
Intro: Welcome to *InTransition*, a programme dedicated to the practise of content communication in the public sector. Here's your host, David Pembroke.

David Pembroke: Hello ladies and gentlemen, and welcome once again to *InTransition*, the podcast that examines the practise of content communication in government and the public sector. My name's David Pembroke, and I'm delighted that you've decided to spend just a small part of your time this week with me as we interview someone who has a lot of experience, particularly in social media in government. I look forward to speaking to him in just a moment.

As we start the show each week, we deal with the definition of just exactly what content communication is. Content communication 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.

So to my guest today, he's someone with a long history in government social media communications. His name is Elliott Franks, who currently is the social media manager for the Queensland government here in Australia. It's a position he's held for about the last five years or so, but he has been involved in government social media way back since about 2011. He did his undergraduate degree in media, also in Queensland, at the leading university, one of the great universities in Australia for media, the Queensland University of Technology. He did spend a brief time in the private sector before jumping into government social media. He joins me now. Elliott, thanks very much for joining me on *InTransition*.

Elliott Franks: No worries at all, David. Nice to speak to you.

David Pembroke: Elliott, just as the social media manager for the Queensland government, that sounds like a very big job.

Elliott Franks: Well, it's not all of the Queensland government. I look after four of the departments for the Queensland government.

David Pembroke: But still, four departments. That's a lot of work.

Elliott Franks: It is. It is a lot of work, and a lot of moving pieces. I just rely on a lot of good people and a good team below me to make sure everything happens at the right time.

David Pembroke: And good plans? Are you a good planner?

Elliott Franks: I am a good planner. I'm more of a good ideas person, and then I rely on other people to fill a lot of those small details.

David Pembroke: OK, so listen, what we might do this afternoon is just ... You can settle back on the couch for a minute and just tell me, what are the things that are keeping you up at night at the moment as the social media manager in four key government departments there in Queensland?

Elliott Franks: I think the scariest thing for our social media isn't even the risk that our content has. It's the risk of the trust we put into the platforms we use, because they can move a lot quicker than anything else going around. So say Facebook is our major channel that we use for all of our communications, but really we are at the whim of Facebook to do whatever they say. That's the biggest risk that keeps me up at night, and making sure we stay abreast of all the changes that happen in the world of social media, that just moves at 100 miles an hour.

David Pembroke: Yeah, indeed. It is this perennial problem that everybody has with these dominant platforms is the fact that they are not owned properties. They are somebody else's property, and therefore, you have to play by their rules. Given that they do play such a fundamental part in your social media communication, how do you stay on top of the changes that are made by Facebook?

Elliott Franks: Absolutely, the million-dollar question, isn't it? Listening to a lot of podcasts, reading a lot of blogs, having a lot of youths who we listen to as well... I've been in the game now for over 10 years, so I have a lot of experience, but there are a lot of people who have used the platform in totally different ways. I make sure we listen to those people who do have great new ideas, and really harness their skills and their enthusiasm.

David Pembroke: In terms of this engagement that you do have with the platforms, and this necessity to be so in tune with them, and with their effective operation, how often do you see the changes taking place, in terms of the results and the analytics that you're drawing down from what I imagine are quite large platforms, and quite large, engaged audiences?

Elliott Franks: It's almost constantly changing. Between all the platforms we use, every day there will be a new change; whether it's a change in Facebook advertising and the way that works, or whether it's a change in the amount of reach you're getting, or the things that you can do on Instagram. It's just every single day, there will be something new. When we do see that, we'll often get together as a team and we'll talk about all the different changes that have occurred. We really do nurture that enthusiasm for the platforms, and if we can get on top of the changes early, that's when we can really get our best results.

David Pembroke: But in terms of that, how much of a risk is that? The fact that you are looking as closely as you are and perhaps, sometimes do you find yourself jumping at shadows, that things that may appear to be a change in fact aren't a change? They're an anomaly of sorts, and therefore, by this reactive responsive approach, that perhaps sometimes you may over index one way or the other.

Elliott Franks: That's definitely a risk, but we see it more as an opportunity. That if something is new and we can almost game the system in getting a better result, then we'll jump at that opportunity.

David Pembroke: In terms of Facebook, it's the general consideration truism, call it what you will, at the moment is that it's now a paid platform. Is that your experience?

