
InTransition Episode 73 – Joanne Painter

David Pembroke: Well hello ladies and gentlemen, and welcome once again to In Transition. The podcast that examines the practice of content marketing in government and the public sector. My name's David Pembroke and I'm delighted that you're with me once again. We do have another great guest this week. I know we keep serving them up to you and there are plenty of great people out there, but this week in particular, is a very experience person who can really share some insights and wisdom over many years working in both journalism and in public relations in corporate communications.

We'll come to her in just a moment, but as we do each week, we start with the definition so as it we understand just exactly what it is that we are talking about. Content marketing is a strategic, measurable, and accountable business process that relies on the creation, curation, and distribution of useful, relevant, and consistent content. The purpose is to engage and inform a specific audience in order to achieve a desired citizen and/or stakeholder action. There it is, that is what content marketing is as it relates to government and public sector industries.

To our guest this week, Joanne Painter is the founder and managing director of Icon PR, a communications consultancy based in Melbourne, Australia. Jo has led her team for over 15 years on a range of projects in both the public and private sector. Icon PR won the 2015 Golden Target award for sustainability and corporate social responsibility. Awarded by the public relations institute of Australia for their, "Love food, hate waste," campaign for sustainability Victoria. They also were highly commended for their, "Stand up for Farmers," campaign for New South Wales farmers. Before her career in public sector and private sector communications, Jo was a senior journalist for the Age Newspaper in Melbourne. Jo, thanks for joining us, In Transition.

Joanne Painter: Thank you David, it's a delight to be here.

David Pembroke: Jo, let's just wind the clock back to those days of journalism. What initially attracted you to want to become a journalist?

Joanne Painter: I think that if you're a story teller at heart, then any form of ability to influence the public and share those stories is quite compelling. For my initial interest in journalism was very much around the ability to tell stories and to discover and share new and interesting information. Which I guess, 20, 30 years down the track, I'm showing my age here, but I'm still doing albeit in a different guise and in a different industry.

David Pembroke: Just thinking back to those earlier days, what was the thrill that really got you hooked into being a journalist?

Joanne Painter: I think it was a combination ... I often worked in both the hard news and the more investigative side of things. It was that ability to really get deep into a story and to

create content in its form then as journalism, that was meaningful and relevant and important. That actually touched people's lives and went to I guess a core truth with it, that was a truth about our society, our political system, the behaviours and products and things that make up our economy. It was very much, yes you're doing a job day to day, but behind that sits I guess a passion for information and the passion for knowledge.

David Pembroke: What makes a good journalist?

Joanne Painter: I think today it's quite different to what it was 20 years ago. In my career, I think it's an ability to really connect with any person and to be quite compassionate but also quite dispassionate at the same time. I think you got to be a great listener but also a great talker. Today, I think you got to be a multitasker and somebody who can work across, what we call an omni-channel approach. I think the journalists of today are fundamentally multiskilled, they're multitaskers, and they're multichannel. They're as good at story telling in the digital formats as they are in the traditional print and electronic formats. I think it's a very interesting change that we've seen over the last 10-15 years.

David Pembroke: From your point of view, tell us the story or the time in your life when you decided, "Okay, I've had enough of this journalism caper, I'm going to go and do something else."

Joanne Painter: It was actually my husband and my friends. I was very happy in journalism and had a really lovely career at the Age, and I still very fondly remember those times. For me, it was having my second child and really looking around going, despite the best efforts of management, there's always a glass ceiling. It was more a glass ceiling by the fact that many women leave the work force voluntarily to raise children. In my case, I decided that rather than have to work the 10 and 12 and 20 hour days, which ironic sometimes I still do, and fight that battle, that I'd actually get into business for myself.

I was lucky that my husband was running a creative agency and that my skillset at the time was very conducive to what was then, very much the beginnings of the digital revolution, particularly in communications. I'd always been very fascinated by online. We were really early adopters in digital, both in our personal lives but also in my husband's business. It just made sense to try something different, and being at the cusp of both the digital revolution but also the branded and the content marketing revolution, it was an exciting and still is a very exciting time, and I'm very privileged to be part of it.

