
InTransition Episode 11 - Jason Miller

David Pembroke: Hello ladies and gentlemen wherever you might be listening to this podcast around the world, welcome to InTransition, the program that examines the practice of content marketing in government.

My name is David Pembroke, this is episode 11 and it will be cracker. I promised you the biggest names and the best minds in content marketing from around the world and today we deliver again.

Jason Miller, the senior manager for content marketing at LinkedIn is our guest. That rights, Jason Miller. And if any of you don't know Jason or haven't seen him speak, prepare to be entertained. Many of you will know that I pack up the caravan each September and fly to Cleveland to attend Content Marketing World, the annual jamboree for content marketers.

And as soon for the speaking schedule for the big event comes out, I always mark Jason's presentation because not only is it informative, not only do you take away a number of practical steps but you're also guaranteed plenty of laughs.

By the way, everyone just a bit of advice if you are looking to learn more about content marketing and to get to know the people in our community, you really should head to Cleveland in September. The dates of the event starts around the 7th of September and it is a must not miss event.

So enough the plugs for Joe Pulitzi and the team at CMA and let's get on with the show. And as is our practice each week we do start with the definition of content marketing in government and it is an adaption of the Content Marketing Institute's definition.

"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 the desired citizen or stake holder action."

As you can see, this is directly applicable to the work of people who are working in government communication. As the world changes, there is no question that we must adapt and change the way we connect with citizens. Now our guest as I promised is Jason Miller, he joins me on the line. Jason, welcome to InTransition.

Jason Miller: Excellent, thank you so much for having me David. I am happy to be here.

David: Jason just for the audience to get to know you a little bit just give us a bit of the backstory of Jason Miller.

Jason: Sure, it's interesting how I got to where I am at today. I started in the world of – I started at Sony music entertainment doing artist developments. We take baby

bands and make them into superstars but it worked here and there, not all the time of course.

I have a background on B2C and with the music industry was kind of in shambles around 2009, I decided it was time for me to get out. They were just very behind in a lot of tactics and they weren't fighting digital for a very long time so I decided to move in to world tech marketing and reinvent myself a little bit.

I spent two years at Marketo running global content and social there. And then, LinkedIn called and told me about this push they're doing for content and made me an offer I can't refuse so I've been here almost two years now and I'm never been happier.

David: In terms of the changes that you've seen just probably in the last couple of years and we can get to talking specifically about what LinkedIn are doing in their content marketing space, but what are the big changes that you're seeing at the moment in content marketing?

Jason: The biggest change that I'm seen is it used to be just producing a bunch of content, put it out there and see what sticks. That's how the record labels were dealing with artists back in the 90's and it ended up being a disaster. They will just sign all these bands and throw them in the wall and whoever stuck they would ride along with. I think content marketing was getting in to that as well.

In order to rank, in order to make a difference you have to make a ton of content. I think the big shift now is to create – I would say focus on creating not more content but more relevant content. Cut into the real core of what's important with your customers and prospects and handling from marketing process are great, to empathize with you customers.

Your job as a content marketer is to be the best answer. It's the search engine's job to deliver the most relevant answer to a search topic's question. And you're job as content marketer is to be that best answer and be better than anybody else and not a lot of fluff.

And again I think the search engines have killed off these content farms because they were keyword stuff and they were diluting the good results. You don't have to create 50 blogs a day to make a difference now. You just need to create something that is very relevant and very specific to your audience and then go promote it.

David: We'll get to that question of distributions as well because I think that is very important. But what advice do you have for people in terms of them trying to achieve content that is the best answer? What are some of the techniques that you use to be able to find that insight that allows them to create the content that's going to connect with their particular audience?

Jason: That's a great question. I think in this day and age with all the data's available to use a marketer, the question of whether or not I should create a piece of content is

clearly out there right. Some light keyword research discovering the keywords that are most important to your brand or business and then some social listening around.

Find out other people talking about these topics. Are there questions that are going unanswered? Are there questions that are being answered but it's not being answered very well? Does your business saw problems that these folks don't even know they have yet?

