trend of foot. I just think it is a very good one and these examples I have been using from the Canadian government are assymptomatic that on one hand there is a need, faced by almost all the organizations to become much more efficient whether in the debt levels or other financial constraints for making them highly sensitized.

And this leads us to things like needing to look at an integrated service. The best way to achieve that seems to be almost without fail to jump over onto the user, the costumer, the citizen side and say, "What are the things genuinely most important? What is the best way to organize things to service that?"

I can go more deeply into this where I see the content real play here is what is most effective is genuine stories, genuine content, genuine resources that people find are useful given key tasks. That means making a much deeper connection between an organization and its constituency, it's reason for being.

I'm seeing that on the technical side of organizations whether it's Boeing or Slumber J, leading edge companies around the world where they say, "We do very sophisticated things. But in addition to trying to keep up with the pace of technical innovation about these systems we actually have to know more and more about our users, our customers, the communities in which we work." This seems to feed straight into an interest in content marketing and building as you said at the outset a more vital, more vibrant relationships with an engaged audience.

I find this a fascinating trend and I sort of watched it over the years with some of my large industrial customers. We talk a lot about making the customers the product manager. How do we equip customers with all of the information and all of knowledge so that they can tell stories to us about what they need to do? That becomes the songsheet by which we lead our research and development activities. That is a fascinating change of dynamics. It also means

that on the technical side on how systems are built we need to be fundamentally more agile because suddenly now we are expected to deliver software or physical systems, airplanes or what not that are highly customized to communities of customers. That is the front right now in the competitive landscape for business. I find for those financial reasons I touched on governments to be honest are even greater pressure to get on that bandwagon.

David: In terms of that, it is step change in a way that they traditionally go about their business of communication. Obviously, there's a need for new skills, new capability in order for them to be able to implement such an approach. What sort of advice do you have for people in government as to how they can best prepare to take advantage of a methodology such as the one you've outlined?

Joe: That's a good question. There's a couple. One is recognizing that there is a genuine need for change. No matter what the new communication business involves more cross jurisdictional collaboration. It comes with a lot of changes. And a lot of organizations depending on their culture, this is close to terrifying. There are changes there.

There's also this aspect of there is a different set of tools. It is inescapably a more technical environment. That this communication activity suddenly has this mandate to approach this communication tasks with a technical sophistication that make sure that it's going to be findable. That it's going to be something that they can repurposed and redeployed in different ways.

As one example we had with this former project, we had a Director General, a relatively senior executive within the department who simply refused to come to any of our meetings because we used words like meta data, taxonomy. It was enough to keep this lady out of the room. Because she was a specialist in the business, basically a farm insurance. She was really on the business side. She said, "No no I'm not. I can't come."

While we were at the stage in the project where we're doing what I call information prototyping, doing lightweight prototyping with the type of information experiences that could be produced with this new type of content, she came bursting into the room and immediately went to the screen to start basically querrying and quibbling with individual terms and their usage and placement. It proved to us in such a compelling way that the technical jargon was just that. That in fact we could present what we we're doing in

ways that was successful and that wasn't unsalvageably nerdy. We could make this very tangible.

As a specialist in her field, once we are in this information prototyping stage, she could really engage with and understand where it was we were trying to go. That's certainly one of them.

There's probably a long list of others. I guess my last one which I spent a lot of time on. I had the executive levels in the Canadian government. One of the things I tell them is that, "We have some very good news. There is over 30 years of experience in bringing some of the new technologies and new publishing techniques to bear on our content. We don't have to struggle through all the problems. We have solved all the problems often several times before." It is an invocation that I tell them that, "We need to leverage the current best practices and the state of the art because it works very very well. All of the battle scars have been earned."

Again I'll use the Canadian Government as an example but this time so that as a whipping boy because we have huge initiatives underway called the web renewal. It is basically a complete revamp of the federal government's online presence. Among the things they work hard on is accessibility, compliance with the applicable web accessibility standards. To say that they're struggling would be the biggest understatement.

I give them a hard time and I do not pull any punches when I'm talking with the CIO. I said, "You know one of the reasons you're struggling is that you have done your online presence or online services wrong for so long. And the way you're approaching it now is equally wrong. If we really tap into the lessons that have been learned about content technologies the answer is very simple and the path to easy and sustainable success story is very clear why you insist on not doing." You can tell that makes me very popular.

