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## InTransition Episode 85 – Michael Schoonhoven

David: Hello, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome once again to InTransition, the podcast that examines the practice of content marketing in government and the public sector. My name is David Pembroke. I'm coming to you from Cleveland, Ohio, Content Marketing World. We've got a great guest for today's podcast but before we come to him, I will just go through the definition as I do at the beginning of each program so that 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. That is the definition of content marketing as it relates to public sector and government.

My guest today is Michael Schoonhoven from the Netherlands. As content marketing does, it attracts lots of people from all over the world. Michael, as have I, has been here for six years in a row. As we just walk in, we've just had breakfast actually and we were coming across the gala registrations and we ... as we walked in, we walked past the hall of fame and Michael, both you and I are hall of famers here at content marketing world.

Michael: Yeah, that's true, David. Yeah, I'm very proud of that, to be together and very closely in, I think about 40 people are just the six time attendees. It's very limited, limited number of people who are attending for the six years now.

David: It's interesting isn't it when you go back to that original meeting when was held at the Renaissance Hotel here in Cleveland and I was fortunate enough to win the award for the person who'd travelled the furthest coming from Australia. I still have that book by the way that Joe gave me all those years ago and very proud of that as well. But to think that there were 650 people from about, I think, 14 or 15 countries and my understanding is that this year there'll be closer to 5,000 from over a hundred countries. What's your view about this explosion of interest in content marketing?

Michael: Yeah, that's an interesting question. What you see happening in the world is that with traditional advertising is not working that well anymore and people want to have relevant information and relevant engagement with their clients or with their employees in terms of content, it's still a very new thing in the world. Like I was doing marketing in the company I worked for years ago, I did a lot with contents but I didn't know it was called content marketing. Then I was, well, Googling online and saw something on content marketing and then content marketing world, and that hooked me up with Joe and the Content Marketing Institute. Of course, my first introduction to content marketing and Content Marketing World in 2000. What was it? 2000, 20001.

After that, in the world, you see a development of all kinds of content but do content right and really make it purpose driven and have an impact. You should have a structure and more knowledge and insights how content marketing works. Every year, there are

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more best practices in the world, very, very nice approaches and successful approaches about content. I think that's one of the most interesting thing that people can see, that there's much knowledge every time more best practices and to learn from that and take it back to your office or your agency really helps you making the next step.

David: In terms of the changes that you've seen in the last six years, what are the big changes that you've noticed in content marketing? At its heart, what do you believe makes for the most effective content marketing?

Michael: What I've seen in the changes was, first it was like publishing some content like a blog post or video or a podcast or a webinar. It wasn't structured. It was just an unstructured way of putting out information. Well, it shows, teaches us every year a documented content strategy is so important. I think the mind shifts on that is a big change in the industry. It's more documented, more in a strategic way, more aligned with the business instead of just the marketing department. I believe in the coming years, we will see that content marketing shifts more to content service programs integrated into the whole company instead of being a kind of a marketing playground. Content will be part of the business in the whole company.

It will be digitalized as well. You see still a traditional way of working together in companies that will be supported by technology, online technology to work together online, collaborating online on content, sharing it, creating it online and do it without the silos in the companies.

David: We'll come to some of that in a moment but it's interesting you say that content service programs because at the breakfast this morning when you mentioned that, my ears popped up. Because marketing, particularly in the government and public sector often, when it's used, the description of content marketing, there is a ... you see people sort of turn off because a lot of people in government think, "Oh, we're not in the marketing business." They are. But the actual term itself is not popularized and certainly is not something that is particularly relevant. I'd say that in the mainstream, it's not particularly relevant to many people who work in government and government communications.

But this notion of a content service program, that struck a bit of a chord for me because I think there's two strengths in that. One of them is the fact that it's not about marketing, not about communications and I think it's fair to say that mainly in government, both communications and marketing are not particularly well regarded, not seen a critical to the business whereas something like a content service program that belongs in another area of the business could in fact be a very powerful way to communicate the value of what essentially is content marketing but it's just called another thing. Now, that's a long way around asking you about perhaps giving me a little detail bit more detail about how you see these content service programs working.

Michael: Yeah, when most people talk about content marketing, they think of lead generation. If we most education about content marketing, it's about lead generation, about SEO, about attracting more visitors, et cetera. But if you take it a step higher and think more

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of the purpose driven content, you're not campaigning, you're not marketing content, you're just think more in how can you translate content to a service. The service has a totally different mindset because a service can be to your existing customers as well. Like if you have a new a client and he comes and you want to be ... him as an ambassador, you need a lot of service to him to have him work with your product or your service very successfully. If you give him a lot of content service, he will be very satisfied because he got all the education, all the information he needs to use your product or your service.

