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## InTransition Episode 90 – Emily Crume

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Pembroke: Well hello, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome once again to InTransition, the podcast that examines the practice of content marketing in government and the public sector. Coming to you from Cleveland, Ohio, Content Marketing World. The show is starting to break up, but one more guest to bring you from Cleveland, Ohio, before we finish this very special brace of shows which have been really great. I'm sure you've enjoyed many of them, because we've had so much access to really smart people. Before I introduce our guest for this final interview, it's time for the definition. As those of you who listen to the show every week, we go into the definition because we think it's still very important that people understand just exactly what is we're talking about when we talk about content marketing in government and the public sector environment.

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 stakeholder or citizen action. That's the definition. It is an adaptation of, in fact, what is the Content marketing Institute's definition of content marketing. Interestingly, it's all about engaging and informing, and encouraging the behaviour in citizen and stakeholder as opposed to what business to business and business to consumer marketers are looking to do, which is obviously to drive some sort of profitable action. That's why we've changed, or adapted, I would say. We haven't changed it, because it is very, very, very similar.

Today I'm joined by Emily Crume who is the director of strategy for Social Media Examiner. Now this is a big deal because Social Media Examiner is really one of the pioneers of building community and building education amongst people who are looking to become more effective at how they use social channels to achieve their particular objectives. It's an organisation led by Mike Stelzner, and he has been, as I say, a pioneer in this space. They have built a vast community who continue day after day to go back to Social Media Examiner to drink from the well, because there is so much information there, so much value. Mike and his team continue to deliver sincerely, and effectively, and usefully, day after day after day, creating that valuable utility. Now, the person who's in charge of strategy is sitting right in front of me. Emily, thank you very much for joining us InTransition.

Emily: Happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

David : You must feel very proud to work for Social Media Examiner because it's such a big and important community.

Emily: Well, proud is a good word. It makes you feel good when you have raving fans that come up and tell you how much we have transformed their lives, or how valuable we can be to them. It's really great to be a helpful resource.

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David : How have you set about that, and obviously, under Mike's leadership? What are the sort of things that he talks about within his teams, in terms of delivering value to the people who are your audience?

Emily: I think Mike is a big proponent of the servant leadership strategy of doing business, and so he's very generous and helpful, and he encourages that in his team. Rather than trying to sell thoughts, ideas, or other things to people, friends, that we encounter, we understand what it is that they're trying to achieve, and we learn how we might be able to help them. Helping people achieve their objectives helps you achieve yours. Not in a direct way, but it will help.

David : It's certainly delivered for Social Media Examiner because you've been wonderfully successful. You have your own very big event, and we'll come to talk about that in a moment because I think it's important that we do not leave behind the importance of communication in that physical way, where we come together in groups. We'll come to that in a moment. Before we get into any of that, let's learn a little bit more about you. What's your story and your journey to Social Media Examiner?

Emily: I have a unique story. Mike and I worked together a long time ago, and have always had sort of a parallel path. I've been involved in B2B technology media. I've been involved in consumer media. I've always been in a structured sales type of a role, but more than selling I think I like to help people find fit and achieve their objectives. That is natural to what I'm doing now, because I'm helping find ways to connect brands, solutions, services, to our audience of social media marketers.

David : Okay, so that strategy piece. Just explain that in a little bit more detail as to your role is director of strategy, so what are you tasked to do and how are you measured in terms of your performance?

Emily: Well, it's measured in terms of sales for our newsletter. We have a newsletter that queues our readers every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, new posts are up. There's also an opportunity for solutions and services to be part of that newsletter in a native way, and to communicate their message. They're educational pieces, so gated white papers and other kind of content that's educational and informational in nature is communicated in that newsletter and offered for free to our audience.

I'm measured in terms of, I guess, sell through and revenue in terms of that. Then in terms of our event I help to create the experiences that brands have. Delivering their message or getting in touch with our community that attends the live events. That is from the very detail of square meters to also some of their marketing activations. I help coach them on ways to create engaging programs that they can activate live and in-person to get people interested in what it is that they have to offer.

