

CharityComms podcast – episode 1, pt.1 transcript

Robyn: Hi everyone, we're thrilled to welcome you to the first episode of the CharityComms podcast. My name's Robyn and I'm the events assistant; you may well have spoken to me before, if you have, hello.

Sushi: And I'm Sushi, I'm the digital manager and you've probably spoken to me too.

Robyn: We're creating this podcast with the aim of enabling the sharing of expertise and to ultimately champion great comms in the sector through a new format. We also asked you of the ways we could share information in the network and "podcast" received a lot of positive responses. So here we are. We're both huge podcast fans so couldn't turn down the opportunity.

Sushi: We're still working on fitting this around our hectic events schedule, so we can't promise regularity in posting, but we do promise to pick up on compelling subjects and give something worth listening to.

Robyn: For our first episode, we thought we'd go digital and focus on digital leadership and challenging the status quo. As the world continues to become more virtual, digital leadership in the third sector is becoming more important than ever to keep up with this change. We've separated this episode into two parts. For the first part, we caught up with two digital pros, who gave compelling talks at our events, regarding how they shook up digital content at their organisations. They were Jon Ware, previously digital lead at Anthony Nolan and Chris Flood, content strategy lead at Cancer Research UK.

Sushi: In part two, which will be coming out soon, we'll be discussing digital leadership with two freelancers, who specialise in the subject, Brani Milosevic and Zoe Amar. We'll be picking their brains on how to change the conversation on digital transformation in your organisation.

Robyn: So without further ado, let's move on to the first interview. We were lucky enough to have the fantastic Jon Ware, one of 2017's extremely deserving Inspiring Communicator Award winners, chat to us about his successful content strategy at Anthony Nolan. We used different clips of the original audio from Jon's talk at the Small charities conference in 2016 and our follow-up interview, so the audio quality varies a little throughout, but we hope that won't affect your enjoyment. Here it is.

A note to the reader: to differentiate between audio from the original talks and audio from the follow up interview we have colour coded them:

- [Audio from the original session is in blue](#)

- Audio from the follow up interview is in black

[APPLAUSE]

Jon: I'm Jon. I'm from Anthony Nolan. If you don't know us, we're a blood cancer charity. We deal with stem cell transplants for people with blood cancer and blood disorders. We deal with finding the right donors to help those people. And there's a thing I've observed in a lot of charities across the UK when it comes to social media content, and that's there are really two opposing philosophies. And one of them really is that social media content needs to follow your needs. And generally, those needs are off-platform. You need to get people to visit your website and sign up, you need to get them to take some kind of action, you're really driving them away from the social media platform and onto whatever you need them to do.

I disagree with that approach. I think your content needs to be led by what your audience wants. The difficulty, of course, is what they generally want is in platform. They don't come to your Facebook page because they want to visit your website. Most of the time they have Google, they can just do that themselves. They visit your Facebook page because they want to see content that inspires them and they like your cause, and they want to click 'like'.

Even though most charities follow one of these two philosophies, often they don't really consciously know they're doing it. So, this leads to a real conflict of interest between the audience and the organisation, both of whom are expecting to get very different things out of the relationship. And that leads to content that's very confusing, or content that sometimes is just plain bad.

Robyn: Hey Jon, it's great to have you here. Thanks for coming in to chat to us today.

Jon: Thank you for having me.

Sushi: And Sushi, also here with us.

Robyn: Fantastic. So, you spoke about how you challenged the status quo in your content strategy at Anthony Nolan. You were working with the team, you were sort of leading the team against the grain and you did have some support, but in yourself, were you always confident you were always going in the right direction with it.

Jon: I was always confident in the right direction. I don't think I was ever really confident in myself. I think that social media, in particular, breeds a lot of self-reflection and anxiety. Both because you're getting constant immediate feedback from your audience and if something goes wrong, or even goes slightly worse than you we're expecting, that can be a real blow to your

confidence. But equally, because the landscape itself is fluid, you may find yourself having to explain to the team why this year's campaign is underperforming on last year's campaign, whether it's about "the content went wrong", or whether it's "Facebook is increasing its chokehold on your organic reach". And so therefore the numbers aren't lower than anything they should have been because of anything you've done. In other words, there are a lot of external factors that can make you feel less than confident.

Sushi: But, is there a kind of- I've heard the idea that there's a push towards to the kind of video content, and you see news agencies doing this as well, news agencies pushing tons of video content and video snips, driving traffic in the blurb for instance, which I imagine is their basic strategy. Do you think that is actually the change?

Jon: I read a very good article, I can't remember who it was by, talking about video and looking at, is it that people want video more and more, or is it that Facebook wants us to believe that people want video. Facebook wants us to push towards video and so it's putting lots of PR out there saying "we all need to get on board with video" and if you don't you're left behind. And so you get received wisdom that gets propagated very quickly without ever really being criticised or analysed.

As for charity video, I think some charities are doing some really good work with it but nevertheless the resources that are needed for it, many small charities can't really invest in it and they shouldn't be trying to make it work when actually the extra reach that Facebook purports to be giving them isn't nearly as important as delivering the best possible content that appeals to their audience.

