



EP#173: PUBLIC SECTOR
CONTENT: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES
AND STORYTELLING TIPS

WITH ANDREW PARSONS

TRANSCRIPT

Andrew Parsons:

Video is very effective because it could be used for your media material, it could be used for internal communications, it could be used for public information. It's a part of a tool set.

Now we have podcasting. Now we have a much better live-streaming. The technology has changed, but the principles still remain very much the same.

And it's honest content. You're filming news, you're capturing history. There's nothing greater than being able to draw back on that content 10 months later, 10 years later, 10 decades later, and say, "This is where we came from and this is where we are now."

I've always had a fundamental rule that you might work in government, but when you work in a media and comms team, you run it like a newsroom because news cycles now are so tight. You've got to act and behave like the environment you're working in. If you are not a part of that conversation, someone else will fill that gap.

Voice Over:

Welcome to the GovComms podcast, bringing you the latest insights and innovations from experts and thought leaders around the globe in government communication.

Now, here is your host, David Pembroke.

David Pembroke:

Hello everyone, and welcome once again to GovComms, the podcast about the practice of communication in government and the public sector.

My name is David Pembroke. Thanks for joining me.

As we begin our conversation today, may I first acknowledge the traditional owners of the land from where we are broadcasting today, the Ngunnawal people. And pay my respects to elders past, present, and emerging, and recognise the ongoing contribution they make to the life of our city and this region. And I'd also like to pay my respects to all First Nations people of the lands from where anyone listening to this podcast today is joining us from.

Well, happy 2025, everyone. And we're jumping into our first of many new episodes for this year, and we're starting off with a very relevant and important topic.

As government communicators, we're working in a media landscape that is changing at warp speed. Shrinking newsrooms, low or no resources, news deserts and growing opportunities for us to tell our story, is going to help us to really connect with citizens and stakeholders as we attempt to explain policy, program, services and regulation on behalf of our elected representatives.

Media has really shifted from the press release to live broadcast, social media and campaigns, and creative storytelling. And really, if you look at modern day marketing now, it is all about story and it is all about content, and also the technology that brings it all together.

Well, today is a guest who has first-hand experience in really nailing this opportunity in government and the private sector for many, many years. And indeed, I will declare an interest here. This is someone who I have known for a very long time.

Andrew Parsons is a seasoned media and communications expert. And we first met when he was a cameraman for regional television and I was the communications director of a local rugby union team here in Canberra. And we used to sit around and used to talk shop. And Parsons was always one of those guys who had all the kit and he was always interested in technology and he was always ahead of the game.

And certainly, he has taken those skills working in local government, emergency services and federal agencies to deliver award-winning campaigns such as pioneering live broadcasts at Dubbo Regional Council here in New South Wales, Australia to growing the New South Wales police force's social media following to over 1 million people.

He also oversaw the police, film and television unit, and he also managed police TV programming for shows such as RBT and The Force. And he's currently working for the Inspector General of Water Compliance, which is a federal agency which looks after water resources in the Murray-Darling Basin in Australia, which is a huge and very, very important water system that really looks after a huge amount of Australia.

So anyway, he's joining me now. Andrew Parsons, welcome to GovComms.

Andrew Parsons:

Thanks for having me, David.

David Pembroke:

We go back a long way. And when you really think about those early days when you were behind the camera, what interested you at first about getting into the game of media and storytelling and camera work?

Andrew Parsons:

Well, it's one of those funny ones that I grew up in Wagga in the Riverina. And at the time there was a big television station there, RVN-2, it's now Seven. The building itself is actually now a new age church. So the studio's gone, the television station is gone, etc.

But growing up, I was doing that children's theatre workshop and was always on the stage and being a clown. And I never really thought about being behind the camera because I was always going to be a paramedic. My life ambition was to be a paramedic. Day in, day out, that's what I want it to be. And my parents said to me, "You've got to go and get a job. You've got to go and do something and then maybe think about being a paramedic."

