
InTransition 137: Tom Nickson

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

David Pembroke: Hello ladies and gentlemen, and welcome once again to InTransition, the podcast that examines the practise of content communication in government and the public sector. My name is David Pembroke, and today we reach into the worlds of professional Australian rules football to understand how one of Australia's leading AFL teams, indeed they were the premiers not this season but the season before, how they go about telling their story and engaging with their audiences online, because I think there is so much that we can learn from professional sport. If any of you are interested in learning a little bit more about contentgroup we are on Facebook, on LinkedIn and Twitter, so please don't forget to also visit our website. And if you are so minded, if you could give us a review, maybe, at iTunes or Stitcher, that always helps because people can then find us and more people can join the community of InTransition.

But joining me is Tom Nickson, and Tom is the head of digital at the Western Bulldogs AFL team, and he's been involved at the Western Bulldogs from 2011 where between 2011, 2016 he was the digital communications manager for the Western Bulldogs, but as of 2016 he has been the head of digital, and before joining the Western Bulldogs, he was a freelance sports writer and commentator, and he joins me from Melbourne today. Tom, thanks very much for joining me InTransition.

Tom Nickson: Thanks very much for having me, David.

David Pembroke: It must be a great interest of yours, being football, but also being in the middle of that ability to tell the story of the football team. It certainly must get you out of bed most mornings, because there'd be a lot to do.

Tom Nickson: I think it's a very privileged position that we get. Maybe sometimes we take it for granted a little bit to be on the inside of a sporting organisation, and I guess become the intermediary between the fans and the public, and the players and the athletes, and the internal operations. I know growing up, and as my own sporting background, and times I had there were some of the best time, around your mates and your friends in a sporting club, and I guess we're pretty fortunate that we get to work in such an environment

day to day, but in an area that so many people have such a strong passion and interest in.

David Pembroke: This podcast is very much focused on the how, and we'll always like to delve in with our guests to really get them to reveal just exactly how it is that they go about their job. So perhaps if we could start at the beginning of the planning process, and I would imagine that about now, given that the Australian rules football season in Australia is now over for the year, that this is probably the time of the year when you're starting to think about next season and perhaps even looking back on what's happened in this past season. Is now the time that you start to plan?

Tom Nickson: It is indeed. I think you're always looking ahead to the next milestones, the next events, and I think what you learn and you observe in the AFL industry is the AFL's done a fantastic job in making the code and the game very relevant 12 months around. That it's not just the home and away season, but there's a pre-season competition, you turn into finals, and then we've just come out the trade period, we'll be heading into the draught, and pre-season just after that. And there's now an AFLW competition which really fills out the summer months heading into the home and away season too, so you're always, I guess, reviewing and then planning for that next upcoming event, so at the moment we've definitely reviewed how we've gone about things in the home and away season, and unfortunately no finals campaign this year, but at the same time we're planning how we wanted to execute trade.

We're starting to review what we did through the trade period, and our eyes now turn towards the draught period and what we wanna do through that. That's such a key traffic time and engagement time for our fans. It's an opportunity where you bring new players into the club, new fan favourites for the next generation, so there's some great opportunities there, that we get to introduce those people first to our fans.

David Pembroke: When you look back on last season, the season just past, and probably for our overseas listeners, they may not quite understand what happened the year before where the Western Bulldogs, which is the team that Tom works for, came from eighth place, one of the great battling clubs, fought their way through to the grand final, won the grand final. There were people in the streets for days and days, families who've grown up for generations without success, and it was an incredible time. And this year you didn't have, obviously, that opportunity, because you didn't make the finals, but when

you look back on that period what did you do well this year and what did you not do so well this year?

Tom Nickson: I think just to touch on what you said, for the listeners that are abroad and outside of Australia, the run we had in 2006 - it had been 61 years since we'd won a premiership, and I think it's been likened to the Leicester City's of the EPL, and Chicago Cubs in major league baseball. Even the Cleveland Cavaliers in the NBA, and such as of that championship drought. I think what we learned and what we always knew was how passionate our fans are, and it's continued to, I guess, underlie what we do, is really creating content and experiences that continue to elicit that passion from our fans and make them feel closer to the club.