Robyn: It almost sounds like this is the third sector's version of fake news – is video really the future?!

[Laughter]

Robyn: But, how would you say you could see through that stuff when it's coming out? That's a really tough one, I'm sorry to put you on the spot with that!

Jon: I don't think you can, because after a while it becomes real, right? So, everyone is doing video because video is what we're expected to deliver. You're never going to be immune to the hype, at the very least you can look at it sceptically. Analyse it in the context of you and your needs and then proceed from there.

Jon: There's a narrative I keep hearing in digital marketing both in the charity sector and elsewhere and you hear it repeatedly, it's the same words, it's "Facebook likes are a vanity metric". Whenever I hear this it's usually

someone who wants to demonstrate how pragmatic they're being and so they're saying Facebook engagement is kind of wishy washy. The real metric is *whatever I'm then going to talk about*. And I would push back on that, respectfully, not because it's untrue; Facebook likes are, by their very nature, meaningless.

But when we say "Facebook likes are a vanity metric," it leads us down the road of thinking that they're petty, they're meaningless and that they can be dismissed. That's just not true. Because of how Facebook works, and social media works in general, the newsfeed algorithm dictates that unpopular content is punished, and popular content is rewarded.

Jon: I do have a bunch of rants on the vanity metric if you still want to talk about it.

Robyn: Oh yes!

Sushi: Oh, we do want to talk about that!

Jon: Well I think that, again, that it's one of those things, it's that received wisdom that can spread very quickly without really being looked at. So, in the last year alone I know I've been to enough digital conferences and digital events where the speaker stood up and very grandly said "Facebook likes are vanity metric" and it's up there in 80-point font, and the point they go on to make is something really sensible.

They're saying, obviously you need to be looking at the bottom line, you need to be looking at click throughs, you need to be thinking about what your social media content does for you organisationally. And because, in the age of Twitter, we all want some wisdom that is really short and snappy, and shareable, that really worries me because we're operating on social media platforms and 'likes' on Facebook are the basic currency of that platform. It's a little bit like saying email open rates aren't important, because after all, you want people to click through and make a donation. Well no, you're not going to get to that stage if you're not getting it right at that first stage. If you want to succeed in the field of organic content, you need to be getting good engagement, otherwise you're not going to get people to click through and take action in the first place. What I do see is charities that are trying too hard to hit the bottom line and so they're hitting their followers with a succession of very transactional content, lots of calls to action, lots of "here's how you can help us" without doing anything to earn that in the first place.

Sushi: Wow, Amen!

Jon: And I think that's the great maxim, that whenever you're putting out social media content, you shouldn't be thinking "what can I get out of this", you should be thinking "who is going to engage with this?". And if the answer

is “no one but it’s still important”, maybe you need to think about how you’re dealing with that important issue.

Robyn: When did you first recognise the gap between content the charity was creating and what the audience actually wanted to see and engage with?

Jon: Well, before I actually started as digital content lead at Anthony Nolan, a few months before, there was a big news appeal and most of our appeals, all of our appeals at the time, were press-led. We had a fantastic comms team, and there was a story that was a dad who needed a transplant and his family were really keen to get the word out and encourage more people to sign up. And so our press team did this incredible work, you could see it in the nationals; in *The Telegraph* and *The Mail*, this incredibly moving and compelling story. And I think it was *Good Morning Britain*, or I think another morning show as well, and I looked at our social content and it went out a couple of days after all of this and it just said “Did you see us on *Good Morning Britain*? Wasn’t it great?”. It was so obviously secondary and it was so obvious that we’d started to consider social as “this is where we comment on the really important stuff that happens or we refer to it”, but this isn’t ground zero, where we do the stuff that’s immediate and important. And it wasn’t until, a few weeks into the role, I got really lucky because there was a young woman called Lara Casalotti. She had a very rare genetic make-up because she had mixed heritage – Thai, Chinese, Italian.

Sushi: Oh yes, this was quite famous wasn’t it?

Jon: It really was, and I had only been in the role a couple of weeks, but basically her younger brother came to us and said: “I really want to get the word out here, but because we come from quite an international family, we’ve been hopping all over the world, I really want to focus on social media. The thing is I don’t really know anything about it”. So, me and Emily, our comms manager, sat down with him and chatted to him about it and then we started working together and we did joined up work. I put stuff up on social and it went viral, in that way that it so rarely actually does. It was fantastic, it was the most successful content we’d ever done.

Sushi: [laughing] and you were like “job done, I’m done!”

Jon: [laughing] I mean no, it would have been nice to have rested on our laurels but then, of course, inevitably the website crashed because of too many people replying.

Sushi: Of course.