And I accidentally fell into radio because I used to as a kid, do all these character voices. I had a massive repertoire of character voices and sound effects like Michael Winslow from the Police Academy movies.

And I used to ring the radio station and was basically a pest. They loved it and they ended up bringing me in, this is 2WG in Wagga. And I ended up doing all these voiceovers and getting paid for it when I was still in high school. A 16-year-old getting 30 bucks an ad. It was fantastic.

So I fell into radio and was still doing that during high school. And then after that, figured out what do I want to do. And the parents said, "You need to go and get a job and what do you want to do?" And I thought, "Uh, I'll ring a guy on you in radio," because he was the local TV news presenter, Tony Pritchard.

And he ended up that day organising an interview and I went up and wax lyrical with the boss about how I was going to be the world's best paramedic, not knowing he was offering me a job in television. But reported back to my parents that I'd had this interview.

But I told them I was going to be a paramedic. And I remember them just sitting there scratching their head and saying, "You clown." And the boss rang me back and said, "Are you interested?" And I said, "Yes, I am." So I ended up leaving year 12 on, I think it was the Thursday, I finished doing the English exam and then I started at Prime Television as an audio operator slash engineer on the Monday.

David Pembroke:

What did you learn from those early days working in radio and working in audio, about the power of audio?

Andrew Parsons:

Well, first of all, it was so immediate, and two things that came out from that. Having a hearing loss and actually being deaf in one ear, being able to hear my own voice and how you enunciate things. That was the first thing I learned was being able to speak clearly and properly.

The second one was what you said and what you did had such an immediate effect. Back then, you'd have the competition line and you would basically say, "The first person to call us on this number gets a free pizza." And the next minute the whole switchboard would light up as people wanted something.

Or when it was a news story, if it was a bushfire. And we had lots of those growing up in the Riverina, lots of grass fires. And that was where you went to when it was really bad. Everyone listened to the radio. So I caught on pretty quickly that this media caper was fast and furious, and incredibly rewarding.

David Pembroke:

Have you been surprised in any way as an audio person about the rise of the importance and influence of podcasts in the modern media landscape?

Andrew Parsons:

Well, two things. Being an audio person was a bit groundbreaking for Prime and myself because I got employed and then told them that I was deaf.

David Pembroke:

Were you deaf from birth or did it happen as an accident as a kid?

Andrew Parsons:

I got a virus when I was a baby and it took my hearing when I was quite young. I was actually 1-year-old during Cyclone Tracy, and they thought for many years it was as a result of Cyclone Tracy because I was born in Darwin. But it was a viral infection. But I digress.

I started in television and I remember walking into the audio control booth and having this massive desk. And all I could say is, "Thank God it was mono because if it was stereo, I was going to be in a lot of trouble," because I can't hear out of my left ear. So at the time it was a mono feed and I learnt the craft of voice-overs and music to voice-overs and video is terrible if the audio is terrible, the nature of television.

And then fast-forward to where we are now and the rise of podcasting. And if you like the new form of the spoken word and radio, very familiar. But I just love how honest conversations like what we're having now attract an audience because it's interesting, where the content creators are the ones that are directing the content. It's terrific.

David Pembroke:

Are you surprised that government organisations don't do more podcasts?

Andrew Parsons:

Well, the challenge with the public service, and I can say this now having worked in all three tiers of government and also working in the private sector. It's the clearance process. If there's one blocker to good creativity, it's bureaucracy. And that obviously is there for a reason. I'm certainly not downplaying that and I'm certainly not suggesting in any way that there should be shortcuts.

But the challenge of actually producing something, certainly in a public environment, is inherently risky if you've got a very, very low-risk appetite as most public service organisations do. But those that do podcasts and do it well are usually because it's the topic.

And some things in government are very difficult to make entertaining or interesting. Turgent policy and things that don't affect everyday citizens can be a very difficult sell, to talk about. But then I counter that by saying that the best way to try and get a message like that across is engage the stakeholders, get them to tell the story. What does it mean for them? How does it affect them?

