David: Kanchan, you work for the ACT government in the Community Services Directorate. How well are you guys going in terms of your content marketing?

Kanchan: I think that it would be fair to say that we're probably ...We're not starting out, we've started out, we've got the channels established and now it's about thinking strategically more long term about how we marry our different assets. Now it's about what are we looking to do? Why are we looking to do it, and how can we better do it? In my Directorate we have a lot of people who wouldn't engage through digital media so face to face contact is very important. We have to marry that up with the people, the younger people, the people that are working during the day that do want to engage via social media, via blogs, or other forums. That's about thinking how do we do what we do? Why do we do it better? And, what is the evidence that points us in this certain direction?

It's quite an exciting stage for us. It's quite interesting. As I mentioned my background is in newspapers. I guess I'm along the same journey the government's taking. It's about going from how we have done things in the past and looking where we're going to. In Canberra we're lucky almost everybody has access to the internet, or a device, a mobile device if not. We know the audience has the means to communicate with us. It's do they want to communicate with us in that way and if so, why? What's their purpose?

David: You're an old style newspaper man and so you understand what a story looks like, what it smells like, you know how to actually get that story through. What are the challenges of bringing journalism skills to storytelling in government?

Kanchan: My role is as a media manager. A large part of my role is issue spotting. It's about not being so defensive on occasion I think. About engaging with people. The engagement part of the role is a newer role to me. If people have questions to ask, let's not be afraid of those questions. Newspapers, I can communicate. I know how people like to be communicated with and I'm not a policy writer or bureaucrat so I write in a way people can understand. I think it's being some of the general communication skills and the principles that we all have here today and about marrying them and tailoring them for the audience and for the purpose.

David: Where are the constraints? Where are the troubles? Where are the roadblocks to the effectiveness of your communication?

Kanchan: Resourcing would be an obvious one. We all face resourcing constraints. We would like to do more. It's about then identifying what we have and how we can do it better. Another one is making sure colleagues who I work with who are sort of outside of communications are comfortable engaging in this domain. For them it's a new way of working as well.

I think there is a cultural shift that is taking place. It has taken place because obviously lots of our staff expects us to communicate in the way that they communicate in their home life. It's not an option to communicate the way we used to. We have to have contemporary practice. It's a cultural change. We're fortunate in that from the Chief Minister downwards, there's an adoption and a willingness to invest in new technologies and communications. It's about then identifying what we can do in that space.

David: You mentioned that face to face you is still very important in terms of communicating the government's message. I think that's the case the world over. How well are you doing at the moment in terms of taking those opportunities to create relevant content for people who are perhaps unable to attend some of those face to face meetings?

Kanchan: I think it's getting better David. We try to spread the load of events by what content is a part of it as an educative process. If I'm talking to someone in a policy area and their face is lighting up at the story they're telling me, then that's a good story and it's something that the members of the community would be interested in as well. I think it's an educative process. It's not about the traditional media release only anymore. You don't have to think in those terms. Broadening the thoughts. You're right when you mention we have an abundance of content. We're going to have Directorate within the people we support and we assist. It's about I guess ...Again I tend to find what's the purpose and then try to then use the content, one piece of content for different purposes, so that we're not over-burdening ourselves, we're not reaching too far and un-delivering; and that we can minimize the amount of work the policy officer, the program officer has to undertake.

David: Is your purpose or your content mission well understood across the Directorate?

Kanchan: It's getting better I'd say. I think a large number of people understand what we're inherently trying to do, but maybe they need to policy, the formal policy, to tell then what we're doing. From the Executive downwards, there's and increasing understanding about the value of our content and the need to communicate that to members of the public. Because, as we've said, our best stories are within our people and the best communicators are often our people. It's not me who's into everything in message it's somebody who can tell in plain English what it is they're doing. I think there is also ...We have some really sensitive areas to be working and there's been a frustration that maybe what we're trying to do and hoe we're trying to support people isn't getting out into the domain. Well, I can tell this story. I have that. How can I tell this story and what support do I need from the communications team?

I think it's come to the point where again we're, "Wait a minute, if my colleagues in Territory Municipal Services and the ranges that they do, if they can get their stories into public domain and the good work they do, I don't see why I can't do that as well."