Jon: We had to draught people in to deal with tons of people all over the world who wanted to sign up. But, that felt like a breath of fresh air because,

again, we were getting this great national coverage, and this great social media stuff as well and it was feeding into each other. Emily could go back to the nationals and say, “look we’ve got more tweets, support from JK Rowling, Stephen Fry, it’s a whole new story”. And people were coming to us from the news stories, to the social media, the campaign hashtag #match4lara, and we were there, we were at the heart of it. It was so wonderfully, I suppose, mutually sustaining and that felt like something we hadn’t really done before. And in many ways, seeing those results, seeing that work was the step forward we needed to really make social a bit more of a primary channel for us.

Sushi: hmm! Wow. I find it really interesting that you said– when did you come into post [as communications lead]?

Jon: It was at the very end of 2015.

Sushi: I mean I find it fascinating that a charity of that scale wasn’t seeing social as a community space? I just find it interesting that there is that kind of– I’m not necessarily saying that it’s a dumping ground for content, but there is something about the idea that we don’t think of social as a community.

Jon – Well.. the interesting thing is that we have a separate patients and families page and that is very well guarded, very well gardened, and the content you get there as a community is wonderful. But I think when you have a main page and you have this real muddle of people who might be beneficiaries, might be family members, might be donors of some kind, might be volunteers. There’s such a mish mash, that yeah there’s no one really looking out for them in particular, and so in that vacuum, the voices that speak loudest are the ones that say, “we want something out of this audience”. You don’t really have anyone to represent them, right? Because they’re not really anyone’s, they don’t belong to any team.

Sushi: so that’s what you’re almost becoming? That person that represents them?

Jon: Yeah, that’s what I tried to become, yeah.

Sushi: Wow, that’s great.

Jon – So we started looking round for inspiration, other charities that we thought were doing amazing things and how we could start to do that better. We had no budget for this, this was very much just me trying to figure out how we can make things better without spending money, without trying to use extra resources. It made me think a lot about the monolith, the universal narrative, the hero’s journey. The idea that really, there are only a few basic narratives that we keep coming back to as humans, and that if you want to produce some organic content for your Facebook page that

performs well, you need to be thinking along the same terms. You need to be coming up with content that's universally relevant to your audience. No matter whether they're stem cell donors, whether they're younger people, whether they're families.

Essentially, we looked back at the content that had consistently performed well and we figured we could divide it up into four basic narrative categories. So, we took these and we looked at the emotions underlying them and we looked the messages we could use these stories to portray. If, say, someone needs a stem cell transplant, we can use them to tell a really urgent story about how important it is to sign up to the register. And this of course is a direct call to action and we call this **The Hunt**. It has a direct call to action, but equally it has an important in platform action. If you're already registered as a stem cell donor, or if you can't register as a stem cell donor, it's ok, share this post, get the word out to your friends and family. We need to make this happen. This was something we'd always known in some form.

The second kind of narrative category was **The Hero** post. This was much more celebratory and is the story of someone who's donated their stem cells, they're explaining what the procedure was like. These are really nice for us because you get a real sense of community behind them. You get the people who've had a transplant or had a family member who's had a transplant commenting underneath the post saying, "you're amazing, you've done something incredible. Thank you so much". And this in turn encourages more people who are following us to become stem cell donors themselves, or would-be stem cell donors. It makes them understand that what they can do is something really positive so it's great for retention as well.

Number three is really really simple: **The Happy Ending**. So, take the story of where someone is at after they've had a stem cell transplant. One year, two years, three years down the line. Again, it's reinforcing the importance of our work.

Number four, I call **The Heartbeat**. And of the four narrative categories, this is the only one that really related directly to us. This is about what we're doing and what we've done. Whether that's our founding story, our place in history and this is the stuff that reinforces our path in the story overall.

And we figured we could take these four narrative categories and we could build them up, talk to more of our supporters, get them coming out, week after week in different forms without even getting sick of them.

Robyn: It seems like storytelling was the key to connecting your audience to your cause. What inspired you to create those content types?

Jon: Well normally I'd try and sum it up in a nice neat way.

Sushi: Do!

Jon: When in fact it's messy and drawn out. It was a combination of being a massive nerd for Young and Joseph Campbell and these universal stories and myths which always had the same basic components. And then doing a

fairly sustained audit of the content we'd done and looking at the patterns and seeing that there were certain kinds of stories that were very varied, but they all had something important in common and equally the kinds of posts that I felt were most useful to us, if we were getting the right messages across.

Robyn: A lot of charities do work with sad and challenging causes, do you have any advice on how to identify those elements or bring out the inspiring side of a story that just feels overwhelmingly sad.

Jon: I had this when I did a talk about our digital content last year and someone came up to us afterwards and she said, "this is great, and really great for you – I work for a charity that plants saplings. Where's the human element in that?" And it made me stutter and blush a little bit but at the same time, if your charity is doing good work, there will be impact, and if you're having impact, there will be wins. They may seem small and inconsequential in the face of something that seems sad or tough, or a huge issue. That doesn't mean they're not important and they won't inspire people.

Sushi: Lots of people struggle with this, dealing with teams outside of digital. I mean, when you're in a digital team, you have to be on board with certain ways of working, otherwise you can't do your job. So how did you get buy-in from those other teams that may have been providing you with the kinds of stories you were trying not to share anymore?