And that's been, in many ways, a bit of the driving force behind certainly our podcast here at the Inspector-General of Water Compliance, so Water's Edge, that we have a very strong editorial rule over that. That it's honest conversation and that it's meaningful conversation and it's relevant to all the people who live in the Murray-Darling Basin, which is 1 million square kilometres or 14% of the Australian landmass.

David Pembroke:

Yeah, look, we wrestle with it every day around clearances in working with our clients to get work done, to get it moved through. And I often watch and observe and I think about this notion of risk appetite.

But do think to myself, "Really, there is little to no risk in again, adopting the approach that you have or working with people inside the organisation to better explain the policy, the program, the service or the regulation in terms that people can understand." Often, to quite narrow and specific audiences. Because not all government communication is a health campaign, like a COVID-19 campaign. Or a debt defence force recruiting campaign where you want to get to large audiences.

A lot of it is actually very, very narrow. And so the risks actually is not there. So how do we improve clearance processes or how do you get around or how do you accelerate processes? What are the things that you've learned over the years that you could help the audience to understand how they might be able to achieve faster approvals or more innovative ideas?

Andrew Parsons:

Well, it's twofold I think, David. The first thing for me, and coming through the public service, is I joined at a relatively senior level. I got to a very, very senior level and now I've taken a step back. I've gone back into the realm of AL2 having spent over a decade as the SES band won.

So I was fortunate that I was at the clearance point. I was the last stop. Now I'm a part of the cog and that's important. But that cog is supported by a very good executive, the Inspector-General of Water Compliance is the Honourable Troy Grant who is a former deputy Premier of New South Wales.

And when I was in New South Wales police, he was actually my police minister. He by nature is a fantastic communicator. And certainly in my time in the federal government, I had a secretary, Andrew Metcalfe at immigration. And again, another amazing communicator, and they've invested-

David Pembroke:

Never met a microphone he doesn't like.

Andrew Parsons:

... Your words are not mine, David.

They are both really strong advocates of media and communication. And Troy himself has a mantra, which is, "Communicating is educating," and that is the core fundamentals of what we do. Right?

So having that buy-in from the senior executive is first and foremost. And I'll make an observation, and this is my second tour back into the Commonwealth having been in the New South Wales state government and then local government for a while.

But I do see as an observation, a lot of people who move into the heads of media and communications in public agencies, often don't come from media and communications backgrounds. They're policy people or they've had some sort of operational background, and they just happen to be at that band that is a branch head or ultimately responsible. So there's always going to be that inherent risk management in there if you are not a media and comms professional.

So I was a little bit of a circle in a box in some regard that I wasn't from a policy background, I wasn't from necessarily an operational background. I've been on both sides of the shop. So I know what the content is needed and what the content should do, and what our corporate messaging is. As the custodian of the corporate message, I should have a pretty good idea of what messaging we should be giving.

So marrying that expertise, experience, skin in the game, if you like, in being responsible for an agency's media and communications or public information arm is something which is important. You'd be very hard-pressed to find, certainly in the emergency services, someone who's in charge of media and communications who doesn't have a media and comms background.

Could you imagine being in a critical crisis and you've got yourself tied up in the clearance process because that's the way it is, but there's an emergency unfolding. You've got streamline and that is no different to newsrooms with their deadlines.

So working with that senior executive and having that confidence, building that trust with your senior executive is very important. And every role that I've had, I've either reported directly to a CEO or a secretary or a commissioner. And I think when you start putting those other multiple layers in between, because of span and control and what have you, all you're doing is adding another gateway. And that can actually be an impedance.

It's good for best practice and management. Sure, I'm not discrediting that at all. But if the balloon goes up and your agency or entity is under threat or in the middle of an emergency, the news cycle rolls on. So you could be going through the process of getting every Tom, Dick and Harriet to approve what you've done, but then news cycle has moved on and either you become the story or you're not a part of the story.

