
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 for joining me once again. Today, a great interview is ahead with an old friend of mine, and the program's, and contentgroup, here in the Australian Capital Territory. We'll discuss the emerging trend of journalists entering government and what that challenge is, but we'll come to that in just a moment. But as we start the programme each week, as we do, with the definition of content communication. Actually, before I do that, I would just send a note to, or a message out to people to maybe go onto the Content Marketing Institute blog to have a look what Joe Pulizzi's talking about in terms of the naming frameworks around content. He talks about content marketing and is it the right term to be using. Which is exactly why we don't talk about content marketing anymore, because really marketing in government we found is a dirty word.

'Content communication' works much more effectively with senior executives when they're sitting in front of their political masters. If they're spending money on communication that's OK; spend it on marketing, that's bad. So, there you go. But anyway, 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 outcome. That's what we're talking about today. But to my guest today, Kanchan Dutt, is a journalist. Started in the UK, but then came to Australia and we first crossed paths when he was working on a number of beats actually, out at the local newspaper here, the *Canberra Times*. But then he took the jump into the public sector, where he worked for the local municipal government here in Canberra in the community services sector.

I really want to explore some of that, because community services is such a big challenge for us, as inequality is such a big challenge for governments around the world. How can we use content to challenge some of those issues, so we'll come to that. But he's now jumped into the big league, so to speak, working for the Australian Bureau of Statistics. And really at a time when data is all powerful, information is all powerful. We'll talk to him as well about what is the ABS doing to tell the Australian story, so as that people can understand what the changes are. So as then government can explain why it is they have to intervene and make the policies that they do. Interesting stuff ahead. Kanchan, thanks very much for coming back to InTransition.

Kanchan Dutt: Thank you. Thank you for the welcome, and it's quite a welcome, I hope I live up to it in the course of this discussion.

David Pembroke: Now this is the second time, because interestingly we were just talking before we started the tape about our first, and if people get onto the contentgroup.com.au and dive right back into the archives, we had a live stream probably, I don't know, four years ago on a conversation about exactly what

we're going to talk about today. In that time, back then you had, I think pretty well just started in the public service. Probably four or five years now that you've been here?

Kanchan Dutt: Yeah. My last job before the ABS was in the community as a Directorate, and I joined there in about 2011. I joined the ACT government, I think it was, gosh, going back to 2007.

David Pembroke: OK, right, so you might've been in there for quite a long time before then.

Kanchan Dutt: Yeah.

David Pembroke: OK, so you're quite some way into this journey from journalist to government communications professional. It's something that people are really increasingly having to look at because of the decreasing opportunities, in particular, mainstream media. Maybe describe for me how that was for you, moving from being a beat reporter, into working for government.

Kanchan Dutt: That is kind of a scary thing that I've been in the public service communications longer than I was a reporter. Which are one of those milestones that you look at when you get older, and a bit greyer, and a bit more generous around the waist. But I was fortunate in both instances, I moved to Australia from the UK and I went to the *Canberra Times*. I was on a tourist visa and then, which meant I could only stay here for three months in any one job. And they were very generous in then sponsoring me to stay on there longer, and that enabled me to then get more contacts and then a couple years after I moved to the education department in communications. When I moved to Australia, having been a reporter in the UK for 10 years, I moved here for my now wife, rather than for jobs. But it was a good reason to have a change of path as well. And it coincided, not at the start, the tough times that papers faced were pretty well entrenched even back then.

It was also well, if I'm going to be looking forward to my career, where will the next step be? And it was good that I had some good supporters at the time that opened up some doors for me who were in the public service.

David Pembroke: It's a big issue, isn't it? Because if you do want to have a family, you do want to have a career, you do need to have stability. It's a really challenging issue, isn't it, for people to look at. They may love writing stories and may want to be out there speaking truth to power, but the reality is you've got to put food on the table.

Kanchan Dutt: Yeah, and also when you're in newspapers particularly, and living in Canberra, there aren't many options for working in newspapers. You've got a few plum jobs up on the hill that are declining in number, and a couple of weekly papers. Other than that it's a Melbourne, or a Sydney, or a Brisbane trip. Whereas when you move to the public sector, also in communications the private sector is

expanding, contentgroup has been here a while, one of the main stayers. But there are other new companies emerging on the market and obviously within the public sector there are many more options as well. It's, I guess, about where you see yourself going and where that path will be and where you think you can, I guess, rejuvenate and make a difference as well.