You have to lay down the foundation and again this is not more content but more relevant content. How can you really put yourself in their shoes and get to the core what content marketing is really all about and that's about helping instead of selling.

David: And in terms of that helping and really understanding the audience, how long does it generally take for people to really get that clear understanding of the needs of their audience and the problems that they have?

Jason: I think it should be an ongoing thing but it's as easy as jumping into LinkedIn or Twitter and finding these real time conversations.

Some of the most successful contents that I've found is that – I market to marketer so people say I have unique case but it works universally. If I have problem and I solve it and write about it, that's the best kind of content that's out there because it's a real world problem that you're documenting. You're writing very conversational and then you're going to put it out there. As one marketer to another or it's one problem solved by person who has that problem, giving their answer to the rest of the world.

David: How do you then make judgments about the type of media that you should use to communicate with that audience be it a blog post, video, podcast, or some graphics. How do you make those judgments?

Jason: I think it's important to figure out where your audience is and what type of content they're consuming. I talk a lot about this concept about the big rock which is a very big substantial piece of content. Like the sophisticated marketers got LinkedIn or the definitive guides to marketing that we did in Marketo.

Then, you have to make sure that this piece of content that you slice and dice to smaller pieces or what-not but you have to make sure that you have each piece of content optimized for your consumers choose to consume that. Because the consumers are in control, we know that.

They're searching on topics. They're doing their own research before they're ready to talk to your sales people. It's important to be on Slides Share and have an audio podcast like we're on today, a webinar, video, e-book that is optimized for Kindle.

I think you should be everywhere. I call it the 'bad out of hell' approach. For those who are about to create content fire cannons like ACDC would say. And the point is

be everywhere, launch your content like a product. Be everywhere and then once you've figured out where it's really taken off, then you invest and scale.

David: That comes to that distribution piece. Getting it out there, getting it seen, getting it understood, it sounds to me like that's going to take a whole lot of time to try to do that. Is it a time consuming exercise?

Jason: I think if you have a hundred pieces of content you're trying to do it for, yes it can be incredibly challenging. But if you have one core piece of content that you can repurpose into several other pieces like one giant e-book and then turn it into a video or webinar, a couple of blog posts, etcetera.

These are like the little tentacles that all lead back to that Big Rock piece of content, that major piece of content. And I think it's really a thunder approach. How much value can you get out of one piece of content?

I see so many content marketers produce something really great and they launch it and then they give up way too quickly. You've got to ask yourself, "What is the audience out there? How big is that audience and what are the tools that are available to us through social advertising, native advertising?" Those are the questions. And then compare it.

Have you gotten the most out of every piece of content you have? Have you – I don't want to say strangled because that sounds so morbid – but have you squeezed all the juice out of that piece of content before you're giving up or moving to something else?

David: That's really an interesting point because I think people do publish and move on and create blog post and then move on to the next thing without really taking best value, I suppose, of the archives that they tend to create. Is there some risk though that people will think that you've squeezed it a little too hard sometimes that you are not creating enough new and interesting content that is giving more insights to people?

Jason: I think there is a two prone approach to this. Doug Kessler from the Velocity Group has this he calls 'one homerun per quarter'. The homerun per quarter is your Big Rock, this big substantial piece of content you invest in and then you chop it up into smaller pieces.

But all along the way, I call blogging the social media advertiser together. It's the mother ship. It is where all this stuff going to launch from. You can't confuse your blog with your resource centre. Your resource centre is your library, an index or your library but your blog is where you tell your story. It's got dates; it's a flowing narrative of your story.

I think you need to invest in that big rock and have that substantial piece of content you're repurposing throughout that quarter and then underneath that as the foundation have your blog as your day to day story. You don't have to blog every

single day. If you can, that's great but you blog when you have something to say. You blog when you have something you want to get out there. I think the two works together seamlessly and that's the core of the strategy.

Again it doesn't take tremendous amount of time or effort. I think you're not focused on those two complimenting one another, then you can get in trouble and then you get in over your head; you've got too many things going on.