David Pembroke:

And would you agree with me, because a thesis that I'm now working on is that technology has changed the way that the world operates. People carry supercomputers in their pockets and they have access to the world's information 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Expectations are that they're going to receive that information in the form and the channel that they want at the time of their choosing.

And really, government needs to move to the need of the citizen and the stakeholder as opposed to try to impose whatever structures that they may have of approvals and other things, because people won't wait. And they won't apply any of their time and their attention, which is their most valuable asset, to important information that government might like to get across if it's not presented in the form and in the channel and at the time that people want to receive it.

Now, there is a trust crisis that we all know about in democratic institutions. So as technology changes, surely government has to understand that the risks involved are considerable by not moving, by not changing and by not adapting.

And that the greater risk is by not changing as opposed to staying where they might be at the moment because trust will continue to decay. Because people aren't getting what they want and when they want it because their behaviours have now changed. That is my theory. What is your view on that theory?

Andrew Parsons:

Well, first two things. One, I'm never going to rail against government policy insofar as you know how we do the approvals process or the government of the day. So as a public servant, we are bound by the way in which we do get our approvals and the ways in which we behave. That's just an institutional fundamental.

David Pembroke:

But I'm not arguing to get rid of approvals processes, but I'm arguing for a better understanding of the risk. Such that, you can still have those approvals processes in place, but there's a better understanding so those approvals move far greater. And things that don't need to be approved, where there's guardrails put in place, he's left and right of arc. You're a sensible person, get on with your job as opposed to, I'm going to sit here and I want to see everything come across my desk.

Andrew Parsons:

Well, and I was just going to add to that. Where that now plays a greater role is again, that trust and confidence in your professionals, your people who have got that experience and that trust as a part of that executive team.

And I've been very fortunate that yes, I have been subjected to those long approval processes, but their risk managed. And if the way in which you risk manage that and the way in which you bring people in early ... And I'm going through this at the moment. And being able to make sure that my senior executive know that what we are going to produce, because of the way we operate, the speed at which we operate.

I've always had a fundamental rule that you might work in government, but when you work in a media comms team, you run it like a newsroom, because news cycles now are so tight. You've got to act and behave like the environment you working in. And the executive I've worked with, up to date, have been very responsive to that. They've been very aware.

Those agencies that aren't, or those agencies that don't normally play in that space, that's where analysis leads to paralysis sometimes. And that's what I'm talking about, that the news cycle marches on. If you are not a part of that conversation, someone else will fill that gap. So to answer your question-

David Pembroke:

On your behalf, true.

Andrew Parsons:

... Yeah. So to really answer your question, it goes back to things can and will gradually get quicker as trust and confidence in what you do and how you do it is built. Yes, there are guardrails. Yes, left and right of arc are there for that.

But it also comes back down to the experience of the team and the leaders. If you've got an experience media and comms team who have got skin in the game, who have played in that space, they get it. If you haven't had the luxury of working in that space, but you know how it works and what have you, yes, well-intentioned people often do great jobs. But the deadline is very, very tight.

We're very fortunate that certainly the way in which we communicate is being a Commonwealth integrity agency. A lot of agencies in the states and federally are certainly looking at how we operate and how we do things. We are not going to cut corners and we're not going to for the sake of a headline, miss out on a clearance process. But as we mature, our processes will mature. And that's something that I think any agency will go through.

David Pembroke:

Now, I do want to come to exactly the setup that you have put together there at the IGWC because I did have the great pleasure of visiting at your organisation with your team not so long ago.

And you are the living, breathing example of where I think everyone needs to get to because the capability needs to be baked into organisations. They need to be able to do it themselves. Like my company content group, we are a provider of these services to government, and that's all well and good, but that's not going to cut it.