David Pembroke: What skills have you taken from journalism into your public-sector communications career, that have had the biggest impact?

Kanchan Dutt: There is the flippant answer to that question, which is the traditional journalism skills that I won't talk about in case one of my employers is listening in to this podcast, so I'll keep that one off the record (laughs). Listen, David, you'll know as well as anybody else, the art to communication is just story telling. And journalists are among the best story tellers that you get. Good journalists can turn their hand to any story and they can make it accessible. Once you have that ability, you can then open up the other strands to who you talk to. Also, one of things I am forever grateful for for being a journalist, is it brought me out of my shell as an individual. My first job in a paper, I grew up in a town in Slough, in southeast England. It was a mainly Anglo workforce, in an older, it was the era when some of the World War II veterans were dying off but they were still part of our customer base, so going out to engage with those people...

I'm from an Indian background originally, born in the UK, it was almost like chalk and cheese. That made me get out of my shell and become more engaging with other people, and that served me immensely well throughout all my jobs.

David Pembroke: Yeah, it's interesting, there's a couple of things in that, but maybe let's just stay on that for the minute. What's emerged over as a theme really in the, I don't know, 120-plus podcasts that we continue to, that we're up to, one of the continuing themes and advice that people have, particularly for government communications professionals is, get out of your seat and go and talk to people. Get up and get moving, go and build the relationships, because that's how you'll have an impact. If you sit behind the email and just ping off emails, you'll get nowhere. But you've got to lose a bit of shoe leather and get up and get to know people at a human level, and that's where you can become effective.

Kanchan Dutt: Exactly right. We were having a chat yesterday with some of my colleagues in the office about something we want to get more media engagement with. And it came down to picking up the phone, talking to the gentleman you want to engage with. The emails are good, you can get the information out of that, but don't rely on that as the sole source of it. We tend to fall in the, even journalists who then transition to public Heads of Communications still tend to, sorry not tend to, some of them fall into the trap of relying on email communication, because they're time poor, they need to get the information out to people. But when you get into that one-on-one engagement, it reaps huge dividends, it's almost a no brainer.

David Pembroke: But that's from a media point of view. But I suppose what I'm probably more suggesting though is, the internal communication challenge and building of credibility that government communications, the WPP research recently has confirmed that communication isn't really a valued function in many governments anywhere in the world. It's seen as the car wash, or the colouring-in department. And the advice really is, to build your credibility, get up and go and talk to the policy people. Get up and go and talk to other people to build relationships, to understand their business, to explain to them how you can actually add value to what they're doing as opposed to being seen as an end-of-the-line service.

Kanchan Dutt: Exactly, right. And I'm fortunate, all my roles that I've had, supervisors have been supportive of me getting out to do that. Because it's one thing to pick up the phone but when you're in the same building as your colleagues it makes no sense not to go and see them. It's obviously when you've got an organisation that's spread over different parts of the country, that's a bit trickier. But we've still got video conferencing, you can get on a plane and hop up to see the Melbourne staff, the Darwin staff, there's no reason for not engaging in that way. It builds relationships that you don't get any other way.

David Pembroke: In terms of, just going back to that other second point around story telling. Story telling at its heart needs tension, it needs... it can't be, 'and this happened, and this happened and this happened and it was all great'. Because that's a boring story. To be an effective story teller you need to be able to contrast, to find conflict. In my experience, particularly senior people don't like to talk about the bad thing, we don't want to talk about the bad thing. So how do you find, or how do you take on that challenge of, to tell a good story you need to have the tension, you need to have the resolution, the challenge, the things that didn't work, the things that are working, in an environment where people are saying, no, no, we just want to have sunshine and good light here. We don't want challenging... we don't want the bad stuff out in the public eye. Or we don't want to tell the bad stuff because that will make us look bad, or it might expose us, or it might expose our minister. So how do you go about telling good stories in that sort of environment?

Kanchan Dutt: It's interesting, the use of the word 'tension'. I don't think I've ever landed upon an ideal place where we can acknowledge tension without either scaring the organisations I work for, or too obviously underplaying it to the people you're trying to communicate to.

David Pembroke: Who can smell if it's phoney...