David : With that, and as I say, content marketing is both offline and online activity. Offline, obviously the number one tactic that's been measured by Content Marketing Institute in their research for year on year on year is, in fact, the most effective are events. Why do you believe that that's the case when we have so much utility available to us through an

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online environment?

Emily: I think we're human beings and our nature is to connect with people. When you have a digital discovery research process there is not that face to face eye contact so you're not being able to read how people respond to you. I think the live events ... Somebody explained it to me as, "I live in a digital world and I need analog activity." I think an event brings that analog activity to the forefront. Then of course you get the raving fans that really want to be together, so there's that ... It's a sense of community, but it's also like, "Here's people that I look up to, that I've followed, and have helped transform my life. And then I get to meet them in real person." It's a little bit of a celebrity halo effect, too.

David : Okay. In terms of getting the most out of events, what advice do you give to people to make sure that they create that best possible experience so they create the best possible reaction or memory in the person who they're engaging with?

Emily: I always try to coach customers that you need to put yourself in the shoes of who it is that you're trying to talk to. Don't sell, or pitch, or demo, ask questions. My twitter handle is @EmilyQuestions because I tend to ask a lot of questions. When people start talking about themselves they reveal motivations and things that they are keyed in on that will allow you to connect the dots. Instead of launching into a pitch or a sell, trying to sell somebody, uncovering the pain points and understanding a little bit more about what it is that they're challenged with can help you point them in the right direction. Maybe it's not you at that time, it might be something else, but giving that help, coaching, advice, or new idea to somebody can always transform their business, and then they kind of remember that.

David : Do you think that that's changing, that because people have got so much access to information, people are very well informed, people have almost infinite choices to where they apply their attention? Do you think that technology, and the way that that has impacted behaviour and feelings and other things means now that people have got less time for the pitch? That they are now so centred in what they want to hear that they are much more interested in that softer approach, which is much more based around questions. As opposed to they have now less tolerance for someone who doesn't empathize with them, and so therefore they'll burn off anybody who really doesn't take that sort of approach.

Emily: I think today's consumer, and today's buyer, is far more well educated about options and solutions. They know their needs, and they have a shortlist. They can educate themselves, and they can understand more about what is available and what is out there. I think it really brings it down to relationships. People do business with those they know, like, and trust. I know that's a very bandied about phrase, but it's true. If you like what someone is doing, and you like someone, you want to do business with them. You find ways to do business with them to further both ends, or both success.

David : This podcast is very much directed to the government and people who work in government trying to communicate more effectively. I think at times now in our global communities all around the world we're finding this technology is delivering enormous

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amounts of dislocation into communities, because of technology. Technology is replacing jobs. It's challenging in so many ways for different people. The mission, obviously, of what we're trying to do is to help government to become much more effective in the way that they communicate so that they can explain themselves much more clearly to the community, so the community can understand why decisions are being taken.

That being the case, and in terms of what you are seeing in terms of changes in social media, changes in content, what advice would you have to people working in government communications as to how they could be more effective, how they could take advantage of these changes that we're talking about?

Emily: Well, perfect example is all of the listening tools that are out there. They should be out there listening. People are talking and you can hear what they are saying about news, information, their cities, their towns, initiatives. Listen. Listen and then respond, and open a conversation in real-time. You have the ability to real-time talk to people. When they're out there, customer ... It's almost like customer service in a sense. You can really further the conversation as opposed to just delivering a message into the ether and never looking for any response. Listen, monitor, and react in real-time, I think is a perfect way to match technology to what's going on in government today.

David : In terms of that though, what skills do you need to do, or what skills do you need to have? What technology do you need to have in place to be able to do that effectively?

