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## InTransition 129: Matt Hurle, Sales Director at TRIBE

Speaker 1: Welcome to InTransition, a program dedicated to the practice of content communication in the public sector. Here's your host, David Pembroke.

David Pembroke: Hello ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to InTransition, the podcast that examines the practice of content communication in Government and the public sector. My name's David Pembroke, and thank you very much for joining me. Today, we will explore a particularly interesting part of content communication that relates to the use and influence of what is now being described, or people being described, as influencers. How do we get and reach and use and leverage the power of that authentic following that so many of these people have?

We are speaking to Matt Hurle, who is the digital sales director of TRIBE, which is a technology platform that connects brands, not for profits, national associations and potentially even Government with micro-influencers, which are those people who have a view. They have a point of view and they also have, most importantly, a following that can help those brands, those not for profits, those national associations and, as I say, potentially Governments to achieve their objectives. He joins me on the line now. Matt, thanks for joining me InTransition.

Matt Hurle: Hi David. How are you? Thanks for having me.

David Pembroke: No problem at all. Influencers, they've come of age in so many ways, haven't they? It's been a practice of public relations for years and years and years to try to get the right people to attend your event or to speak on your behalf. Influencers have really found a real niche, haven't they?

Matt Hurle: Yeah. Look, they have. It is constantly evolving. Here at TRIBE, we're constantly talking about the evolution from socialite media back to what it really should have been the first time around, and that's obviously social media. We find that brands are now starting to move away from top tier celebrities and traditional ambassadors, and starting to move towards everyday people that have, like you said, built up their following over time in a really authentic and genuine way.

David Pembroke: That's interesting. Celebrity is so much of what drives traffic on the internet. Why is it that people, or you're finding, that we're now moving away from celebrity?

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Matt Hurle:

Yeah. Look, obviously when you work with celebrities, you have the opportunity to get earned media and PR off the back of that. However, we're seeing that influencers with smaller followings actually generate a much higher percentage of engagement than their top tier counterparts. Someone with three or four thousand followers is going to have three to four or five or six percent more engagement compared to someone with 100,000 followers who might be lucky to have one or two percent engagement.

Based off that sort of data and those insights, brands are now changing how they work with influencers, because you could spend \$5,000 to work with one top tier or celebrity influencer or Instafamous person who might have a half a million followers, but, for the same amount of investment today, you could actually activate 20 or 30 citizen influencers and get the same combined social reach, but at a much higher percentage of engagement. Not only that, the authenticity is much greater with these smaller pockets of influence.

These people tend to obviously have a much higher percentage of engagement with their community, because they're more likely to respond to them. They're more likely to bump into them in the street, they're more likely to comment back, it's not this faceless celebrity that is making a genuine product recommendation, it's a real person. For that reason, the sentiment within these micro influence posts actually tends to be a lot more positive as well. There's a couple of reasons. One's the data, the other is the sentiment and third, I guess, the authenticity.

David Pembroke:

Do you then track that influence all the way through to the impact of a particular micro-influencer on a business objective?

Matt Hurle:

It really depends on the client. Obviously everyone has different objectives. We tend to use cost per engagement as the most common benchmark in our industry. What does it cost for a like, share or comment? However, we've worked with brands like Helga's who were able to get sales data. They would look at month on month sales data. Using a TRIBE or using micro-influencers at scale, they were able to get a 9% sales uplift. Similarly, Swisse Wellness did a campaign with us recently. Again, they used a volume of micro-influencers to complement some of the top tier celebrities that they work with. They saw an uplift of 30 and 45 percent on two skews that they were using via our platform. Pretty significant sales uplift we're seeing in certain categories.

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Definitely bigger brands that are launching new skews tend to work the best, but we also have smaller brands that might be trying to drive ecommerce sales. They might get a slight uplift in web traffic, but what they'll see is the conversion rate on that traffic is really significant. That's because when you're using influencers, you're really tapping into the trust that they've built up with their followers over time. That trust, in the online world just like in the real world, can't be sped up. That's probably the biggest value that you're leveraging when you are working with influencers, because a trusted recommendation is the Holy Grail of what marketers look for.

