
Speaker 1: 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 thank you very much for joining us again this week.

Today, we will talk to someone whose job it is to make people happy. But before we come to him, we start, as we do each week, with the definition of content communication as it relates to government and the public sector. So, 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, there we go.

Now, today my guest is Clint Parr, and he is the Head of People and Culture at Clemenger BBDO, which is Australia's largest and most successful marketing communications company. Fantastic company, clients including The Gallery of Modern Art, Transport Accident Commission in Victoria, Tourism Australia, and any number of other agencies, clients that they've had over these ... Very, very, very successful.

But Clint's job, as I say, is Head of People and Culture, and in Clint's very own words, his job, and the purpose and mission of his life is to deliver happiness. That's happy employees that make happy clients, happy clients make happy companies, happy companies make happy communities, and happy communities make a happy world. I like how that all comes together, but what I want to know is how is Clint making people happy when we're living in very stressful, ever-changing, stretched times. We're all being asked to do more with less. We've got technology, we've got change, we've got pace, we've got new channels, we've got expectations, we've got accountabilities, we've got automation, we've got artificial intelligence, we've got machine learning, and we've got to do it all.

So, Clint, welcome to InTransition, and how can you keep people happy when things are changing as quickly as they are?

Clint Parr: Thanks so much for having me. How to keep people happy? Mate, it's a really great question and it's one that I work on, both in my personal and professional life. From a professional point of view, there's lots of different ways that we can do that. I'm looking at countless ways that we do it here, both on an individual level and from a company point of view. So, mate, where do you want to start?

David Pembroke: OK, well let's start. Essentially, I want to look at this from really the practitioner's point of view, so as someone who is perhaps leading a team where they're being asked to do lots and lots and lots of different work, and the

expectations from their clients, be it, say, from a political office or from a senior executive, that the team is being asked to continually to do more with less. How do you go setting about the frameworks and the cultures that enables people to deal with that load of work?

Clint Parr: Mate, again it's a number of things. We're looking at ... The advertising industry, as a whole, is quite a fast-paced and demanding industry. There's very tight timelines that we're dealing with. There is lots of meetings. It's very dynamic. We require a lot of people to work together in collaborative teams, and all these people need to pull together and deliver quite a large amount of work in a very short timeframe.

The things that we're doing here at the moment is really trying to give people an individual voice to deal with their issues. A lot of my job is what I sort of call pastoral care, which is just basically giving people an ear, somebody to come and talk to and unload a lot of their stress, a lot of the time. The other things we do is give them access to counselling services and all sorts of things like that to deal with the stressful side of things.

The other thing that we're working on as an organisation is really around taking away a lot of the unnecessary processes and paperwork and admin and all that sort of stuff that's been parts of people's jobs and finding new ways to automate processes and do things digitally that makes things quicker and easier so that people don't feel as stressed in trying to just get through the work that they need to do.

David Pembroke: OK, let's go through a couple of those just sort of one at a time, really. When people are coming to you in this day and age, and they're sitting down with you and they're saying, "Clint, I am hassled. I am bothered. Things are getting on top of me," what are the top two or three things that people are generally saying to you in this day and age that is really having an impact on their quality of life?

Clint Parr: Yeah, great question. There's a few things, and it's different for different people. A lot of it is interpersonal relationship stuff. Workplaces are funny places, man. You come here. You have to work, or you're here for the majority of your week, forced to get along with people who you maybe, not necessarily would deal with outside of work if you had the choice. You're kind of forced to deal with these guys and create something on a day-to-day basis, so there's a lot of people who get stressed out with not getting along with people because there's different styles of ways of working and that sort of stuff. In those sorts of situations, a lot of it is just listening to them, understanding their concerns, and then giving them strategies as to how to deal with those sorts of issues. Getting them to understand what sort of stylistic differences there are between different people and maybe how to address different problems. That's probably a big one that we come across.

Another one that people come to me with is this sense of having too much to do and not enough time to do it, and that's not unique to our industry. That seems to be a problem that everyone's facing around the world at the moment, it's cultural busyness. Everyone's feeling busy and all that sort of thing.

