
InTransition Episode 81 – Colin Anstie

David Pembroke: 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 thank you so much for giving me just a little bit of your time again this week. My guest this week is someone who knows a lot about social media but before we come to him, we start as we do each week, with the definition of content marketing as it relates to government and the public sector. Content marketing is a strategic, measurable and repeatable 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.

My guest this week is Col Anstie who is the CEO of the digital marketing agency, Raging Digital. He's also the Marketing Director of the CBR Innovation Network, and Col has extensive experience in digital marketing, holding previous roles as Digital Marketing Manager of RaboDirect Australia, Online and Direct Banking Channel Manager for the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, and the Online Marketing Manager for Telstra. For those of you who are overseas, that is Australia's largest telecommunications company. Col, thanks for joining us In Transition.

Col Anstie: Thanks so much for having me. Thanks for a great intro. Love that. That's excellent.

David Pembroke: Okay, mate. You've been in this game for a long time now. There's a few things I do want to talk to you about in relation to social media, education, teaching and training, because I know that that's an area where you're putting a bit of focus and it's a very important area, but just maybe a bit more of the backstory. How did you come to be involved in digital media?

Col Anstie: Yeah. Great question. Look, it would have been back in about 2005 when I was working for Telstra, that big telco. I was probably the youngest out of a team of 20 marketers there and so anything digital such as websites or email marketing or anything that was tricky or technical like that, they said, "Give it to the young guy." That's really how it happened and I just loved digital, straight off the bat. From the outset, it was very much about the fact that I could track it. Instead of a brochure or TV or radio or that kind of thing, which you can track, too, to a certain degree, but with digital you can track it right through to that sale or service or outcomes, so back in '05 was when I was just thrilled by it.

David Pembroke: In terms of back then, what was some of the business outcomes that you were looking to achieve, way back in the mid 2000's?

Col Anstie: Look, even back from the start, pretty brutal focus as in just straight up sales of mobile phones, fixed telephones, data networks. That customer service piece was

probably a quick follower after that, so being able to have that two way conversation, being able to convey information. The big corporates particularly, that brand awareness, like getting your name out there, getting people knowing it and trusting it. They're the three big ones, really.

David Pembroke: In terms of that customer service, how did you break down or indeed build the trust within the organisation that allowed a big organisation like Telstra to be comfortable with opening up the channels to allow people to have those conversations? Because this particular podcast is directed to government and public sector organisations and I know there are a lot of people out there who are still having trouble convincing some of their higher ups that opening up the channel and having the conversation is a good idea.

Col Anstie: Yeah. Absolutely, and I deal with quite a lot of the government departments on exactly this topic and look, the answer is very simple to how we did it. The answer is very slowly. Just really cautious, careful, planning around how you do it and the world we're in right now, it's long gone where an organisation chooses how they engage with their citizens or how they engage with their stakeholders. It is very much in the hands of those citizens or users how they engage, so what I'm always out there recommending is that you open up as many channels as you can feasibly resource so I do not recommend you open up live chat on Facebook today if you don't have a team there ready, resourced, processes in place and training done so they're ready to go.

It was very much how it actually went, so our phone channels was a big one. Email channels opened up, online web forms, and then really pushing in towards that online chat, and whether that is through a Facebook or social media, or something like a live chat or something on your website, and then this was where I really think government should push into on their roadmap, is that artificial intelligence space where you ask Anna or ask Fiona or that kind of thing, and it'll actually be a learning engine that can reply to "Where is my account number?," or, "Where is my permit number?," or whatever it might be for that government service.

David Pembroke: Okay. We'll come to that in a moment. That's interesting that you can see that opportunity for artificial intelligence, machine learning, whatever it is how'd you like describe that, but in terms of your actual focus indeed around the training element which is something I'm fascinated with at the moment because it's a fairly large step change from where we were in terms of our communications to where we need to be today to be effective. You teach digital marketing 101 over at the Australian National University. What sort of skills are you teaching people and what is the demand for skills? What are people looking for from you in terms of that education?

Col Anstie: Yeah. Great question. Look, at the ANU, next one's 18th of October, it's a full day course and it's very hands-on. They all come in with their laptops, and we get in and do it. In terms of the content...

David Pembroke: Is that directed at professionals or is that looking at people who are just running a small business or a large business or a government agency, or is it everybody mixing in together?