David Pembroke: Then, how do you manage that trusted recommendation or, indeed, translate that trusted recommendation to the attribution levels around. You mentioned Helga's Bread there, 9% lift, how were you able to attribute the work of the micro-influencer and connect it so accurately to that lift in sales?

Matt Hurlle: Often when it comes to SSCG products like that, often it comes down to what else they're doing, which adds to their marketing in that time period. Both of those brands didn't do any other above the line media when they ran their TRIBE campaign, and they weren't doing anything else in their marketing apart from point of sale in-store. It's very hard to directly attribute it right back to TRIBE or to micro-influencers. What they can do is they can see all right, what happens when they do nothing? Then, what happens when they made that one controlled shift in their marketing strategy? That helped them measure it.

Other brands might track the growth of their online communities on their social accounts. They might track web traffic. They might use their clickable links if they are leveraging influencers on Facebook or Twitter. You can obviously put a trackable URL in those platforms. Within Instagram, it's a little bit harder because you can't put a trackable link in a comment. What we encourage most brands to do is actually drive the consumer down the funnel to their handle, and then put a trackable link in the brand handle.

One of the things we avoid, or we encourage brands to avoid, doing is putting a link in the influencer's handle. After 24 hours or 48 hours of it being there, the influencer will remove it and then the brand's not going to get anymore benefit from that post. Whereas, a lot of Instagram content lives on for weeks and months, so it's important to look at the long-term strategy with that content.

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David Pembroke: How do you manage the risks of engaging a micro-influencer?

Matt Hurle: It's a really good question. I think one of the best parts about micro-influencers is you're actually spreading your risk out, because you're going to be working with a volume of them as opposed to one or two celebrities. The biggest thing that we do is we encourage influencers to only represent brands that they genuinely love as a consumer. We say that unless they're prepared to spend their own money on something, they actually shouldn't be recommending that their followers go out and buy it. That undertone of authenticity is probably one of the biggest ways that we can manage it.

The second thing is that these individuals have built up their following over years and years of stunning content curation and creation, so they know intimately what their followers genuinely love, and they know the type of content that they respond to, they're really careful to ensure that they don't burn that trust that they've built up with their following over time. It's not like they've been on the Big Brother or The Block or The Bachelor and got a large amount of followers really quickly, they've really invested time and energy to build up that following, they're careful about what they recommend.

We do a lot of education with influencers around being authentic and transparent and genuine. The biggest thing that our platform offers is the ability for brands to actually vet all of the content before it goes live to the consumer. An influencer will go out, create some content, pitch it to a brand, a brand will review it and then either approve it to be published live by the influencer or they'll decline it if it doesn't meet the brand guidelines.

David Pembroke: How do you define a micro-influencer? How big an audience do you have to have to be able to present yourself as an influencer?

Matt Hurle: For our platform, we've defined a micro-influencer as any person with 3,000 followers across Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. They're the three platforms that our system plugs into. That could be across any vertical. It could be health, beauty, fitness, fashion, travel, parental advice, food, you name it. There's a million different verticals on social media.

Basically when an influencer download their app, anyone can download the TRIBE app, for example, and connect their social, when you connect your socials, our tech screens all the accounts to make sure that your followers are genuine and authentic, and to make sure that all of the engagement that is represented in your account is genuine and authentic as well.

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David Pembroke: How many micro-influencers then would there be in Australia?

Matt Hurle: We work pretty closely with Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We've been throwing this question out to them over the last couple of years. Based off the data and insights we've got, we think that there would be at least 250,000 Aussies with 3,000 followers or more today. That number's constantly growing, we think we've only seen the tip of the iceberg of what's to come with this whole influencer and micro-influencer movement.