Jon: I think with varied success. A big learning experience for me was not just rushing ahead and very much getting everyone on board with it first. At the same time, so one of the things I did, I set up a lunchtime workshop where people could come and I would chat to them about Facebook's move towards the algorithm, helping them to understand that actually they might have some very concrete transactional needs for the content but putting it out in this kind of– that you couldn't just put out content that appeals to a very small segment of your social media audience and expect it to find those people. And the people who came generally were more junior people, people my level, and they got it, they got it straight away. They were really behind it, they then were asking lots of great questions about, "ok, how can I get the kind of great content that's going to perform better with your universal audience and then reach more of the people it needs to?"

The problem was, of course, that not everyone came. And it took a while, I think, for the people who hadn't attended or weren't interested in that kind of event to really pick up on why this was important. But again, I think allies are great, but results are better. Over time, the more we did it, the more people got used to seeing in our social feeds this kind of content, the more they became accustomed to the ideas that this was what we were looking for.

Sushi: You talk about this idea that junior staff members got involved and that is so classic. And they were like, "yeah, this is great," and you were like, "yeah, I love you guys" and then it was the kind of more middle managers, I suspect,

that you needed in the room to go "yes, on board and we'll approve x, y and z". Was it a case of them hearing this trickle down effect of, "Jon's got a magic workshop" or what was it, that basically got them on board?

Jon: Again, I think we were quite lucky in that social media wasn't quite that guarded. I think, yes, a trickle down effect. Also, putting the word out, wherever we could. Sending emails round because this lovely fundraising post that also has a human story that's universally compelling did really well.

Sushi: Right. So, showcasing those really good success stories.

Jon: Exactly. Writing CharityComms articles about how great this stuff is. It all helps to make sure people have sight of what you're trying to do.

Sushi: Hear that guys, write CharityComms articles!

Robyn: I mean, it's taken you about 45 minutes to mention it, but we can deal with that.

[Laughter]

Jon: I didn't realise you were...[inaudible]

Robyn: Go on, I'm so sorry. Totally cut you off.

Sushi: I think that is something that social teams probably deal with all the time. I hear it a lot, this kind of idea that they really don't get to the people that – you know the people that are more junior, who can't make decisions, but are super on board with writing the content, get the idea and the concepts and they are the digital champions sometimes, you know. But it's those more middle managers, who you need to say yes to the thing.

Robyn: Fantastic.

Sushi: Terrifying.

Robyn: We both had very different reactions to that – I said fantastic, you said terrifying, excellent.

Jon: It's both!

[Laughing]

Jon: Before I go, I guess a few recaps, a few quick lessons.

Lesson one – social media belongs to your audience, not to you. Make sure you're giving them what they want. Once you've got a good sense of how

you can give them what they're here to see, then you can start to get them to address your audience.

Lesson two – to that end, find the stories that are universally relevant to your audience. Then figure out how you can keep telling them without people getting bored.

Lesson three – respect the platform. Learn the platform. I think I've been harping on a bit because the idea that Facebook Likes aren't to be taken seriously is perfectly acceptable if you aren't going to use Facebook. If you want people to engage with you on the platform, you really need to come to terms with that platform. You need to make sure you're playing ***** the rules and that's how you're going to achieve success.

Lesson four – talk. Keep talking. Take the same emotive lessons about telling a story to persuade people, to get them onto your side to inspire them that you've been applying to your online audiences and apply them instead to your colleagues. Make sure instead that you're not just broadcasting what you want to do and why you're doing it. Make sure they're onside, make sure you're communicating with them.

And if you can do that, you'll end up with content that works for your audience, that works for your platform and works for you as an organisation.

Robyn: Ok great – well thanks so much for coming in Jon. It was really wonderful to chat to you.

Sushi: Thank you.

Jon: Thank you for having me.

Robyn: Jon really has a sixth sense for what drives great content and how to use that to build on the status quo.

Sushi: He really does. I think the most interesting part of Jon's talk was the idea that engagement can be measured using 'likes'. I don't think he's saying engagement is all about 'likes.' He's saying 'likes' is an important part understanding your engagement philosophy or structure. And instead of going, "oh, what is engagement, it's not 'likes'" and kind of challenging that and offering no answer he's being very practical and saying, "well actually, it's a really useful baseline measurement of engagement and then from that, you can build what meaningful engagement is". But it's exactly what the platform demands, it's people and stories.

Robyn: Yeah, absolutely. I think, time and again, no matter what the subject, the talks, no matter where I am, it's always going back to storytelling. Because ultimately, humans just want to hear stories about other humans. They want to be hooked by something. So really, if you're just putting out a simple call to action – run a 10k for us – you've got to give them the why, why are they doing it? And I think weaving that into the universal stories that Jon was referencing is a really compelling way to do it.

Sushi: So, what about when you want to go back to the drawing board and completely rethink your creative process for digital content? Chris Flood from Cancer Research UK gave a talk at our digital conference in 2017 on using agile to create great quality content. His ethos is that if your content is not relentlessly user focused, you're doing it wrong. Let's hear more.