Col Anstie: It's actually publicly open so to anybody with an interest. The people who do attend, so quite a good base of public servants, senior marketing people, junior marketing people, and also quite a few business owners who'd like to understand it better to do it, but I've had right through to students right through to people who've retired and want to run an eBook business so all I'd recommend is that you have a good working knowledge of a computer but otherwise, we take it from there and look, in my view, around the content, there's 106 different marketing channels on the planet today in my view.

We focus on eight of them and what these eight are are the highest impact, lowest cost, and easily resourced channels that actually work. What they actually are, so the very first thing we touch on in the day is something called Search Engine Optimisation and all that means is getting your department or your organisation up to the top of Google. We look at advertising, so how to advertise in Google and how to advertise in those annoying little banner ads that follow you all over the internet. We look at how they work.

There's a really big focus on social media so things like Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter are the big ones, and so how to have a nice presence there, how to manage it in a few minutes a day, and we actually, in the course, go through and do posting but probably the most important part of the day and probably very relevant to the listeners is the content. It's all about great quality content that really cuts through and talks to the people who are using your channels so how to first get them there and then get them reading what you're posting so we go through about how to source content quickly, how to post it quickly, how to track it, whether you should spend money on it, how much, whether you shouldn't, whether you should insource it, outsource it.

It very much is a fit for purpose, like horses for courses. There's a range of different things, so with government, I find they often like to insource but are very happy to come to training and learn how to do it how it's working.

David Pembroke: Yeah, I think over time that government is really going to have to become better at doing it for themselves because I think the requirement of the audience is going to be quick turnaround. People are going to want information, they're socialised by the big private sector brands in terms of the level of services that they're getting there, so I think it really is about building capability within those organisations, but I think it might be useful then, why don't we break down some of those particular areas and maybe some advice that you would have for people? Search Engine Optimisation, how do people get to the top of the page on Google without paying?

Col Anstie: Yeah. Look, there's 132 different factors that Google's looking at with your entire digital presence, so not just your website anymore. Every mention of your name,

brand, associations on the web, but look, there's a few really easy steps that you take first, and it's broken into three categories for me. Number one is actually your own website, so optimise in that. If you're a government department that focuses on the environment, make sure you've got that word "environment," "energy," "land," "water," "Great Barrier Reef." These kind of terms so when people search them in Google, they'll find your website. Number two is actually social media.

Google now doesn't just look at your website as I just mentioned. They do look at your social media channels and your other listings with WhitePages, YellowPages, and all these kinds of things. With your social media listings, they're very highly ranked in Google. Being there is very important. Factor three is definitely and 100% the most important, and it is content. Fresh content about exactly what's happening today. If you can relate it to current affairs, top 10 tips, how to address this, best practice approaches, trends, fashions in your industry. Google is really, really thorough about looking for the newest, freshest content for you to be an authority in your area and I feel so many government departments, both here in Australia and internationally, are the experts, are the domains.

They have these professors and they have these experts on the Great Barrier Reef for example. Put them out there, put these great white papers and PowerPoint presentations and speeches, and you will really start to crush Google. Like, you will have to rank number one because you've got so much great content but put it out publicly is really important. Often, many times I've seen it stays internally or on an intranet or that kind of thing. It really has to go out there on the web so it's both your citizens and users can see it, but also very importantly so Google can see it.

David Pembroke: How do you encourage those organisations to have the confidence that if they publish that something's not going to go wrong? In the risk averse environment, which is government where people are always thinking, "Well, if it could potentially go wrong we won't do it, because if something might happen which could refer or reflect poorly on either the agency or the department, or indeed reflect poorly on the minister," which is often such a big consideration, so how do they make sure things aren't going to go wrong?

Col Anstie: Yeah, look, great question. To be honest, it's very much like other types of content you put out there already. You do it through a press release or you put it on your website. Put it through social media. It is just another channel but it's very important to have that process or procedure or often just have a simple checklist to say, "Does it meet these things? Does it meet these requirements?" Having at least two sets of eyes or four eyes, so not just one person has full control, so having that second person to look over it and review it, but look, the way I would spin that or position that most of the time is that you have to be part of that conversation, you have to be at the table. Otherwise, you just start to become irrelevant and not listened to.

Having your staff well trained, having procedures and processes, having really good, gun operators there that can do this stuff and then just having your fall-back

with your procedures and I can almost guarantee to every listener out there, you will make mistakes, you will get things wrong. That's just a fact, so I'd just embrace it with that in mind. These channels are beautiful in that you can just delete or edit or change or that kind of thing, and it's just really embracing that fail fast or go out and have a go, be part of it. That culture is a big thing, I'm out there trying to subtly decay.