Kanchan Dutt: Yeah. And that's when I think, within, if I'm doing a media pitch, I still wouldn't overtly say, listen guys, look at the way we really ballsed up on this one. Look at page 75 of that report, that's the gold on that stuff. But you need to be prepared to acknowledge it and you need to have your spokes people ready to go, yeah we did that, this is what we learned from it. And this is how we've

moved on. You have to have an answer to the question, don't go out blind, otherwise you'll come a cropper. Also comes down to those relationships you have with the people you are talking to. I think we're both fans of back grounding, where appropriate, with reporters, because it builds that trust and it gives that context. In the ABS we have some really complex statistical data, and it's all foreign to me and I'm having to communicate it.

But when you're talking to journalists who are maybe on the general beat and not a specialist beat and are filing against multiple deadlines a day, if you can give them any other bit of information they can have in the back of their mind, it always helps build that. When you go out, they go oh, actually we know this is where they've come from, these are some of the tensions they've had in the past... They can write about it, they can write about it in a factual way, without us having to megaphone it every time we talk about it.

David Pembroke: What are your say, five top tips to getting good outcomes with the media? In this changing media environment, where I think you hit on something there, that it's multiple deadlines a day. It's almost everybody's in the radio and news business now, top of the clock, as soon as you've got it out it goes. Well, actually it's not even top of the clock anymore it's whenever it's baked, it's gone.

Kanchan Dutt: We're looking, as far as is possible we try to tailor our approach to journalists. There are thousands of journalists, we don't tailor approach to each of them.

David Pembroke: But your role is specifically media, isn't it?

Kanchan Dutt: I have media in my team, then we have because external communications and graphic design as well, there's a few elements to it. With the journalists, whether we're looking at, well what stream are they in, is it broadcast, press, online? What are their deadlines, for example, how they're rolling. Picking up the phone to them, talking to them and try and tailor our content in a way that meets their needs. It's less about, here's our information, do something with it. We're in the business of selling and it's a competitive environment out there. We try and tailor our products towards what their needs are. We don't want to harass reporters, because they've got lots of stuff on their plate, but we also try and approach them when... in a proactive way. Not only when they need something from us, or when they're trying to give us a shellacking, but we try and open up opportunities for them, so they know there's genuine engagement there. Government organisations I would say, hand on heart, are generally doing more of that.

They were quite sheltered in the past about how they approach and there is a lot of nervousness about it I think. But there are so many options for talking to reporters and more broadly communications that are opening up and they're saying well, we've got this good news to tell, let's get out there. My theory is that we're going to get, with any job you work in government communications,

at some point you'll get a pounding. It's worth getting out and talking about a good story before you do that.

David Pembroke: How important, obviously at a place like the ABS, there's lots of information, lots of great information, lots of interesting information. Panel beating that into good stories, or interesting stories, is probably quite a bit of fun, I would imagine, actually finding that story and trying to translate those complex data sets into digestible, interesting information. But to that challenge of context and the importance of context for both the audience and for the journalist environment, how important is it to recognise that context so as you may have the good story but you've got to make sure that it lands at the right time, so as it gets its possible run?

Kanchan Dutt: Yeah, extremely important. One of the benefits we have at the Bureau of Statistics is that we are very down the line. We're a statistical agency. I used to think a conventional Department was quite down the line, but we are super straight line, we don't put any spin on anything at all. I think despite some of the high-profile issues we faced in recent years, I think we're still seen as a straight down the line organisation. People don't expect us to come out with heaps of swirly adjectives and media releases and a whole lot of this, they just want the information from us. Which means that we have I think, still quite, we're trusted to deliver factual information by the population at large. Then the context comes into the longer story-telling picture. We have heaps of education statistics, or we have personal safety statistics and we have a series of those. So we can build that information over a course of time and we can refer back to what previous surveys told us, what we think from these surveys would tell us.

David Pembroke: But do you line up say, for example, education statistics with the context of the end of a school year, where people are maybe deciding where they're going to be sending their kids, so as at that time of the year that people are making decisions. Or winter time, where people are dealing with health issues, so you've got health statistics. Do you line up the stories in that way?

Kanchan Dutt: Yeah, we do. One thing we're getting big into is the various awareness days that come around...

David Pembroke: Yeah, surfing off the back of those.