David Pembroke: Yeah, right, that's stunning potential growth for the use of influencers. I'm interested obviously, at the moment, it's very much focused, or you're delivering your particular platform, to the fast moving consumer goods. Our audience is very much focused in the Government space. Could you see a role or an opportunity perhaps for Government to be using micro-influencers or even media influencers or any sort of influencer in order to achieve their policy, their program, their service or their regulatory objectives?

Matt Hurle: Yeah, look, absolutely David. Surprisingly, we've actually seen early uptake from a number of different Government departments here in Australia. Last year, we had a Victorian Government campaign that was all about promoting a child safety message for never leaving children in cars across hot Aussie summer's days. That particular campaign was executed by a leading PR company out of Melbourne. Interestingly enough, we saw that PR company take a two-pronged approach. They had a top tier celebrity who was the face of the campaign, and she was fantastic at getting media down to the launch day from a traditional PR perspective.

Then, they used TRIBE to activate 30 citizen influencers who were genuine mums that took the pledge to never leave their kids in cars. Those 30 moms had over two million combined followers. They got over 20,000 people engaging in that content. It created a real community movement from their followers of people taking the pledge to never leave their kids in cars. I think it even went onto never leaving dogs in cars and things like that. That was our first example of it.

There was a couple of interesting learnings from that particular campaign. We saw, firstly, the 30 citizen influencers that they approved, approved and published content so quickly that it actually hacked Twitter trending. That works on velocity, rather than volume. Secondly, we saw that the investment that they made in citizen influencers actually resulted in a 25

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times output compared to that top tier celebrity that they invested in. That was one example.

We've seen, again recently, the National Government did a Girls Make Your Move campaign promoting empowerment in females. That was amazing. They spent just under 50,000 across 150 citizen influencers to get a social reach of over five million. They had over 150,000 people around Australia engaging in this community message, which was amazing for that sort of investment.

We've seen it across different educational sectors. We've seen it in children's education around encouraging parents to read. We've seen it with tourism bodies encouraging people to travel to different regions. I think it's only the tip of the iceberg of what's to come in that Government sector.

David Pembroke: I'm interested though in how, again getting back to the risk idea, how did you convince Government that the risks were manageable? That there wasn't going to be, say in your child safety campaign, that those 30 citizen influencers weren't going to go rogue and start making comments about other Government policy or, indeed, the 150 citizen influencers who were involved in the Girls Make Your Move. How were you able to manage that relationship between the client, between yourself as the platform and, indeed, those influencers to make sure that there was an agreed position or an agreed discussion that they were all prepared to get involved in?

Matt Hurle: It's probably twofold. Firstly, within our particular platform, influencers operate under a really strict code of ethics and rules. Our terms and conditions dictate that influencers need to adhere to what the brand is asking for as well as being genuine, authentic and transparent, which I mentioned earlier.

The biggest thing is that brands and anyone signing off on content gets the opportunity to vet the influencer before they actually approve them. They can look at the image, the exact image that the influencer is going to post or video or GIF or whatever the piece of content is. They can look at the exact copy that they're going to attach to that image. They can scroll through that influencer's feed and look at what they've presented to their followers in the past. It's about seeing if that's a conversation that they want their message to be involved in or included in.

Then, brands have the opportunity to participate in that conversation as well. Once an influencer has posted a piece of content, our terms and

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conditions encourage them to answer questions and respond naturally to their audience as they normally would, even if it was a non-sponsored post. However, Government departments could also enter that conversation if they wanted to or if they wanted to point people in a particular direction. What we've seen is that because they are smaller, more genuine pockets of influence, influencers do what is genuine. They're only really talking about things that they do believe in.

David Pembroke: I think that point of being able to sign off and to be able to look at it and be able to say, "Okay. This one, that slate of content that you've put forward, we can now approve that off the platform so away it goes." There is that degree of control before it is published.

