
InTransition Episode 88 Rebecca Lieb

David: Well, hello ladies and gentlemen. Welcome once again to In Transition, the podcast that examines the practice of content marketing as it relates to government and the public sector. My name is David Pembroke. I have a very special guest today for you coming, again, from Content Marketing World in Cleveland, Ohio.

Before we do, as we begin the show each week, we start with the definition of exactly what content marketing is 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 behaviour. That is the definition adapted from the Content Marketing Institute to apply to government and the public sector.

Joining me today is an absolute thrill. We met yesterday, which was fabulous. Rebecca Lieb, probably the world's, well, indeed the world's leading content marketing analyst, formerly of the Altimeter Group, now working on her own doing wonderful stuff, and we'll come to your most recent research that you put out here at Content Marketing World. Rebecca, thanks for joining In Transition.

Rebecca: It's an honour and a pleasure. One of the best things about being at Content Marketing World was meeting you, David. We just instantly bonded, didn't we?

David: We do and we've got lots to talk about. We'll talk about some of that research stuff, the project that's going on back in Australia in a moment. Today, exciting news for you. You've come out with your contextual research. Just tell us what that's all about.

Rebecca: Yeah, absolutely. It's a term I felt that I had to coin. My research is called Contextual Campaigns: Content, Context and Consumer Experiences. What I'm realizing that's happening in content marketing, because I'm really looking at the bleeding edge of over the horizon things, is that we're in an environment where content is moving beyond just screens. We're seeing content everywhere and literally as part of everything, or at least the possibility of that. We've got beacons, sensors and the internet of things, wearable devices, smart packaging and smart fabrics that enable anything to connect to the cloud, to connect to our mobile devices and to create a dialog between brands, consumers, and the objects, things and places that permeate their everyday life. Computing is ubiquitous, so is content.

David: What does it mean though for people? What does these internet of things, this notion that we are connected, the fact there are going to be so many signals moving around which is helping us to inform people, how is that going to impact on the way that people are trying to use that capability in order to achieve their business outcomes?

Rebecca: Context is everything. Context is the crux of this. Internet marketers have long spoken

about the right message to the right person at the right time. We still like that but now it's the right place under the right conditions given the person's history, their purchase history, their consumption patterns, where they're standing and why. We're looking at almost the Ws of journalism, not just who and what, but where, and why, and what channel, under what conditions, at what time, which device and a whole universe of other data that make things go beyond personalization to real one-on-one individual communication and service.

Sometimes it's not even content that goes directly to the consumers. For example, objects are now in our service. Your printer can tell Staples or Office Depot to send more ink making your work environment easier without you having to lift a finger or even think about it.

David: It sounds overwhelming though in a lot of ways. If you are marketing person, say, in a government agency, understanding that there are all these potential data points that you'll be able to use. How are people actually going to operationalize the oceans of data that is swimming around, that they're swimming around in?

Rebecca: Well, first you have to have good data. Just think about whether or not you're marketing to a specific location. Maybe that location has changed or moved. You have to keep that data updated. Governments, by definition, are bound to physical places that are very circumscribed. Immediately, geolocation could become a very, very relevant data point for government. Maybe you're talking about information or service around a national park, or a public building, or public property. There are many, many different ways that a government could connect relevantly and highly contextually and on an individual level with consumers maybe in their language if their first language isn't English, for example, maybe based on where they're standing in a property. Auto dealerships here, for example, are beginning to send messages to customers based on where they are in the facility. Are they in the service area because they need their oil changed, or are they in the showroom because they're considering buying something? That's just one very basic example of what kind of context we're discussing

David: In that, how do you then operationalize it? How do you do it? How do you create that content and distribute that content? It does, in many ways, sound overwhelming that you have so much choice, so much information, but then how do you take all of that information in, process it in some form and then distribute it out so that it's creating some value for the citizen?

Rebecca: Well, you have to start with two things. First and foremost, you have to have a vision. You don't just do it because it's cool, or nifty, or because you can, but because it in some way furthers both what your mission is, as well as the consumers or the citizens, which leads to point number two, the creation of value. People are going to be creeped out and wildly disturbed if these messages start coming from their environment that they're not prepared for, opted into and that come in a correct voice and tone. They're more likely to accept those messages or that content if it provides something of value. The first considerations are vision and value, both for the citizen and for the government agency.

