

InTransition Ep 53 – Martin Schipany

David: Hello ladies and gentlemen. Welcome once again to In-transition. The podcast that examines the practice of content marketing in government. My name's David Pembroke and I'm delighted that you've given us just the small part of your day today as we go through what will be a fascinating interview with a very smart person. Before we do, as always, to the definition of content marketing as it relates to the government and public sector. Because it is so important that we do define what it is that we are talking about because I think still, as it relates to content marketing, there is not a great level of understanding just exactly what it is that we are talking about. The definition: Content marketing is a strategic measurable and accountable business process that relies on the creation, curation and distribution of useful, relevant and consistent content. The purpose is to engage and inform a specific audience in order to achieve a desired citizen and/or stakeholder action.

To our guest today. Martin Schipany is the head of city communications for the city of Vienna's press and information services. Martin started working for the city of Vienna as a press officer before becoming an editor in the press and information services branch. Eventually to rise to the head of the sub-department, city communications. Martin has also been the head press officer for a political party in the Vienna State Parliament. He recently completed his executive masters in international media innovation management, which is one of the reasons why we are speaking with Martin today, because his thesis was on the necessary criteria, instruments and processes needed to implement a municipality's content marketing strategy. Martin Schipany, thank you very much for being In-transition.

Martin: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

David: Martin, just about you, a little bit of personal stuff to start with, you began your career or your studies in political science. How was it that you transferred from political science across to communications?

Martin: Basically, I was always interested in communications and especially during my study, I also started to focus on the kind of communication approaches, not only in political parties, but also in municipalities and at the end, I have the chance to combine this knowledge with the practical work at the city of Vienna when I started as a press officer for executive city council of our urban development traffic and transport.

David: You went straight from uni, straight into the city of Vienna?

Martin: Yes. There was just a shortage in the mission in the planning bureau but I think after a half year, I got the chance to work for the city of Vienna and I was very happy about it.

David: When you look back now on to that time when you joined the city of Vienna and to where you are now, when you look back, what do you look back on and what sort of captures your attention from that time when you first began as a press officer at the city of Vienna? Maybe describe what some of those changes that you've seen?

Martin: I found it was a very, very useful experience because I could get a lot insight in all the different or from very different angles on the municipality and how the municipality works. It was very important to see how the political decision making process works, it was a very important time during my time as a press officer but also afterwards as a press officer for the caucus I was working for and the changes I have seen were primarily connected to the kind we were working with, new media channels so, when I started working in the city of Vienna, internet was very important but we hadn't this clear focus on mobile technology. This is something that ... It's a very disruptive technology, changed a lot of in our minds. We tried to optimize our media products since then, to this kind of technology, to get our information, our services, on smartphones. This was part of probably one of the most important changes.

David: We'll come back to that, because I think as we dive a little bit deeper into your day to day experiences, I think they'll be a lot of insights there that you'll be able to share with our audience and things that they'll be able to take away and apply in their day to day basis. We first connected, when you gave me a call and we had a conversation as it related to your study for the thesis that you were doing into that, what were the necessary criteria, instruments and processes to implement a municipality's content marketing strategy. Just describe to me your journey towards content marketing. When did you discover it and when did you realize that it was going to be a great system for helping to tell the story of municipal government?

Martin: As you know, the term content marketing emerged during the first decade of the millennium, especially in the English speaking market. In the German speaking market it arrived definitely later. I caught up the phrase first in 2013/2014 during a visit to a content marketing agency in Berlin and at this time I thought this could be a very interesting approach, could be very useful also for our daily work at the present information services because what we have seen so far, is that the traditional media face a very, very, very intense crisis and that we should think about of alternatives as municipal communicators about how we can reach our target groups without relying on this middleman. How can we cut out this middleman.

This was the time back in 2014 when I thought, "How can we use this approach in our department?" At this time I started to dive in a little bit deeper into what content marketing is, what it should be, how the typical criteria shaped and also to compare them with our system and that was the starting point for my master thesis.

David: When you started studying, this notion of the application of the content marketing system, what actually surprised you that you weren't wholly aware of when you got started?

Martin: I was really surprised by defining content marketing according to some criteria. I found altogether 13 criteria that are typical for content marketing for example, own media, that every piece of content should have a call to action that should be consistent over time, that you focus clearly on your customer's needs and so on. What I was really surprised by is that our present information, our department fulfils 10 out of these 13 criteria, but I wouldn't go so far to say that we already used content marketing because

there is one important thing missing and it's especially in the field of consistent communicating, this one story over all our media channels.

