
InTransition 133: Lola Berry on Loyalty and Communication

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 once 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 joining us once again as we dive this week into the phenomenon of publishing. How is it that some people really understand how to tell a story so as they can build an audience for the story that they are seeking to tell. It's one of the key and fundamental parts of content communication. And I know that most of us work in government and the public sector but I think what we have to do is always look for best practice and look to people who have been able to build audiences so as they can then build businesses off the back of them and build it further engagement and other opportunities that comes from being able to publish useful, relevant and consistent content over time.

So my guest today is Lola Berry who's an Australian nutritionist and published author who has cultivated a very successful career using social media and I suppose again, you would refer to her as an influencer.

There are a number of journal articles and books that she's published, things from the 20 20 diet cookbook, The Happy Cookbook, The Little Book of Smoothies and Juices, The Happy Life, Summer Foods so she's a real expert because she is a graduate of the Endeavour College of Natural Health where she has a bachelor of health sciences. But perhaps most interestingly is the size and the depth of the audience of the audience that Lola has been able to build on Facebook, 150,000 likes or just under 150,000 likes on her page. Instagram, 121,000 followers and on Twitter, 12,300 followers. So Lola Berry has an audience but she also has a newsletter and I'm very interested to understand just what her story is and why is it that people are so interested in what she has to say and she joins me now today for Melbourne, Australia. Lola, thanks very much for joining me InTransition.

Lola Berry: Yeah, thanks for having me, wrapped to be here.

David Pembroke: Fantastic. You've built a very, very solid audience over time but let's go back to the beginning. When did you start with this interest and passion that you have for nutrition and for food?

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- Lola Berry: I mean I just started making little web episode kind of doco kind of stuff for YouTube when I was 21, was when I started and Steve Irwin was kind of who I looked up to and I thought if I can do a health versions of online content then that was my goal and It all started back here when I just got three jobs, saved up, got a video camera. Lived on the Goldie so I'd get my boyfriend to film me in banana plantations, macadamia plantations and I had all this content. Called a mate in Melbourne and got him to edit the content so that I could put it online. That's kind of where it started from.
- David Pembroke: Okay, so did you have any idea what you were doing? Were you deliberately thinking, "I am going about building an audience around this particular niche?" Or were you just having a lot of fun?
- Lola Berry: I was having a lot of fun. I knew I loved the medium of filming so before doing a nutrition degree I had dropped out of a Bachelor of Performing Arts so I knew I loved the idea of filming and talking on camera so I definitely wanted to combine the two passions together. Where it would take me though there was no expectation.
- David Pembroke: So you didn't have a business plan thinking, "Okay if I can get my audience to a particular size, I can get paid as an influencer" for example. "I can do speaking events, I can create information products that I could sell?"
- Lola Berry: No, no, no, no. When I started doing this, it was Myspace days so there was no Facebook, there was no Instagram, there was no Twitter, it was back in the day so, I was using it more as almost like a resume tool. Like, "Hey, here, this is what I'm doing." And I was using to try and get myself on morning television.
- David Pembroke: Okay so that was the objective. Were you successful in that? I believe that you were.
- Lola Berry: Yeah, you'd consider that my, I guess, break in Australian media. We just cold called. That's all that happened, we used cold called a morning TV show and they wanted to do a one-off segment of a young girl spreading a health message and, yeah as soon as they called cut they signed me to the show so that's where it all begun. But I mean at the same time it was a little luck, working with amazing people and a few people took a chance on me and that's how it happened.
- David Pembroke: And so at what point did you think that you needed that depth of knowledge in your expertise? Were you needed to get that formal qualification?

Lola Berry: Oh no I had that first.

David Pembroke: Oh okay. So you already had that when you were starting out?

Lola Berry: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I looked at it as my ticket to the ball and I thought when I had my ticket to the ball I can wear whatever I want. Film or write books or travel, whatever I wanted to do. If I had a good, strong qualification I could. I knew I didn't want to practice in clinic. I knew that wasn't a goal.

David Pembroke: Okay, so in terms of trying to work out what it was that your audience was looking for, back in those Myspace days when social [was quite small], you didn't have the benefit of being able to draw feedback through the social channels. How was it that you decided what it was that your audience was going to be interested in?