David: I really do like this idea of the big rock, this notion of a big substantial central piece of content that really carries the white of the story particularly as our audience is in government communicators. And if they're announcing a particular policy program or a change to a service or they want to update something, they are generally quite substantial big pieces of work that need to sit there and it does take time to connect with citizens and to connect with stakeholders to explain what sometimes are quite complex insights that they need to get through and that they need to distribute to people. I think that this notion of the big rock is very useful for government communicators.

What are the tips would you have then if a government communicator has produced a really good solid piece of work and they've got it all chopped up into its different places and they have thought through how they're going to distribute it out of the next three months perhaps. This notion of distribution, how then should they go about trying to make sure that it finds its way to the right sort of audiences?

Jason: I think to take a quick step back and talk about the creation of the big rock, when you're creating this thing like, what I found there's this kind of trend of thinking like a publisher and that can only get you so far. If you can move to actually publish in like a publisher and think of what conversations you want to own and then when you're creating your big rock and this applies to the government as well.

How can you write this big rock piece of content that's a quick read? It should be a quick read. It shouldn't be super tech savvy. It should have lots of graphics and pull on some charts or some rich media but think about writing it very strategically like an instruction manual. Because what happens when you get an instruction manual, you throw it into the trash and go on to YouTube, we all know that.

Then how do you bring in third party validation? How do you bring in some thought leaders, maybe some policy makers with a quote or two along the way or a quick interview from the experts?

Again, this all encompassing the big rock and that makes it easier to repurpose this with the interviews being pulled out as blog post, etcetera. Maybe 10 quotes from the e-book put in to a slide share presentation but this is how you get the most value out of one big rock piece of content.

And then, when you go to promote it, again come out the gates guns ablaze. We start off with email which is certainly an essential part of this plan and then we of course use LinkedIn marketing solutions, the various tools there. But again, it's just

interesting to see once you've launched your big rock, email tends to be the big driver.

Then second following that very closely is the blog because you have this rolling thunder approach of these smaller pieces you're repurposing on the blog. And then we native advertising pick up after that as well. So you go from emails number one, to the blogs number one and then sponsored updates – that's our core tool, our native advertiser will take over because it's this rolling thunder approach. And you're constantly – it's always on.

How can you always be on? You're always in front of your audience staying in top of mind. I think that's the key point here when you're looking for distribution.

David: Yes and in terms of that, are you looking at a month ahead, two months ahead, or three months ahead once you got your big rock in place?

Jason: The way we look at it, the blog is the day to day very dynamic way we tell our story. We can react to trends in the industry. We can react to just opinion pieces. If I have an idea tonight and it comes to me in a dream, I can write about it tomorrow. That's very fluid part.

But we look at these content arcs if you will and these arcs could be things that run for a quarter up to two or three quarters. And then, we align the big rock with that and align it to that blog as well so that we have every piece of content, every distribution strategy, every content creator in our team driving this kind of content arc theme.

In my case and LinkedIn market solutions it could be that one, could be the content market a little bit broad. One can be B2B marketing, one can be full funnel marketing, but we go after these content arcs to keep it a running theme and you can really own a conversation very quickly and you can really make an impact with search results and become an authority and a thought leader.

David: Now that's – we're talking very much here about online creation and distribution of content but content marketing obviously is much bigger than that. It does take in offline channel such as events and other activities I think. I tend to – I throw PR into content marketing as well. I just see it as another offline channel the way you distribute your story to a particular audience. How do you combine your online and offline activities so that they're in harmony?

Jason: That's another great question. I think you touched on something that I think is even more important to bring up really quick is to combining PR. It's interesting because there was a report that came out several months ago and it said that PR was better than branded content. And then you see all these PR people celebrating. They've won this battle which is completely the wrong way to think about. I think it was a Nielsen report actually.

And it just goes to show that PR and content should be working together. And branded content right is getting a bad name because we're still learning. These businesses are publishers. We still got a lot to learn way, we got a long way to go but we're getting better. But PR should not be thinking of it as a win for them because it's not. There's too much overlap.

Content can help PR, PR can help content and there's a lot of overlap between analysts and influencers and who can make a difference. So those two needs to be align a lot closer than they are today.

David: How are you going to try and bridge that within LinkedIn? Have you got good alignment with the public relations and advertising areas in LinkedIn? Do they have visibility around what you're doing?