That is not going to cut it in the new world. You are going to have to go down IGWC model to bake it into your organisation because you're going to miss too many opportunities if you are waiting for the outsourced provider to be helping you. But we'll come to that in a moment.

But I do just want to go back to your career because you have worked around the place in media. It was with Prime, it was with ITN, it was with Wynn was with BSkyB as a cameraman. And then working back into the federal agencies, working in emergency services where you've really built some key expertise.

But just going back to some of those earlier experiences as a cameraman, what were some of the things that you learnt back then that you hold true today as the real principles for effective communication?

Andrew Parsons:

I think it comes down to being able to tell the story. It's being able to look ahead on and think the journos writing this, where are they going and working as a part of that team. Being a part of the team was the first principle. The second one, as a camera operator, is recognising and realising, just how powerful video is. Content is king, but video is very much a part of that as well.

If you're seeing it and you're hearing it, then it's there. One of the things that I think I took into the public service from that private sector and mainstream media was, video is very effective because it could be used for all number of things. It can be used for your media material, it could be used for internal communications, it could be used for public information. So I never walked into the public service with a bit of a siloed view on we only did this or we did that.

It's a part of a tool set. Now we have podcasting, now we have much better live-streaming. We're using Riverside FM and being able to capture broadcast quality audio and video from all over the world. The technology has changed, but the principles still remain very much the same. And it's honest content.

One of the things that you learn as a news camera operator is you are filming news, you're capturing history. It's no different if you're doing that for your organisation, you're going out and you're shooting things that the organisation is doing. Events they're doing ministerial things, agency things, projects being delivered in communities. That's a part of history.

And there's nothing greater than being able to draw back on that content 10 months later, 10 years later, 10 decades later and say, "This was a part of our history. This is where we were, this is where we came from, and this is where we are now."

David Pembroke:

And you've been a part of some quite significant innovation in the public sector. I remember that you were a part of the team at the Department of Immigration led by Andrew Metcalfe, but the comms team led by the great Sandi Logan, Marty Stewart, yourself. You were real pioneers in this space of content, weren't you?

Andrew Parsons:

Yeah, it was an interesting time. The department had gone through quite a battering in the early 2000s, and Andrew's philosophy was to be open, transparent and available. And what we did was basically lift a lot of the veil of secrecy, and that's perceived secrecy, about what the organisation did, but also the great stuff that we did.

And one of the things I used to talk about, being fortunate to do the public speaking circuit, was the department was always known usually for one thing, and that was detention. And that was a very big part of what the organisation did, but it was actually a very small part.

Doing the stuff around refugee, humanitarian services, citizenship, all the visa work, that was contributing to this great country. The way that we bring skills and services in, and telling some of those stories about being able to put doctors into country towns that didn't have a doctor for three or four years. But this doctor has come from overseas. They were great stories.

That was one of the things that the department was good at. We reported on what we were doing. So the vision from inside detention centres and operations and stuff that we were doing, particularly in border security, because we used to film all our own border security for ... This is a TV show in Channel 7 I'm talking about.

So the capability that I built when I arrived in 2006 was to bring this in-house capability up. And no offence, government agency spent a lot of money with organisations like yours, and that's

business. But to be able to bring that in-house, brings with it a lot of responsibility, but it also delivers a lot of speed capability and your ability to do your own thing. So we did that in spades.

So building things like online newsrooms, that we had something like 24,000 registered journalists from around the world who were hooked up to our newsroom and immigration back, I think it was about 2008 that came online. And back then we were delivering high-definition content of our operations and audio and photos.

And the philosophy that Sandi Logan ran, and it's something I've held dear ever since, is you're not there to be the spin doctor. If you're being asked a question, answer the question. And if you want to back it up with material, provide the material if people can't get in there.

And I remember it distinctly, and I won't name who it was, but a network did a story on us where they were just beating down on the department and they were using vision of the old building with the old branding. It wasn't even the department's name, and it was quite, they were heaping it on, and there's the name of the old agency.