I think winning and losing, we're in a performance-based industry where it's always going to have an impact on our how people view the team, or sometimes their emotions towards the club, but I think there's a lot of things that we can do day to day and week to week which make people continue to feel proud about being a Western Bulldogs fan or a member. I think people joke about you get born into certain teams and whatnot, but ultimately it's people making a decision to engage with us, and spend their time with us and indeed spend their money with us, so it's our job week in, week out to make them feel good about that choice. Whether it's for us providing insights behind the scenes with what happens inside the locker room, Guernsey presentations, some of that really core inner sanctum items, or it's lifting the lid some of the community work that the club do. I think they're areas that really, I guess, resonate with our fans and make people proud about the connection they have with the club.

David Pembroke: Is it really that content, is it the content that they don't see on a regular basis that, as you say, behind the curtain, the inner sanctum stuff, is that the stuff that really attracts the audiences?

Tom Nickson: It is largely, I think, particularly when it comes to the video side of things, is we're in a privileged position. We get to take the fans to places that they don't usually go day to day, and get them to share experiences that they otherwise wouldn't normally have. I think the bread and butter of the platform still is, at that core, football and sports news. It's team selections, it's injury updates, it's who's in, who's out, who's signed a contract. I think that's where the basis of, I guess, our platform comes, but we're also very much in that storytelling business, and sharing those great stories of the player about to embark on his first game, or their reaction after they've had their first win and they've had their first Gatorade shower, or sharing the

moments where fans get to meet their hero for the first time. They're very real and authentic stories that I think resonate across all levels of our fan base.

David Pembroke: How active and how planned are you in terms of building out your editorial calendars on a week-to-week basis?

Tom Nickson: I think the beauty of a regular season is that it is quite structured. That you know you have a match on a weekend, and whether it's six or seven days turnaround between your last game. There's key markers throughout the week. We know that medical injury news will tend to come out on a Monday, team selections on a Thursday, and then you really kick into your match preview content Friday into a Saturday game, for example. So there's elements that are scheduled by, I guess, those sorts of necessities, and just the rhythm of football. And then beyond that, there's core franchises and staples that we'll release from a content perspective week to week. So we might have some more featured programs in the middle of the week, obviously team previews around a Friday, and then the Saturday, Sunday it's that post-match content, whether it's interviews from the rooms afterwards, match highlights, or an injury update on the Monday. There's those core elements are there, and then can be the storylines week to week, which you turn up and turn down as the case may be.

David Pembroke: In terms of your team, what does it look like? How many people have you got working for you and what roles do they have?

Tom Nickson: Within my team specifically, we have two video producers, a digital marketing coordinator whose focus is purely on our e-communication with our members and fans, so it's through email marketing, and then a social media and digital coordinator whose focus is really, I guess, on the distribution of the content that's created by the club. We have an editorial manager who sits within our communications team whose responsibilities is the written editorial content that works through our website, and we have a partnership with AFL Media so we syndicate some of their written and video content that resonates with our fans through our own channel. There's four core staff alongside me within the digital team. Obviously then the editorial manager, and we have support from our graphic design team as well to really bring different elements to life from a visual sense through our social channels.

David Pembroke: How many pieces of content would you produce on a typical week?

Tom Nickson: I think in season we look upwards of 30 written web articles a week, and anywhere between 20 and 30 video content pieces a week. It hinges a little bit on win and a loss, but it's in that sort ballpark that we work towards.

David Pembroke: Okay, so just going through some of the assets that you do create, video obviously is core to what you do. Is that fair to say?

Tom Nickson: It is. I think it's what we see particularly on the social media side of things. The preference that Facebook and Instagram have within their algorithm for video content has really helped to surface that, but when you consider the way people consume content on their phones these days, it's 10, 15, 30 second short videos, and they say a picture tells a thousand words, so you can get a lot across in a really short space of time in video content.

David Pembroke: So your producers are just belting out one interview and then chopping that up into different assets? Is that how it works?