Jason: Absolutely, I mean if I am going to speak to an event, my PR department they absolutely knows about it. If we have a product launch, we coordinate the content efforts with the PR pitches. We can certainly help develop some content to put in to these PR pitches, these press releases taking a step further beyond the traditional press release which may or may not be as effective as it used to be.

So I think it's all about standing out and it's about the content, the PR team looking at this overlap and seeing how they can help one another. I think it is incredibly important.

There's some folks who are doing it really well since I was in Market, I worked very closely with our PR team. In fact, we were reported to the CMO together. Then here in LinkedIn between speaking events or just content initiatives or the arcs or the big rocks, we team up and everybody is on the same page with one another.

I think I may have skipped over your question. I just did a little political thing there where I skipped around the question there about how do you combine an offline and online.

David: Yes let's go back to that but it is very good point. They're one and the same. In our particular we used to be a public relations agency and we still do the public relation component but we've just grafted on the content creation capability and distribution capability and it all leaves us one particular offerings. I don't get this split between the two.

But anyway, how do you roll together your online and offline strategic way to ensure that the audience and laser like focus on the needs and problems of the audience are being solved to the best of your ability?

Jason: I do quite a bit of speaking gigs but that comes along with the content marketing. If you create something remarkable on the content space that's incredibly relevant helpful, people are going to notice and they're going to want you to share that with them. I think there is a great combination of events. I mean you mentioned Content Marketing World, great place to go network and meet people.

There's one thing I've learned in LinkedIn and throughout my career is that everything that I've gotten from a personal branding standpoint to a business standpoint has been based on solid relationships and the quality network.

If you don't have that in place or you're not constantly building that, if you don't have an audience to share your content with or community, this is where it all comes together. It's an ongoing process and it doesn't have to be an enormous community but it has to be there and you have to put some work into relationship building and network. And what better way to do that than sharing really good helpful relevant content?

David: What are your views on automation?

Jason: Working at Marketo for two years, one of the leading marketing automation platforms, what I found out there is that I think people confuse automation with how we use broadcast with Twitter and do these auto replies and bots and all this crap.

What I think is important to understand is if you're looking to scale your content efforts and deliver content on a scale, it's personalized dynamic content, you're going to need technology. You're going to need marketing automation. So marketing automation when used right, it actually accelerates the personalization of this content and it accelerates the scale and it helps you pull out the best most relevant leads that are coming in from your content based on lead scoring, based on nurturing so marketing automation is key to the platform.

Content SEO, PR, social dimension, and all these folks working together, that's the modern day marketing engine. I think that's what is going to be important moving forward.

David: Yes I intend to agree with you but there's a need and particularly globally focused businesses. I'm speaking to you today from Canberra, Australia and if we want to distribute content at the right time of the day in North America or the northern hemisphere, I'm not going to be sitting up 3 o'clock in the morning trying to post whatever that content is.

I think there's roles certainly in automation. I think it has a major role in terms of ensuring that your distribution is right and that you're getting message to the right audiences at the right time.

Jason: Absolutely.

David: Measurement and evaluation, obviously another key part of content marketing. What's your view around measurement and evaluation and what measures do you use when you have to go upstairs and justify yourself to the people who sit upstairs?

Jason: I think people tend to over complicate this process of measuring. It's certainly a hot topic. The ROI of social media was a hot topic and hopefully they finally put that to

bed. But when I worked at Marketo, I reported to John Miller, he's the co-founder and no relation. John will be the first to tell you that, not me.

The cool thing, what I learned so much in Marketo was because John told me he said, "Look, man." He goes, "You can do whatever you want. We've got budget. You can create whatever type of content that you like to do for the top of the funnel but you have to be able to track all of these to a metric that matters."

The ultimate metric was pipeline and MQL was coming in. And we did that through source tracking all the content, all the links. We figured out which channels were working but it ultimately comes down to gating that big rock piece of content, driving MQLs to that. That's the easy way to look at it.

But there were three other metrics that we looked at that I carried over here to LinkedIn that I monitor very closely and would bring in to a CMO and prove that my content's working.