Elliott Franks: Yes and no. We still find that good content gets good reach. Really, at the end of the day, even if it's paid the paid information that we're putting out should be good content. That being said, we do use a lot of advertising when we're trying to do a lot of the community engagement strategies that we put out.

David Pembroke: OK. Now, in terms of what you're ... Well actually, one step before we talk about your teams, just could you name those departments that you're working for there in Queensland?

Elliott Franks: Definitely. I work for the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Department of Energy and Water Supply, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and the Department of Tourism, Major Events, and Small Business and the Commonwealth Games.

David Pembroke: OK, fantastic. So really, lots of visuals in that.

Elliott Franks: Definitely.

David Pembroke: In those four areas; that must be a key play for you.

Elliott Franks: Yeah, yeah. Lots of visuals, lots of different audiences, lots of different existing communities, really keeps us on our feet. And I guess that's probably the best part of the job, is that every single day I'm not doing the same thing. There's always something new to do.

David Pembroke: In terms of the way that you've integrated your team into the effective functioning of these four different departments, how have you done that? How have you established that linkage back into the line areas, and the business areas? Is it the work that you're doing is connected to the accomplishment of the objectives that are being set?

Elliott Franks: The biggest key is building relationships with the different teams in every department. Then, building trust amongst the senior leaders of those departments. When we started six or so years ago, there was a lot of risk aversion, and a lack of trust that abounded. We just had to build those bridges, get some runs on the board, and really get a lot of wins for those senior leaders. So when they think of engagement and when they think of communication, they think of social media.

David Pembroke: Yeah. In terms of that risk, would you say that it is largely disappeared now? That the social media platforms have proven their effectiveness? They've proven their stripes, and therefore there's less resistance to the use of social media platforms?

Elliott Franks: Yeah, most definitely. I personally don't think there was ever much of a risk, or definitely not as much of a risk as the risk aversion would have you think. Yeah, definitely there's more appetite for really putting yourself out there and speaking like a person, and getting the humorous content out there.

David Pembroke: Yeah. We'll come to that in a moment. I'm interested in that, again, having a personality, having a sense of humour, indeed having a point of view in what is ultimately a political setting. I tend to get this sense almost around the world now that because social media is now so popular with elected public officials that, that's having a bit of a flow-on effect as well; because as they are starting to see some effectiveness ... although, probably talking a little bit too much about themselves, and what they are doing, and content that's immediate and compelling to themselves, rather than to the audience. How much of an impact do you think that's had on the acceptance of the social media channels?

Elliott Franks: It's certainly helped. It's put us in with all new, different ministers throughout the years. They've seen the effectiveness of the work that they're trying to put out. We've already got those channels established. It makes their life easier, and when you can make the minister's life easier then it's better for everyone.

David Pembroke: Very true. Life is for ... Life gets a whole lot easier.

Elliott Franks: It certainly does.

David Pembroke: When the minister's offices are supportive of exactly what it is that you're doing.

Elliott Franks: Definitely.

David Pembroke: You mentioned this in a previous answer, this notion of humour and of having a personality, and having a point of view. Just describe that formula a little more, if you may.

Elliott Franks: It really depends on the different community that we've built. We try to have personas for each of our communities. A persona for the audience of who we think they are, and a persona for the channel. We try to speak like a person. Say on our Fisheries Queensland channel, we've built up a community full of people who are passionate about fishing, passionate about seafood, and also passionate about the rules of fishing; which is, believe it or not, that's a huge part of our community there. For that one, we'll put out all the fishing puns. We'll put out a lot of fishing jokes, cartoons. We'll really not take ourselves too seriously. That really plays well with that audience, because no one really... It's

their choice to follow you or to like you. We really do respect that, and we want the people to enjoy the page. They don't want to be talked at constantly. They want to talk with us, and just have a little bit of fun about some shared interests that we have.

David Pembroke: In terms of that persona, have you named that particular persona entirely?

Elliott Franks: No, we haven't.

David Pembroke: OK. That might be a bit of fun.

Elliott Franks: That would be. I think that might be an activity for next week.