Kanchan Dutt: ... That's it, and those always go down well with us. But you're right, those key points of year as well. The ATO does that very well with obviously end of the financial year, they're well over that stuff. And Human Services and families.gov do it well, but that's main points for families. But yeah, we've got those points as well. Seasonal business cycle years, environmental years, we had an agricultural census out really recently that ties in with that kind of stuff. In one aspect, we want to be the ones who are driving the agenda but we have to recognise there's a lot going on around us as well. And it makes a lot of sense to tap into those already, those themes and obviously then on social media as well.

Because you've got the conventional media and the big awareness days. But on social, what is happening on that and is there anything we can tap into that, that reflects our brand and what we're known for, but shows us engaging in another forum?

David Pembroke: But it's interesting with the ABS, there's the ABS brand, but then say the sub-set brand is the census. We've got an international audience they probably don't know, but the most recent census there was a, let's say there was a, I don't know. Oh, actually you tell me, how did you describe what happened? (laughs)

Kanchan Dutt: I'd describe that as before my time, I think. It was a website denial of server attack, I think it was. (laughs) Looking in from the outside I was going, whoa, who's going to work there, man? Then a couple of months later I walked through the door.

David Pembroke: So anyway, what happened, audience, it was one of the first, I think it was the first, anyway...it was going to be on line, everyone was going to fill out their census data online, and the system crashed. Anyway, politically you can imagine everyone's running around in ever decreasing circles and everyone, well not everyone, but the media particularly, the blood-thirsty media got completely hysterical about the whole thing. But interestingly the census is really a sub-brand of the mother ship. The story of the recent census was obviously the story of the system service denial. But the previous census, the story really, from a communications point of view was the success of it. And the success of the communications, because the census had a personality. It decided to go out and have a bit of fun with the Australian people. I think everybody likes a laugh, whether you're Australian or, doesn't matter, everyone likes humour, everyone wants to have a good time. And the census really got it right, I remember back then, just being, I loved it. I subscribed to it and looked to it and there was some really funny people on message living within the bigger brand. It was a sub-brand so it sort of got away from the ABS stuff. But it was super-successful. Is there still an appetite to have a sense of humour in a place where it's a big, serious, sensible, grown-up organisation?

Kanchan Dutt: Yeah, there is. Obviously, the period when we had census issues was tense, it was full-on and it was a big moment for the organisation, in its 110-year history. Within the ABS, to put it into context, it was the highest profile incident within 110 years. And it led to obviously some thinking about communications and how we do it. I'll be open, I didn't work directly on the census communications campaign, but the guys who were there and this is a shout out, were amazingly resilient and they've done a good job. Obviously, we had the August 9 census night. Then in April we had the initial, typical Australian information release. And then on June 27th we had the main data release, there's more to come. I think we can say the transition of tone on that content, August 9, very full-on, very confronting. April 11th still references back to census fail, but here's the information and how good it is.

June 27, third paragraph of the story, by the way census failed but how good is the information. That's given us, I think that was, each of those are benchmarks for us on how we can communicate. Again, we had to respect in the first instance, I would imagine the tone of the situation. But now we can get a bit more engaging with it and some of the content we're producing is engaging, the humour that you referenced from the 2011 census, I don't know when the tone for this campaign was development but I think it's been more informative than humorous. But there is, I think part of the theme that I'm looking forward to doing is exploring some of those ways to become more engaging with the information we have. We are a statistical agency, it would be like the Reserve Bank coming out with a bunch of emojis on their social media. People would go, wha-hooooaa, who's at the wheel? It's that Dutt again, he's back in the ...

We have to be careful how we do that but we can make it interesting, we can make it relevant, we can in an appropriate context be light-hearted and still maintain the integrity of the brand that we're working towards.

David Pembroke: From a personal point of view I think the ABS is known globally as a world leader. Whose computer systems don't fail? OK, sure, it probably shouldn't have happened but our computer systems here fail all the time, not all the time, but they go down. Anyway, we move on.