The number one would be referral traffic but more specifically non-branded keyword referral traffics. It's basically traffic coming to your site from people who are not typing in your brand name to the search engine. Where are they coming from? Well they have to be coming from your own good content.

Then number two is engagement which is a little bit more tricky to measure. But if you think about it like this, I think it's just a matter of time before the search engines admit that these social signals are playing a role on rankings. But in the meantime, the social shares are a sign of relevance. I always say that don't let your ego hijack your content strategy.

If you have 10 shares on LinkedIn as supposed to another piece of content that has a hundred shares, it doesn't matter the number of shares per say, it matters on who's sharing that. I'll gladly take 10 shares from 10 CMO's that I'm trying to target a hundred practitioners that don't really matter to that piece of content in particular. Engagement is a sign of content relevant that would be the second one.

Then number three finally, the higher quality leads. Are people come into your funnel, into your websites? Are they buying quicker? Are they further down the funnel? Are they closing quicker into these deals?

That's how I view it. I think you can apply those to pretty much in any industry and have success with it.

David: How complicated is the system that you got to actually track those and be able to draw those insights out of your traffic?

Jason: It's really not that complicated. It's landing pages; it's email marketing; it's LinkedIn, the platform itself and then the backend metrics that we have available. It's a combination of – it's funny I worked at Market, now we use Eloqua here but whatever works, right?

A combination of marketing and automation, email and social media marketing teamed up with SEO to optimize it all, dimension that helps us with our webinars and tells us what content's working around our bigger campaigns and then align it with PR. I think all that working together that's how we look at it here.

David: And your team, what sort of team you got there that is putting all of this together and do you work with outside agencies as well to help you with the creation of the content?

Jason: We do and this is a really good point to bring up because people think, "Oh, but you're LinkedIn." Of course I work at LinkedIn but there's LinkedIn and there's LinkedIn Talent Solutions, LinkedIn Sales Solutions, and then there's LinkedIn Marketing Solutions. We're kind of the new kind on the block if you will. We're telling the story of the marketer on LinkedIn which is an important story but it's taken a lot of work to convince folks that there is so much more than just a job secret platform here.

Again I think when I first started it was just only two people on the team and now we've split up. There's actually four people on my team and then we have different content verticals as well focusing our developing content specifically for those verticals.

But it's interesting we do use several outside vendors because again you don't need to go with this alone. We have one vendor that does creative concept extremely well called Scorch. We have another vendor that's like SEO and then a couple of writers on board but I think you pull out together, you don't have to do this alone and you certainly do need help.

So once you find a good agency to align with your needs, you certainly can't go with this alone with a small marketing team. You'll definitely be going to need help from the outside.

David: Do you have any tips as to how people can invest, arrange those relationships and manage those relationships so they'll get the outcomes that they're looking for?

Jason: Yes and that is really a good question by the way and I think this is one of the most important things that I've learned is that when you manage all these different things from SEO, to dimension, to your outside agencies and creative and what not, I call it the hybrid marketer.

You don't necessarily have to be expert in any one thing as a marketer anywhere. But you do have to know and understand how all these different parts work together, how these moving parts work together. So if you're talking to an agency about SEO, then you can and understand that they know they're talking about drive the value and make it work with the rest of this content engine, if you will.

So again am I an expert in demand generation? No but I understand how demand generation plays a role and I understand how content feeds demand generation and

social supports, etcetera. Am I an expert in SEO? No but I understands how the web serves up my content and how rankings are affected by content and social.

Again I think it's time to become this hybrid marketer that really just understands lots of different things and how these pieces fit together to build this content engine. And again it doesn't have to be an engine that pumps out a tremendous amount of content but it needs to be an engine that pumps out extremely relevant content and then targets the audience effectively and then measures effectively and it continues to optimize and scale.

David: Just returning to that point around the audience because I think this is something I really want to get through to the government communication audience is really it's about audience. It's not about what you as government want to say, it's about what does the audience need to know and what problems have they gone and how can you be there as part of the solution in creating those contents.

Are there any other tools that you would perhaps offer some guidance around or preference towards in that sort of keyword research, social listening, some of those areas that can really draw out those insights?