In those situations, it's just about giving them a time to unload, take a deep breath, and reprioritise. I help them with strategies around time management, or prioritising different things. And in some cases going, "OK, well let's work with your manager and take some of that work load off you and give that to somebody else."

Mental health is seeming to be becoming another issue that we deal with a little bit more, and I think that might be because the stigma around mental health is, thankfully, starting to die down a little bit, or is not as scary for people. So, people are a little bit more open about that. For things like that, we are running training sessions here for our management team around identifying mental health issues. What are our responsibilities? How do you deal with those sorts of issues? What should you say? What shouldn't you say? How do you recognise the warning signs?

Those are three things that seem to pop up a little bit.

David Pembroke: Yeah, well they're all things that I think people, again, working in government communication, which in this day and age is not too different to the private sector in terms of demands that people are facing, and workloads and other things. But I'd be interested, just in terms of a cultural sense, how do you encourage that culture of speaking up, that culture of vulnerability that allows people to feel safe, to say, "Look, I'm either struggling with this particular person, or I really can't get out of bed at the moment because I'm feeling like everything's very dark around me."

Clint Parr: Mate, the way that I've done it here is by making myself very available and making it very clear to people why I'm here and that I want to help them. The other thing I've done is I went to a great deal of effort when I joined the agency to build personal relationships with people. For the first two weeks that I worked here, I wore a T-shirt that said, "The new guy," and literally walked around for two weeks learning everybody's name, getting to know them as a person, who they are, what they do, all that sort of thing so that when the time came that there was an issue that they want to discuss, they knew who I was, they knew what I was about, and they felt a level of comfort to come and seek me out.

David Pembroke: I like that. That's a very, very smart way to go about it because it's ... You made yourself vulnerable before transacting any sort of a relationship.

Clint Parr: Exactly. Yeah.

David Pembroke: But it's also, OK, that's your job. You're the Head of People and Culture and you've really got to be the person to get out there. But to me, that sounds like a really good piece of advice just for anybody who is either working in or is reassigned to a new area is to get up out of your chair and go and have those conversations well in advance of whenever you may look to engage with some other person to establish that human connection before it turns into a work connection.

Clint Parr: Exactly. Yeah. It was quite interesting. When I went through and did that exercise when I first started, I had a number of people come and talk to me ... Where just in our office here, that I'm directly dealing with on day-to-day basis, we've got about 120-odd people.

It was interesting. I'd go around and talk to these people, learn their names and all that sort of thing. People who'd worked here for a year, two years, three years, were like, "Ah, geez. I wish I'd learned everybody's names and could go and do what you're doing." I'm like, "Mate, get up out of your chair, walk over to that person you don't know, and say hello and just start a conversation." I said, "It's not difficult. It's never too late to do it." But yeah, people were like, "Oh, yeah. I wish I could have done that."

We do a lot of social events and things like that here in advertising and in our agency, that are designed to get people out of their own little teams and their own little microcosms within the office and get them talking to other people and building those relationships.

David Pembroke: Yeah, and I can see that from an organisational, cultural point of view, top-down approach, "This is the way that we're going to do it." But I think the genius in what you're talking about is really this is the bottom-up approach.

You take responsibility for your own happiness, your own contribution in your workplace. One way that you're gonna be able to do that is to go out and expose yourself, and go out and tap people on the shoulder because as you say, people are often ... They really want to have those conversations because they ... We're all people. We all want to talk to other people. We want to discover their interests, their quiriness, and perhaps by doing that we might short-circuit some of those tensions in the workplace.

Clint Parr: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

David Pembroke: So, from a cultural point of view, just that top-down, how hard ... What do you look to your leadership from in terms of culture? What are the things that you are looking from your leaders to be able to communicate into the agency? What direction are you looking for?

Clint Parr: Mate, I'm very passionate about organisations having a strong sense of purpose and clearly defined values. From our exec leadership team, the things I've been

talking to them about is clearly defining that for ourselves, our sense of why we're here. Why does Clemenger exist, and why should anyone care? If Clemenger was to cease operations tomorrow, apart from the people who'd be out of work and could probably find jobs elsewhere, why would anyone else in the world care that we are no longer here?