David Pembroke: Are you finding that it's decaying, that there is a greater acceptance of the need to be in these places to help organisations to achieve their objectives?

Col Anstie: Yeah, look I've seen some amazing things out there. Some of the teams I work with, so big shout out to you guys. A whole lot of "cowboys" is what I call them in government. Often social media teams or marketing teams who really want to make a difference and try things and so these, the energy, enthusiasm, passion, and push, to push those boundaries is where I see it happening. The way I frame it like that is get in a few key individuals or those leaders or those people who can make that cultural change because it does need to come from the top, and look, two of the things that are a big indicator to me of those who are doing it best is number one is that culture, and number two is having great tools, so systems and platforms to make it happen and make their job easier.

Reason being is social media is hugely laborious, right? Like, it takes a long time to find your content, post it, listen to hundreds of thousands of comments sometimes, so having tools or automation abilities to make it easier on you so you can compress it down to a few minutes a day, so if I go to a minister and say, "You have to hire 20 people today to do this," they always need to say no, so just start in slowly, carefully with a few people and building great systems and processes is really important, I think.

David Pembroke: Yeah. It's an interesting point you raise about this notion of you don't have to boil the ocean, you don't have to do it all at once. Maybe find that pilot project to get started, prove the value, measure the impact and then perhaps move on from there and build confidence by demonstrating the value of the project.

Col Anstie: Yeah. Absolutely perfect. That's, to be honest, been the number one way I've seen this succeed, just choosing one channel so let's just go for Facebook, let's just start with just one, just a small team, and let's just choose one area of your department versus trying to boil the ocean and do it for the whole department. Just choose one project, one initiative, one campaign, one line, and just start there as a trial. Let's just sandbag it, so three months, that's it. We started at this many likes, this many followers and comments, have a look at it, take a snapshot in three months. I think that is excellent advice and it also gives a lot of safety and comfort around it's just this one channel, one program, and a few people. I think that's very wise advice.

David Pembroke: Okay. Second on your list was search engine marketing. How do people get that right?

Col Anstie: Yeah. Search engine marketing is the little ads that appear at the top of Google. You see the ones that are in a slight yellow colour or they say "ads," often the first three that sit in there. Look, this is an amazing space and for a long time has been the crown of digital marketing. You just pay per click, so if your ad shows up 100 times but only 1 person clicks on it, you only get charged for that 1 click. It has an average for your budgeting purposes, use about \$2 per click is a good benchmark, is about how much it'll cost.

To get that right, it's actually extremely simple, and another perspective is it can be hugely complex. The simple view there's three things you need to be doing to make it work well. Number one is the actual ad, so you're going to get 70 something characters in the ad. They're very short and sharp. There's not much to them. Making sure that the words in your ad correspond to the words that people type into Google, basically, so if they're typing in "litter," make sure your ad's got "litter" in it. Number two is actually the landing destination, so the first webpage they land on once they click on your ad.

If you put up an ad for chocolate and it lands on a page for sneakers, Google does not like that. Make sure if your advertising around chocolate, make sure it lands on a page around chocolate. Number three is actually the most important which is the performance. Having an ad which sets a really nice expectation around what they'll receive or what they won't receive and giving them a nice experience through that landing page. If Google shows up your ad 100 times and only 1 person clicks on it, that's a pretty bad outcome for Google, not a good performance. What you should be aiming for is actually about 5 out of 100, or 10 out of 100 clicks is good. 10% click rate is a good metric. That's how they're rating you or assessing you.

David Pembroke: Does it work?

Col Anstie: In my opinion, it has long been the crown of digital so probably if I was going to spend money on advertising, it's one of the first things I'd do.

David Pembroke: Okay, because I don't think I have ever clicked on an ad on Google, ever. That's me. Obviously I must be in the minority, but I find ... I feel like we're moving into the post advertising age and I really, do I need to bother with these advertisements in any way, shape or form, particularly as we move to mobile? I find that completely sort of ... People crowding out my screen with their advertising, I just find that appalling. Am I just an anomaly do you think?

Col Anstie: I'll just give a really blunt answer. I think that classes you more as a savvy user. Look, just to dismiss an entire media by an industry, let's do a live poll, just see what people out there think, but look, I agree 100% with this point, right, is that advertising, there's a metric out there that I love right now. I think it is exactly this. 14% of people trust advertising and something like 92% of people trust peer reviews. That's a phone call, an email, or a recommendation, so yes, I agree 100%. Before, roughly about 40% of people would click on a Google Ad. This is just Google Ads specific now, and that is quickly decreasing, so coming down to the 30%.