David Pembroke: Yes, indeed it is. Just as a matter of interest, how did you deal with that transition that changed, often seen as moving to the dark side to use those carefully acquired skills and the experiences that you've given, to go and apply those skills in a-

Joanne Painter: Well, look I think, 3 things. I was young and I was very naïve and a little bit stupid, which really helps. I think if you're going to make mistakes and take risks, when

you're young you can recover from them very quickly, which we made a lot of ... We were very risky, not risky, we took a risk and created a business. We boot strapped our own business, so we funded it ourselves and put in the hard yakka. I think too, we were, not lucky, I think you make your own luck, but we were very strategic about the choices we made into where we put our assets.

I, in particular, had a real passion for corporate communications and business and finance. I really focused, in the early part of my career, on trying to find clients and work that were most closely associated to both my skills and my interests as a journalist. I was fortunate that I managed to get some great work with ANZ Bank, one of our earliest first customers, and that became one of the building blocks of the company. It's a combination of good luck, good timing, but also good strategy.

David Pembroke: In those early days, did you find that it was difficult when you had this capability, particularly with your husband's skills there from the design point of view and that your journalism skills, that you really, there were limited channels that you were able to use compared to what you can use today?

Joanne Painter: Absolutely. As I said, we were at the very cusp of this whole digital revolution 20 years ago, 15 years ago. Things like social media didn't exist when I started Icon, not when I started Icon, when we started the agency. Yes, you had to be, I think you had to be a little bit more creative and again, you had to take risks and try things. I think one of the lessons I've learned out of boot strapping a business is that you need to be open and really trial and error is really important, without making too many errors. You do have to be willing to innovate and follow, not so much follow the market but be one step ahead of the market, but still be willing to take risks within that, that overarching approach. From our point of view, that was a really good way of approaching a new business.

David Pembroke: Diving into that a little bit more, how do you trial and error successfully, in a way that you don't lose the house or you don't lose the business, but you do it in a way that's incremental and measured and effective?

Joanne Painter: I'll give you a good example. We are 2 weeks away from launching a new division of our company called, Icon China. This is a Mandarin speaking, Australian based Chinese service. It's fundamentally part of the agency, but it's a new capability we've grown and this is a classic case of, we're going ahead with something. We're trialling it, we're going to see how it floats. The way we've done that is we've secured, we identified a need in the market, that was the first thing. We then did some research about what would be the demand drivers and what would be the scale and scope of how we might take that to market. Then what we've done is we've approached a few of our clients and said, "How about we do," effectively a proof of concept with them.

We offer them, whether it's a reduced fee or whether it's just a partnership with them to trial a particular service. Then we use that as our proof of concept/case study to then grow that business more aggressively in market. That notion of

prototyping a concept came to us through our digital division. In digital, we do a lot of prototyping in what we call, agile development. We're now applying those same broad approaches and disciplines into our PR business, very successfully. It's allowed us to become very innovative at moderate costs, there's always a cost in any business and opportunity cost by focusing on one thing over another, but we apply certain degree of our budgets every year to an innovation project.

We invest in that, we put resources into it, it's well backed by research, but we never know whether it's going to fly. To date, those innovations have worked very successfully. This is another example of, in this case, we've self-funded this business arm, it'll cost a few thousand dollars if not more, but we're very confident that not only will it be a revenue raise it will be a good strong pointed difference in the market.

David Pembroke: Yeah, so is that to support Australian companies to go into China?

Joanne Painter: Yeah, well what we found, about 6 or 12 months ago we found that we had several clients who were either wanting to develop products in Australia to ultimately sell in China. A good example are vitamins and I guess FMCG type products. The second one was Australian clients who wanted to expand into China but using their Australian support agencies. 2 things, I went over to Hong Kong last year and negotiated a partnership with one of the best leading Chinese or Asian based PR agencies to be our China based consultants. That allows us to offer a complete solution to our Australian clients, but also for them to offer the same solution to their Chinese based clients.

It was that insight that there was an opportunity here for companies that are either Chinese based, sorry Australian based Chinese companies or Australian companies wishing to do business either with the domestic Chinese markets and they're growing very strongly, or take their products off shore and that's where the business is really focused.

David Pembroke: In terms of this transition that you're seeing in the practice of public relations and communications, what are some of the things that you're seeing at the moment that are fundamental to the change in the way effective story telling can help achieve business objectives?

Joanne Painter: I think, we're noticing 3 very important trends, and I think if agencies are not taking note of these, I'll be left behind. The first one I think we discussed before David, is the incredible increase in the amount of video. What I call, rich media, both government, so public and private sector clients of ours and all over the place really, are really recognizing the significance of rich media. Particularly in video story telling form as a way of engaging content. That notion of content freely given and freely shared, creating content that works, content that's relevant, and content that actually connects into a customer need as opposed to telling customers about your product, you invite customers to learn and engage with it.