Matt Hurle: Yeah. I mean influencers often will submit content and then a brand, or a brand manager, will give them feedback. They'll edit it slightly, so that it is adhering to brand guidelines. We, in our platform, brand managers can invite legal teams in, to come in and review the content and help approve or decline in. There's a number of different tools that we're offering our clients and partners to be able to vet it, and to make sure that it is exactly what they want published out there to the consumer.

David Pembroke: What's your recommendation to people? I suppose maybe this is a bit of an unfair question without knowing whatever the particular business objective is, but how do you position people with this idea of using influencers as part of a mix of various options that you might have?

Matt Hurle: It's a good question. I think it's a fair one, to be honest. Basically what we're seeing, in terms of trends, is that brands are starting to add influencer activity to almost every campaign that they do. It's not necessarily the biggest part of the media spend. A lot of brands that we're working with are actually pushing more money into this area, because consumers want to hear from other consumers. They trust that so much more than a branded message. It's the reason that third party websites and review websites are growing so quickly.

Ultimately, if a brand can control their messaging in third party environments like social media, then that's the Holy Grail of what you shoot for in marketing. From our experience, we're seeing that most campaigns, or most media budgets, are starting to add influencer activity to every single campaign.

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The one thing I would say, in terms of how you use social media, is that it's not necessarily your traditional media brief. You really need to try and get influencers to do authentic recommendations and share their experience of something authentic, as opposed to getting them to spread a media message or some other sort of campaign creative that a marketer's already come up with. We always encourage our clients to empower the creator to create stunning content, because that's what they do and that's why their followers follow them. That tends to work really, really well nine times out of ten.

Whereas if you try and get an influencer to simply share a piece of content that's been created for a TVC [television commercial] or for a billboard or something like that, in a social media environment, that'll just flop. It really does need to be bespoke creative that is authentically created by the influencers that brands decide to partner with.

David Pembroke: Now, you've given some indication of costs, but where might it sit? Like an average influencer campaign with, say, a radio campaign or a TV campaign or a print campaign or a banner ad campaign, where does it sit in terms of that hierarchy of cost?

Matt Hurlle: Yeah. I mean it's like anything. You can spend as much or as little as you want. With a platform like ours, we've been around two years and we've had this growing database of influencers who are using the platform. When we first started, brands were doing test and learn campaigns that might have been three to five thousand across a month or two month period. Now that we've got 20,000 plus influencers using our platform, and that's growing every single day, we're seeing campaigns that are 30, 40, 50 thousand across that plan period.

You can invest as much or as little as you want in influencer marketing. The power of platform like TRIBE or the power of using a volume of micro-influencers is that you can create this word of mouth at scale. You generate this grassroots, ground up messaging, which is a lot more effective than top down messaging. If you're comparing that to radio or TV, it's probably going to be five or ten percent of whatever a marketer might be spending in those other channels. We've seen that it's a really effective way for small to medium size brands to get much better bang for buck, and to also approach influencer marketing with an always on view, so that they can consistently be out there in the market messaging to their customers and potential customers.



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David Pembroke: In your position there at TRIBE, you're obviously seeing a lot of social media. I'm sure you're looking at it all the time. What's your view today on what are the best practises around effective communication through social media? What are the things that you should be doing, and what are some of the things that you shouldn't be doing?

Matt Hurlle: I think, firstly, we've done over, I think, nearly over 4,000 campaigns since we launched TRIBE two years ago and nearly every single brand manager that we've worked with has talked about a content crisis or content drought. They're resourced to create four or five creative campaigns a year maximum, but we join distribution channel of social, they now need to create content every day or at least every week. No one can keep up.

By leveraging a volume of creators to come up with a broad range of content, you can allow your feed, and it's called feed for a reason, you can allow your feed to stay beautiful and engaging. If you bring that, then your customers will want to hang around and they'll want to continue engaging with you. If brands are just taking cookie cutter content that is created for a magazine ad or a billboard and trying to stuff it into a social environment, they'll lose every time. That's where this huge creator economy can potentially make huge waves in helping solve that problem.