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- David: What about that issue of privacy? I think that's a huge issue for government is that people don't want to be spied on. People don't want to think that the government knows where they are or what they're doing. At the same time, they probably do want that really useful piece of information that would help to enhance the experience that they're having.
- Rebecca: People don't want to feel they're spied on. This does not have to be personally identifiable information. People don't necessarily have to give up their phone number or their address to get useful information. Maybe the context of being somewhere is enough. I live in New York City. I've been getting relevant messages all week from my local municipality because we were expecting a very big hurricane over the past weekend. That's information I want, I need. I had flights booked. I had guests coming. It's relevant to the when, and the where and the how without our mayor coming to my house and telling me this vital information in person.
- David: In terms of your views and, perhaps, if we can broaden the conversation now a bit wider, you are, as I mentioned in the intro, the leading analyst in the Content Marketing World. Looking, watching, observing, assessing what's going on, what are your views on government and how well or not well they're doing content marketing at the moment?
- Rebecca: Well, the flabby but inevitable answer to that is it depends. I've seen governments doing an absolutely terrific job. New York City where I live actually has a chief digital officer now. Under the last mayoral regime, things have ramped up considerably. I've seen wonderful content marketing in different regions of Canada, and some wonderful things coming out of your part of the world as well dating as far back as that incredibly viral Queensland campaign that people are still talking about.
- David: Yeah, the greatest job in the world.
- Rebecca: Indeed. I would like to have that ... I would like to share with you that right now that I'm up for the greatest job in the world but that's pure content marketing that was owned and earned medias. Zero paid media. Kudos.
- David: What's your advice to governments who are perhaps just starting to move into this area? What are the things that they need to have in place to be successful?
- Rebecca: They need to have that vision and that creation of value. They also need to integrate a lot of systems and a lot of departments. This isn't just about marketing. This is about facilities. This is about products. This is about data across a whole ecosystem so different parties that perhaps don't sit at the table together very often like IT, and product, and marketing need to come together in order to enable these things to make them happen.
- David: Now, you've seen that obviously good examples of that happening where you can get that collaboration, that cooperation. How best can people achieve that in terms of some of those conversations that need to take place? Obviously, you're very keen on this

notion of vision, and the why, and answering that question first.

Rebecca: I ask the companies that I interviewed how to do this most properly. I spoke to companies like The Walt Disney Company, GE, Nestle so some of the world's biggest organizations. They were unanimous on two points. The first was definitely do it. This is valuable. It's coming and consumers and citizens are beginning to expect it, and we'll only expect it more in the future. Their second piece of advice is very valid. It starts small. You don't have to create a high tech Star Wars level program right out of the box. Do something. Pilot it. Fail fast. Learn quickly and move on.

David: Certainly that is the flavour of ... Agile is really the flavour of where government service delivery program, delivery and development is moving so people are adapting that. To get to the gates, and it's obviously in those bigger companies you're talking to, the Nestles, the GEs, the very, very sophisticated marketing organization-

Rebecca: Even they're saying not necessarily ready for prime time. For example, Nestle would love to use smart packaging in their two billion products that they sell every day. That's not quite ready for prime time. It's still too expensive.

David: In terms of getting, say, a senior, a secretary of a government department like the leadership areas ... If you're someone who's listening to this podcast who's working in a particular area of government who knows, who says, "I know that this is where we've got to go. I understand that's the future." How do you describe or what do you imagine that conversation needs to be with the C-suite to get them to come along for the ride?

Rebecca: I think this gets back to value. This can create greater efficiency. It can create better communications. It can help the citizenry at a more effective and much more timely way. Connect it to value. Connect it to return on investment and I think it's a done deal.

David: Now, in terms of some of the analysis that you have done that we were looking at yesterday, what are those value points that you can see in the wagon wheel that you've produced in terms of where is the value that can be created from content marketing at that macro level?