I think that that's where your culture comes from. Culture is just your sense of purpose and how you live out your values. So, I talked to them about that, and I asked them to be very clear about that and be very authentic in how they communicate that to our employees, and authentic in how they live those values on a day-to-day basis.

David Pembroke: As somebody who's worked, obviously, across a range of different places over the years, but also observing other businesses in the advertising world, which you do, where you get to look into other people's places. How seriously do you think people take this issue of culture, which is, as you say, defining that "why", defining that purpose and values? Because I'm interested to know ... Lots of people have got things written on walls, but how many people do you think talk about it regularly to embed it into their cultures?

Clint Parr: In the advertising industry, I don't think we do it very well at all if I'm brutally honest. We're kind of like the mechanic with the busted car. We know how to communicate. We tell everybody else how to communicate and all that sort of thing, but when it comes to doing it ourselves we've, traditionally, in the advertising industry, not just here but as a whole, haven't been particularly great at it.

David Pembroke: And is that because agencies have, again, like many government agencies, government departments, are task-driven, ultimately so busy that it just gets lost in the day-to-day, and perhaps the immediate business benefits of having a strong culture are lost in that culture of busyness?

Clint Parr: I think so, mate. The other thing is if you look at how the advertising industry came about and a lot of the modern advertising agencies now were started by creative people. As they are creative people, they've kind of wanted to almost buck the trend and not be associated with being like a corporate company. They all got very big open-plan offices and things like that because God forbid that everybody sits there in their own little office.

Rather than doing what the corporate sector may have done around really, clearly defining those purpose and values, they substituted that with building their cultures around parties, and ping pong tables, and beer fridges, and all that sort of thing. That sort of defined the culture of a lot of the advertising industry for the last few decades, and I think it's only the last maybe five to ten years that advertising agencies have started to look at that and go, "Well, we need more. Our culture can't be just about who has the best parties. It needs to be around what we do for the world, how we invest in our employees and the

experience, how we live out our values." They're starting to get it and go, "It's not just corporate-speak. It's actually valuable."

David Pembroke: Do you think that that's a response from the employees, that they're looking for that purpose, or is it just an evolutionary part of the development of culture around the communications business?

Clint Parr: Probably the latter, mate. I think it's just there's a bit more maturity now. There's been a couple of examples recently of advertising agencies being bought by places like Accenture and PwC and those kinds of businesses.

And the other thing is we used to just compete against each other, so it was usually ... It was traditionally just one advertising agency competing against another advertising agency for business, but now we're competing with the likes of Google and Facebook and other big companies like that who have gone out and do have clearly defined purpose and values that define their culture. We realised that if we want to compete against those guys, we need to compete for talent with those guys, and therefore we need to compete with how we define and develop our culture.

David Pembroke: So, I'm interested ... That's a fascinating observation, the first one around these big consulting firms who have now ... They're stretching themselves out into the creative space to think, "Well, we can give all sorts of other advice. Why can't we give this advice?" And they're acquiring the capability through senior experienced people and other capabilities. And then you talk about those massive platforms, Google and Facebook, who are soaking up and sucking up all of the growth in the digital advertising budgets that are going into the marketplace.

How is that model, that traditional model that you've been involved in ... How is it evolving? How would you describe how things are changing where you're working now?

Clint Parr: How we've done it here is really just around education. I spent a lot of time here with our exec team explaining the differences, like really basic stuff, to them. Explaining the differences around the expectations that millennials have compared to, say, what the baby boomers had around their employment. It's really just about educating these guys and going, "The world has changed. The way we need to operate needs to change to keep up with that."

So yeah, a lot of it's just been about education for us, I think.

David Pembroke: But in terms of that, also though, are you at the advertising agency, who are obviously very skilled in creativity ... Are you then looking at, for example, management consulting and thinking, "Well, actually we could provide those services and why don't we go and attack them and go after their business like they're coming after ours?"