This is something that happens especially at the intersection between the political level and the municipal level and there we have definitely to build a lot of more awareness than in the past and also to get them get the PR offices of the political offices in our boat and to show them, "Here are other alternatives." Mainly the workload of our PR officers in the political offices is to talk to journalists, to talk to traditional media, but that content marketing provides alternatives communicating with your target groups and delivering the information they really need. This is something where we have definitely to build a lot of more awareness than in the past.

David: How are you going with that job, because I think that's an eternal lament. Even today, I was in a presentation with a large Australian government agency and when I finished the presentation, that was the first question that was asked, "How do you get the attention of the political media offices to understand that there is more to life than speaking to the media?" How have you gone about solving that problem.

Martin: We started ... I finished my master thesis on, I would say, on three levels, to get them with us, we started on a strategic level and tried with the help of the content marketing agency to define on a strategic level what our narrative should be in terms of content marketing criteria, so we created the so-called citizen journey. Citizen journey is comparable to the customer journey as we know it from marketing or also content marketing so you know in which situation your customer needs which kind of information. It really helps him to satisfy his needs and we thought, this should be also a journey our customers or our citizens should take so that we now try to work on, for example when you want a passport or want an application for a kindergarten, that we ask ourselves, in which situation do our cities need which kind of content, so that it's going to be helpful for them.

With this citizen journey, we can identify all the point of sales, the touch points with the municipality and also a possible channel so we can deliver them the content they really need and to work on this strategy on an operative level, this is the time when we now get it in the political offices and the PR offices. For example, when we do something for a new product, we want to launch, a magazine in the economy field for small and medium enterprises, this is going to be in the next weeks, we're in intense workshops also with the little office so that we can work together on what are the needs of their target groups, what do they need from the city of Vienna, how can we deliver it, how can the content be shaped so that it is really, really helpful and this is the way we want to get them on board.

David: How are you going with that so far? Have you been able to convince them or start to get them to understand that perhaps a larger investment in content marketing is appropriate?

Martin: I don't think that's such a ... It's the only thing of the investment in terms of budget because what we already have are very, very powerful communication channels. We

definitely already have the design budget for all media, the thing is, just that we combine it with this very specific approach of content marketing, not only to think stand oriented in terms of what do we want to tell our customers, but to think, "What is the need of our customers?" This very customer focused approach in communication is the decisive thing, not so much to talk about but send an oriented message. The thing here is to combine these approach with our media channels on the one hand and so far it worked really well. The signals are from every side very positive, they're very interested in these things because they also see ... Can't be to future just only to talk to journalists, talk to traditional media.

They have another interest than we have. We want to reach our citizens, we want to convince them about our efficiency, about our work and traditional media want to maximize their profits, that's a fundamentally other issue and then fundamentally other goal they have. The thing is, we have to make ourselves in the long run, more or less independent and that's the thing.

David: What about in the area of advertising spending, because in another area of criticism or another area that sort of retards the growth of content marketing is the perceived need to spend money on traditional advertising. Be it television advertising, radio advertising, print advertising. Are you in Vienna seeing the same sort of focus or in Europe are you still seeing that same reliance on advertising spending?

Martin: I think there is a shift in the balance between owned media budgets and advertisement budgets. I do really think for the future that both will exist because content marketing or owned media are a very, very good way to build up long term relationships, to build up subscribers, loyal customers on one hand, but from time to time, it will be necessary to get definitely a high awareness focused on one point and therefore advertisement is a very useful thing. I think we will see in the future a stronger combination between content marketing tools on one hand and on the other hand, campaigns with the support of classic advertisement in TV or in the print sector.

What I can see is that there is a shift away from the traditional advertising markets, not only in Austria. Two weeks ago, a very, very well-known publishing house announced that they will focus more on content marketing and that they want to be the leader in the segment in Austria. There you can see there is another ... That there's a change process going on. Also in the German speaking market in Germany, C3 code creating content is probably the biggest content marketing agency in Germany and they bought recently an agency in London. They are trying to expand their work and their field of expertise. What we can see is, on one hand, there have been more investments in the field of owned media in content marketing related issues on one hand but, advertisement will still play a role.

David: In your thesis, you did use the city of Vienna as a case study. What recommendations did you make to the city of Vienna to improve their content marketing strategy?

Martin: As I've mentioned before, one recommendation was definitely that we need another narrative for the strategic level. This is kind of sedition journey that we have to focus on

clearly, what the needs of our citizens are in specific situations, this is something that we've worked on for a few weeks and we are already now in the phase of presenting it to the decision makers and stakeholders in the municipality and this thing is going very well. Another thing is, another recommendation is that we strongly recommended to develop a documentation strategy because we are producing a lot of content, we are producing a lot of good content on various media channels: print, digital and so on, but the thing is, with their documentation strategy, it's possible to enhance the traceability of content aggregation and creation process so that we can, based on the documentation strategy, optimize the learnings and the findings out of our content production.