We've had significant success with videos across the spectrum, whether it's a private client or you mentioned Sustainability Victoria, a significant, a huge amount of video content going on there. That's the first one, video. The second one is obviously social media. Social media continues to grow both as a channel, and I say there's a collected channel, there are lots of different social platforms. As a broad based solutions set within public relations, the complexity of social media and the rise of influences in others, is really important and you can't ignore, in many cases our campaigns start in social. Literally last week, completed a big Instagram based promotion for Choice Hotels International. That campaign is all about, was basically ran as a public relations campaign, executed entirely on Instagram and Facebook and Twitter.

The third component is the, I've mentioned this word before, but this omni-channel approach. Public relations is no longer a siloed service. Public relations is omni-channel and it's increasingly media neutral. Being able, as PR practitioners, to create the solution first and then think about the channels. We're not so much focused on just pumping out a press release, it's more about creating content that we can then distribute through particular channels that will help, whether it's build brand, engagement, or really communicate your product or service.

David Pembroke: Okay, now listen, I do want to get to a couple of the case studies, because our audience has told that that's what they really like. They like to know the challenges and the opportunities, but just quickly, to whiz through those and just maybe 1 or 2 questions on each. Just with video, what are your views on production values? Does it always have to be beautifully shot with that real rich imagery or can sort of, low cost video meet the need of a particular market?

Joanne Painter: I think, in terms of setting a budget, you need to be very clear. My advice is always start with the product. If your product or service, or what you're trying to promote or talk about, is something that is suitable to do on a very low resolution, hand held, iPhone platform, very low cost, then absolutely. Equally, if you're trying to promote a 5 or 6 star hotel, and you're doing that with a really cheap, nasty piece of video content then that's exactly the same as doing a cheap, nasty ad or a cheap, nasty brochure. To me, it's around deciding the format, both the channel and the format and the quality in the overarching approach that's best suited to your product.

Some of the best videos I've seen have been done on a hand held camera. Instagram is a great format too as well, for great visuals. There are fantastic things you can do, but I do think that there is a little bit of rush to do the cheap, nasty stuff. My advice to clients is, if you're doing major brand work, if you're doing a brand campaign, a campaign that fundamentally talks to your brand, then the production values and the creative approach should be more considered. Not necessarily more expensive, but more strategically aligned, then something that is what I call a cheap and cheerful explainer video or a basic informational piece of content, which might have a lifespan of a week. Then clearly, you wouldn't be spending \$100,000 on that. For a major brand video, you might.

I think it is very much around taking the video content you're producing and linking that back into what is your communication strategy, what is your brand strategy, and what is the purpose and target audience.

David Pembroke: On social media, have you given up on organic reach and do you accept now that it's pay to play?

Joanne Painter: Actually no, I'm huge on organic. A good example, look I think they go hand in hand. Yes, the social landscape is getting increasingly complex from that point of view and you can't ignore the synergies between paid and earned. We've just completed a whole bunch of beautiful videos for Sustainability Victoria, which is the next iteration of our campaign that won the Golden Target last year. Those videos were, it's all about leftovers, it's called, "I Love Leftovers." They're really dealing with people's love of food and passion for cooking.

Again, using some really smart research, we created these fantastic videos which weren't outrageously expensive. They had almost no paid media behind them and they've had hundreds of thousands of views. Many of them are getting over 100,000 views each, organically. You can achieve fantastic results organically, but importantly you must have the content and the approach to content story telling that is suitable to your audience and is suitable to the product. If you don't get that right, yes, you'll be paying a bomb and even then you won't get any engagement.

David Pembroke: Just finally, on that omni-channel, where do offline events sit, and offline execution sit in terms of you when you're putting together these strategies? How important is it to make sure that you are continuing to turn up in person?

Joanne Painter: I think they're very important. I think the omni-channel approach is recognizing that all channels can and should work together, in different combinations. I still believe, some of the smartest PR campaigns I've seen in the last few years, and Edelman did one in Sydney recently for Samsung, where they did a combination of very clever social media with some fantastic experiential in events. This just amplifies and deepens the engagement with that particular product. I think that, again, the smart operators, the ones that really get the new media landscape, understand it, you can't, you typically don't do as well in just one media as you can be utilizing strategically a range of medias and a range of platforms.