David Pembroke: Give him a name, because I think that's... Again, and this is the thing that I love so much about government communication is that within an area like fisheries... Let's take that as an example. It is such a rich area for you to curate as you obviously are with finding the jokes and the puns from other sources. But also, that originating content, to be able to give people who are interested in fishing the insights about well, where are the fish? Where are they running? What are the best places to do that? That's information that you have.

Elliott Franks: That is certainly right, because we've got our fisheries officers out everywhere. They know the areas better than anyone. We utilise that for them to say what's biting, and then while we tell them, tell people what's biting, we'll just remind them of the rules as well.

David Pembroke: Yeah.

Elliott Franks: Those communities really, they build themselves. You just have to nurture them.

David Pembroke: Yeah, right.

Elliott Franks: There's obviously many, many communities who are fishing out there. We just try to have one that's kind of in our home, so we invite people in just to have a chat about fishing.

David Pembroke: How niched down do you get within that community? Do you do inland fishing, beach fishing, deep-sea fishing... Or do you try to sort of deal with all of the audiences in one place?

Elliott Franks: We try to deal with all of the fishing audiences. In Queensland, most of our fishing is offshore.

David Pembroke: Yeah.

Elliott Franks: That's the majority of our fishing, but we have a lot of different dams that we've stocked. We'll talk about those as well, lots of different river fishing. Generally, people who love fishing love all kinds of fishing, so we deal with them all at the one time.

David Pembroke: What's the content that works the best?

Elliott Franks: The content that works the best is actually... For that channel?

David Pembroke: Yeah.

Elliott Franks: Is the fines, whenever we fine someone. That's by far the best. Once we had a video that was of someone who had illegally modified a boat so they could hide lots of crabs in it. That boat couldn't be sold because it just wasn't safe to sell. We crushed it, and we filmed it. That's by far our most popular post, watching someone else's boat get crushed. There's a little bit of sadism for people out there. They like seeing the rules being enforced.

David Pembroke: When you say other fine content, it's not what people ... Do you tell stories of, "We picked up XY fisherman who did this..."?

Elliott Franks: Yup.

David Pembroke: "...And therefore, we fined them because they did... took too many... or too small fish..." or whatever. Something like that?

Elliott Franks: Yeah. Generally it's after they've been charged by the courts.

David Pembroke: Yup.

Elliott Franks: Then we'll tell people what they got charged with. We won't identify them, because that's a bridge too far; but we'll tell them what they were charged with and show some pictures. Generally, people like to share that content.

David Pembroke: Yeah, right. In terms of your fisheries offices, because again, this is my other sort of great or developing theory, I suppose, is this notion of distributed responsibility for communication. In this day and age, really everyone is going to ... is a content creator. The fact that you have this huge network of fisheries offices and officers all across Queensland, all doing interesting things, probably seeing some of the most amazing sites or recording some amazing events where people have had record catches, or things like that. How are you using that resource in order for you to get content to publish on your page?

Elliott Franks: Well, that's probably one of our bigger wins, because at first, those officers were fairly resistant to social media. Over time, they've started to see the value because people would come and talk to them about the stuff they've seen on the fisheries page. Over time, they've become our biggest champions. They'll

provide the 'what's biting'. They'll send us in pictures. They'll send us in videos of them meeting famous people. They really are our people on the ground, and they're the people where we're trying to sell to the audience as people who are just like them; because they really are. The fisheries officers are the most passionate anglers going around.

David Pembroke: Yeah.

Elliott Franks: Really selling that they're just one of them has really been a big win for us.

David Pembroke: In terms of their skills and digital skills, and in making sure that they know how to use the equipment, to make sure that they're taking better photos, making sure that they're understanding what a story might look like, understanding the types of angles that you might be looking for, how have you improved their skills?

Elliott Franks: In terms of the media collection, we've trained them one-on-one. We've created a few videos on how to take a video, and how to take a picture.

David Pembroke: Yup.

Elliott Franks: Like turning it horizontally. A lot of them are provided with better phones as well, and that's really been a big change in the past few years as iPhones and Samsung technology has become ... or the cameras have become so good, the product has improved a lot. In terms of getting the story, that's something that we don't struggle with, but one of the bigger challenges across all of our areas is people knowing when there's a story right in front of their nose.

David Pembroke: Yeah.

Elliott Franks: For us, it's just building the relationship with them.