Clint Parr: Mate, that's a secret (laughs).

David Pembroke: (Laughs)

Clint Parr: Nah, mate, it's interesting. There's areas which maybe not to the management consultancy level, but certainly there's growth areas in terms of data, social, customer experience, and those sorts of areas which traditionally probably ... Well social hasn't really been traditional, but they haven't traditionally sat within creative advertising agencies. And those things are starting to fall under our remit a lot more. It's an evolving business, and that's kind of what makes it exciting because you can apply creative thinking to all sorts of areas. Yeah, it's kinda why it's fun to be here.

David Pembroke: Yeah, sure. With all that change going on, obviously education is part of the antidote, being able to move and adjust and change, but what other things are you looking to do? Are you hiring different types of people with different types of skillsets?

Clint Parr: Yeah, absolutely. One of the easiest areas to talk about is this area of content, developing content for, say, Facebook platforms, or YouTube, or all those sorts of things. The types of companies that we're dealing with now who are doing that are very different, and so therefore we've gotta go out and hire very different people.

One of the roles that we been looking for recently is what we're calling a predator, which is like a producer and editor, who can go out there, shoot some content, bring it back, edit it, all really quickly, and it's sort of like a person who's maybe doing three people's jobs all in one. We're looking at things like that. In that area of customer experience, we're looking for people who've got a really good strategic background in that area. On the social media side of things, we're seeing people who come from more sort of like journalistic backgrounds and things like that.

Yeah, we're certainly having to get very creative in terms of where we're hiring people from now, which is quite different for us. It's no longer a case that we can just go around and poach people from other advertising agencies and all that sort of thing. We've got to think outside the box.

David Pembroke: And your process around doing that, your process about how you define what it is that you need ... Could you describe how you do that? Because most of the people who listen to this podcast are involved in government communications. That's their job. They work inside government and they, again, looking for similar types of people in terms of the predator, for example. Every government department, agency, now has a predator of some sort. Same sort of thing with journalists. Journalists are getting jobs in government agencies to help fuel that, to create the content to sustain their presences on Facebook.

What guidance can you give to people in terms of the processes that you go through to, first of all, identify the skills that you need, but then get them into your agency?

Clint Parr:

Yeah, mate, it's a really interesting one. I think what's driven our need to do this sort of stuff is this idea of needing low-cost, quality content. And how can we deliver those projects faster, more cost-effective, but still maintaining a very high level of quality?

So, it's really costs that drove our issue there, because we had a production department where we could have gone through our normal channel of briefing in an idea to our creative department. They come up with a script and a beautiful-looking visual idea. Then, it goes down to our production department and they have a guy who shoots it. Then, it goes and gets passed on to the edit room and all that sort of stuff.

But nowadays with social, you need to react so quickly to get content up and to respond to triggers that are happening out in the world that we were kind of forced into this change. We just had to go out there and try to find people. It was really tricky to start off with, trying to identify, "Where do we get these people from?" and all that sort of thing.

Now, these roles are sort of starting to become a little bit more common. It's a bit easier to find them at production houses or things like that. And also, kids coming out of uni. They grew up with this technology and all these different skills. The millennials seem to be more multi-skilled than, say, traditional... 10, 15, 20 years ago when people were more specialised into their areas.

We look at what we call T-shaped employees. They're these employees where, if you imagine a capital T, across the top they know a little about a lot, but then they can go deep in one or two key areas. That's the sort of skillset that we look for.

David Pembroke:

What sort of a job do you think that the vocational education training organisations, your TAFEs of the world and the universities are doing in terms of equipping these skilful, bright, young people with the right tools to be able to deliver value for an organisation like Clemenger?

Clint Parr:

Mate, it's hard for them. I think when we start talking about like the predators and things like that, the people that we've hired, a lot of them are more self-taught. They're just people who are really interested in that sort of thing, so they jump on YouTube or that sort of thing, and just go and do their own research and muck around with it and learn it for themselves. There's definitely still a place for traditional education and learning in terms of doing this sort of stuff, but a lot of the guys, yeah, that we're getting just seem to be more self-taught and just passionate about those sorts of things.