Chris: My name's Chris, I work for Cancer Research UK. At the moment I'm just excited to have been given a laser pointer, so that's a career highlight for me. But besides that, I'm the content strategy lead at Cancer Research UK. And I'm going to talk to you today, a little bit about agile content.

I guess the idea with agile is to try and deliver a working product that meets a user's basic need as quickly as possible and once you've done that, you then test that basic working product on your user to get feedback that informs the next round of development. So, you deliver the first feature of your product, you test that, you release that, you see how that performs and then you use the learnings you get from that release to feed back into the next part of the product you're building. The idea, I guess, is that agile is supposed to mitigate risk because you're releasing little and often and always learning about what your user wants.

Agile is set up by self-managing teams. Right, so the idea being that, because the people are building the stuff, the closest to the user, they are best placed to judge what the thing is you should be building.

Robyn: So, Chris, thanks so much for being here today.

Chris: Cool, no worries. Thanks very much for inviting me in.

Robyn: Sushi is also here with us.

Sushi: Hello. Have you got any examples, just to make it really real, kind of products you've run agile...agile-ly? And what you've delivered?

Chris: I can talk about World Cancer Day. So, we did a prototype of our World Cancer Day offer back in the summer. And we put that prototype together in a week. So, in the space of a week, we unpicked actually what is

our World Cancer Day offer all about, so essentially, it's a global day where people raise awareness of cancer. And for us, we chose to mark that day by something called a unity band, which is a wearable bracelet that people can wear to show awareness. So, in the space of a week we defined what our communications strategy could be. We actually wireframed the simple version of the website. We took that wireframe and we put it in front of real users, inviting them in to test to see how they used it and tested the assumptions we had about how we were communicating World Cancer Day, how we thought people should be interacting with our website and webpage. And by the end of the week, we had a group of insights we could use to inform actually the next round of building that website so we basically went from the space of kind of the start of the week being like "well, we need to build something, we're not really sure what it is" to the end of the week, we'd built the first round of something and we tested it with real users. Now, what we built wasn't perfect, it wasn't polished, but it did give us a very strong direction of travel that we could then take and use in the next iteration of that product.

Sushi: Wow – a week?

Chris: A week.

Sushi: That's madness.

Chris: So, in terms of what that means for content, when we kind of talk about content and agile in the same sentence, it is important to recognise I think the content profession has some issues, right? Firstly, content people have an uneasy relationship with agile, so we're not as technical as developers. We're not as obsessed with post-it notes as UXers. I certainly couldn't grow a beard as hipster as a designer could. So, because of that it's kind of unclear what content's role is in the digital world. Quite often we don't see ourselves as a digital native profession, I suppose in the same way that designers and developers and UXers can be.

Robyn: You're very fluent in your agile language and you get the idea of how it works across very clearly, but you started in print.

Chris: Yeah.

Robyn: Which in comparison is very static.

Chris: Yeah.

Robyn: You can't really work in an agile way with it because it does have an end point, once it's out it's on paper, it's there. So how did you find the transition? Did you have any challenges you came up across? Or did you feel

like an imposter because you didn't have a hipster beard like the design guys?

Chris: Yeah, I mean definitely. I think one of the things holding me back in life has been my inability to grow decent facial hair.

[Laughter]

Chris: But separately from that I guess, when I worked in print I was very much on the production side. And actually, the way I used to be judged in my performance, my role, was all about outputs, right? So, it was about "did I hit this deadline?" "did I deliver my portfolio on budget?" and actually there wasn't a huge amount of thought towards, "did the people find it useful who were reading the print content?" Whereas I think in digital, the biggest change and mindset for me is actually moving towards outcomes, right? So actually moving towards this thing we're building solving a problem for our user. And actually how you get there doesn't matter too much in a way. I think with digital, the biggest change for me was actually I suppose embracing that two way conversation with your users. I could publish something online and I could get comments and feedback on it within a couple of hours if I wanted to, right?

Sushi: Or analytics will should you no one's read it?

Chris: Exactly.

[Laughter]

Chris: So, if you take away nothing else from my rant so far, it's that content is related really closely to UX and design. So actually, if you have a designer, who is designing something that has lorem ipsum in, well, you know what? They're just going to be designing for an artificial experience. And similarly, if you have someone working in user experience, who wants to go out and test your webpage, well actually if they're testing lorem ipsum, they're just going to be testing an artificial experience as well. How can you possibly get real insights from artificial experiences? So, what we try and do at Cancer Research is actually like, if we've got something to test or design and there's a deadline coming up, if you see your designer working with this child of Satan that is lorem ipsum, right, sit down next to them and say, "you know what – let me write some stuff for you. Let's work together to figure out what content is going to work with your design. Let's bounce some ideas off here. Similarly, if you've got a UXer, who's about to do some guerrilla testing, say to her, "well, you know what – can I just spend 15 minutes just giving you a first draft of content that you can put in that test?" Because, firstly, those disciplines will love you because actually, you're helping them get more accurate results, you're helping them add life to their design. But also, this stuff, it doesn't need to be perfect, it doesn't need to be

your finished copy, it doesn't need to be shined and polished, but it does need to be something that speaks to the user, and speaks to the experience you want to create with your content.