So I just politely rang the chief of staff and said, "Look, understand you're doing a story and understand you put that to air last night, but you used some wrong vision. I'm going to send you some B-roll of up-to-date content so you can use that next time you're beating down on us."

And next time they did beat down on us, at least the picture quality, it was perfect.

David Pembroke:

Right branding, right building.

Andrew Parsons:

And that's the name of the game. You're not necessarily there to deflect all the time. You are there to also provide that support and that service to people who are reporting on news, reporting on the facts, and they can't always get into a facility or a location, whereas we can.

David Pembroke:

But see, that's 2008, and I do remember visiting with you and Sandi and Marty and Andrew and just walking around going, "Yep, this is it. This is going to be the future."

We're now 2025, and I still don't think the penny has dropped when really all government department and agencies are content factories. They're full of stories and exactly as you say, they're not just full of bad news. They're full of 95% of what it is good news, and great stories, and interesting people and people working hard and dedicated.

So I don't know, I just don't get it. I don't get it why people don't understand that this isn't something that is an absolute central and core function, particularly now when technology has moved on as much as it has. Tell me why it hasn't happened, Andrew. Put me out of my misery.

Andrew Parsons:

Well, I think it comes down to also trust in the brand and in what you're doing. I think there are agencies out there who can spend millions and millions of dollars in producing ... And this isn't just public agencies, this is private sector as well. But if you haven't got that trust and confidence in the community and what you're doing, you then suddenly become the headline for putting out glossy videos and glossy photos and all that sort of thing.

If you've started to build that rapport and that trust with the community, and this is something, and I'm certainly not saying this because he's my current boss. But Troy Grant, for example, through the work of the Inspector General is out and about in the communities. He's not this invisible entity that is saying that he's doing things across the Basin. He's physically out there.

So if we're out there capturing stories and capturing interviews and the commentary from the community with Troy or even without Troy, that helps build that brand and that voice, it builds that trust.

It shows that we are engaged and we are actually out there doing things, and we're not force-feeding our material because people have, "Oh yeah, that's our bloke that he does that." Or, "I remember him." And the brand becomes something that's a little bit more synonymous with trust and confidence.

So I'm just saying to you, David, that if you are in an organisation or an industry that has got that good connectivity with community and you're communicating and educating, then people will see that material. And they're seeing it online, they're seeing it in print, they're seeing it on their TV news services. They get it.

It doesn't mean that you're immune to criticism. I look at the work we did in police. We would be shooting police operations and showing how we're beating the bad guys and what have you, but police are humans and they make mistakes and sometimes they end up in the headline.

So you've got to balance that. You're not always going to be successful if you are creating content in getting your brand to be number one. But you will be successful if you are producing good content and regular content and people really understand what you're doing and why you're doing it, and can see for themselves what you're doing.

David Pembroke:

But right, look, and I'm not totally obsessed with what the Department of Immigration did way back in 2008. But I used to watch it and think, "Yes, yes, yes."

They've got the answer here because you turn the reputation around by useful, relevant, consistent information over time in multiple channels to be able to get to the audience to explain what the business of the organisation was. And so it wasn't just about the Palmer Report and Cornelia Rau and as you say, the people being locked up. It was a much broader story. It was a bigger story and it worked.

So anyway, I will drop it there, but I don't know, it is a perpetual frustration that the skills of media have not made their way as comprehensively as I think they need to into government and public sector organisations. So they are better able to explain the great work that they do.

But anyway, I will drop off that now, and just go back to just another area of interest I've got at the moment. And probably, post my visit with you out there in Dubbo, is that you are working now in regional Australia and regional media is under huge strain and pressure.

And it really goes to the point of just how more important it is, the role and the work that you do, and the credibility and the authenticity and the honesty and the frankness of the content that you are going to have to create. Because increasingly, there are less options. There is less information available.

How is it that you are now thinking about getting your story told in that vast region of the Murray-Darling Basin at a time when there are less resources supporting journalism in those areas?