Lola Berry: Ah, no they had no choice in the matter. I just filmed cool little episodes about medicinal food and people responding while we were putting on them YouTube and people were responding quite well and it just grew from there. It was called Fruits and Roots with Lola Berry and I booked this one place to film in Mount Warning, it was an amazing beautiful water company and they said, "Oh do you want to use our helicopter to film?" I said, "Yeah, I'd love to. We want to do a segment on the importance of hydration and water and show how awesome your water is." We rocked up to film and she's like, "This is a porno isn't it?" And I'm like, "What?" And she's like, "Fruits and Roots, Lola Berry, it's definitely not health." And I was like, "No, no, no. I'm here to talk about your water."

So there were definitely those kind of moments. But yeah, I just wanted to film cool content that would inspire people, that was kind of the number one goal. It was awesome to get the TV gig with that goal still sat, stayed the same, which was to inspire people.

David Pembroke: And how big an impact did that television gig have on the growth in your popularity?

Lola Berry: Yeah my website broke on my first day I was on TV. People trying to buy books that didn't exist. So...

David Pembroke: Did you tell them you had a book to sell?

Lola Berry: No, it's just that when we buy a book, we want to buy a ... because I went on doing a nutrition segment so I think they might have presumed, "Oh well,

she's a nutritionist, she might have a book." I'm not sure. So, I quickly self-published my first book when I was 23.

I forgot your question now, I've got off track. Yeah, go for the next question.

David Pembroke: So in terms of your model for success, and obviously you've been doing this now for a long time in terms of reaching out to an audience, understanding an audience, having an expertise, telling a story, being consistent with telling that story. What's your advice to people? Whether they are working in a government department or a not for profit. What's the best way for them to achieve what you've achieved, which is a sort of substantial and engaged audience?

Lola Berry: Oh my advice would be do what you love, be real and back yourself. That would be my advice because no one's going to hand you on a silver platter what you want. I've definitely learned that in business. And if you're real, people respond to that because I think there's a lot of... Especially with Instagram nowadays, there's a lot of fake out there, there's a lot of Instagram fame and things like that and I think if you're honest and real and authentic then you can't really go wrong and if you believe in yourself then you'll be able to get through the challenges that come because you'll know that you're focused on the goal and it doesn't really matter what's thrown at you.

David Pembroke: But is there also a need though that you have to create value for that audience or why would they bother listening to you? Why would they bother spending their most precious asset, which is someone's time and attention? So just how important is it that you connect with the need of an audience along with that authenticity and expertise?

Lola Berry: Yeah, of course you've gotta give them something that they want but to me I would like to think that that is having a very real and authentic message and I think that that is what the audience wants and respond to and they will tell you accordingly if they're not happy with your message as well and you learn very fast if you've upset your audience. So I think of course you need to provide something that is engaging and is of value to your audience and I don't know what that is for every person but I think for me, that would be to hopefully inspire people to be the best they can be. Whether that be yoga, healthy recipes, you know being out in nature or just being honest about who you are.

David Pembroke: Yeah, that's interesting. You make that point around business and this business, probably any other business, or try to build an audience is that it's hard work. That it takes time.

Did you realise when you'd begun how hard this would be to build a consistent and loyal audience over time?

Lola Berry: It's funny you should say that, a lot of people come up to me and they go, "Ah I want to be you." And I go, "Imagine the hardest thing you've done and times it by a thousand." because it's the success that you see on Instagram or social media, all those highlights, it is a highlight reel and it's probably in all honesty, two percent of what goes on. There's a lot of unsuccessful meetings or business plans that don't get off the ground or really ... There's a lot of money invested and lost and there's a lot of other things that go on that you're not going necessarily post about [like] the failures but there's just as many failures, if not more than success. So I would say to people, "It's absolutely hard." Which is why I said before the key is to be real but also to believe in yourself because without that self belief you probably won't get that far.

David Pembroke: Yeah, yeah. No I certainly agree with you that there has to be that purpose and mission around what it is that you speaking about or communicating about because if it doesn't resonate without yourself, as you say, it takes time, effort, energy and if you don't believe and you're not passionate about what it is that you're trying to achieve it comes through very quickly, doesn't it, in the resonance of the content. If it's not making a point or if it's not something, something that is of use or of value, you find out pretty quickly that the audience either will disappear or that they certainly will let you know that what you're creating is not what they want.