Tom Nickson: It is. We try to, I guess, shoot once and syndicate many times over. It might be we do a press conference in which we release the full press conference version for people that wish to view it in its entirety. We might pull out a couple of key 15, 30 second grabs to push through social, of key talking points that come from it. We then might drop a couple of those grabs into a news wrap that we run at the end of the week to back over some of the key talking points that came out in that particular press conference. We might turn that video piece into an audio MP3 which drops through our audioBoom channel, so people might not necessarily wanna watch it as a video but they'll stream it as an audio clip, and then sort of key grabs from that obviously spin into written editorial content. It's amazing how one piece of content captured once can be split so many different ways, but you've gotta provide that content of choice for people the way they wanna consume it, and that's what we aim to do.

David Pembroke: And then obviously on the distribution side of things, you have that social media community manager. Could you describe their role and what takes up the bulk of their time?

Tom Nickson: It'd be the combination of the, I guess, the posting of the content on the websites or setting up the article. If it needs to be escalated onto the homepage, the hero carousel that we have to really surface the content and highlight it. There might be a push notification through our mobile app to draw attention to that content piece to our app users, and then it's about distributing it through our social channels, so it's not necessarily about one

piece of content and one element of copy that goes with it. They've gotta really work to make sure the tone and the expression of that piece of content suits the audience, so Twitter is very much that newsfeed, so it's just putting the facts out there and letting it run. Facebook we want people to engage with and share their thoughts, so might be pulling out a quote from the story to get people buying into what it is and clicking through to more. Instagram we might create a quote graphic, which our social producer will do. He'll drop some keywords into a template with an image of the person that's the talking head, just to try to convey, I guess, the message and the key elements through the different platforms.

David Pembroke: What about the management of the interaction on the Facebook page? Who's got responsibility for that?

Tom Nickson: That's definitely led by our social coordinator, and a couple of other member of our team, including myself, have access and admin rights to be able to oversee and manage some of the feedback. I know in peak periods the comments come in quicker than you can read them, and that's where it's great to have a couple of hands to be able to view over what's being said. I think Facebook has some of its own in-built censoring on the way for certain words and certain sentiments that aren't appropriate, but we've also gotta make sure that people that are engaged in our page feel they're safe to engage with the content, but safe to express their thoughts, but it's done in a manner which isn't necessarily causing conflict, or it is derogatory or untowards other people that are wanting to become involved with the channels.

David Pembroke: Do people generally behave themselves?

Tom Nickson: I think we find that our fans are really pretty good. That they're able to have conflicting and contrasting views, but they almost self-moderate in a way that there'll be people that will sit either side of the fence, but more often than not they can have a pretty honest feedback or discussion on the channels. More often than not, we don't have to jump in to censor some of the commentary, but they generally are able to keep away from it turning into a personal slinging contest.

David Pembroke: Now, you mention the written word, that you've got an editorial manager. What's their role, in terms of guiding and directing the written content?

Tom Nickson: It's probably no different to the way you'd look at an editor with a newspaper, is, I guess, they have a firm understanding of our audience, and

the key news items that are coming up, and it's about creating the best written content to suit those needs. So whether it's writing an article off the back of a press conference, or a more creative piece that our editorial manager creates in the lead-up to matches is Four Things To Watch, which is one of the more popular items that we have there, which is his slant on the key talking points coming into the game. Anything from then compositing external experts' opinions on our team's performance. So it's about, I guess, not only creating but collecting some of the best content that's available to push through in the written form.

David Pembroke: How do you look at that written content alongside the video content, the audio content and the graphic content? What purpose does the written word have?

Tom Nickson: I think the written word is still as powerful as ever, and I think what we're seeing, it's more the way it is expressed and the way people wanna consume the written word. It's probably shorter than what it was in terms of the length of stories online. People wanna read content that's quite succinct and to the point, but you probably need to find that hook as much as anything to get people clicking through to read the content, whether it's in a headline, whether it's in a key quote that we think will draw people's attention in, or in many cases we like the format of a list story where there might be four talking points or five outcomes that people need to review. You tease the first two and try and drag people through to read three, four and five, so it's all in that lead paragraph, and the way in trying to pitch it to our online audiences.

David Pembroke: In terms of the graphics, you mentioned that you've got a graphic design team, but they don't necessarily work for you. Why is that?