Andrew Parsons:

If I could just take you back a couple of years back to Dubbo Regional Council. One of the things that I noticed when I arrived was the withdrawal of local media. They were starting to move people out in television newsrooms. The newspapers were being downscaled, some papers were moving to online only. But it wasn't stopping us when we were still producing so much content for media. We were still writing media news releases. We were still shooting material for video news releases and audio and so on.

So what I ended up doing is a bit of a challenge to the media types, if you like, where we produced our own bulletin, our own news update if you like, for Dubbo Regional Council, presented by a former television journalist, produced by us. All of us that worked in that office came from mainstream media, and there wasn't anyone that worked in that team that had not worked some form of broadcast or media.

And we were honest, we didn't spin things. We literally just told the stories that we were giving to the media that weren't carried because we weren't advertising on certain people, so they didn't run our stories. They didn't feel obliged or obligated to cover it or they didn't have the resources.

So it ended up becoming a relatively popular way of getting our message across to start with. Unfortunately, there were things happening in Dubbo Council at the time, and it got caught up in, I guess the silliness of that. I don't even want to say politics because it wasn't real politics. And that was a bit of a death knell to that.

But interestingly, it made its way onto Media Watch and people go, "Oh, you got on Media Watch." But when you look at what they actually did a Media Watch, they quite clearly articulated that when you have people who are working industry who no longer have jobs, they will go to organisations like government agencies and corporates and what have you.

And if you are not covering the stories, they're more than capable of producing that material and putting it out. And what Media Watch basically said was, "If you withdraw your local media, someone will fill the gap." And we filled that gap.

And it would've continued to be relatively successful by covering what council was doing because that's what its role was. It wasn't there to be the mouthpiece for the mayor or anything like that. It was literally about where ratepayers money was being spent and things that were being opened and what people needed to know. But as I said, it got caught up in that silliness at the time and it fell by the wayside.

But interestingly since then, I've actually been contacted by organisations like yours who wanted to know could they sell the model, because they had a big counsellor or a big organisation that wanted to do the same thing.

And when I tell people like you, "Well, we did it ourselves. We don't own it. It's not our IP to sell. You can go and do it yourself if you've got the right people and the right capability." And that is the truth.

So fast-forward to the IGWC and we're doing something very similar that the Inspector-General, the Honourable Troy Grant announced his first inquiry at the end of October that affects all of the Murray-Darling Basin.

So we put out video news release, we made the press release live via Sydney Teleports, which broadcast to all the major networks so they could record that and use that as well. We sent out an audio news release and we sent out lots of rich media material for newsrooms across the Basin to use, and they used it.

And that is a role that we will continue to fill because the work that we do and how we do, it's factual. This is what we're doing. This is the outcome of an investigation or a report or an audit, and here's some material for you to use along with some background information. How you use that newsroom is entirely up to you, but we make that available because they wouldn't otherwise be able to capture that.

David Pembroke:

Yeah. And again, to me it just makes perfect sense and it is one of the requirements of the change in capability, which is the democratisation of the factors of media production and distribution. Like everyone can do it now.

You just need to have, as you say, the skilled people who can help you to work through how is it that we're going to tell this story? A big announcement like you discussed. But then there's the day-to-day meat and potatoes stuff, the smaller stuff that people really do need to know and they do need to understand so they can engage.

But perhaps, and you've been very generous with your time, Andrew, but just as a final question, as someone who's been around for a long time. You're now in it again working for the IGWC. If you throw forward, where do you see the evolution taking place and how can people prepare for success in the future, working in government communication?

Andrew Parsons:

I think we've got great talent out there in mainstream media or people who are going through the university process or the work experience process to get that media experience. I think organisations need to not only tap into the technical capability to capture that, but they also need those people who can tell a story.

The way that you tell stories now on things like short-form videos on the TikToks of the world and things like that, where the attention span is so much smaller, but so is the length of content. That's always going to be there and potentially emerging.