Lola Berry: Yeah and you can feel it too. If you're spreading a good message or not or you know if that was in alignment or not. Like I'll say no to a lot of gigs because I will, for example, a lot of people will go, "Hey can I send you..." I got one just before we jumped on Skype together and it was, "Hey Lola, can I send you a top, can you take a photo of yourself in it for me. You can keep the top but can you do an Instagram post for me?" And in the past, I probably would've just been like, "Ah, alright. I'll do the right thing by this person." And now I'm just, that person doesn't actually really care too much about me, they care about the numbers so I just will say no very comfortably now and I'm not going to do things that really aren't offering my audience anything.

David Pembroke: Okay so could you sort of draw the curtain back a little around your weekly practices [and] around your content creation? Have you got a fairly standard week in terms of preparation and distribution and if you do, are there some of those secrets you could share with us?

Lola Berry: Well first of all, there's no real structure for me and with Instagram algorithms changing so much, you can't have a structure. They don't allow that because once and upon a time I'd post a breakfast meal, lunch meal and a dinner meal, maybe a treat in the afternoon or the evening. Now if you post more than two times a day, the algorithms will come to bite you and your post won't be seen in people's news feeds. And it won't get the likes. So being too forced with it or doing any automated posting, which I've never done before, I think would probably backfire as far as a week in my life with social media now, obviously I have campaigns I work with.

I write part of the menu for Grill'd and I have to, as a part of that relationship, I do social media for them. So once every couple of weeks I'll pop into Grill'd and have a burger and post that photo and the agreement is always that I get credit control so I get to post it my way with my jewellery on and my nail polish on and a cool photo holding a healthy burger on a paleo bun, I don't want to post it on gluten or something that I wouldn't eat. I want to be really transparent with all my posting.

As far as my personal stuff, I just share what I'm doing. So I've recently been to Los Angeles so all of my posts were pretty much from there. Nothing scheduled, everything was like, "Yo guys I'm having a green juice today." Or, "I'm on set doing the show today." I filmed a bit of content as well and vlogged a bit as well some video diaries for YouTube that I will often release, when that happens, I'll release a shorter version for Instagram but there's no real structure to it. When a vlog's done and it's a story or the shorter Instagram version comes out, for me really, in all honesty, I'm trying to think what I shared today. I shared a photo of my lunch. Earlier.

David Pembroke: Right.

Lola Berry: And I wrote, "Gee I'm loving using capers at the moment." Fact, I love using capers at the moment. You know what I mean? I'd rather be honest with the audience rather than pushing something because the reality is, when I sign contracts and work with bigger companies, there is an expectation to post, so I figure if I can do as many posts that are real time and what I'm doing in that moment, then the audience is probably going to respond better when

there is a post that is a paid post. I'm really honest when I do them, I'll write sponsored post. Like SP.

David Pembroke: But you're also finding though that that real time content is resonant. People like the fact that they're seeing you going through your life just doing what you're doing because you obviously have a big focus on food and nutrition. So if they're following you they're following food and nutrition but they're following your journey as living your life.

Lola Berry: Yeah, because there's a lot of elements like the food and nutrition is one thing. Then there's the yoga, then there's [my] smoothie bar. Then there's the travel and being half based in Sydney and half based in Melbourne. There's so many elements so the audience like to feel like they come [on] that journey with you. And I think it's giving the feeling of connection and being very honest with the audience.

David Pembroke: So now you've got that audience, what do you ... What's next? What are some of the things that you're trying to do with that audience in order to create value, not only for them but for Lola Berry?

Lola Berry: Well I've got two more books coming out and the contents very different to what I have normally written about. So my next book is all about beauty food because I used to be a make-up artist so I'm tapping into different types of passions that I haven't really been able to share with people in the past.

I think sharing what you're doing and where you're going, a lot more of the America stuff... It's amazing because you're tapping into a different audience but you don't want to alienate your current audience as well so that's a really... I found that really interesting juggling act. When I was in America for a solid couple of months.

I think as far as what's next, it's really just about, I think, sharing the journey but growing the audience in a really organic manner and hoping that they're real. I've never paid for a follower. I've never sponsored an Instagram post as far as I paid for one to go into people's news feeds. I like it to have organic growth.