Robyn: You hate lorem ipsum!

Chris: I do.

Robyn: I'm not even sure that's exactly how it's spelt but we're going to go with that – is that an accurate pronunciation? Lorem ipsum?

[Laughter]

Chris: It is, lorem ipsum.

Robyn: Fantastic. But I was curious, did you ever use it and was there a time that you had to transition out of using it and was that hard, putting your own unpolished content out there in the world?

Chris: Sure, so as much as I bang the drum about starting small and writing a minimum viable product, and that kind of iteration, I think it is important to recognise that stuff is hard, because you are putting out unpolished, unfinished stuff. And I think especially if you're in an organisation where agile isn't well spread, people won't look at that and see an MVP, they'll look at that and see something that isn't as good as they're expecting or as polished as they were expecting.

Robyn: Just in case there's anyone at home that doesn't know what a MVP is, would you mind elaborating?

Chris: Yeah, of course. So MVP stands for minimum viable product. Earlier when I was talking about definitions of agile and I said that agile is getting the smallest possible thing out to your user and then testing and getting feedback, that smallest possible thing is an MVP.

Robyn: Amazing.

Chris: And I think it can be quite hard to stick your head above the parapet, in a way. But I think actually – the key thing you need to do is, actually, you need to be brave and stick your neck out and do it. And secondly, you need to practise what you preach because if you bang the drum about MVPs and you talk about iteration, and your output is just MVPs – you deliver an MVP and then you move onto the next shiny thing, you lose a lot of credibility in that space, So actually, what I found that works for me was just telling that story and actually demonstrating the journey and evolution of your content or your copy through that journey, through that process. And almost show that actually, we did this MVP, took me an hour to write this copy, put it up,

here's what we found out. Then actually, the next time round, I took about two hours and it increased conversion or whatever by this amount, and actually the next time round we did this change and it brought conversion down, but then we did other change and brought it up. And actually just show that journey, so people do get a sense of that story and a sense of that evolution.

Robyn: Brilliant. Is there anything else you wanted to touch on with that? Because if not, I'll move onto the next myth that you're busting. You don't need to use lorem ipsum, also content is not king!

[Laughter]

Chris: So, there are some words I've completely banned my team from using at Cancer Research UK. And the first one, is that content is king. And my problem with this phrase is 'king' implies that content is more important than good UX. It implies that content is more important than good design. It implies, you know what, actually you don't need to have a solid development process set up that minimises technical debt and all that other stuff. It implies that all those other disciplines just do the grunt work to make our content look great. And actually what that means is if we think about agile as something that's about being iterative and quick-moving and experimentation and all that other stuff, well actually this means, content is king suggests that content doesn't need to be iterative – it's too important, you know? It implies that actually we can't possibly risk testing our content because it's king, it's the most important thing that a user is going to experience.

Instead, I much prefer the phrase, 'content is the kingdom', right? How me and my team work at CRUK, is that we try and see content as this kingdom that connects all these different disciplines out there and builds a coherent whole for the user. Because your user is going to come to your site for great content, but actually you need to have great UX and great design and great development to deliver that great content.

Robyn: Really loved how you didn't just do away with it but moulded it into something that makes more sense for you, which is that content is a kingdom. So, why do you think it's so important to challenge the notion that content is king?

Chris: So, I think in digital, one of our favourite things to talk about is how bad silos are. And we talk about how teams in print are doing their thing and then we have a social team that does their thing and a digital team that does their thing, and actually if we spend so much time treating content as this thing that's up on a pedestal, then we kind of forget that actually, it is part of the overall digital experience for users. And our users don't see content, UX and design, they see the website, right? And I guess the reason that phrase bothers me a little bit is that, I can totally see why it got used, right? It got

used to say, don't ignore the content. But actually what it does is it almost perpetuates those digital silos that we have, and it almost encourages, a team of UXers will build a wireframe and then hand it over to a designer, who will do the colouring in or whatever it is designers do.

[Laughter]

And then, after that, it will get handed over to the content people who write the copy and then it will get handed over to a developer who will build it and then it will get out to our users and I think, even if you do that quickly, and you move fast, you sometimes get trapped into thinking you're working in an agile way. But actually, without that collaboration between disciplines, you're not working in agile, you're just building stuff quickly. And I think that's an important distinction. I think my issue with content is king is that it just fosters this idea that we need to be off doing our own thing, and our thing is more important than you're thing and actually, you won't understand my thing anyway so why should I bother explaining it to you, and I just think we could be more effective if we think about actually how it interacts with that wider whole.

Robyn: Absolutely, I think that's something I took away from it – that it seems like, the process of agile, in terms of how the team works, is that it's actually sort of a marriage between empowering people to take ownership of their own role but then also, understanding their place in the team. And that seems like a really powerful way of getting people to work together.