David Pembroke: Yeah, OK.

Elliott Franks: Getting them to send in one story and we go: "That's absolutely fantastic."

David Pembroke: Yeah, right.

Elliott Franks: "Give us more of that." Once they see it on the page, I think there's a sense of pride that they've created that. Then, we just get more and more from them.

David Pembroke: How big is that network, just by the way?

Elliott Franks: I think there's over 100 fisheries officers throughout the state.

David Pembroke: Wow.

Elliott Franks: Yeah.

David Pembroke: How many of them would be enthusiastic contributors?

Elliott Franks: Yeah, it's not a huge portion of them, probably 20 or 30 of them.

David Pembroke: OK. Are they competitive?

Elliott Franks: Yeah. Well, I think they're all competitive, across all of our areas. People really like to get their content out.

David Pembroke: Yeah, and so obviously you can clearly see that in fisheries. That's an obvious one. It's an activity that people are engaged in. It's a real passion, and so you can see the content there. Perhaps in an area like energy, like coal mining...

Elliott Franks: Yup, yup.

David Pembroke: How do you make coal mining exciting?

Elliott Franks: Well, the coal mining, that falls under our natural resources and mines area.

David Pembroke: Yup.

Elliott Franks: For that area, we have a mining page. We have a gas safety page. We have a land and spatial page. In terms of the mining page, our audience for the mining page is people who work in the mining industry; because what we really want to talk about on that is about what mining adds to the economy. Mine safety is a huge, huge push for us. We're really talking to the people who work in the industry; we're not talking to all Queenslanders, though they're welcome to visit the page. Our persona there is someone who is within the industry. It's actually pretty easy to talk to them about coal mining because they see the benefits of coal mining.

David Pembroke: Again, I suppose the other theory around sort of narrowing audiences, we do now live in this narrow-cast world because people draw to themselves the content that they're looking for. Therefore, it is quite narrow. How do you deal with that? The fact that you have to deal with quite narrow and specific audiences on the one hand, but then on the other hand, looking at tourism and fisheries, they're much larger audiences. How do you balance those two demands?

Elliott Franks: Well, we find that the narrow audiences are generally the ones who are more passionate. We don't really worry if there is a perturbed, small audience; because generally, those people are very passionate about that as well. Take our land and spatial page. When we first started that, it was mainly for land valuations because that's something that everyone gets, so we wanted a channel where we could communicate about that. Then that grew to land and

spatials, so that's all people who are into mapping and old maps, and historical photos.

At first, we thought, there's not going to be an audience for that at all. It's turned out there's some very passionate land and spatial people who are very engaged on that channel. While it's smaller than most of our Queensland channels, we just try and provide the valuable information to those people who are very passionate about that area.

David Pembroke: Again, how do you then access, say, the bureaucratic resources in the policy and programme areas around land and spatial? How active are they in supporting you with the expertise and the content that you need to make those engagements meaningful and relevant to that passionate audience?

Elliott Franks: Yup. At first, that's always hard. There's a few ways. Meeting face-to-face and building those relationships is always the best. Like the audience that are passionate about that within the area, those people are just as passionate. Letting them know that they have a channel where they can communicate with like-minded people, that's worked really well. We do things like filming videos with one of the old mapping guys. He just told stories about the department. People have loved that within that area. The other tools we have is we use Yammer internally.

David Pembroke: Yup.

Elliott Franks: That's been a really good source of stories, because people will put out just what they're working on. We'll see that and go: "That's a fantastic story." We'll contact them and get that story out. Generally, that leads to more and more stories from those people as well.

David Pembroke: Across the four different departments and within those departments there's obviously multiple audiences that you're seeking to serve. How many pages are you servicing at the moment?

Elliott Franks: I think it's around 60 pages currently.

David Pembroke: Wow.

Elliott Franks: Between Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram.

David Pembroke: OK. And then, how big is your team working with that distributed resource that you have in these different areas, from the fisheries offices through to the policy people in land and spatial? How many people do *you* have?

Elliott Franks: I have three.

David Pembroke: Three?!

Elliott Franks: Myself and two officers underneath me, yes.

David Pembroke: Oh, wow.

Elliott Franks: Yes. We're kept fairly busy.