Tom Nickson: I think it's largely the way we're set up as a marketing department. We're broken into three key areas. We have digital, we have brand, and we have communications that all sit under the marketing umbrella, and brand is obviously both the visual and written expression of who we are and our identity as a club, and that's where graphic design sits. We're very much a collaborative team, so it's not necessarily about who reports to who. We all sit in on the same meetings. We're all in the same area within the office. It's more a reporting structure as much as anything, and in many ways it allows them to have an element of independence when they're servicing a whole business, so they've got requirements for not only the digital side of things but from our comms team, our commercial partners, our community foundation, our membership ticketing team, our fan development team. So

it gives them, I guess, the capacity to sit independently as that creative across the entire business so that they can work independently of a lot of project without necessarily having their time pulled in one direction because of reporting structures.

David Pembroke: But if you've got an urgent need to create a graphic, are they available to help you with that?

Tom Nickson: Oh, most definitely, and I think that's the best thing. I've worked with our graphic designer for the past five or six years, since he started with the club at a similar time to I did, and I think we're very much on the same page about the way we wanna operate, the way things need to be in the digital space, and he's said before that we'll kick the ball out in front of him and he'll run onto it and do the rest, so we're all very much on the one page with the way we wanna go about things. We've got the highest level of respect and trust with the way that Dom goes about his work, and it's all part of the team environment work, and it's the same with our video producers. It's the same with the editorial side of things, that we get together, we know what the concept is, we work out what our contribution is to the execution and we go away and execute, and you end up with the final product that the fans see.

David Pembroke: Do you have then an analyst on your team, a data analyst who is then looking at all the various channels, looking at the activities, looking at the signals and being able to give you a sense of what's working, what's not working?

Tom Nickson: We don't have a specific analyst sitting within the team. I think that's a large part of what my role is, is to help close the feedback loop, and sit back and review what content is working, what channels it's working best for, whether it's the time that we're posting, the type of content, whether it's visual, are we using video, where the clicks are going the most. Whether that's through looking off Google Analytics, off our analytics platform. We use Omniture that sits behind the website platform or the analytics through our app just to get an understanding as to how people are engaging, because then similar from the social side of things, where again, Facebook, using their own analytics, we've got a contract in partnership with Socialbakers as far as social analytics and metrics, so using that to get some context as to how our content's performing as well. So it's about pulling all those little bits of information in and trying to build out the complete picture to get an understanding of the performance.

David Pembroke: In terms of that, what periods do you look at in terms of being able to draw down on that analytical insight? Are you looking at it on a quarterly basis, or a monthly basis, to test and learn, and to try to change things up in terms of your mix, or are you perhaps even a longer period of time, looking at it say, maybe through a six-monthly lens?

Tom Nickson: I think it's a combination that we work off an almost week to week cycle, in terms of our content that we produce from match to match, and we'll review the week before as we move towards the week ahead, and getting an understanding as to what content was driving traffic one week earlier, and maybe how that can influence or shape what we're doing in the week coming. We look at it in the context of month to month, and then comparing months in a year on year capacity too, to give some lighter context as to the growth, and indeed looking at benchmarking across the league, so we get an understanding as to what's happening across the wider AFL network.

We might task ourselves with certain growth targets or certain view targets and we find we fall short, but then when you look in the context of the AFL network, viewership's down for that month and the small growth that we had is actually a small win, so I think context is everything when it comes to numbers. I think you can paint a case for an against most concepts, depending on how you shape the numbers, so I think the more we know, the more context that we can provide, the more that we can gain meaningful insights into the numbers that are presented to us.

David Pembroke: And also in the model of the way that the AFL runs itself, it obviously has a very big central media area, digital area, where there's a lot of context that's created at head office and then made available. Can you explain how that works with the mothership, so to speak?