Chris: I'm going to try and move onto some of the more practical side now I guess. I'm going to talk you through some of the ways we bake that iteration and agile approach at quite an early stage at CRUK.

The first we do is run a Cloze test on all of our content. This is a way of testing how easy your content is to understand, right. It's real simple, real easy.

Literally all you do, is you give your user a piece of content, but you replace every sixth word with a blank space. And then you ask them to fill in those blank spaces and kind of guess what they are. We aim for people getting about 60% of those blank spaces correct. And when I talk about what correct means, I guess if I wrote some copy that said, "Chris' talk was incredibly really amazing," right -

If my user thought I had said, "Chris' talk was really incredibly amazingly great," or something, actually great and amazing, kind of mean similar things, I'd actually class that as a pass for my Cloze test.

And we find that if people get less than 60%, it means one of two things. It means either our content isn't the best, it's not well written - maybe we're using long paragraphs, or our sentences are too wordy, or it's not written in plain English, all that good, digital copywriting 101 stuff - or we're aiming at people who don't have the context they need. Maybe we're written all this great content aimed at our research community, who do all the amazing work at fighting cancer in the labs, but we're sending it to our fundraisers and volunteers to test and those guys perhaps don't have the scientific context and background they need to understand that content.

It's actually a great test to test how easy your copy is to understand. But actually, as content creators and writers, we know creating something that's easy to understand isn't as effective as creating something that creates a powerful emotional experience. If we want our users to take action, we need to engage with them on an emotional level.

The guys at GOV.UK digital services, they do some amazing testing work about this stuff, so if this stuff interests you, go away and check those guys out. They have a test that I absolutely love. The reason I love it so much is that it's super low-fi, it's super simple, super easy. And actually, because most tests focus on whether a user does a task, this focuses on how it makes users feel. So literally all you need is a green highlighter pen, and a red highlighter pen and a bunch of users to run this test. You literally print out the page you want to test and give it to your users. And if you ask them to highlight paragraphs, phrases, sentences in green where your copy is making them feel the way you want them to feel, and highlight phrases, paragraphs in red when your content is making them feel the opposite of how you want them to feel. Say if I'm writing content that I really want to excite people. I'd say, highlight anything about this content that excites you in green and highlight anything that makes you bored in red.

And after that, you just literally collect in all those highlights, you print yourself out a fresh copy, just for you and you replicate those highlights on your fresh copy. So say I give this to ten users, if six of those users found a particular sentence really exciting and they highlighted that sentence in green, I'd go over that sentence six times in green highlighter pen on my copy and similarly, if four users found a word I'd used really boring, I'd highlight over that word four times on my copy. Actually, what that gives you is a lo-fi heat map of your content, because of the strength of highlights on your copy should reflect the strength of emotion that content is stirring in users. I love this because this is something we don't need to spend time building and going down to research labs to do. We quite often do stuff like this in the Cancer Research charity shops. Nip up the road, test it, to see how it performs. And we also do it quite often in coffee shops, which is my next slide; my next test.

This is a test I can take credit for. Me and a guy I used to work with at my old job came up with this. The idea is if you take a piece of content you want to test and improve, just literally take it to your local pretentious hipster coffee shop. Order yourself a flat white and then test your content. So, run that GOV.UK test, run the cloze test, run any of the other tests that are out there. The key thing here is that the second you've finished that flat white, you're done testing. Instead, you order yourself a second flat white and rewrite the content based on what you found out in the testing. And again, once you finished drinking that second flat white you go and order yourself a third flat white and you re-test the content, ideally with some new users who haven't seen the first iteration. Now I love this test for a bunch of reasons. So firstly, I really like coffee. But if coffee isn't your thing, feel free to try it with gin or wine, or you could just set a 30 min timer on your phone. What all this stuff is, is it's

about getting into that iterative agile mindset because you're forcing yourself to only concentrate on the most important stuff.

So, the whole thing about agile is about doing the least amount of effort to deliver the most amount of value. And actually, sometimes when we test, we can be so obsessed with getting insights and getting all of this data and this testing, we sometimes lose sight of why we're getting it. We're getting this data to make a decision. But similarly, here, with that first flat white, you're never going to get every piece of insight in the world, but you are going to get enough to hopefully steer the direction of where you want to take your content. And certainly, on that second flat white, you're never going to fix every single problem your content has in the space of one coffee. But you are going to have a good stab at tackling the biggest concern or the second biggest concern. You should break that content down into small chunks, so you can tackle it. Similarly, what that third flat white does I guess, is that it just gives you a bit more insight, a bit more information to check that you're actually on the right track.

Sushi: Ok so, we thought we would do the cloze test on a bit of CharityComms copy. This copy is live on the website, it's on the About us page. We might change it based on today's outcome – who knows? But if I read through, and then you guys maybe try and fill in the blanks.

Chris: Yeah.

Sushi: And this is just to show you how easy this test is, how you could do it on your About page if you're thinking of trying some of this. So CharityComms is the membership [pauses].