I did want to come back to that in a moment, but I'm really interested again in your time in the communications services sector. Because it is this, I think this is the great challenge, this is the great moral challenge of how do we continue to drive economic growth, but stop the widening of the gap. And this is everywhere, it seems to be a global phenomenon, here in Australia as well as Europe, North America, South America, everywhere. And you saw it pretty well close up being the Communications Director of the Community Services Directorate. Now look, obviously Canberra is the world's most liveable city, it's got the highest living standard in the world, we're not like everybody else. But we still have our share of people who are not doing as well and even yesterday, statistically here, wages growth is still... jobs are up but wages growth is still pretty tight. So, what's your views about that and where can communication play a role in helping government and helping communities get better?

Kanchan Dutt: The Community Services Directorate was an eye-opening time for me, work-wise. Because you do, as you say, you get to understand more of the difficulties that probably more people than we would imagine are facing, within our community. It goes from the severe poverty, you see people who are experiencing homelessness on the streets. And we have young people who are in the care system. But then there's the less obvious forms of hardship as well that we get. Colleagues around us who are couch surfing for a couple of nights, or who have gone to the Salvos to get a short-term loan to pay some of their bills off. Where communications comes in is, I think is raising the awareness of that and reducing the stigma that we have. Somebody who has a disability is not

a disabled person, they're a person who has a disability and it doesn't detract from what they are as an individual.

Somebody's who's an Aboriginal person, they can either be as we all, facing hardship or there can be as many of us in Canberra, high-flying success story. We don't need to pinpoint everybody to the same story. That kind of equalising, and awareness raising I think is something that the Directorate has a big part to play in. And through them the government as well more broadly, also acknowledging that it's there and we do need assistance for parts of our community. We can't deny we need public housing, we need subsidies for various parts of the community. Just making the awareness again, we need this help, some people need it, and if you need this help, here is where it is as well.

David Pembroke: But ultimately, to me then, it sounds like part of the solution, or the role that communications can play is through stories. Is through telling those stories in an engaging way, so as that the people who are perhaps more privileged, like myself, can understand what the challenges are and perhaps I could relate to it a little bit more effectively, through better stories, perhaps if I'm aware of it, or if I'm made aware of it.

Kanchan Dutt: Yeah, without a doubt. There is so much going on in good... one of the difficulties we always had in the agency was getting the individuals themselves who were experiencing the hardship, whatever it might be, to tell their stories. Because they don't want to come forward and say, listen, look what I'm going through. And also there are a whole legion of appropriate privacy provisions around identifying people in various states of government support, so that was the difficulty. On the plus side, we had some very good staff within the agency and within community sector that worked with them to tell that story on their behalf. You'll know, David, you worked with our Directorate over a number of years, you know some of the things going on there, you supported the Youth Awards as well as a group, so...

There are many ways to tell the story and put it together in a way that doesn't diminish what's going on because we don't want to scare people. If you're trying to engage people in part of your discussion you don't want to scare them off, by going jeez, we're all going to hell in a hand basket. They need to feel as though they can do something about it, or that there's a reason for them being told the story.

David Pembroke: But that's indirect contrast, isn't it, to the political environment that runs around these issues because it is, that's the tone, isn't it? It's an extreme tone. This is a disaster and this is a... there's nothing in the middle anymore. Particularly in the media, everything is either a disaster, or it's wonderful and there's really no sensible place for discussion or stories to take place.

Kanchan Dutt: It goes to that tension you were mentioning earlier on about storytelling. I am not a complete pessimist, I acknowledge the fact that-

David Pembroke: In terms of, not a pessimist about the politicians, or not a pessimist about solving some of the inequality challenges?

Kanchan Dutt: Being a dutiful public servant I won't comment on politicians. (laughs) I think in terms of the general tone, there were extremities, we all know the commentators that make something bigger out of something that is not there ...

David Pembroke: Correct.

Kanchan Dutt: ...And they're the ones that get the attention. There are also lots of thoughtful commentators out there that engage with us. I know in my previous job, in my current job, that person fall into how they're talking about information. I think what's underplayed, it's the old thing, those who shout the loudest get the most attention. There are a lot of quietly talking people out there who has very broad networks, that talk in quite measured ways about what's going on. We're talking policy makers, I'm talking researchers, well thought out reporters, media people, commentators and members of the community as well. Those ones can, they hear the shouting and they can put it to one side, or they can put it in its context. I think I'm the dull thud in the background, I keep going boom, boom, boom, this is the information. It will give you migraine, or you take some Mersyndol or you go, oh yeah, I listen to him I'll listen to you, for god's sake.