But then you've got the longer-form storytelling that is needed through things like podcasts or video content. You've got the opportunity I think to actually produce content that can go into mainstream media. I ultimately one day would love to see us produce something about the Murray-Darling Basin that could be, for example, a Netflix documentary. And there's nothing really stopping us from doing that, just need to have a meeting with Netflix.

But from that perspective, there is ample opportunity for organisations across the board, be they government departments or otherwise, that if you are dealing with people or your business is about people, then there are going to be stories. There are going to be a plethora of stories and angles that you can share.

And it's not always going to be interesting to everybody. And people, I could stop someone in the street and say, "Hey, have you listened to the contentgroup's podcast? They'd probably say, "No." If I was in Canberra, they'd all say, "yes."

But it's one of those things that, as I said earlier, if you build that trust and confidence and that recognition in what you do with your audience and you're producing good content, you're producing honest content. Then I think the future is really bright for professionals like us in this game to be the pilots and captains of our own success.

If we drop off and we get caught up in the, I use bureaucracy as a broad word, not specifically the public service. But if we get caught up into the bureaucracy of risk and not investigating or trying something new, we can't pioneer in things.

And if there's one thing I've loved doing, and it's a bit different at the moment. But I've got a great history of being able to pioneer things. I'm looking forward to the next thing to pioneer. If that's here, great. If it's somewhere else, great, but there's life in the old dog yet, so to speak. And I think that there is great opportunity out there. We just need to find the right story and the right people to tell it.

David Pembroke:

Amen to that. And really, I think you've been very generous with your time, and I do have some more questions, but perhaps we can save those for another time.

But Andrew Parsons from the IGWC, thank you very much. Congratulations on a wonderful career to date. Look forward to seeing the documentary on Netflix because maybe that might be something that you look to do into the future.

But again, audience, it just explains or gives you a bit of an insight into the thinking of one of the pioneers of content in government that he's starting to think about those types of things. And that's what you should be thinking about as well. How can you tell your stories to the people who you need to reach and to influence and to engage? And really, there is no excuse now, the factors of media production and distribution have been democratised.

You no longer have to buy ink in 44 gallon drums. You do not need to own transmission towers. You don't need to buy expensive editing and camera equipment. It is all now so accessible. You have to build it into your business.

Just as Andrew Parsons did back in the day at the Department of Immigration, just as he did at the New South Wales Police Force, just as he has done now at IGWC. And just as he did also, at the Dubbo City Council, where taking responsibility for the stories and taking responsibilities to make sure that they connected with the audiences, with people who needed to understand that information.

So Andrew, thank you mate for coming onto the program.

Andrew Parsons:

Thank you, David.

David Pembroke:

Lots in that. And I think that that will inspire more people. And I know we, not stuck on the clearance stuff, but that's one of the biggest issues when it comes to the publishing of useful, relevant, and consistent content and changing processes and updating mindsets and getting people to understand the risks.

Often imaginary risks in a lot of this stuff, because as I say, there are so many good stories that need to be told. They just need to be told well.

So thank you Andrew Parsons from the IGWC, and as I say, one of the great pioneers of content in government and the public sector in Australia.

So audience, thank you. And what a way to start 2025 with someone like Andrew Parsons who can really articulate, as he did, about the opportunity to tell your own story. So thank you audience for coming back to listen to another great story from the world of government communications.

Now, a rating or a review of the program always is appreciated because it does help us to be found. So wherever you're listening to the podcast, just jump on, give us a rating of some sort, and that will be much appreciated.

So you can find all of the latest information, updates, insights, and other things from everything that is happening in the world of government communications. There are many back episodes of GovComms, but also on LinkedIn at the GovComms Institute.

And we look forward to bringing you another great story from the world of government communications in the next fortnight. But for the moment, my name is David Pembroke, and it's bye for now.

Voice Over:

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