So for me it's just like be real, share the message. My dream is to live in a tree house one day. You know, you ask me what are you going to do in five years time? I'd be like, "I'd love to have a tree house with a tree. I'd love to be based on the other side of the world sometimes." It's always changing

and I'm just learning to be really fluid with it and when you live from a place and not having heaps of expectation and just following, we call it in yoga, following your dharma, your purpose, things generally fall into place and they're often not what you expect.

David Pembroke: And in terms of just growing those audiences though, are you at all strategic in any way where you're going and researching perhaps some of your other competitors or colleagues in the same sort of area and try to understand where those audiences are and what some of their approaches might be to influence the way that you go about your content creation and distribution?

Lola Berry: No not at all. I'm the opposite.

David Pembroke: Okay.

Lola Berry: I don't look at competition. I think what everyone has to offer is completely different. I know that I'm different to other nutritionists and they're different to me and what they offer is different to what I offer so I figure as long as I'm just being very true to myself and honest and authentic with the people that I communicate with, my audience, then that makes me happy and I think I've found the more filming and the more public speaking I do, the most common feedback that I get is, "Oh my god, you're way realer than I expected and you're a bogan." And so I kind of figure the more video content and the more I can talk to audience, the more they're like, "Oh, she's not like any other nutritionist. She doesn't speak proper, she's got a potty mouth." Those kind of things.

So, for me it's just let me get out there, let me get on telly, let me speak to people because I think when you're just speaking people can see that ... A lot of people think I'm a blonde Instagramgram girl. I'm sure. I think that, I like the idea of being able to just be real, speak from the heart and that's kind of my secret weapon I guess.

David Pembroke: You mentioned video there. What's your experience been with video given that there's this whole movement at the moment, this pivot to video. Everyone's now getting involved with video. What's your experience with video and what works for you on video?

Lola Berry: Well we can see with Instagramgram and algorithm changes, it favours video. As does Facebook, favours video content. I love live Facebook, I like live Instagrams. My Instagram stories do really well so I'll try and be quite consistent with them on a daily basis. I wouldn't share everything, there are

some things I like to keep personal just because that's sacred to me. But I will share generally what I feel at that time is relevant and in align with my audience and... So today I got up and went for a run around this beautiful garden and I did a little bit of an Instagram story of the garden. Instagram story is fantastic. It's growing rapidly. Instagram in Australia is obviously overtaking Snapchat in that sense in the live 24 hour story kind of side of things.

I think one thing I reckon about video content is I've got all the whizz bang filming equipment and I end up doing most of it on my phone. I think that realness and that less polished, I think just that real, authentic, makes it easier for the audience to connect with you.

David Pembroke: Interesting. And the books, I'm intrigued by the books. In this world of digitally rich media, what is the role of the book? And are we talking about eBooks or are we talking about printed books that people can buy?

Lola Berry: I work with Pan MacMillan so my books are hard copies. So you can walk into a bookstore and get them. They also come out on eBooks, Apple as well. So you can go either way, it's totally up to you. But I'm working with traditional media and traditional books in that sense. I think that there's something quite romantic about having a tactile book that you can touch and feel and smell the pages of and cook from and spill things on and I quite like the romance of a book personally. As far as they're placed, I think it is wonderful to have something that either an audience member or someone can hold.

I gave two talks on the weekend and on both days we sold loads of books. because it's so nice to take a piece of that home and take a memory home that you can have and hold that isn't on your smartphone you know?

David Pembroke: Sure, is there a commercial side to the book publishing or is it more, as you've described, more like a substantial business card that helps to create a relationship with someone?

Lola Berry: When you say commercial side, do you mean like is it profitable?

David Pembroke: Yeah, from making money, from selling books.

Lola Berry: It's what I make most of my money off.

David Pembroke: Oh wow, okay.

Lola Berry: Yeah so once you become a bestseller, you'll do great. Books are great, fantastic source of income but they're also a joy to make and I'm literally been manuscript writing all day today. So it's a lot of love, blood, sweat and tears generally will go into a manuscript and a book and I write all of my own recipes so I'm very involved in the book process and I love it.