Emily: I'm sure that these local governments, or even governments, they all have digital presence, putting things out there, and then using the technology to ... You can see who's visiting your page, you can look at SEO, that's another indicator. There's all these signals, and we call them digital breadcrumbs, that you can understand what's going on in the journey, what are people looking for? Using even Google Analytics, or something like that, to see what people are searching for in terms of what's current, current news, or putting in your town, some initiative or something. Just looking for those kinds of signals and trying to find out what comes up.

A lot of it's related to knowing how to analyse numbers. You almost have to become data driven, or data smart, about how you can use that insight to your advantage to address issues, that maybe are not being addressed, with your communications and crafting the message that speaks to what's being talked about beyond what you're doing in your office.

David : In terms of that, and I think that's a good point you raise around this notion of the ability ... You've seen the future, and the future involves mathematics. You're going to have to get more involved and engaged. How difficult is it for people who perhaps by being in communication they've probably made a decision along the way that maybe maths isn't for them, because it's a little bit too hard or it's not something that resonates with them. But we've now entered the era where maths is now going to be a fundamentally key part of anyone who wants to be successful in terms of the communications game because, as you say, these signals can be interpreted through numbers, and therefore

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you've got to use the numbers to inform your content. How best are people able, do you think, to get themselves ready for this integration of mathematics into the communication process?

Emily: Hire some really smart people. Actually, not everybody is a numbers person, and I think that there's enough software out there that will transform the digital figures into a visual representation that you can interpret. Charts and graphs, and things like that, that come from that data. There's ways to transform the raw information into something visual that's going to allow you to assess and make decisions based on that.

I think we need to go back to school and make sure that kids, in addition to communication skills, whether it's written, whether it's a verbal, whether it's analytical, that they are also making sure that they understand the importance of numbers and counting one, two, three. Because that also translates to dollars, or to funding, or to programs, or whatever. You can't forget, there isn't one without the other. Know your strengths, if that's not your strength, hire the person that's going to be able to interpret that data for you.

David : I think it's a very good point you make, though, that you've got to have some level of understanding. I don't think you can entirely walk away from it. Even before you get to the numbers, and you get to the signals, and even perhaps before you get to the content, you've got to get to the strategy piece. As the director of strategy for Social Media Examiner, how do you go about setting out what those objectives are that you need to put in place? First of all, understanding the "why", and then moving to the "what", the objectives. What's your process around setting objectives and holding you and your team accountable to those objectives? How do you go about imagining that? Because in government sometimes it can be a bit difficult because people don't want to be accountable, as much as they should.

Emily: Great question. I think what Mike is really good at in inspiring the team is doing research. Surveys are a big part of what informs our editorial, what informs our curriculum that we teach, what informs the sessions at a conference, what our news is. I think that is something that you can easily do, polls, and surveys, and asking questions. What's on the minds of your constituents, and then acting on that. Then creating the message and the structure around what those care-about are. Of course that align with what either your government initiatives are, but survey, listen, and act on those points.

David : Have you found that, given the technology and given the ability to be able to survey much more easily than previously in the past, do you use them more than you have done in the past?

Emily: We have a standard research study, an industry report, that we produce every year, and that's kind of the backbone of what informs us. We also have to have a current pulse on what's going on, because things are changing so rapidly. I don't think you can rely on a single source. I think you have to take in multiple sources. Every initiative might require something different. On the sales side, trying to find new customers might require me doing research or finding new customers that are coming into the market, so apply that

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to your space.

What are the new laws that are being enacted? What is the current election cycle? What's on people's minds? I don't know what you call them Australia, but we have ballot initiatives that people will vote on. What is the local ... Who's building what, and where, and how do people feel about it? What's going to make the difference? What's going to get people on board? I think those are the kinds of things that you need to pay attention to in your space. I think, go to the people. Do what you're doing here, ask the question.

David : You make a good point there, also, around change, and dealing with change, and being prepared to change, and knowing that the world is moving quickly. It's almost a cliché, isn't it, that things are changing so fast. How have you, and the team at Social Media Examiner, been able to build that mindset into the organisation, and the process into the organisation which has enabled you to be agile? How have you established that?