David: We're always improving and I think everyone is adopting and trying to get better and better all the time. I think one of the big challenges is around, you know the changing in composition of skills that's required to execute a content marketing program of communication as opposed to your traditional media relations, issues, management, you know, Ministerial focus communications. How is it that you're going about improving the skills of your staff so that they can become better publishers than media managers?

Kanchan: Part of it is, I think, trusting the staff to have the core capabilities to deliver product we need them to deliver. Another part of it as I mentioned before, the staff expects to interact internally and digitally the way they interact at home. The staff of our communications teams likewise. They engage in content marketing here as receivers or in a personal capacity. They have the knowledge. They're ahead of where government is often in communicating and communicating their content to social networks. It's probably about formally identifying a way we want to go and 'b' how the staff can do that.

As we mentioned, my background is not in content marketing, but I have the core skills that are needed to progress on this path. Where I don't know the answers, I ask the answers. I ask the questions to get the answers across government, people like the contentgroup, liaising through the social networks that are out there to find out how we go. Probably most importantly is where are we going. (7:03 EDIT As both Craig and Gina have mentioned), start out small and get the buy in from the Executive and from the Minister's offices, so that they're comfortable with the approach we're taking and that they can see the reasons why we are going where we are going.

David: Just looking at that Executive level, what are some of the challenges that you've seen in convincing that senior level that this is going to be okay? The world's not going to end and we're going to be okay.

Kanchan: I guess as with any audience, difference levels of awareness, knowledge of the mediums that we're using , the tools that we are looking to utilize. Making sure that they are comfortable, they're aware of and not dismissing their concerns. These are experienced policy and program officers. They've engaged with the community on many levels over often many years, and in different jurisdictions. They have a wealth of knowledge they can bring to it. Then define what they're talking about and translating their concerns into my line of work.

I guess other issues are then, why do we need to do it? Sometimes it can be just, "All right we need to do communications campaign. Let's do social media. So we need social media? Is it really where we want to expend our energies?" Can have these discussions, obviously the best way to do that is in a prepared environment where you're working to a deadline that's not the next day as opposed to the ad-hoc one that comes out in Melbourne. We do have these conversations internally, why we're doing what we're doing, and the policy work, the way we draft policies. Do we focus on, for example just a child who's in a protection environment. Or does that child have disability? Do they have public housing needs as well? These conversations are really important in getting to where we are going.

David: In large government departments how important is the digital technology in spreading the message.

Kanchan: It's hugely important David. We have, our Directorate is about 1200 staff and a large number of those work off-site, outside of our corporate offices the communication via internet is massively important. The need to engage the Executives who are often removed from them, they need to hear the messages straight from the Executives mouths. They need to be able to comment back as well. We've introduced recently a Sharepoint internet that has the static internet site and the more dynamic collaboration zone as well. We want to get people engaging with the Directorate as across their own work spaces as well. The different business units that develop policy, it's a massive area for us.

David: Do you think there is a reluctance to embrace content marketing in government because marketing is sometimes considered a hard sell?

Kanchan: Maybe the terminology isn't well known amongst my colleagues, not in the comms area, but they support the idea of getting good content out there. We have good content, we need to communicate it. Whether it's about a new program we're running, whether it's trying to get specific feedback on a policy development, whether it's about a day for children and families, we need to get the content out there. I feel that they're supportive of the idea. Marketing maybe might jar them slightly, but once you explain what it means I think they'd be supportive of it.

David: This is a debate and a discussion going on at a global area. Some people don't like the term. Some people think it’s a great term. I'm certainly in the content marketing camp. I believe that it's a very effective and useful way and I think that simple definition and really understanding that content marketing is a process, and it's a methodology. It's not the tactical side of things and the execution.

Kanchan, you are of the media, that's where you began your career. I think it's interesting that we do have a conversation now about the media. As far as I'm concerned they still remain a fundamental part of any communication. We're not talking about content marketing in isolation. It's the only way to do it. You do have to consider the media. What role do you see the media taking in this emerging, evolving, rapidly changing landscape?

Kanchan: It's very interesting to watch it evolve and it does change almost on a daily basis. We for example, we in the past, have relied on a media release we get from our agency or from the Minister to announce a relatively low level program or an open day. The chances of it getting out were pretty slim. The chances of it getting picked up by the media were almost non-existent. We can now have our own direct marking content however that needs to go to get the message out there. It doesn't infringe on the media's territory because they wouldn't have reported on it anyway. You also see, conversely, you have the media then linking and follow see what we're doing on our channels to see where there is a story for them. You're right, it's a process that works in parallel. We have a dependency on the media. We need them to talk about our big policy initiatives, our programs, and to listen to feedback from the community. It's a great mechanism for doing that when it's done in an analytical and appropriate fashion.