People don't like to be advertised to and that's why the growth of organic content marketing where it's just a really nice article or beautiful posts on social media which are not paid for, like, every day of the week, I would take an unpaid organic piece of content over paid advertising and if you can get traction there, it's a much better way to fly. Google prefers it, users prefer it, but advertising I feel still does have a place. The reason being is if you want to get that much broader reach, do it quickly, and you need to be getting sales or transactions or conversions, not always the case with government departments, advertising is a very sure-fire way of doing that.

David Pembroke: What's your views also, though, about building trust over time? The way that technology has changed the context, it's changed the world. We all now carry around these supercomputers in our pocket which now give us access to the information, the education, and the entertainment that we want at the time we want it, on the device of our choosing. The first point you made around citizens and customers being in complete control, how do you think that's changed the way that people take information because it's my experience that you have to be a lot more patient now, that if you want to build a relationship with a particular audience, you have to turn up in service of that audience over time, not ask too much, but just be there and try to be relevant, try to be useful, try to be consistent to build trust over time because it's that trust over time that will then convert into a relationship of sorts which can then be used by an agency or a department to drive the particular behaviour that they're looking, but you have to be more patient now than you ever did in the past.

Col Anstie: Yeah. Look, I 100% agree with that. That long, slow burn, just like when you meet a potential partner for the first time, if you asked them to marry you on the first date, that's probably not going to go well.

David Pembroke: No, it didn't.

Col Anstie: It really is exactly as you said, David, it's that courting process, that dating process, and then that build up to that relationship builds that trust and credibility, and hopefully that long term relationship, or maybe not. I think of it very similarly and look, wherever I can, if I can get a great presence, great message, and great content to my audience without paying for it, I definitely do. That old word of mouth, number 1 marketing channel on my list is still the most powerful. Look, just on a couple of things around trends, around this, and we're talking advertising versus non-advertising.

David Pembroke: But still, it's important, and I agree with you in that it's not an either/or thing. I think you need to be doing both. I think you do need to be advertising, as well as sending out that other...

Col Anstie: That's often the answer, yeah.

David Pembroke: Yeah. I think it's both, but anyway, sorry, I interrupted you.

Col Anstie: Yeah. I was just going to ... The two trends I'm really seeing and very applicable to government, right, and their citizens, and something they've potentially been a little bit slower to shift to. Number one is that broadcasting advertising has long been the way marketing's been done, right? Or communications. What I mean by that is TV and radio, like I hit 100,000 or a 100 million people at once. Marketing has really shifted into that one to one messaging. If I've got a target base of 24 million people in Australia, as a government department, I don't actually need to talk to all of those.

I just need to talk to this one million. Getting content or being able to target information, messages, and channels to the right person at the right time is what it's really about now. It's really shifted away from that broadcast into that sniper. Social media has allowed that. Right down to that single individual, Pete Smith, I can talk to him about the Great Barrier Reef, or about climate change, or about whatever it might be.

David Pembroke: Yeah. I agree with you that we've gone from the broadcast era to the narrow cast era, and particularly, Facebook, the ability to target through using Facebook and Facebook advertising to get to Pete Smith and to be able to say, "Hey Pete, here's some information that we might think" ... But how then do we transition? This goes back to this issue around skills because traditionally, as you say, government has communicated through a few channels. Media, and through the ministerial areas and trying to get media releases out and picked up and run, and then the broadcast television advertising, radio advertising, print advertising, magazine advertising, and there's a certain skillset that's required to be able to operate effectively in that paradigm. We're now in the publishing, content driven, got to think like the media, how do I stay relevant, how do I publish content.

Now, as a trainer, and as an educator, how are you helping people cross the divide? How are you helping them get from skilful in that role, in that paradigm, to skilful and effective in the new world which is quite a different mindset and a different approach? It does carry more risk but it does require more skill, that ability to be able to create content, distribute content, measure content. It's a different game.

Col Anstie: Yeah. Absolutely. It can be quite a big transition for people. Me personally, I absolutely love that education type piece, so those half day and one day courses are a big one. 30 people might come along to those and then we go hand-on and do it, and then after that, I'll often sit one on one with people so for two hours, and we'll just work on specifically Facebook or specifically Twitter or their website, and also come into organisations and look at their exact problems and I'll actually do it for them for three months, train them up, show them how to do it, track the results. Come in as a bit of a fixer, because all people learn in different ways.