David Pembroke: We'll jump into some of these case studies. I think the first one, you've already eluded to, this "Love food, Hate waste," campaign that was done for Sustainability Victoria. What was the objective?

Joanne Painter: If we just go back to, I guess the need for the campaign. "Love food, Hate waste," is actually a UK program, the rights of which were bought by the Victorian government. The primary purpose here is to reduce the amount of food waste householders create every year. For example, every year, around a quarter of everything we buy at the grocery store ends up in waste. Australians are incredibly

wasteful. We waste around, just over \$2,000 a year of perfectly good food that purchase and end up throwing out. That's a combination of stuff that sits in the fridge, left overs, or if you cooked too much pasta and you chuck it in the bin.

That has a huge cost both environmentally, it has a cost in terms of the resource it requires to pick up that waste, and of course the waste of the resource itself. The stakeholder in Victoria engaged us through Sustainability Victoria to come up with a campaign that would educate Victorians about why we need to reduce waste, and to really encourage them to pick up and take on some of these new waste reduction behaviours. That's really where the origins of the campaign came from.

David Pembroke: Okay, and then when that was set about, the set down with the objective, obviously it must have been around changing the behaviours of people either buying too much or cooking too much, or throwing food out. How did you go about setting those objectives around the campaign to achieve that type of behaviour?

Joanne Painter: One of the things that we do, and this is very big of course in government, I don't think any of your listeners will be too surprised, we use an evidence based approach to a behaviour change campaign. We were leveraging a huge amount of research, so there was a lot of domestic research in Australia but also international research into behaviour change around this topic. That allowed us to identify both the range of behaviours and also some KPIs in terms of how much we could actually achieve in terms of awareness.

We were lucky that the client had done what we call, pre-campaign research, to identify the level of awareness about the issue and the propensity and willingness of people who had been researched to change their behaviours, should they be convinced. We decided that this campaign, because it was very much around both driving awareness in the first instance and starting off the behavioural change. Those were the 2 dimensions that we wanted to focus on. We set very clear KPIs, again very important in any campaign, to set tangible and realistic measures about what the campaign wants to achieve and how you'll go about measuring that.

David Pembroke: Obviously, with that research in place, you had a benchmark from which to work from, yeah?

Joanne Painter: Yes, absolutely. The goals of the campaign, in terms of, I'm just actually going through the thing here. The goal of the campaign was to achieve, as I said, to achieve measurable levels of awareness. We wanted to raise awareness of both the amount of food that's wasted in Victoria, the cost to families, that figure \$2,200, and to encourage people to start changing their behaviours at home so they purchase less, they waste less, and they throw out less. By wasting less means you don't cook as much or if you do cook, you only cook as much as you need and you use up those left overs and then, to reuse food or to use food that maybe coming up to its use by date. There are a bunch of smaller behaviours that we wanted to target through the campaign.

David Pembroke: With those or using that research to understand that audience better, how were you able to then segment the targets that you were going after? Was it quite clear who you were after and where they were located?

Joanne Painter: Again, we used independent research. We also used the Neilson, the behavioural segmentations. There's behavioural segmentations that you can use in terms of your audience profiling. Clearly the female grocery buyer, who is a fairly popular segment for FMCG campaigns, was one of our key targets. We're also keen though to get influences in the family decision making, so they can be children and teenagers are often very important because they're often learning about this at school or they're coming into awareness about their own waste behaviours and becoming more focused on that. Those are the 2 key audience groups we wanted to reach.

David Pembroke: Okay, and when you sat down and said, "Okay, we've got to start to make some decisions now, not only about the story that we want to tell." Sounds like the story was reasonably well defined in those early stages, in terms of that figure obviously that you had and plus those various behavioural insights that you had. How then did you go about deciding which were going to be the best channels?

Joanne Painter: We did, again, the research told us a number of things. When it comes to food, and rather than focusing on weight, the campaign's focused on food. Because while people will often turn off when they talk about waste, rubbish, and things like that, because they're not particularly attractive, people absolutely love food. It's one of the most shared content topics on social media and in digital. Rather than focusing on the negatives, we focus the campaign on the beauty and the fabulous stuff you can do with food. That was, I guess, the first insight.