Rebecca: That's an excellent question, particularly for your audience because what I'm trying to do ... Content marketing has been adapted by organizations and organizations that are businesses that want to sell stuff. Governments, not so much. I've been trying to look at the value of content marketing in a dollars and cents capacity, not based on sales. I've come up with a six-point compass each with many subcategories of where that value can be created and also quantified. One example would be customer service, deflecting calls from a call centre with immediate, relevant, contextually valid content that doesn't cost \$7 every time a customer picks up the phone and speaks to a paid agent, product development based on user input and also, in contextual ways, perceived ways that people are using facilities or things because this data can now be sourced out. Increased recruitment and retention is a very valuable thing. Operational efficiency. Unilever saved a billion dollars a year just by implementing the right systems across global teams so that work was not re-duplicated. That's an example that applies equally to

government or any other type of organization.

David: That's four. What are the other two?

Rebecca: Gosh. You know what? It's like naming the seven dwarfs. You can never do all of them without a cheat sheet.

David: That's good.

Rebecca: There's brand. There's propensity to buy or to do business with brand favourability in general.

David: I think all of those things that you just mentioned, I think they are directly applicable to government.

Rebecca: Quantifiable.

David: Well, that's the point, isn't it? That you can actually do the measurement and understand what those benefits are and what's the realized benefit in terms of dollars and cents.

Rebecca: Exactly. If you go to a top government official and start saying, "You'll get more likes or more engagement," that meeting is over. Thank you so much for your time. Please close the door on the way out.

David: Well, that's so true. I think that's the challenge that we are trying to take up at the moment is to wrap content marketing into a familiar casing where we're talking in the language of the senior government executive and around their issues and their problems as opposed to, as you say, the likes, the shares, the mentions, the whatever else.

Rebecca: The only way to do that is to have content strategy before you commit to content marketing. One is strategic. The other is tactical. Tactical is great but it's got to tie into what are our goals? What do we want to achieve and how are we going to measure our progress towards achieving that?

David: In terms of those senior conversations when you're going in and talking to senior executives and trying to understand what their problems are, how do you shape up those conversations to get them talking so you can then understand how the content marketing solution might fit in as a way to solve some of those problems?

Rebecca: It depends on the maturity of the organizations. Some are very, very sophisticated about this. I have a lot of clients in the tech centres so they don't need a lot of explaining. I did, however, this week talked to a company that manufactures medical instruments that doesn't even understand the possibilities of what they could do. They're looking at the wrong vendors. They're looking at a search vendor, for example, to handle the entirety of their digital strategy when in fact that is a very, very small part of what they need.

Sometimes it's explaining very gently to people that you don't know what you don't know. That's the other end of the spectrum.

David: To be very gentle in those conversations to bring them along to get them to reveal to you in simple terms what that problem is and then to understand, well, this is where content may play role in being able to alleviate that problem.

Rebecca: Indeed. Once they drink the Kool-Aid, they're usually very happy. I had one client that in last year I developed a US content strategy for them. They implemented it. Six months later, they called back and said, "Could you do this for a 93-country ecosystem?" I take that as a pat on the back, not just for me and my work, but also for the value of content marketing. In six months, they expanded from one country to 93.

David: Wow. That's a great result. In terms of also perhaps people who are not as well across content marketing, and to understand its impact, and how long it takes to have impact, where do you sit on this notion of timing and the fact that it really does take time to create the relationship, the trusted relationship with the audience through the content? How do you sell in a process that is taking time for someone who has a problem today and wants the problem solved yesterday?

Rebecca: I feel like this is my opportunity to do a commercial for myself which is the last thing that I expected. Time is absolutely the problem and not just the time to develop the relationship with the audience, but the time to change internally and to put together the teams, and the tools, and the tactics to achieve what you need to achieve to recognize your strategy. When I work with my clients and create content strategies, my deliverable is always a roadmap. Usually it's about three years but it's cut into quarterly achievable benchmarks. A big part of that is helping them to prioritize what they want to achieve, what they can achieve, and what needs to be achieved before they can move on to the next step. It is really a step by step guide, quarter by quarter, over 12 quarters so that they can get there in recognizable chunks, not you need a content strategy. This is how we're going to get you to a content strategy in six month's time.