Like the example you used before this morning during breakfast about the content case, if there's a lot of telephone calls coming in on a certain topic and you can take that away by a content service program to give people in the months before a certain phone peak, all the information they need, with a call to action not to call then it really helps. That's not marketing in the traditional way of thinking of marketing but that's just a way of servicing. For me, that's our two good examples of content service program. The word program is different than campaigning because a campaign is just a stop and an end time and campaign is more on promotion but a program is just a thing you create and can exist forever.

A couple of years ago, I created a financial health program only based on content. It helps people making aware about financial health, with a financial health check with all pro, all tips and tricks how to become more financially healthy. That's a program that's can run for years instead of just a particular time of a couple of months of marketing campaign.

David: But ultimately a content service program uses exactly the same techniques as content marketing, it's just a different description for the same thing.

Michael: Yeah, that's true. That's true. But it has a different approach for a lot of people. If people are distracted of marketing in a way of thinking on promotion and thinking of, "Hey, this can be a way of a new, a new way of servicing our clients, our customers, or even our colleagues or our partners." Then it's a different approach. What I see in the project when I use ... I use this a lot, the word content service program and what I see happening is that it's much more easier to involve product management, sales, HR, finance, IT because it's a new way of servicing for them as well to create relevant content for, for example, an IT department. If I talk with IT department about content service programs, the conversation comes with how can you help your employees or your colleagues using the IT you're implementing in the best way to reaching their goals, if you educate them well, if you service them with content, that really helps them achieving their goals using your systems.

David: Yeah, it's, well, certainly, absolutely relevant to my audience, or the InTransition audience because they are working in government and public sector and really everyone who works in government and the public sector is engaged in public service. That's why they do the jobs that they do. This notion of a content service program may be a more sympathetic way to describe and explain to people just exactly what the value of content marketing is. I sort of don't want to job off the content marketing bandwagon

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because I've been on the bandwagon as you have for a long time and I think we sort of certainly owe it to the content marketing community to continue to sort of work hard at that.

But certainly, as a way of differentiating, as you say, like content marketing in large measure is about that notion of marketing qualified leads and marketing automation and running campaigns and drip campaigns, all that sort of stuff, which is very much different to being in service of an audience by creating that useful, relevant and consistent content. Ultimately, that's what people do in the public service. You're looking to engage with the communities in order to strengthen the community and to improve the well-being of citizens as well. I think there's something in there and I think we'll might take that one away and workshop a little bit more and see how we might be able to start to talk about content service programs as a way of solving business problems within government and the public sector.

We're talking about a couple of other things over breakfast which I thought would be useful and relevant to ... for our audience as well. This was this notion of the creation of content and where that responsibility lies and that it's really not just about the communications area of an organization or a marketing area who've got the responsibility but really it needs to be a responsibility of everybody. Now, in terms of government and public sector, that's the policy areas, that's the program areas, that's the regulation areas, that's other ... the finance area, the legal area, all, everybody really needs to get involved in being able to create that useful, relevant, consistent content to engage those audiences. You've had a lot of experience in the Netherlands working with insurance companies. Tell me, how do you go about trying to get people to see the value of a content service program and then once you do, how do you get them to create content of adequate quality that is helping them to solve business problems?

Michael: Yeah, first answer on the question is how to have them see the value of content service program. What I do a lot with the project I work on is to do an assessment within the company about all the questions they've got from internally or externally, how much time they work on that and what I see a lot is that there are so many duplicate of answers and questions that waste a lot of time in the company. For example, a sales person gets maybe a hundred times the same question and he's answered one by one and that cost a lot of time. Also, for the audience, it's kind of frustrating because if information or an answer on his question is not available very easy, he's very reliable on the account manager or the sales person. If he's not available, then he doesn't have an answer on his question.

That's an example of showing people the difference in their work now and how it can be solved with a content service program. This is an easy one. I can give me more examples. But it's more the approach. Within that assessment, we take all levels of kind of issues in the company if they are really purpose driven, what they are doing, if they are aligned with the strategy of the company, if they're really product focused instead of client focused or customer focused. All of those things are put in one plan for that company and trying to get as much metrics as we can in measurement in ways of, well, a time issue is a big thing in companies mostly. That's also in the creation side, creating

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contents in across the company, costs a lot of companies a lot of times because they have a lot of meetings, they have a lot of sending emails up and forward all the time with updates and everything to create a final content at the end.

First, if we have the strategy and the positioning of contents in its place then we are going to talk to, "How is this ... Who should be involved with the content creation? Who is going to give inputs on the content?" In most companies, kind of all knowledge workers and product experts are very valuable giving input on the content. How are you going to do it effective? Well, my point of view, you can only do that in a digital way, not by having multiple meetings or phone calls or email conversations but create a collaboration platform for your company where everybody is involved in certain groups to create content. All the product experts, all the people you have with the company with the knowledge you need, put them in a digital workspace and start creating content together.