But I'm the constant hum of information that's out there, that just tries to underlay ... If in any inflammatory story they reference our information in the correct way, part of the job done, you've got the facts in there, and if we can put some context into it.

David Pembroke: Have you seen perhaps a lessening then of this hysteria and that, as you say the base beat of your story, the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, here it is, factual, factual, factual. Are you seeing that that's having some sort of impact, some sort of effect?

Kanchan Dutt: I think 'base beat' is much better than 'dull thud,' so I'll use that one from now on, it's a much more attractive way of saying it.

David Pembroke: Well, to me that's content, that's content communication, is understanding what the story is you want to tell, using the skills of journalism to turn it into its most appealing form... Make sure that your graphics are good, your audio's good, your data visualisation, whatever it is and then find the channel and then keep turning up. Here we are, we're here, we're here again, we're here again, and earn the attention of the audience. It's the only way that it's going to work. And perhaps, I don't think you're ever going to stop the screamers, I think there's always going to be that element of it. But I think we need to, as you say, draw people to that sensible centre. And this is where government communication can play a role. There's nothing anywhere that says that government communication has to be dull.

Kanchan Dutt: No.

David Pembroke: It can be on brands, but do it well, and do it in an entertaining way. Again, this is exactly the purpose of what we're trying to do with this content communication process. Is to give people those skills so as they can Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, here we are, we're still here, we're still here. And hopefully, as you say, bringing people on a journey and earning the attention of citizens and stakeholders so as that they can understand, OK, right I've got that now, when government makes decision that context of the decision is a little bit better filled in than it is otherwise, that if I'm just listening to shock jocks, or SKY television news, or whatever it is where there's extreme views, and people's opinions are ping-ponging around and there's really not much basis to those discussions.

Kanchan Dutt: No, you're right, if you're looking at my facts and you come to your conclusion and you thought different from my conclusion, that's fair enough, but you've got the facts on the table out it. We're never going to make, also the ABS is different, we don't want to make you think our way because we're a statistical agency. But you're never going to convince everybody that your policy direction is the right one, but if they're arguing with you, if your facts are on the table and they're accepted then it's a level playing field for discussion.

David Pembroke: But how do you then feel about the notion, we're coming up against time, just maybe one or two more quick questions. But how do you then feel about this truism really, that facts validate someone's position, they look at it, but it's a motion that moves people. What role does the ABS, or any other government agency have to emotionally engage with people? Or is that the role of the political leaders and really the bureaucracy shouldn't be involved?

Kanchan Dutt: If I go back to the, I forget the name of the breakfast you hosted along, a couple of weeks ago with the Head of the UK Government Communications....

David Pembroke: Oh yeah, Alex Aiken.

Kanchan Dutt: Yep. And he was saying, in government if you're not making a change, if you're not changing the audience's behaviour what are you doing, why are you communicating? I think yeah, if I'm thinking health, the smoking rates, yeah OK. The education reading rates, yeah, I've got that. If I'm thinking the ABS, we're not less laying out policy, so the emotion for us, we're not trying... we steer away from policy, we don't want to get into the policy discussion. We do want to make you engage in our information, we need to realise the importance of our information, but not towards an end result necessarily so. Which is slightly, it's something that I'm coming to terms with as a communicator because I've been used to, he's a journalist looking for the angle, as a political communications officer spinning it, or putting a particular view point across. And then government communications, finding the government's viewpoint and emphasising that. And then the ABS-

David Pembroke: Different.

Kanchan Dutt: Yeah, the emotion we want it to be, we want you to be engaged in our information, we want you to realise the importance of the information, but necessarily to sway to a certain view point. If I can use a loose analogy, we do economic information, we put it on Facebook, instant response. We talk about domestic and family violence rates. Bam. People engage in that subject matter. We haven't put any kind of artifice on it, the same information is the bit is what people engage in emotionally. That's where we know we hit the mark. Health information. All the stuff that relates to us in a social/education/health sphere that's really where we get lots of traction on communications.

David Pembroke: There's a final question and perhaps to look to the future and perhaps drawing on your vast experience, what do you see in terms of the way content can play a role in helping governments strengthen communities and improve the wellbeing of citizens? What's going to happen? What change is required?

Kanchan Dutt: That's a really good question. Thanks for the lead in time to answer that one as well, David.