Jason: When Google took away their keyword research tool, that was a pretty big hit because that used to be the ultimate tool. You can drop your keywords in and you can see the competition. You can see the search find was pretty easy. But there's a couple of work around.

There is a nice little tool called Ubersuggest which basically scrapes Google's Autosuggest. And so if you type in keyword phrase it will come up with a bunch of suggestions for you to create topics around. I think that's incredibly helpful.

And again it's as simple as getting into LinkedIn and maybe in the newsfeed, checking out your connections and seeing what they are posting, your prospects or what not, jumping into some groups and see what the final conversation is around there or just search in Twitter around some keywords.

That is all out there. I think I caught the lazy marketers' syndrome if you're just sitting there and you're guessing at what you think your audience wants. There's no more guess work, it's all out there. It's just a matter of pulling it together and finding the conversations that you can add to and be helpful and make a difference.

And again, you should always ask yourself should I create this 10-piece of content or not? And if you do, make sure you do it the best you can.

David: Before we do wind it up, I'm really interested in LinkedIn and the way LinkedIn has gone about its business of creating content and I know from my own experience that we find the engagement on LinkedIn to be far more powerful than, well every other platform to be perfectly frank. Why do you think that is? What's the plan and what's the appeal do you think to people of being engaged and involved on LinkedIn?

Jason: There's a couple of ways to look at this, number one is we found a couple of years ago when I first started when we were making this content push that our members were looking. They were really interested in unique content in this professional mindset.

I think of it as, folks like to spend time on the other social networks but they invest time when they're on LinkedIn because they are there to become better on what they do, become inspired or connect with other professionals who can help them out.

Again with the influence with this program is where we started with this, with creating unique relevant content and then feeding it into the platform into Pulse, our news aggregator. But it's been tremendous so far just the engagement on the content and just to sharing. There's always some great conversation happening and it's incredibly – it's a professional mindset so it's much different than the other social networks.

We also opened the publishing platform to all members now. So now you can publish long form content on LinkedIn, share it with your network and keep the conversation going there.

From a company's standpoint, if you don't have a company page I think you're simply missing opportunities. It's free to setup. It's your hub for thought leadership in content distribution on LinkedIn. It's search is indexed by the search engines, it's another spot on page one many times and it's where you can share your own content. You can curate content from other thought leaders in the space and then turn on sponsored updates if you want to expand on that audience. But there's so many opportunities.

Slide Share is another one that I think is terribly unutilized for the B2B audience specifically. But I think there's so many different opportunities and the members on LinkedIn are just really interested in consuming content in this professional mindset.

David: Just a final question, looking ahead 12 months, where do you think things are going to be?

Jason: That's a big question. I think it's time for everyone to be very serious about mobile and make sure that the content marketing experience is optimized between the three screens from desktop to mobile to tablet. We call it from coffee to couch here in LinkedIn because it's interesting to see the traffic that comes in.

When we look at traffic on LinkedIn we see all three devices spike in the morning. We see desktop peek during the day as it should because of work. And then, we see tablet peek at night because you're on your couch watching television but all through that day was constant is the mobile device.

So I think focus on mobile and just making sure that your content is optimized for mobile and across the three screens and I think that's where it's all headed in my opinion.

David: Fantastic. Well Jason, thank you very much for your time this afternoon. I really enjoyed the conversation and as I say you are a keynote highlight of Content Marketing World each year, but where else can people follow you and get the insights from Jason Miller and continue to understand a little bit more about your processes and your understanding of content marketing?

Jason: Sure so the book that I've just put out is "Welcome to the Funnel", quick short quick reading, welcometothefunnel.com. It's pretty much everything I know about content and social written from the practitioner.

This is not a theoretical approach. This is from the trenches. Everything in there works, I promise you.

I'm @JasonMillerCA on twitter and if you search Jason Miller on LinkedIn, just put a note there where you heard me and I'm happy to connect with you.

David: Fantastic. Well Jason thanks again my friend and all the best. Have a great day.

Jason: Excellent. Thanks for having me. It's been a lot of fun.