I worked with products in a lot of companies in the Netherlands and this works really, really good because the content and the people are always available. They don't have all the meeting times. They just work together on creating a document on one place. They always see the latest version of it. Everybody can co-create on that version instead of sending multiple emails to each other with updates and update again and then an update again. If the content is created and it stays internally, you can just put in from the creation, the digital creation group to a content library so it's accessible for the whole company. If you work with partners or clients, you can make it accessible in a partner community or a client community.

David: Are you saying that it's been given more priority from organizations and that this responsibility is growing well beyond the communications area or these particular line areas are taking on the responsibility of creating content? If you're saying that, what is encouraging them to be able to do that?

Michael: Yeah, in the beginning, my point of view, when I start at a company, they don't see it at that moment because mostly the marketing or communication department is responsible for content. But when we talk a lot with those companies, with those teams, then we find out that a lot of other teams are very, very important with the content marketing or the content creation. So then we create a content team where all the important stakeholders are making part of the team. In that way, you create an accountable team to create content. But the purpose of creating content is very important. The team should have the same purpose, the same goal and then everybody can give their information, engage based on that purpose.

For example, a product manager who has no, mostly no contact with the consumers, he gets a lot of information from the sales and the marketing department if they talk about the purpose. He has much more insights to create his new product and he can get a lot of more information about the product through marketing and sales if he finds out there are certain questions from customers about the product.

David: You've mentioned no a number of occasions in this interview and again at breakfast this

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morning around purpose and the importance of purpose and the importance of connecting the content creators to this notion of a higher purpose and being in service of their audience. Why is it so important that purpose be at the heart of the creation of content?

Michael: To align it with your business strategy and every business has his purpose or should have a very clear purpose. Only in that way you can really create relevant content to your audience. Because if it's not related to a purpose, it's most of the time it's just a one off on a certain occasion. For example, we want to ... we want more leads so let's make some promotional content to get more leads. But if you really want to make a next step of your company and you're focused on the purpose why your company is on this earth and you want to really involve customers and employees, then you should focus on the purpose and then you can really make a difference. Then also your content can make really a difference in people's lives.

David: Then how do we make people be patient enough to wait and not to be focused on that, the short term? Because purpose driven marketing is ultimately going to create delivery but it's probably not going to work as fast as it may focusing on a campaign which is a promotional campaign which is looking to be a product driven solution that's driven very, very quickly and very hard and very effectively. How do you build that patience?

Michael: Yeah, that's a hard one. That's a hard one because if they're focused on quick results, then it's a challenge to do that. But what really helps, if you have the purpose and you have accountability on that purpose and clarity on the purpose, then you can create the path how to come to that purpose and every step has to lead towards that purpose. You can make it very quick and very relevant in the first time like Marcus Sheridan always says, "We are here to answer questions." If that leads to your end purpose, that's a very good step to start with and it saves a lot of time and a lot of energy of a lot of people. You make your customers happy if you answer the questions very quickly. That's always the thing that immediately helps your company.

If you talk with sales or products or what line of business and you talk about ... you ask them how many questions they got from customers or even colleagues and you translate that to, "Okay, how much time do you spend on answering those questions and how many meetings do you have talking about the questions and how to get more insights in your clients," et cetera. You translate that to, "Okay, how can we create content very quickly to make the small steps to solve those problems immediately?" That really helps changing the mindset of the new leads focus to a service focus which is more effective working, way of working.

David: In terms of Content Marketing World this year, big crowd, what are some of the things that you're most looking forward to learning this year at Content Marketing World?

Michael: I saw some new tracks this year about neuromarketing, more in the physics of people and how you can get more impact off people. I'm interested in those kind of topics to have more impact with the content and it relates of course with the purpose, the purpose driven content we just talked about. Of course, to meet my peers and friends

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here at the Content Marketing World.

David: It's always good fun, isn't it, catching up with everyone?

Michael: It's a lot of fun. It's very nice to hear all the stories and how we have the same issues and the same challenges and how we approach it and that's a very learning experience as well because that's the real practice, the practice rules instead of the theoretical rules and just talk about issues and new ideas and developments. Yeah, that makes you creative and you come back with some more ideas and focus.

David: Well, long may it continue. I'm sure that you'll be here for many more Content Marketing Worlds to come as I will be. I look forward to it but congratulations on being here for your sixth. Thanks very much for joining us InTransition today. Thank you.

Michael: Thanks, David for having me. Thank you very much.