Some people like watching a video, some people like coming to a face to face course, others have to have hands-on and tactile feeling of how to do it, and it is

quite tough and the skills are quite different so just because you're an amazing print advertiser at the present doesn't mean you're going to be phenomenal at digital. Many of your skills will be quite strong to get that transition, and it's a big thing for a lot of people. I really recommend, if you are in those other types of broadcast advertising and marketing, definitely just give it a try. Come across and see if you like it, have a go at it. It's really valuable as a marketer for you, whether in government or in private, to be aware of it, understand it, and then you can make a very active choice as to whether you want to outsource it or delegate it or hire someone.

David Pembroke: Okay. A couple more things before you go. Email, what's your view on email?

Col Anstie: Email marketing type stuff?

David Pembroke: Yeah.

Col Anstie: One of the oldest forms of digital, so websites and email marketing, but look, blow me down. Email marketing is still one of the most effective for outcome. People don't like receiving spam and marketing/advertising stuff, but using a personal brand, so coming from a minister of dep-sec or a senior person, and giving a clear direction is very powerful through email. People do invariably read it, see it, and know it's there. Building email lists, so all of you, while you're surfing the web, you get 1000 pop ups saying, "Subscribe to my list, join my list, do this, do that," and the reason for that is because it really does still work.

David Pembroke: Yeah. They're annoying, but they work.

Col Anstie: Yeah. It really does.

David Pembroke: A final question is really around the use of surveys and the ability to survey and the ability to get insights from your audience by asking them to answer questions. How important is it to know and understand your audience in order for you to create the right sorts of content, and to understand their preferences around times of the day, channels, content types?

Col Anstie: Yeah. Look, it's absolutely critical. I mean, if you can talk specifically to that group you're after and understand what they want, there's a number of ways to do it and surveys are a very cheap, quick, effective way to get good numbers. People do not love surveys like filling them in, so I'd recommend never more than five questions, never more than two minutes. One minute is better, so short, sharp, quick, good technology, can answer it on mobile, tablet or desktop. Some really good, like SurveyMonkey's the big one out there, or a Qualtrics type tool, but those kinds of things are good but working with a lot of government departments, they quite like user testing and whether to invite 20 people in, give them some sandwiches, have them there for two hours and get them testing, using, asking them questions, reviewing things. There's a number of options, and yeah, if you can get direct feedback from your user base, that's brilliant.

David Pembroke: Well, I think what we'll do in the next few months, we might get you to come back and really run through some tools that people can actually use because I think the points you made around the supporting technology stack, it's one thing to have the skills, but in order to personalise, in order to automate, there are some issues in government obviously around listening, for example, where you get into that privacy space which you've got to be really careful about, but I think we'll do it in the next couple of months. We'll get you back, and have another conversation but thanks for coming in. Where can people actually get in contact with you and attend your courses and learn a little bit more about how you can help them in their government department or agency?

Col Anstie: Yeah, sure. Look, if they come to my website, RagingDigital.com. You can come there, all my courses are there. You can actually just live book an appointment with me, so my calendar's there. You can just book it in and we'll catch up for a coffee. Always out and about and running lots of training sessions at the moment, so yeah, love to talk to you and I really love bringing this information, these tools to people. If you'd like my two favourite tools of the week at the moment, so for your social media management, Hootsuite.com, is the number one out there for managing your social media. If you want to see what technology other departments are on, both international or national, there's a brilliant tool called Sifter.com. You can just type in a website and it'll tell you all the technology, frontend and backend, of all the tools they're using, technology, what their website's built on, how they're managing their content, social media, so it's completely free and I'm on there all the time. I love it.

David Pembroke: Fantastic. Okay, Col, well thank you very much for coming into the studio today. Appreciate it, and I know the audience will as well. Thanks for coming in and spending some time with us.

Col Anstie: Absolute pleasure, thank you.

David Pembroke: And to you audience, thank you very much for turning up again this week. There was a lot of value in that, a lot of insight and I'm sure there's quite a few things actually that you'll take out of that conversation back into your daily work and which will help you to tell better stories in order that you can achieve your mission of strengthening communities and improving the wellbeing of citizens. Thanks again for turning up again this week and I'll be back next week at the same time. Bye for now.