David Pembroke: You're spinning lots of plates there.

Elliott Franks: We are spinning lots of plates, so we have to make sure that we get the right people ... We teach the right people in the right areas what we need, and generally once we get them a bit of tutelage, then they become a little more proficient at providing us what we need. Then, we just use a few key management tools to make sure that emails are cut down, phone calls are cut down, and everyone's on the same page.

David Pembroke: OK. We'll come to that discussion just in a minute about the tools, because I'm interested in understanding the, not only the platforms, obviously the social platforms you're using, but what tools you're using to improve the quality of your communication. I think you used something that fascinates me, it's around this piece of education. How are you investing in that education, and how are you delivering that education at the moment, into these diverse areas within the departments?

Elliott Franks: Thankfully a lot of the communication staff, when they come in, even if they're new to government have generally got a good idea about social media. Universities, they're all teaching people about social media communication now, so if someone's new to government, they're pretty savvy on the platforms to start with. Generally, we don't have to teach that. We'll just have to teach them what kind of messaging, the kind of content that works on the channels, who the key people to talk to are, and how to provide it to us, and what we can offer them as well.

David Pembroke: Who has publishing rights? Do you own the exclusive publishing rights for those 60 pages, or 60 channels that you've got open?

Elliott Franks: It does depend on the channel. Most of them, we'll have final approval on there.

David Pembroke: OK.

Elliott Franks: A lot of them, they're fine, totally good to go out. We'll just look at it, "Yup, perfect, take it".

David Pembroke: OK.

Elliott Franks: We do have a final QA on it, just to really reduce that risk. Also, it's good to look over everything so we can go: "All right, that's going to be a possibly

controversial one. Let's make sure we're all around to monitor that," and not put it out on a Friday afternoon, or a Saturday.

- David Pembroke: How many sort of specific calendars would you be running across those platforms, the multiple platforms?
- Elliott Franks: Every single channel-
- David Pembroke: Has a calendar.
- Elliott Franks: Has a calendar, yes.
- David Pembroke: OK. The publish cadence inside of those, obviously some are going to be a lot more active than others.
- Elliott Franks: Yup.
- David Pembroke: But again, how do you determine the publishing cadence for the different channels?
- Elliott Franks: It really depends on the channel. Some channels, it's fine to have one or two posts a day; and some channels we've found can handle four, five or six posts a day. The more popular, more active ones, they can handle a lot more posts.
- David Pembroke: Yeah.
- Elliott Franks: Really when it comes down to it, what we focus on is, is it quality content? We don't want to be putting out content for the sake of it. We want it to always be good content. Obviously that can't always happen working in government, but we really try our best to make sure that there's good quality content. We run it past the test: "Would I put this on my wall? Would I share it?"
- David Pembroke: Yeah. Now in terms of, and again, it sort of staggers me a little that you are running that many platforms ... Sorry, that many channels on that many platforms with so few people. Have you had the conversation yet to say: "Hey look, here's the value that we're creating. Here's the benefit that we're creating. If you were to double or triple the size of my team, I would be able to realise far greater benefit," or are you just so busy, head down, tail up, spinning plates, making sure it's going, that you just don't have time to walk yourself up the corridors to the higher ups to say: "It's time."
- Elliott Franks: I think there would be value to more people, but we also ... We have access to our designers and our video team. We have access to all the comms people. Really, there's probably more value in making sure that all those coms people who are engaged with those business areas are working really well with us, rather than giving us more people.

David Pembroke: Sure.

Elliott Franks: That's the most important thing, getting those comms people in all the different areas fully engaged with what we're doing. Then, it kind of makes our life easier if they are better.

David Pembroke: Yeah. I heard a great saying this morning on a podcast, and it was that constraint is fuel. I think that's...

Elliott Franks: That's definitely right. We see ourselves kind of as the Marines of the communications world, and we just make due.

David Pembroke: Well, that's it. That's it, isn't it? You've got to do with what you've got to do. Again, it's this notion of getting that capability closer to the story, the communication people working in those particular line areas who can find the story, who can create the content, who can distribute it to air traffic control, as you're obviously sitting there and you're able to optimise the platforms, and be in tune with that distribution element of it; which is obviously the fundamental part of your job.