In terms of my top two things, it would firstly be keep the content as social-centric as possible and not just trying to stuff above the line content into your social media. Engage with the community and respond to their questions and don't be afraid to respond in a public environment, so that the rest of the community understands that there is someone listening to them and hearing them. Then, secondly, making sure that you are working with and being genuine and authentic and transparent in all of the social channels as well.

David Pembroke: Okay, Matt Hurlle from TRIBE, thank you very much for joining us this afternoon. I think it's very early days in the life of the influence of the influencer, it seems like a pretty smart way and effective way for Government and public sector organisations to reach out to audiences. Given particularly through your platform, there is that opportunity of control that they can minimise the risks by being able to approve before publishing, but to really harness the citizen-centred, citizen creator to create authentic, useful, relevant, inspiring content that's going to get into parts of the web that perhaps your Government endorsed site may never see these people. They may never be able to get anywhere near their sort of

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audiences, I think it's really going to grow, and that's obviously the experience you're having at the moment.

Matt Hurle: Yeah, absolutely. I mean we've been overwhelmed with the uptake. I think we've got somewhere between 20 or 30 new campaigns coming to our platform every day. I'm really impressed, to be honest, with not only the private sector but also the public sector, in terms of how hungry they are to look for new ways to communicate with people and I think we're just seeing the very beginning of what's to come with starting times.

David Pembroke: It's a different mindset, isn't it? Everyone was comfortable with buying advertising from television stations, radio stations, newspapers, magazines. This is a step change to buying, it's not advertising, but buying advocacy direct from the public and paying the public to express a view about whatever it is that you might be seeking to propagate throughout the community.

Matt Hurle: Yeah. I mean we always say that you've got a lot more customers than you do sales people. You spend so much money trying to drive your customers down the funnel to become a customer. We think that influencer marketing, and citizen influencers especially, gives you the opportunity to turn that funnel on its side to allow your most influential customers or, yeah, consumers to become your most influential customers. Yeah, it's definitely the beginning of a massive shift in terms of how brands communicate with their customers and potential customers.

David Pembroke: Just a final question, how much money can you make being an influencer?

Matt Hurle: It's a good question. Our top influencer, who is a naturopath, she's made about \$100,000 over the last 18 months. She's very consistent and passionate that she's able to wrap lots of different types of brands into her feed, in the health and wellness space and travel space. Yeah, anywhere from a couple of grand a month to \$100,000 if you really want to focus a lot of effort and time into this space.

David Pembroke: Very good. I'm sure lots of people are now thinking, oh I might have a crack at this.

Matt Hurle: We've paid out over three million dollars to our pool of talent in the last two years, and that's grown really quickly. Fortune definitely favours the brave, and those that are getting in and putting the hard work in now will probably reap those rewards over time.

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David Pembroke: Okay. I can hear people switching off now, going back to their feeds and starting to think, I'm going to get into the creation business. Matt, thank you very much for spending a bit of your time with us today. I think it's a fascinating part of content and content communication, and really getting people in that Government and public sector space to start thinking about, okay. Will we use influencers? How can we use influencers? How can we do them in such a way that it's going to help us to strengthen communities and improve the wellbeing of citizens? Matt, thanks very much for giving up some of your time today.

Matt Hurle: Thank you, my pleasure.

David Pembroke: To you, the listener, thank you very much for coming to InTransition again this week. Fantastic conversation there with Matt Hurle. That is something to think about, I think that is a real sleeper. That could be a real innovation for your campaign, to really think about going through, jumping onto TRIBE and having a bit of a hunt about in your particular area, in those niche areas, because we live in the world of narrow in this day and age. We really need to be thoughtful and considerate about those audiences that we seek to engage with. If we get narrow, I'm sure that you'll be able to find someone on TRIBE who would be able to help you to achieve those business objectives of yours. Give it a try. Go out and give it a whirl.

Anyway, thanks for that again. We'll be back at the same time next week. For the moment, it's bye for now.

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