David Pembroke: There's no editing on this podcast.

Kanchan Dutt: Oh, sorry, folks. Government communication's becoming more focused, I think. You'll have worked with more departments than I have, but they're becoming a lot more attuned to contemporary communication needs, and the breadth of them.

David Pembroke: And so they should, just by the way. (laughs)

Kanchan Dutt: Yeah, without a doubt.

David Pembroke: Given the fact that everybody's now connected. Everyone's walking around with a smart device. Actually, just back from holidays in Vietnam, and amazing in Vietnam. There are still the very poorest people in the world living the most modest lives in remote rural areas. They don't have much, but you know what they've got, a smart phone. They've got a smart phone and the WiFi in Vietnam is really strong.

Kanchan Dutt: Really?

David Pembroke: Yeah. You see people sitting in the middle of rice fields looking at their phones.

Kanchan Dutt: Get out, really?

David Pembroke: Yeah, everywhere, everyone's got a phone. This is again the important of communications. Communications is moving because of this structural, this infrastructure improvement. It's going from a, the old days, the colouring-in

department, the carwash, to this central, the central nervous system is in place. And the atomic particle of a government's message is that I've got to move through this system. There's this massive need and that people now need to become creators and distributors in a much more fundamental way. That's my theory anyway.

Kanchan Dutt: I think what I see happening from my experience in government departments, is they're bringing, they're changing the infrastructure. The communications isn't the bit on the end, they're bringing it in that core part of it. Whether we're looking at digital engagement, transactions, we're looking at comms 101 media engagement, advertising, whatever it is. It's more of the integral part of the organisation, because from the centre's perspective, we saw acutely clearly what happens when the public has an issue with the government department, it goes off. You don't want that to be the first time the Head of your Agency knows the comms team. You need them to be embedded before to build that trust of relationship, the relationships being talked about are ready. I think structurally they come into line more, they're being more central, more focused, and that will enable a more of an organisation-wide communications perspective.

The one thing some government agencies do really well, is really putting it at the needs of the consumer. Not being so fractured in how we talk about our various services, or programmes, but really wrapping up what the consumer needs. From whether we need health support, education support, or get into work support, all that kind of stuff. That's I think where we are going a long way towards achieving, but there's a lot of work to do there as well.

David Pembroke: Sure, indeed. But look, I think it's the most exciting time for people working in government communications because of the contextual change. We're going basically from the basement up next to the CEOs office and I see in the not too distant future that the executive will be sitting there and the comms team will be sitting on the same floor. Because it will be where the organisation tells its story, both internally to its organisation, because productivity is so important in contained environments. That needs to be very strategically engaged with and then those external audiences and how can we move quickly as the world starts to spin faster and faster and faster, there won't be the time to be able to run down to the basement to talk to the communications team.

Kanchan Dutt: Yeah. (laughs)

David Pembroke: They'll have to be very much in tune with some of that thinking. We're saying that, but as you say it will take time. And it mightn't happen in my lifetime but we'll be pushing along as hard as we can. Kanchan, thanks very much mate, for coming in-

Kanchan Dutt: Thank you, David, appreciate it.

David Pembroke: ... on a very, very chilly Canberra morning. I've just, as I say, been in Vietnam, beautiful, warm and hot over there and only been back here a few days and-

Kanchan Dutt: Very similar.

David Pembroke: ... it woke me up this morning. But thanks, mate. And thanks to you, the audience, for turning up. A little bit longer again this week I know, I try to keep it to sort of 30 minutes, somewhere about, the ticker says about 37. I've ruined people's walks to work, if it goes too long I've got complained against...

Kanchan Dutt: It's more exercise, walk longer. Always a positive side. Or make it 40 minutes.

David Pembroke: (Laughs) Thanks mate. And again, thanks audience, thanks fantastic chat with Kanchan, lots of insights there, take a few things out of that. And again, get up go and talk to people build those relationships, get out from behind the chair and understand people's work and tell them and explain to them. We've all got to have this advocacy role on behalf of the organisation to explain the value that we can create. Because as I say, the infrastructure's changed, people's behaviour has changed and we're the ones who are going to be able to drive the value. So, get out there and make it happen people. So, for another week thanks very much and I will be back at the same time next week. But for the moment it's by for now.