Another thing is that we are now trying to identify niche markets where we, as a city of Vienna can use our expert status and build new audiences, so niche markets that a traditional media do not focus on because it's not important enough for them. For example, in the few small and medium enterprises, it could be a very, very useful thing to produce such a magazine or such a media product for us as a city because there we could focus very clearly on what are the supports, what is the supportive role of the city of Vienna in this field and how can we be a service provider for these enterprises in our city.

David: How difficult have you found it trying to harmonize, across all areas of the city of Vienna. This notion of the citizen journey, given that there's an experience from, might be economic development, it could be sport and recreation, it could be health. There are some many different areas that require different approaches, different needs, different people who are interested. How have you gone about trying to grip up that very diverse audience groups into a coherent approach?

Martin: That's definitely the toughest thing because you don't have a lot to do with the different specialized fields, for example sports, economics and so on. You have all to do with very different types of persons in these fields. Some of them get a really quick and fast to say, "Yeah that's a brilliant idea, let's make this a thing, let's make this citizen journey so that we have a good overview about what our needs and how can we be a service provider for these needs?" On one hand, on the other hand, the problem is because time is always limited and to get them so far to say, "Yeah please invest a bit of your time to do this strategic work." Which is in my in my opinion definitely necessary.

It's just probably that the hardest thing to say is, invest specific time amount of your time, budget to do this work with us because on the long run, it will pay off. We will see that, and it is the nice thing about content marketing, you can make definitely every piece of content measurable and you will see, this content works or this content doesn't work. On the long run, we will see that also the political offices knows that the CO level in the municipality, they will benefit from this work and from this time and amount they had invested just one at a time.

David: Your view is that as to the content marketing program starts to produce the dividends, the measurable dividends, so that people can see the results that you will start to get more engagement and more uptake from multiple areas of the city of Vienna?

Martin: Definitely, it's always this term of return on investment. I think that's the tipping point where we can convince them that content marketing initiatives, if you want to call it content marketing or maybe in with another term the problem is that the moment that there is no universally accepted definition although your definition is a very, very good one and I used it also for my master thesis. The thing is, to illustrate how the process works, to illustrate the benefits and advantages of this whole process and then, I think, it would be a lot easier to convince internal, especially internal stakeholders in a municipality, in the municipal PR that this kind of communication strategy is definitely a future oriented communications strategy.

David: One of your other recommendations which I think was of interest to me in particular, was this notion of locating the public relations, media relations, content marketing capability much closer to the leadership of the organization. Can you describe why you decided that that was a necessary step in order to have the city of Vienna adopt an approach to content marketing?

Martin: That was definitely one of my recommendations but we didn't make it so far internally. I think we are in a very good position as a department within the municipality because we are the only one expert department that deals with all the questions around communication and we have a lot of task around consulting, issue management, coordination, internal communication, a lot of outstanding tasks that the other departments don't have. The thing here is that basically, yeah, their communication department should normally be as close as possible to chief executive officer, to the top management level just because there are so many questions related to fundamentally strategic issues in content marketing so, why are we doing this? Why are we serving these target groups?

These are questions that only the top management level could answer, and that's the reason why I recommended that the department for communication should be as close as possible to this top management level. As I've stated before, it's not the decisive thing for us as present information service because when we have a close look at the history and then the development of the history of our department, we have very, very many informal ways to steer and to play a role as advisor, to get the answers on this question: Why are we focusing on this or are we communicating in this way and these things ... Therefore the positioning in our case is not the decisive thing.

David: You had a win with in and around the citizen journey and having people to understand that strategic level narrative and understanding and satisfying the needs of citizens and in crafting content to meet those needs and obviously I'm sure, there is distribution elements there, as well as measurement and evaluation. You didn't have as much success in terms of getting the content marketing function more closely, physically located I suppose, next to the CEO, but what was some of the other recommendations that have been accepted?

Martin: For example, when a recommendation has been accepted definitely that we have to avoid content silos, we have many, many, many meetings within the city of Vienna and

one recommendation was definitely a closer coordination between the political level and content production level and that that was already before I did the thesis but it's just such an important part in this whole content marketing structure that you have one core team, one total core team that has an overview about the whole content production that's going on into CDN and we've done it two years ago with this ... editorial core team in our city. It's in permanent contact with the political office. We have then a clearer view about the web pages we produce, we have an overview about the planned advertising campaigns, we have weekly meeting with the press offices and one very important thing by doing content marketing as a municipality is that you have this kind of permeability between these content sectors and that they don't only work on their own.

David: How far or how would you write your ability to be able to integrate content marketing into your ... How far away or how far along are you on the journey?