Emily: It doesn't hurt that we are willing to try new things. I think as new things come up, auditing new technologies or platforms is something that we do, but also being willing to say, "It's not for me", and step away from it. Not abandon, but recognise that doesn't need to be part of your core. You don't need to chase every shiny object, but you need to be able to speak to it in a comprehensive way. Also, one thing that I've learned, even more so here working with this team, is failure happens and so that's okay. You don't have to let it define you, let it inform your future. If you fail at something, fail quickly, move ahead from it, take the learnings, and then apply it and double down on what it is that you really want to do.

I'll give you an example. We launched a lifestyle parenting magazine because Mike was very interested in this and had aspirations of being a children's book author. He came up with this idea, we could have a blog, a methodology, my kids adventures, and we could create these really great long-form activities that parents could do with their kids. We thought we would monetize this with advertising. I had come from a consumer advertising background. We quickly learned that, to our quality standards, the cost of editorial was going to be astronomical to maintain this.

We weren't going to be able to scale, and we certainly weren't going to be able to fund this with advertising until, or unless, we did certain things that we weren't willing to do. We had this, and we had a podcast, and less than two years later we shut it down. We had a good run. It's still an evergreen bunch of content that's out there, but that's not going to part of our portfolio moving forward.

I think we learned a lot from that, and that allowed Mike to say, "Here's what I'm going to focus on. This is where I'm strong, and I'm going to build Social Media Marketing World in to be the world's largest conference for marketers in the social media space, and the digital space." I think we're pursuing that end and we're going to see exponential growth, because we've decided that's not where our strength lies. We maybe didn't succeed at that, but we're going to move forward and go where our strength are.

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David : Focus, I think, is everything. Timing is another real consideration, isn't it? In that at what point do you say enough's enough?

Emily: You have to look at the balance sheet and you have to say if ... There's a great ability for people to spend, or for businesses to spend, I call OPM, other people's money. If it's your money, and even if it's not your money, you need to treat like it's your money. You think about it, and what's the viability in the long-term, I think the decision becomes easier.

David : It's interesting, around this whole notion of test and learn, agile, fail, fast, that the current Prime Minister of Australia when he was appointed the first thing that he said when he was elected was exactly that. He gave the Australian public service permission to fail. He said we have to change, we have to start to become more agile. We have to accept that the world is changing fast, that you're not always going to get things right, but you're going to have to try. Obviously, not with catastrophic ... You've got to make sure that you make those bets on different programs in a way that's manageable, and learnable.

One of the key things that's coming through in a lot of the discussions we've had over the last few months is really around this notion of piloting. Starting something that's not ... Everything's important, but something that you can see, that you can focus on, that's got a real beginning and end point, and that you can really start to test some of these new methodologies, new processes, and go with that. I think that's something that works well. Do you guys do much with pilot projects?

Emily: I think we're constantly trying new things, or we're forced to try new things, because the market is changing and asking marketers to try new things. I think we're always looking at new ways to, I guess, bolster or enhance the footprint that we already have in the market space. I think we do ... We're not a big company that's launching things constantly, or continually, but maybe it's enhancement. I guess it's review data, what kind of enhancements, process improvements.

We had a year of no new things. One year I was here and we insisted on, "there was no new things". It was all going to be process improvement. Then the next year was, "the year of new things". We follow some methodology, and strategically think about where we want to go. Spend the time, be quiet, understand where you sit in a market or a space, and then try to visualize where you want to go. You always need to have a point on the horizon that you're shooting for. If you're a sailor you might have to tack a number of different ways as you feel the wind, and use it to your advantage. There is always that centre-point on the horizon.

David : We've been here for the last couple of days at Content Marketing World. You've been here a number of times before. What are your reflections as we sit here and the expo hall is broken down around us? What are you taking away from these last couple of days that you think is important?