David Pembroke: And from your point of view, when you're looking at that, you're quite happy to take someone who can demonstrate the skill as opposed to someone who's got a piece of paper?

Clint Parr: Yes. Yeah, we are for a few reasons. Often, these guys will be able to show us their work, so they can come in here and they will have their own websites and things like that, and go, "Here is content that I've created. You can look at what I've done." And we can go, "That looks really cool," or, "that looks really terrible," and make a decision based on that. That's more how we're making decisions rather than going, "OK, what qualifications have you got?"

David Pembroke: Yeah, OK. Very good. Now listen, just before we go ... We're coming up against time, but the pace of change, the role of artificial intelligence, machine learning, really this change that is sweeping through communications is only starting to kick off in terms of the transformation. How do you build that resilience into the organisation, and that agility into the organisation so as it ... Clemenger is there in 50, 60, 100 years time?

Clint Parr: Yeah, good question, mate. That's a particular topic of interest for me at the moment. I think we're somewhat sheltered from it a little bit just due to the nature of a lot of our work. The creative side of things ... Computers are really good at the algorithmic side of stuff, but they haven't really cracked how to deal with human emotion and creative product and all that sort of thing.

There are certainly elements of our jobs which we are automating, and we're embracing that. I think we ... Companies basically pay us to be creative, and we're looking at ways that we can shape how that works for us if that makes sense. How do we want to use digital? And how can we use digital to affect how we work moving forwards? And we build that into how we work.

David Pembroke: And in terms of that balance between the value of the creativity and the value of the data, heavy analytical side of things ... In terms of that value in the eyes of the customer, what are they valuing more in this day and age, the great idea or the provable data that someone can bring to the table?

Clint Parr: Mate, it's now a very good mix between the two, and that's something that we've been talking about here quite a lot is that creative ideas that need to be backed up by data. We can come up with really, really, wonderful, creative ideas for a business, but if it goes into research and whatever and people don't like it, or we can't demonstrate why this creative campaign will work, clients generally won't buy it.

The old days of creatives coming up with just wonderful, big, beautiful ideas without being able to back it up with hard data are kinda gone now, which means that we're having to invest in data strategists and things like that here. You can back up all our ideas with research and data. Yeah.

David Pembroke: Well, Clint, sounds like you've got your hands full there, my friend, with a very big job, major Australian, traditional ... One of the giants, if not the giant of Australian advertising over many, many years. And these changes that are sweeping through the industry, and the fact that you move or die. And then these challenges of culture, of getting different people, more diverse people from cultural backgrounds with different skills, with different challenges, at a time of great change. It sounds like it's gonna be a really, really interesting challenge for you, an interesting business challenge to make sure that you can pull together a team, because ultimately, that's what it is, is a team to be able to deliver value.

Clint Parr: Exactly. It keeps me busy, keeps me employed, so ...

David Pembroke: Excellent, mate. Well, thank you very much for joining us today InTransition. And the other thing ... Just before you go ... Just congratulations, I think, on that insight that you've given us around ... And thanks for that insight about getting up and getting out of your chair, and go and have a conversation. Go and get to know somebody. Go and ask a question. Go and find out what interests them. Go and find out what makes them tick, what's on the inside. Because when it's all said and done, we're all people and we all want to feel valued. We want to be understood, and we want to be contributing to that mission and that purpose of the organisations that we work for. I think it's everyone's responsibility. And often, we look upstairs to the executive, "Oh, what are they doing?" Well, it's not so much what are they doing. What are you doing?

So maybe set yourself a target over the next couple of weeks to go and introduce yourself to maybe, I don't know, one, two, three people who you don't know, and by the end of the year, you've probably introduced yourself to the whole department, or the whole agency. I just think that's such a great bit of wisdom.

So, Clint, thank you very much for joining us today. And to you, the listener, thank you very much for coming back for this edition of InTransition. We'll be back at the same time next week, so for now, it's bye.

Speaker 1: 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.