David: In terms of that, in your planning, are you saying then along the way that this is what expect to achieve after the first quarter? This is what we expect to achieve after six months, nine months, 12 months so at least there's something that they can see and that there's a benchmark of which they can measure progress?

Rebecca: Absolutely. I also build in quick wins to that process so that the stakeholders or the champions of the initiatives can then go upstairs and say, "Look, we did this in just three months." People don't always want to wait for the whole thing to come to fruition so you have to have some low-hanging fruits and hors d'oeuvres before dinner, so to speak.

David: There's plenty of those around.

Rebecca: Absolutely. There are lots of quick wins but you have to help companies prioritize them. The only way to do that is to go in, and listen, and conduct scads of stakeholder

interviews and really understand what the problems are and what the needs are, not just from one or two stakeholders, but from 20 or 40.

David: It does take that amount of insight and that amount of investment in that research and discovery phase to be able to get the insights you need to build the plans.

Rebecca: I'm an analyst. Without research, I got nothing.

David: Just a couple of things, a couple of quick things before we sign off. Mindset is a different thing. We've transitioned really to this new world and really your research around this contextual marketing is really another big step into the future. Many people are still where they're used to be which is buying advertising, media relations, serving up the content for the politicians either in talking points, or speeches, or whatever it is that they've got. This mentality or this transition, that's the skills and mindset to be able to do ... That is much different to publishing useful, relevant, consistent content through multiple channels potentially everyday day of the week.

Rebecca: It never ends. It literally never ends. This is a continuous cycle rather than a six-week or an eight-week campaign-based project. As a result, you can't create new content from zero every day. Part of a reasonable content strategy, a critical part is creating content that's atomizable and repurposable so that when that politician makes that speech, it turns into a video. It turns into a PowerPoint. It turns into a white paper. It turns into tweets. As a journalist, we're all sitting on what I like to call my unpublished research of my notes and other form factors that content can be delivered in so it's very much a part of the job of content to feed that cycle without the investment of new content created every day.

David: How do you then change the mindset though? How do you help people to become what is now a publisher journalist approach as opposed to that's not how we do it. What we do is just stuff things into channels.

Rebecca: There's education and there's what I'd like to call, I've done published research on this topic, creating a culture of content. Content just doesn't come from the marketing, or the comms people, or the social media people. Content comes from all aspects of the organization, particularly any public-facing entity in the organization. Then government, that's pretty much everything. Is it the HR department? Is it the product department? Is it that politician who's out in the field and listening to what constituents are saying? It's this continual feedback loop so that even people who aren't content creators are content deliverers. They bring the ideas, and the insights, and the thoughts to those who are going to make the film, create the app, write the blog posts.

David: This is certainly a change, isn't it?

Rebecca: This is absolutely a change, but it's a change that is very positive and that can create great morale boost when people feel like they're contributing positively and that their concerns are being heard. When customer service says, "Hey, we keep getting this problem and we keep getting this feedback." Then somebody from marketing says, "Let

me help you address that." That's what content marketing enables that was never really possible in advertising.

David: In terms of then trying to spread those skills into an organization so it's not just always the communications team who's then backing things up and they've got piles and piles of information that they've got to try then process, how would you recommend or what would you recommend an approach to distributing that responsibility out into the organization so we're pushing the capability closer to the edges? Instead of having, say, a 10-person comms team, we've actually got 500 people in our organization all thinking, all creating, all doing. How do we make that happen?

Rebecca: We make that happen. We hopefully make that happen, but we do it with guardrails and with training. That's what your employees and your staff are going to be doing anyway on social media. You can't teach social media right and wrong because there is no right and wrong, but you can train your staff in content marketing, and in social media, and in communications and instruct them on what the shades of grey are, enable them to recognize where problems can arise. Tell them what's appropriate and what's not appropriate. Create guidelines. I've done this with many, many organizations. There's always the danger that mistakes are going to happen. In fact, eventually something bad will happen, but responsible organizations take responsibility for that and they move on. They also seem more human, more approachable.