Tom Nickson: There's been probably a lot reported on it with AFL Media and how they work, they're essentially the media and content of the league, and they do a great job in really providing comprehensive coverage of the game. They've got a full complement of staff writers, of video producers, of graphic designers, and I guess they're sitting right in the middle of that relationship between fans and the game as well. I guess the difference is that as clubs fans have relationships directly with us as a fan, but for those that want a broader understanding or awareness of the game, they're the comprehensive place. We work with the staff beat writers that they have, and they produce some contents which we syndicate, and similarly from a video content perspective, we syndicate some of those contents too, but you really look at them no differently to the other media entities that indeed

cover the game, from the traditional mainstream TV networks and newspapers and radios through to the more new media outlets that exist online.

David Pembroke: Okay. So they're as much a competitor as anybody else?

Tom Nickson: I think that's definitely the way that they sit. That they're a legitimate media outlet that cover the game, that they have their own editorial staff, a full complement there, and they very much position themselves as the key, I guess, news and particularly online news channel for the game, and they've been very successful when you look at the audience numbers they're able to generate through the AFL network.

David Pembroke: Yeah, it's massive. How do you ensure that your team is staying on top of the latest trends, and the latest tools, and the latest information that you need, and knowledge that you need to continue to improve?

Tom Nickson: I think it's like most industries, whether it's trade publications or blogs, that we're always have the ear to the ground and see where the next emergencies are coming from, whether it's subscribing to different mailing lists to get an understanding of the technology that's coming through, or even just following teams through their social and web channels to gain inspiration. It might be keeping an eye on what the NBA or the NFL's doing, what's happening over in some of the larger EPL clubs, or what's happening over in Syria and some of those other soccer giants across Europe. I think they've got some very extensive content and digital teams which cover the club, and they create some fantastic content, and there's some great ideas that can be gleaned from the way they go about things, and sometimes it's a little easier to imitate than be completely original and innovate yourself, and when you do work in a lean operation, sometimes it's the best way to go.

David Pembroke: What about the players who are obviously a key asset in telling the story of the Western Bulldogs? How do you manage their contribution that they make to the story that you're trying to tell?

Tom Nickson: I think the beauty about the players across all sports is, I guess, they're their own individuals, and increasingly you're seeing that fans are attracted as much to the players as they are to teams. Take the NBA, for example. Fans of LeBron James, they're not necessarily a fan of the Cleveland Cavaliers or The Miami Heat, when he was there, or there are fans now of, if you're in Australia, of Ben Simmons rather than the Philadelphia 76ers, so I think they're such an important ingredient.

I think you look at some of the stats and the research that come out, particularly out of Facebook and Instagram, and I think it's quite staggering that the amount of, or the proportion of people when they follow brands or entities online, a lot of it is athletes first, then it's clubs, then it's leagues, so they're so important, and I guess for them their social media channels are very much an extension of their physical offline self, and that it's now just another means that they can communicate with their fans, or indeed audiences more widely.

David Pembroke: But how do you then manage them in a way that, yes, you want them to be authentic, but at the same time you want them to contribute to the brand and the story that you're trying to tell. So are there guidelines, or anything? Any guidance or directions that you might give to them around the way that they behave online?

Tom Nickson: I think collaboratively we work to ensure they have a firm understanding of how they contribute to the bigger picture. That they know how best to present themselves, and understanding too that the social media space is no different to the way they present themselves when they front a press conference, or speak to a journalist or a newspaper, or jump on a radio interview. That simply it's another extension, another channel of their professional communications as an athlete, so it's the same process that most advisers would give, whether you're in a large corporate giving advisers to executive before they speak to media, or within another brand, and you've got brand investors. It's about, I guess, them - and they live it every day. The values of us as a club, and what we stand for, and then how that carries through to the way they communicate with people.

David Pembroke: If I might take you back to a word that you used earlier in the discussion, which is something of real fascination to me around building engagement, and trust and relationships with audiences, but whether you're working in government or you're working in sport, but you mentioned experiences and the creation of experiences. What did you mean by that word, or what do you mean when you use that word "experience"?

Tom Nickson: I think experiences is increasingly the way that we transport a fan into the middle of an environment, so whether it's augmented reality, or virtual reality, or whether it's about providing them with access to a scene or a moment in time that they otherwise wouldn't be able to be a part of, so whether it is transporting them into the coach's post-match address after our last game of the season, and listening to the coach, Luke Beveridge, pay tribute to two retiring greats of our football club. That's an experience in

itself, it's not just a piece of content. It's not just a video, but the rawness of that content makes you feel like you're really there and you're living that moment too, and I think that's when we talk about experiences, it's making our fans feel like they're coming on the journey with us and they're not just observers from the outside.