David: Yeah I imagine. I'm interested in your take also around that because where I come at content marketing is obviously the background around that marketing communications storytelling side of things. It's not the technical side of things. I'd be interested in your view around this closer collaboration or this inevitable collaboration between the chief marketing officer and chief information officer. How that can most effectively be handled in your view?

Joe: Interestingly I do find that in most organizations and it's true in government environments. It's even more strikingly true in the commercial sector where

for example the chief marketing officer has a large and rapidly growing technology budget and very often is intentionally kept separate from that of the chief information officer and the information technologygroup.

This worries me because it sort of creating a new stove pipe in not too long we will have to wrestle with. I sadly often see under performance in the area of collaboration. What I find most interesting is the prospect of having a new type of storytelling that emerges the organically and genuinely from the organization, knowing that that's going to fly fast and be the most supportable and most durable. And any reactions and any sort of engagement that comes from it will be actually the most useful. So on some of these projects like the farmer one, I could see forming before my eyes a genuine discussion and interaction between ministries and farmers. You see this is gold.

David: Obviously it seems to me that came from the recognition of the promisee of the audience, of the needs of the audience and the acceptance that that was the starting point, that had to be the starting point for everything that followed.

Joe: Absolutely. What technology we put in place tend to be very open standards-based, really very low cost. So we were able to move outside of the CIOs purview. We were supporting the business side and they collaborated with marketing side, the COM side. In fact we tried to play nice and involve the information-technology group and went to great lengths to do so. But by their own admission, even that stands in their credit. They said, "We really don't have the resources or the expertise to support you in leveraging the latest in content technologies and publishing technologies to support this kind of citizen centric view."

It was one where they intentionally and by their own intention exempted themselves from the project. I do see that in a great deal. But it is concerning because ultimately the CIO, the information technology group should be able to be a constructive and active partner with the chief marketing officer or with the different lines of business.

One of the things I find most interesting about content as an artifact or as for the phenomenon is that it is something by its nature integrates things. It brings details from different parts of a business unit together to say this is what the system is trying to do. They don't know or care what your internal

language or your organizational boundaries, how do we intergrate. It is the one thing that content really lets us do.

I was talking with a firm in the UK this morning about it. They said, "Content is special and unique artifact. It is something that integrates data structures often from many different places with rhetorical patterns that give it meaning and the convincing power. As a consequence as a technical artifact is a very difficult thing in some ways to manage. It's a complex artifact. Our challenge as content technologists is how do we do a good job. How do we not break the mold? How do we not impose restrictions on the content so it can be exactly as it needs to be?

Even in technical environments when we look at things like large military systems, we found if we swung around and looked at it in the perspective of a technician who's trying to fix this thing, we reorganized all of the information around an airplane for example around those perspectives and suddenly and sometimes surprisingly we found new and better ways to manage those systems and manage the equipment. By that shift of perspective, it is a great opportunity for organizations to reinvent themselves. As we know many of the organizations are long overdue for this.

David: If all of this wasn't complicated and difficult enough, I logged on to see the most recent piece of work by Scott Brinker, the chief marketing technologist. I think it's chiefmartec.com. We'll put it in the show notes as a link. But the most recent map of content technology vendors. Apparently it is now doubled inside the last 9 to 12 months. What is your take on that, on this explosion of technologies that are now available in each of the crevices of the content strategy and content marketing process?

Joe: Yes we've been through several revolutions in the content business. With each one we've had a snowstorm of options suddenly turn up. In general we welcome it every time. We are hopeful that organizations keep a content and citizen first mentality. Therefore look at all of these options as things that they can draw upon, use and when their superseded by something better they can quickly move to it.

Some of my customers about their continual habit of being application centric that they will buy a particular tool chain maybe the Adobe suite or whatever it is and they will move into it and they will break it in like a pair of slippers Then in five years be complaining about how they can't do this or they can't extend

it that way. Even the prospect of trying to move out of a particular tool set, is and this is where exactly the Canadian government is today they have all sorts of commercial content management tools that they have for their web infrastructure. They have digged in so deeply that it is an undertaking of literally mindnumbing scale to get out of them let alone to get anything new.

If we use the word content correctly from the technical perspective and keep this content centric view, content oriented view of things and in particular content as for the citizen or for the audience, we can actually protect ourselves. We can actually design things so that the content comes first and stays first and that the different technologies come in and out basically to do what we want them to do. Like a chocolate bar or something when we're done with them we toss it in the bin and we move on to something else.