Based on that insight, we then decided to look at, where are people talking about sharing and engaging with information about food? The 3 areas were very much Facebook, YouTube, and online. While the campaign had used other channels, we used traditional channels, we used events, we did a whole bunch of other stuff, we really did the 3 pillars if you like, of the campaign were Facebook, YouTube for video, and the website. These gave us the strongest penetration into those target audiences, while also allowing the natural, organic amplification and sharing of the content.

David Pembroke: If they were the things that worked, what were the things that you got wrong?

Joanne Painter: The thing that we didn't anticipate as a PR agency was how difficult this would be to PR. We didn't get amazing PR traction. We did get some PR, but again, the lesson here is that these types of campaigns, where we got the most amazing results was in the social and digital channels. Where we got less impact was with the traditional media channels. This time around, that was our first year of the campaign, this year we've actually done very little traditional PR, and we've actually focused more of our budget into branded content or content marketing tactics and into online.

David Pembroke: In terms of that bench ... Have you gone back to the benchmark to be able to see how you've gone in terms of those awareness and attitude changes that you were looking after?

Joanne Painter: Yeah, so certainly the end of last year we did some post ... We did the pre-campaign research, and the post evaluation research was quite remarkable. Colmar Brunton were brought in to do the independent research into what impact the campaign had had, and they found that the level of improvement in the months after the campaign, concern about household food wastage had risen 10 percentage points, which is actually quite significant. We also had very high level of recall for the not wasting food messages. We had 42% recall, 18% recall on the cost and the amount of food wasted, as well as very high 40% recall on the hints and tips. Also 40% of people said they were now motivated to eat or use up left overs.

Those figures became, they were very good and they were strong, we will then go back into market again at the end of this year to test those figures again. We'll be doing annual research to make sure that the campaign we're currently working on now, or I think have just wrapped in the last few weeks, that that campaign is continuing to drive that behaviour change as opposed to letting those behaviours lapse. Because we also know that behaviours, once taken up, yes they can last, but they often need to be reinforced and reminded to really achieve long term behavioural change.

David Pembroke: Yeah, which is probably a point I'd raise with you. I've got this theory now that the era of the campaign is finished really, because that message that you've got, you can run through a period of activity, but say that finishes on the Friday, that audience is still going to be there on the Monday, and on the Tuesday, and on the Wednesday. How do you go about continuing to speak to people and smooth out that engagement over a 12-month period as opposed to getting at them in these really high intense periods and then disappearing, and then coming back and disappearing and coming back?

Joanne Painter: David, I think you really nailed ... That's a huge challenge for government. Realistically, governments can't campaign 100% on. Campaigns, as you rightly point out, they come and go, they have cycles, they have budgets. The solution to that, and I'm certainly no, I'm not the world's best expert in this, but certainly from our point of view, it is around creating content and building community.

In the first instance, you need to try to create content that has a long shelf life, that has innate, organic ability to influence and continue the messaging well beyond the end of the paid advertising or it could be your social campaign. That's the first one. The second one is around being realistic around the type of content and where you place that content.

Building communities around your brand through the campaign process, will give you the best chance of that community continuing to be advocates for your product or brand or service. Those 2 things, creating a community around the

brand through the campaign and creating content that is rich and engaging enough to have its own shelf life and create its own momentum, would be the 2 key bits of advice I could give people looking to extend campaign.

David Pembroke: Fantastic Jo. Thank you very much. We have come hard up against time as we do when we try to keep it to time as best as we possibly can. Congratulations, not only on the Golden Target award, but for all of the work that you've been doing over the last 20 years or so. You are obviously one of the leaders of the industry in Australia and Icon PR, well known around Australia, and soon to be in China, by the sounds of things as well.

Joanne Painter: Thank you David, it's a pleasure.

David Pembroke: Good luck with that and we didn't get to that second case study which was the "Stand Up for Farmers," so what I will do, is hold you to in I don't know, a couple month's time, we'll give you another call and we'll get you to tell that story as well.

Joanne Painter: We'd love to, thank you David.

David Pembroke: Thank you very much. Thanks for your time Jo, and thanks to you audience very much for giving us your time once again, as we explore this practice of content marketing in government and the public sector. What a fantastic case study there from Jo Painter from Icon PR. So many value tips there about how you can get out there and I think the last one in particular, this notion of building a community, building an audience, and engaging with them over time around your particular story that will build the trust, that will build the confidence, and that hopefully will improve the dialogue between government and citizens and stakeholders. There you go. Thanks again and we'll be back next week. Bye for now.