David Pembroke: Okay. So it's really reaching beyond the transactional to that deeper engagement, whereas you used the word "feel", so you're trying to make people feel something.

Tom Nickson: I think that's correct. It's a really emotional connection that fans have with their supporting teams, and that's when content really hits the markets, when it does get people to feel something, whether it's pride, whether it's sadness, passion. I think that's when we're doing our job really well, particularly in the video space, is people aren't just taking information out of it, but they walk away with an emotion and a feeling, and it, we hope, strengthens their level of connectedness to the club.

David Pembroke: So where to next? Say over the next 12 months, describe to me perhaps where you think the world of digital communication will be in 12 months, and perhaps something that you'll be doing more of, and maybe something that you think you might be doing less of.

Tom Nickson: I think definitely more. The video space continues just to blow up, and I think it's probably more of that authentic, inside, inner sanctum type content. That's where our fans really connect, but it's probably, again, trying to find more ways of diversifying what we do as well, so we know we have a heavy focus on football content. It's how can we showcase the personalities of our players and what they are like off the field and pull that through to the contents, so they're not just connecting with, I guess, experiences and football interactions, but they're really connecting with people, and I think what you see the rise of a lot of those athlete-led media or websites. Your content creators.

You look at Unscripted, or you look at PlayersInsider, or PlayersVoice or Players' Tribute, and it's the reason why they're increasing and they're becoming more popular is because you get to see the authentic self of the players, and again, the value that social media has provided and the digital media is that ability to have a one-to-one connection with a player, with a club, and I think the more that you can provide access or insight into the authentic self of the players, I think that's where there's some real growth to come from.

David Pembroke: But obviously there's also the challenge, isn't there, of too much, and too much access, maybe, to perhaps even too much distraction, and you start to get into the space of impacting on performance, and as you suggested during the discussion, winning does drive a lot of engagement, and it does affect your results.

Tom Nickson: I think you're correct there, that it is about striking that right balance, and it's not necessarily been in every waking moment with a camera waiting to capture that next nugget, because if you see a coach's post-matches address to the players once or twice, you probably start to feel like you've seen it the third and fourth time, so it's still about keeping it fresh and finding new ways to cover the same events, but it might be uncovering different individual personalities at different times. We're really lucky that we've got not only an AFL playing group, but we have an AFLW women's team as well which provides us with another 30 athletes, and 30 different stories to be told, and 30 different experiences that they have through a season, so there's always those stories there, and it's probably finding the right medium and the right way of expressing it, and again, that's the challenge for us – and it might not always be video. It could be through a podcast, could be through written, it could be through photos. It's on us to make sure we're finding the right content to tell the story in the right way.

David Pembroke: Yeah, that's the challenge, isn't it, to be thoughtful, and it's not just about volume. It obviously is about making sure that you've got that mix right, and that sounds like it's a very difficult task.

Tom Nickson: First and foremost, we have to manage those relationships that we have internally, and that we're there to work with and work for the players as we are as much to work for the fans and for the external people external to the club, so we've gotta make sure that we're doing the right thing by those relationships internally to allow the athletes and the players to be the best they possibly can be, both on and off the field, and that's the balance that we've gotta strike. And you see through the likes of the new Patrick Dangerfields that just really enjoy the content creation process, and being active in that social space, and there's others that-

David Pembroke: Yeah. Head for the hills.

Tom Nickson: Maybe not as keen, but again, you work with them to find a way to be able to tell their story. I think even some of our shyest players, we've been able to find ways of sharing their experiences or telling their story, and you might start with written interviews, and it might evolve into a short post-match

interview on camera, and it might grow from there. I think you can't jump into an all-access documentary the first day you meet anybody. I think it's like any relationship, that you get to know them, get to know what works for them, how they operate, and then you build from there.

David Pembroke: And just a personal question to finish off on, this is a 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. How do you manage to switch off and not think about it at every waking moment?