We've always looked at how we can deploy content technologies in particular the root standards, extensible markup language (XML) or HTML5 and how to deploy it in such a way that is genuinely technology independent. This so we can exploit every new tool. So next year when the latest analytics tool comes out, integrating it with our content libraries is easy peasy as opposed to the skies falling how will we ever afford for this change.

David: So as you said here, I might have taken a bit more of your time you have been so generous I really appreciate that and I know the audience certainly would appreciate your insights. Just as a looking forward what do you see over the next 12 to 18 months, 24 months as the changes that we're going to continue to see. As the internet of things start to take hold whether it's 50 billion devices whether it's 200 billion devices connected to the internet, broadband starting to change and continuing to change people's behavior.

           We are at galloping speed probably beyond galloping speed the change that's taking place at the moment, where do you see the opportunities and if you were a chief marketing officer or chief information officer at the moment listening to this you're thinking, "Yeah I do want to do this but this is the context that I'm in." What are the few simple things over the next 12 to 24 months that I can do to make some progress?

Joe: I think back to your introductory remarks and the point you just brought up about about putting the audience, putting the citizen at the center and almost like rethinking activities, communication activities from that perspective. In all this I do hold up the UK government as a shining example of almost a

bewildering willingness to sort of turn down off the political marketing that seem to overwhelm all government sites. Actually go at it from, what are the 10 things that people really need to do and will start there.

David: And it's incredible to see the costs that they've been able to pull out of their communications budget. Mindnumbing how big they are.

Joe: Oh absolutely and I did I work on the Canadian governments business case for doing their complete revamp. My estimates ran to billions of dollars being saved. A lot of it not expenditures that directly result in better content going to the right people. In fact it was a lot of busy work patching over and fixing and converting and re-converting.

A lot of things you do really don't need to be done if we approach this correctly. Then you go back to what happens if we are developing with the proper strategy in place, developing key content that's going to be impactful both internally and externally that builds these kind of connections.

I go to UK a lot. If I were a citizen there I would be delighted to interact with some parts of their online information experience simply because it is so clearly stripped down to just the facts and things that are genuinely interesting and useful. It is something that can be done and like that minister in Nova Scotia who just said we have to start today to improve our content. They actually did. They started with the results of our usability tests. They started saying, "Okay here's our schedule for editing and the new writing guidelines. Let's get to work." There was no disguise that it was work but they had seen proof positive of the kind of beneficial impact good content can have.

David: I think we may wrap it up there. I think we can go on talking for quite some time because I think it's an area of great interest. I think it's an area not only of great challenge but great opportunity. And Joe thank you very much for joining us today on InTransition. Thank you very much for your insights, just before you go if you could tell us where people might be able to get hold of you and have a look at some of your other work and other writings.

Joe: Sure thank you. Joe Gollner, it's a relatively uncommon name although there are some Gollners in Australia I like to point out. Basically Joe Gollner or @joegollner is my Twitter handle. If you go to Gollner.ca you'll find my blog and I blog as the content philosopher so you can take that as a warning.

The business Gnostyx is really Gnostyx.com which is undergoing a substantive revamp as we speak. But certainly my blog and I do post a variety of white papers and there are links from there to my Slideshare. I am well known for a large and quite ugly but hopefully informative diagrams throughout my Slideshare.

David: Excellent. I can hear the audience scrambling already to jump online and take in more of the wisdom and content of Joe Gollner. Joe thank you very much for joining us. What enormous value in this area of content strategy and intelligent content and adaptable content, agile content whatever it is the language you use to describe it. This is going to be critically important for people working on major content projects for government. So we all have to get our heads into this space, understanding the governance around your content assets into the organization and through the organization will be a real priority for those of us who work in government.

I know you've got a lot of value from our discussion with Joe. I would encourage you to connect with Joe and follow him on his blog because there are so much useful information and insight as we all learn more about content strategy in government.

It would be great if you could quickly pop over to iTunes or Stitcher to leave a review. Everyone of those helps us to get the message out. Thanks again for being part of our project which is really starting to build a global community of government communicators who are pursuing the practice of content marketing as we all seek to build stronger communities and improve the well-being of citizens wherever you may be in the world. Thanks again for joining me. Look forward to speaking to you again next week.