When Edelman, the global PR firm, publishes its Trust Barometer every year, we see that corporate executives and politicians are among the least trusted people in the world. Employees, the rank and file, are among the most trusted voices. That's a very, very critical aspect of a solid, sound communication strategy.

David: That risk management, it's ingrained in governments. We don't want anything to go wrong. We don't want to make the minister look bad. We don't want anyone to take any of his oxygen. It's baked in. How do we grind it out to get the wheels spinning a little bit more fluently so we are meeting the need of the citizens so we're communicating with them?

Rebecca: I'm seeing in that governments. I think we're seeing that with Justin Trudeau in Canada, for example. It's a very liberal policy, a very approachable prime minister. What you don't want to see is something like the Philippines who tweeted out that Obama was the son of a ... I can't even say the word on your podcast the other day. That's the difference between responsibility, foresight and training. I won't even talk about Donald Trump, that person who is running for president, in my company and running amok on Twitter. This comes in all shapes, and sizes, and flavours.

David: You think though that you're certainly seeing from your vantage point that risk aversion is falling because the benefits are being realized or the benefits are being understood of this opportunity to create content, go direct and to create those trusted relationships with citizens and stakeholders.

Rebecca: Let's face it. A fundamental part of any government or any politician is to recognize the

realities of the world that we live in, and this is the world that we live in. When we've got candidates, and officials, and popes all on social media and communicating extemporaneously, that's the new reality.

David: You got to get with the program.

Rebecca: Get with the program.

David: Just as we wrap up here at Content Marketing World for another year, what have you taken away from the last couple of days here?

Rebecca: I've taken away that content marketing continues to grow, which it's nice to see this conference get bigger, and better, and more international every year. It's very, very heartening. I also see content creeping into every aspect of digital marketing. You look at the exhibition hall and companies that used to call themselves email companies, or search companies, or all content companies. Content is firmly rooted and firmly established. We've come a long way and we have a long way to go because the technology, and the tactics, and the media channels continue to develop. It is not boring.

David: Well, indeed. When you think about your research now, this smart packaging, smart clothing, the internet of things, beyond the screen ...

Rebecca: None of that happens without content, does it?

David: Yeah. It's just going to keep moving fast. Why don't we close on that question in terms of this notion of pace of change, of continued innovation, of transformations in organizations? We're all trying to keep up and the next thing and the next thing. How do we manage that? How do we manage that change in a way that's sustainable, but in a way that is going to deliver value to citizens and stakeholders?

Rebecca: We manage it by looking at it strategically and asking how change can provide value to ourselves and our stakeholders. We don't look at it tactically and say, "My goodness, there's Facebook. We need a Facebook page. My goodness, Apple has come out with a watch. We need a watch strategy." That's tactical. Keep your eye on the big picture and on the vision, and you'll come out okay.

David: That will be the way that you probably ... You don't have to do everything, do you? You just have to pick the right things for you and the right things for your audience to deliver that value and there's quite a few things that you will have to make choices in the strategies because you're not going to have the time, the effort, the resources or anything else.

Rebecca: Exactly. Resources are limited. People initially jumped on content marketing because it was free. I'm making air quotes with my fingers. Nothing that demands time or resources is ever free. People cost money. Time is money and we have to use and spend those resources wisely. As content moves into more complex channels technologically,

it's getting more expensive. It's not just blogging anymore.

David: Rebecca Lieb, thank you so much for taking the time today to speak to us. Actually, I will talk more about that research program that's going on back at the Australian National University. Rebecca has very kindly agreed to run our eyes across it as we go through this notion of trying to build a process and a standard that we can use for government so that we can get that project management, and that governance, and that risk management, and we can really build in the guardrails and the disciplines within the content marketing process that will give the C-suite and the executive the confidence that this is really going to deliver some value. We'll come to that. Thank you very much again for your time. To you, the listener, thank you very much for tuning in again. It's been such a great time here at Content Marketing World. Lovely to meet you, Rebecca. Great to meet old friends again. They do a great job here at Content Marketing Institute, don't they?

Rebecca: Yes, they do. David, this has been my pleasure. Thank you so much for the time you've accorded me.

David: Rebecca, thanks to you and thanks to the listener. We'll speak to you next week. Bye for now.