We have a huge range of information that is more for the user, for the member of the public, they don't need to know about, but we're not excluding them from that process. We invite them to do it.

David: Okay. Let me create a role-play as such: you have a piece of content, it's a great piece of content and you publish that. Have you ever had a phone call from someone in the media saying, "What are you doing? How come you're publishing it on your own channels and not giving it to us?"

Kanchan: Fortunately we have a backup of Ministers' offices that take those calls instead of me. It has happened. It's a tricky one to navigate. Part of it is still is identifying ...A journo may pick up on something that we put out that we wouldn't have thought was a media-worthy story. Or, another instance, we've put something out unfettered. That's our right in instance to do that. We own the content, we want to get it out through certain channels. The Minister may do a blog post, or they may tweet about it, or they may engage in another agencies forum. They may post on another site. It's because that audience has been chosen to be the most appropriate for that piece of communication. It's also about then going back to the journo and saying, "We're not trying to exclude you from the process, we need to work with you. We have reliance on your communications tools. As you can see how we've provided information in the past." I think on both sides it's a developmental process and there will be hiccups on the way around it.

David: Can you give us some examples of where you've been able to bring some of your journalistic skills to bear and to create some great content that has really resonated with an audience and helped the government achieve an objective? Because, I think ultimately what content marketing is about is activity has to connected to an objective. If you could give me an example.

Kanchan: We, we being our Directorate consultation on a policy called the Human Services Blueprint, which is an idea to restructure the way Human Services delivers in the ACT across our agency and engaging ACT health as well as education as our main partners in this area. That was an interesting process. It engaged the government's Time to Talk website. It had involvement from the Ministers downward. It was a cross-media promotion on limited budget. There were media releases, there was a narrative to prosecute within, whether that be within the Assemblies speeches the Minister delivered on the social media postings, in the media release, in events and embedding that narrative in other projects across a Directorate as well. I guess my role in that was simple-speak. Policy guys are great at writing policy and are intellectually several eons above me.

When it comes down to writing simple English it's sometimes beyond their grasp. Translation is a key element in my work. Then, what does it mean to the individual. One thing we did was generate personas for this content to put on the Time to Talk website. That got some amazing, in terms of numbers, feedback. We did one on "your experience as a parent." The feedback from people who had been through early childhood to health education, it was quite immense. Feedback they wouldn't have known about otherwise. It's a trigger question. It's a prod. It's a nice little, "What does this mean to you." Back comes the outburst of content.

I guess I'm there to, I won't say coordinate, to help guide how we talk, what we talk about, and where we talk about it. Then joining up the dots across the different interests, the stakeholders. The Human Services Blueprint I mentioned. For an expense of 500 dollars we had a week's, 2 weeks’ worth, a month's worth of analysing Facebook. We measured the responses. We knew who was coming. WE knew who it was reaching. We knew who our demographic was roughly, That's tangible information you can give. If you can contrast filing your thoughts on Facebook in traditional media that we purchase, it's almost not comparable.

David: Kanchan, your top tips to people to get started, to get going?

Kanchan: I guess getting started is the main thing, whether it's doing the research, whether it's implementing the results of the research, start doing it. If you're not doing it then you're playing catch-up even more than probably you are already. Have the understanding of what it is you're trying to achieve, a clear and concise objective about why you're doing what you're doing. Start small if you need to. Start small, get the case studies, pick some easy wins. It's basic cons in that sense, get some easy wins and get the buy in from the influencers to do that path. Then report back, be transparent with the people you're communicating with. Be open, be there for them. Let them know that their comments are valued and that they're not just into cyberspace and passing onto people who need to know about it. I guess also one thing I think Human Services has done very well, and Commonwealth also, is focusing the content on the needs of the user, not the bureaucratic needs.

As I mentioned, we work closely with Health and Education as well as Chief Minister Directorate. Really packaging up what we're doing and looking around beyond our borders. Is there more that's going on that we need to feed into this. When you've got those basics right, you can begin to deliver your package.