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Emily: I think it's an exciting time in the world, and history, to be a marketer. There's a lot of fantastic things that are being thought up and brought into the market. You made a comment earlier about people are afraid of losing things, or losing jobs, because technology's going to take those jobs away. I say let technology take those jobs away so that we can free our minds and our creativity to do other things. If artificial intelligence can take the burden off the human resource, so that human resources free to use their brain and think of new ways to engage, and new ways to serve customers, or create opportunities or products or services, I say do that. Don't be afraid.

David : Then other things that you've taken from the last couple of days? Was there any sort of sessions that you went to and you thought, wow, I haven't thought about that so far. That's really changed the way that I've thought, or challenged a strong-held opinion or view?

Emily: I wouldn't say that there's been any of that like, "oh my God moments", but a lot of reinforcement to my personal philosophy of exploration, discovery, learning. I think you always need to be learning. The time that you step off the gas and relax isn't good. You should always be sitting forward in your seat looking to find out what's over the crest of the hill.

David : I think that's wonderful advice, and probably good advice to wrap up on. Before we go, what is the best way that people can get involved in the Social Media Examiner community? Where can they find Social Media Examiner if they haven't heard about before? There's many millions of people who probably haven't despite the fact that there is a very big community there already. Where is the place people can go and understand, and take advantage of the very generous community that's in place that Mike Stelzner, and yourself, and the others at the team, have invested considerable resources, and time, and effort, into over the years?

Emily: Sure. I would first start with the blog. If you're a business, or you're in marketing, and you want to know more about how to use social media in your marketing, socialmediaexaminer.com is the first place. You can find us on Twitter, we're @SMExaminer. We share other people's content widely, beyond our own, so you'll find other nuggets and pieces of gold there. We're on Facebook. There's a LinkedIn group, that's not as active.

We also have a private education platform called the Social Media Marketing Society. It only opens once a year, and if you want ongoing education you can go there. We have an online summit called the Social Media Success Summit, which you can purchase a ticket. They're starting in October, it's a month long of training. Which is really valuable if you're into marketing. Then of course Social Media Marketing World, which is in San Diego, March 22nd through 24th, 2017.

David : I think, actually, before we do go that issue around education and training. I think this is fundamental in that we are a big transition, and you do have to get new skills. You still have to find new skills. I know, myself, even here over the last couple of days I'm going away with a greater commitment to deepen some of my technical skills that I know I'm



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deficient. Because the world is changing so fast, because there are further opportunities to exploit these great improvements that you really do have to take the time to invest in your own capability. I think that's a lesson for everybody. Agree?

Emily: Totally agree. Professional development is something that ... You need to be a student learning constantly, all the time. You're never out of school. It doesn't matter what you do, I don't think you can always ... I think you can always improve.

David : No doubt at all. Well, Emily, thank you very much for your time this afternoon, and being on In Transition podcast. Yeah, it's a bit sad in a way. You can hear it in the background as the expo hall here is being packed away.

Emily: ... cardboard boxes.

David : Exactly.

Emily: Trolleys of booths being carted away.

David : It's all being carted away. But it's been a another magnificent event here in Cleveland, Ohio, at Content Marketing World. The Content Marketing Institute continue to do a wonderful job, as does Social Media Examiner, in building these big communities where people can come together, spend time, learn, laugh, argue, cry, do whatever they need to do. But be intensely human, and to learn. It's been great. We do, tomorrow, have the industry workshops. We're going to be running the government and public sector workshop here at Content Marketing World, which is great.

It's very important that the government and public sector community becomes part of the broader content marketing community. That we don't isolate ourselves and say, "Well, just because we're government, we're different." We're not. We're storytellers, we're about building trust with audiences over time through engagement, through listening, as Emily said before. We'll be doing that tomorrow. Hopefully that will be online and available somewhere into the future. For another week, thank you very much for taking the time to be with me, and I'll be back next week. Bye for now.