David Pembroke: Yeah, so that book process, how do you have your ideas about what's a good topic? What's a deep enough and rich enough topic that you can justify investing the time and effort and energy into creating a piece of content that is just so substantial, like a book?

Lola Berry: The way it rolls for me is I'll come up with half a dozen ideas and then I'll sit down with my publishers and they'll be like, "We like this one, this is the one we want to focus on." Then I go back and I write what's called a skeleton, which is like a rough breakdown of what how a book could look and then I send that back to them and they go, "Yeah we love this bit." I have a tendency to write through Hippy Woo-Woo, so like that's a bit too hippy, we're going to pull the tarot cards Lola but we're going to keep these recipes and talk to the healing power of mother nature and you know, the whole kind of coach me around the execution and really help me with the editing side. I'm not a natural academic writer. So I also work with an editor to help make the books readable. Pretty much.

David Pembroke: Obviously very important. It seems, just wrapping up now, is it exhausting? It sounds like it be very tiring to be Lola Berry and that you're on. It's almost like just the Truman Show. That there's this whole sense that whatever's on is on and that you've got an audience and it's a performance and I know that you did mention that there are bits of your life that you certainly keep well and truly to yourself, but otherwise that, meeting and reaching that expectation, is there an element of fatigue that you find?

Lola Berry: Do you know what, if you asked me that two years ago I'd say, "No way, I love it, I live it, I breath it. Da da da da. No way, no way."

The truth is, sometimes I walk into a yoga class and I just want to do a yoga class. And I don't care if I stuff up. I don't care if I don't do the full pose perfect but yeah, there are some days where all you just want to go and get your coffee and, I probably sound like a brat even saying this to be totally honest with you, but sure there are some days where you just have a crappy day and you want to cry but you can't get away with it. Or you just want to have a day where you lay in bed and eat chocolate and not get up and work. Oh my god, those days a hundred percent exist but the truth is I am happiest

when I'm doing the stuff that I love and my golden rule is to do the things that I love and if something doesn't work and if something doesn't ... It gets to a point where it's not serving me or I don't feel like I love it ... I've done big contracts with big food companies and it hasn't been the right fit.

I've got told I look messy because I dress a bit bohemian and it really hurt me. Like I've sat in meetings and been ripped to shreds. Images of myself have been ripped up in front of me and you know and said that's ugly and normally I just walk away from those gigs because it's not servicing them and it's not servicing me so I think the older I get, I turned 32 two weeks ago, and I think the older I get the more that I am enjoying saying no to things that are not going to bring me happiness and I think as a result, it doesn't get tiring. But it gets tiring if I'm out of alignment with what I love, for sure.

David Pembroke: Yeah. Alright Lola Berry, thank you so much for being so generous with your time and to spend a little bit of your valuable time with us today just having a little bit of a chat about the way you go about building, engaging and delighting that audience and really delivering value and happiness on a daily basis.

If people are interested and they want to find out a little bit more about you, when's the next book? Where's the best places that people can become part of that community? Part of that family that you've build up now, over many years?

Lola Berry: Oh you're a legend, here comes the shameless plug.

David Pembroke: Yeah, why not let's go.

Lola Berry: My beauty book is coming out on the first of November, so really soon and that'll be available all over Australia and New Zealand and then I just run through social media so yeah, my Lola Berry is my Instagram and then I'm all over Facebook and like you said, Twitter, YouTube. Love it, love it all.

David Pembroke: Excellent. Well Lola, thank you very much and to you the audience, thank you for coming back once again this week to spend a bit of time with my good self and with Lola Berry. I think there's so much that government communicators, public sector communicators, can listen to that passion and that intensity and that commitment and that hard work. I think what I take out of the discussion we've just had with Lola is that this stuff takes time. It takes a dedication and it takes a commitment and it takes belief in the story

that you're telling and one of the great gifts of being in government and public sector communication is that often what you're doing has real purpose, has real meaning and is all about strengthening communities and improving the wellbeing of citizens so take that lesson from Lola.

And Lola has bad days too. So just remember that not everything's going to be a 100 percent hit winner.

So anyway thank you very much for joining me once again, but for now it is time to say goodbye and we will be at the same time next week, but for now, it's goodbye.

Speaker 1:

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