Tom Nickson: It is, I guess, an occupational hazard in sport that it is consistent, and I think the way you look at it is the fan probably never switches off, too. You don't turn on your fandom at start of April, at the start of the season, and turn it off in September. That you are a fan 365 days a year. I think to be in the sporting space, you really do need to love the industry and love what you do, and I guess understand what you're committing into, and it's not necessarily the industry for everyone.

I think you might speak to uni grads, or people that are starting out their careers and they wanna work in sport, and some of them see the shiny bright lights, you see the match day on a weekend, but you don't see turning up the next morning to facilitate the press conference, or you don't hear the calls in the media side that are coming at all hours of the night time when there's a story about the break. Most recently we had a new recruit sign, and you've gotta jump in the car and head up the highway to get an interview because that's just the commitment that you make to the fans, and I guess getting the story out there. You've gotta enjoy what you do, and-

David Pembroke: But can you turn off? Do you ever turn off?

Tom Nickson: I think you can turn down. I think you can definitely dial down the volume, and I think increasingly when you have more people working around you that it becomes a manageable task. There is the capacity in season to take weekends off, where it can footie-free, or you have bye weekend and you make the most of it, or be able to handball or to shift around some responsibilities so you can get some downtime, but you do know that when the season's on, the season's on, and sometimes you joke that you'll say goodbye to your friends in April and you catch them in October. It is what it is, but it's a fantastic industry, and I think the memories that you walk away with, particularly in the good times, but even in the bad times or the tougher times, they're pretty long-lasting, so it's all very much worth it.

David Pembroke: Yeah, indeed. So where can people get a bit of a look at some of the work of Tom Nickson and his team there at the Western Bulldogs? Where are the best places for people to come and sample some of the system that you've described to us today?

Tom Nickson: I think the starting point is definitely westernbulldogs.com.au, and jump on all the big socials. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, too, at Western Bulldogs, and for our women's team, Bulldogs W. They're the key places where we're sharing our content, even jump in the App Store and Google Play and download the Bulldogs mobile app, and they're all great places where you can see the social content, the written content and the video content that we put out there, and there's some great stuff there. We've just done a fantastic mini documentary on our number one AFLW draught pick. We followed our management committee all through the deliberations, and then we're with them the moment they made the house visit to Isabel Huntington to tell her the news that she was going pick number one, and I guess they're those type of experiences and type of content that we pride ourselves on, and being able to take fans, not just of the team but of the sport, and general sports fans, to places that you can't go.

The other place that I'd highly recommend is keep the eyes peeled on the website. We released a documentary recently called *The Outsiders* about our 2016 run. Adrian Brown, who's a phenomenal producer, put that effort together, and that was all inner sanctum content that he created in consult with our former head of communications, Dennis Bicer, at the club, and that really showcases what we're about as a club, and the storytelling, and the experiences and the emotion that we try to create within our content.

David Pembroke: Fantastic. Well, congratulations, Tom. It's just a fantastic story about the way you've been able to assemble a great team and tell a great story, because you have done that wonderfully well with the Western Bulldogs. Obviously the on-field success in 2016 was a great platform, but since then you've been doing a great job in getting people to love the Bulldogs even more, so congratulations for all your success, and now thanks very much for joining us today.

Tom Nickson: My pleasure, and thanks very much for having me, David.

David Pembroke: Yeah, fantastic chat there with Tom Nickson. Obviously football, or AFL football, and most of the major codes, as Tom was suggesting, particularly in some of the big European and North American Sports, they do have that

access and they do have the thrill of sport to be able to drill down on, but there's so much in the process that Tom was suggesting about the need to create experiences. The need to be authentic. All of us can do that in the government communications space. We can look to the people, we can look to the benefits that we're trying to create, and be consistent, and be real, and really connect through to those audiences, but there's so much in that, so I'd go back and have another listen. I think there's so much in that from Tom Nickson today, so a great conversation there with the head of digital at the Western Bulldogs AFL team, and if you don't have an AFL team, wherever you are in the world, why don't you follow the Western Bulldogs?

So thanks again for joining in once again this week, and I look forward to you coming back again next week, but for the moment it's bye for now.

Speaker 1:

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