Martin: In terms of percent, I would say that we are maybe 80 - 85% that we could call it content marketing, I think the biggest challenges we have to face now are on a strategic level on one hand that we will be able to distribute one notion, one idea, one communication idea through our channels at the same moment consistently over time. This is different, the one main challenge for the near future ends on the level then our process of the findings and learning so that if your evaluation process, so that we can permanently evaluate our content. This is something that has a lot of to do with the technical stuff with the content marketing's ... Not content marketing, content management systems with monitoring tools and they are working on ... with our IT department, with our online department to set up a new content management system for the city so that it would be a lot of easier than now to evaluate the content that's been produced on the one hand, on the other hand also to make a closer connection between external and internal communication so that we all have in the city, the same content management system and can work in one environment and this is something that has a lot of to do with technical stuff but this is definitely the second challenge we have to face.

David: How's that going for you, because that ... That's obviously a vexed issue, a complicated issue with security, with privacy, with other requirements, other needs. It's generally quite a complex task to be able to bring digital ICT and content together. What advice do you have for people to be able to try to marry out the content with the technology stack that's required to deliver those experiences that you need for citizens?

Martin: One of them is definitely that you need a lot of tolerance in this process, that you need to focus as a team on this one single goal, that you don't lose your mind in this process. Honestly, it has a lot of to do with coordination between security and communication issues, especially working together with the IT Department and with the IT stuff. Normally in answering questions about how secure, how safe is this technology, how can we use ... On the other hand from a communication perspective you normally ask other questions, not the security questions, you ask, "What is the user experience, what's kind of design do we need so that it's smooth, so that we can deliver it in a convenient?"

It's a fundamentally different issue normally. The thing is that you set up a coordination process over time so that you can share your different understanding of this system and can build a consensus over time. We are already now in our in a good way, so we will launch the first pilot phase in April to see the first content product support platforms based on this new CMS, but the process we went through was long. I think two years ago was the starting point and it has a lot also to do with the budget because this technical stuff is always very expensive and you need a lot of external contractors to set up and install these programs and the software.

We were in the lucky situation that they were there was this clear goal, this clear task from our CEO level to say, "Yeah, okay, we need this kind of system." Also our chief information officer was a very important part in this process in terms of being a catalyst ...

David: A catalyst for change?

Martin: A catalyst for change just to encourage our team to work very fast and focused in this whole process.

David: Fantastic. Martin, congratulations on the progress that you're making there at the city of Vienna. I think a lot of people listening will take a lot away from this and a lot of the insights where you've been able to develop some approaches and really understood it that really core level, just exactly the benefits of content marketing and how it can be applied to municipal government because in my view, and I know you share the view with me that really this is the heart of the future of communication and his ability to be able to go direct, to be able to become the media on behalf of your organizations, to tell those stories, to explain to people what it is that you need to explain to them so they can have the information they need to improve their lives or strengthen communities.

It sounds like you're making wonderful progress there and also that thesis, fabulous read. Really enjoyed it. Congratulations on that and where might people be able to find the thesis if they're interested to go and have a deeper read of all of your analysis of content marketing as it relates to municipal government? Where might be the best place to people to find that information?

Martin: I think that probably the easiest way would be to simply to send me just an email. I have not put it online so far but maybe I would do it and so I would share a link with you so that you can add it to the podcast but I think the easiest way would be to send me an email because normally I like it though to step in a short conversation with people who want my thesis so that I can see a little bit closer, "What's the interest behind and which kind of organizations are working?" I usually use it also as a starting point for short conversations. Just send me an email that would be the easiest way.

David: Okay, and that email address is?

Martin: The e-mail address is m.schipany@gmx.at

David: We will sort that out in the show notes to make sure that we put it up there and then people will be able to access that very fine piece of scholarly research, Martin. It's interesting you said in part of the thesis that looking around and hunting around for information, there really is not very much about and it's very true, there's not ... The books have been yet to be written about this transformation as it relates to government and public sector communications. I think your thesis is a very fine start for people on their journey as they seek to understand the potential of content marketing as it relates to government and public sector communication.

Thank you very much for giving up some of your day with us today and thank you audience for once again tuning in to In-transition as we explore the practice of content marketing in government and the public sector. Next week we'll be back with another fascinating guest for you. Please tune in and if you do, or can jump over to iTunes or Stitcher with a bit of a review, just helps the program to be found or jump onto the content group website and sign yourself up to the newsletter so we can stay in touch as we seek to further the discussion, the debate and the understanding of this wonderful time In-transition as the world of government and public sector communication changes. Thanks again for your time. We'll speak to you soon and thanks again to Martin Schipany. Bye bye.