Elliott Franks: That's completely right. It's about building those relationships and educating those people, because Queensland, it's a huge state. There are people from the government all over the state, so it's our job to try and get as many of those people who have a story to tell, to give them access to those communities that we've built.

David Pembroke: In terms of that, just as a final question really around the enthusiasm and growth of the participation of the public sector, of these workers, obviously there's enthusiasm. It's growing. You mentioned the fisheries officers - of the 100, there's 20 to 30 who are really keen. As a sort of overall growth marker in terms of people wanting to participate, understanding the benefits to their job that will help them to achieve the objective being assigned to them, how much growth is there, and how much enthusiasm is there to be involved in communication?

Elliott Franks: It's constant.

David Pembroke: Yeah.

Elliott Franks: Constant growth. Particularly, say, with a lot of our advertising campaigns as well. That's often a door for us to get in there. They might have a biosecurity campaign, where they want to reach a very specific target audience, in a specific area. We can come to them and go: "What social media advertising? We can do that for you better than anyone else can."

David Pembroke: Yeah.

Elliott Franks: Once they get in there, they're like, "That's fantastic." They get that that really pulls them into providing us information, because that gives us more people on our page who might like that particular interest area. That really helps us a lot.

David Pembroke: Yeah, indeed. Now, sorry, I'll ask you one more question. I don't want to hold you up too long.

Elliott Franks: No worries.

David Pembroke: Just a final question around the harmonisation of the online activity with the offline activity, because we still know that face-to-face communications, events, community consultation, still very powerful, still very important. How do you harmonise the two? How do you get yourself in step with that offline activity to ensure that your online activity is supporting that, but also that you're feeding back from a lot of that offline activity that's taking place?

Elliott Franks: We bring people to those offline activities; that's a lot of the value that we can add. We're seeing events that haven't told us that they're holding them, so they'll hold an event without social media support, and not many people are turning up to them. Then, they'll come to us early, we'll create a strategy, possibly some paid advertising, and we'll get a much bigger turnout offline; because that's really how people are finding out about events.

David Pembroke: Yeah.

Elliott Franks: People aren't reading newspapers. They're not reading newsletters. If it comes up in their feed, and it's an event that really targeted towards them, they'll turn up to it. They're finding out from their friends, from everywhere else, and from us, about events on social media.

David Pembroke: Yeah, no doubt.

Elliott Franks: Then on the flip side, once the events are being held, we try to value-add as much as possible. Whether that's getting a video and putting that up afterwards, possibly a Facebook live, or at a minimum getting some pictures on the day - we try and really utilise that as well in our content.

David Pembroke: Yeah. No, yeah. Indeed. I think that's massively important. I think they do feed off each other, no doubt, that I think there's got to be that sort of driving back towards whatever the objective, particular objective is, so it's tied, or bonded back to the business objective.

Well mate, it sounds fantastic. Everything going well, then. I think we can sort of tick the box and know that we're safely being looked after well in terms of the content publishing business in the Queensland government. I'm sure you've got another boat to crush there today, so I won't hold you any longer! Elliott Franks, thank you very much for spending a bit time with us today on *InTransition*. I

know the audience will take a lot from that, and a lot of insight that they can apply in their day-to-day government communication jobs as we all get about the business of strengthening communities and improving the well-being of citizens through this process of content communication.

Thank you once again, and to you, the audience, thanks once again for coming back for another half an hour as we speak about everything content communication in government and the public sector. Really, what a fascinating, busy world. Wouldn't you love to spend a day sitting with Elliott and his team as they sort of run the 60 channels across multiple platforms, and sourcing people from all different parts of the wonderful and huge state of Queensland here in Australia; massive part of Australia. It would be fascinating to see, and also the decision-making process about what's in, what's going to work, what's not going to work... Feeding back to the audience saying: "Hey, that's great, but maybe next time we could see something else, or did you think of something else?" Yeah, really fascinating. If I'm ever in Queensland, I might knock on Elliott Franks' door. The Marines, as he calls them, up there in Queensland doing the job. Anyway, audience, thank you very much. I will be back at the same time next week. Thank you very much, and it's by for now.

Outro:

You've been listening to *InTransition*, the programme dedicated to the practise of content communication in the public sector. For more, visit us at contentgroup.com.au