Chris: Body?

Sushi: Not body.

Robyn: I was gonna say network.

Sushi: Oh my god – Robyn's got it.

[Laughter]

Robyn: I've got to be honest, I read ahead, and I don't know the second one, please go ahead Sush, this is going to be embarrassing.

Sushi: Yup ...for communications professionals working in, blank.

Chris: [exhales]

Robyn: Oh, blank charities.

Sushi: Blank charities; UK charities.

Chris: Yeah, I was going to say, I'm guessing it wasn't 'awesome'.

[Laughter]

Robyn: In the best charities!

[Laughter]

Sushi: We're here to help blank the standards of...?

Chris: I'd say, we're here to raise the standards of.

Robyn: It's got to be raise.

Sushi: Yeah, it's raise, you got it – doing good. Raise the standards of communications across the sector to blank the flag?

Chris: Is it fly the flag?

Robyn: It's got to be fly, right?

Sushi: Yeah, it's got to be fly – it is fly.

[Laughter]

Sushi: Fly the flag for communications as a vital blank function

Robyn: A vital? I mean, vital function...?

Sushi: No.

Robyn: Have we got an extra adjective in there just to make it sound exciting?

Sushi: We've got an extra word in there – strategic.

Chris: Strategic!

Robyn: Ohh! Strategy! How could I forget strategy?

Chris: If in doubt, it's probably strategy.

[Laughter]

Sushi: Function at the heart of charities and to blank communications professionals.

Chris and Robyn: Support?

Sushi: So, it's connect.

Robyn: Ohhhh! Well we are a network, ah ok.

Sushi: Through sharing best blank.

Chris: Practice.

Robyn: Yeah, practice.

Sushi: Got it!

Robyn: Ok, ok, alright

Sushi: Well it's not awful, is it? Might not be changing it.

Robyn: I think it's good, I mean we've got the buzzword, strategy.

Sushi: We've got strategy in there.

Robyn: We've got exactly where we are - the UK - people need to know that.

Chris: That's higher than 60%, I reckon.

Sushi; Do you think? I can't work it out.

Robyn: Whenever you have a test like this, you've got to really carve out some time to put it in, you've got to commit to doing it or else it's just something that sounds nice and will be helpful and you never get around to doing it.

Chris: Sure.

Robyn: Do you have any tips for making sure you do actually put these into your content cycle when you're going through the process?

Chris: So, the nice things about these tests is they're upfront low-cost tests. So, they are actually tests you can do before you've even typed any content into your CMS, right? Before you've even hit publish. I think in my mind, it is just about carving out an hour or two to just do this stuff, you know? We're quite lucky over at Cancer Research UK because we have a shop, we're based in

Angel and there's a Cancer Research shop round the corner and that is like, the perfect ground for testing and for us to be doing this stuff and meeting our users. But I guess the key thing I think is that, I always think some insight is better than no insight. So even if you're worried that, you know what, I can't find exactly the user I'm looking for, or I'd love to spend the whole day doing user testing but I've only got an hour – there's still some time to do some stuff, right? And there's still time to do enough of this low-fi testing to help inform your decision making at an early stage. I think stuff like this Cloze test, right, the comprehension test, you can literally take an extra 15 minutes of your lunch break and do it in Pret or something, if you needed to. I'd say, just get out there. If it helps you, put an hour in your diary or calendar, block out the time and just try and do it in those small steps, do it quick and often.

Sushi: I love the – for our smaller organisations who might be listening – I just love the low-fi aspect of it. I mean, CharityComms is a small charity and when you were doing your talk, I was going, "Oh brilliant, I could do that tomorrow." Which is great – that for me is the best bit of it and my favourite takeaway, that nothing was technical.

Robyn: Do you have any advice for people who are daunted by converting to agile, or making their process more agile?

Chris: OK, yes – I don't know if it's good advice but I'm just going to say it and you guys can make your mind up.

[Laughter]

Chris: So firstly, I touched on this earlier, that there are a bunch of different flavours of agile, right? And people can sometimes get quite defensive or quite evangelistic. They're like; "You're not doing agile properly because you're not running user stories, running a proper scrum or you're not using estimation of velocity and all of these buzzwords and these terms. But I think in my mind, agile is really just about releasing that minimum viable product and getting stuff out to your users as quickly as possible, about listening to their feedback, about engaging with them and about empowering teams on the ground floor to make decisions. If you can try and put user-centricity at the heart of everything you do, so if every single thing you do, you start with the question, "What does this mean for the user? What's best for the user in this situation?" And if you can work in a collaborative team, where perhaps the boundaries between different roles is slightly blurred. If you can co-locate, if you're in a project team, move your project people to sit around the same desks, if you can do that stuff and just think about that collaboration side of agile and that user-centric side of agile, then in my mind, it doesn't really how far you go on the other stuff. Because that's given you a good foot in the door and you can decide, actually, what works for you and what doesn't. Because agile is really just a set of principles and how you apply those principles is up to you. I guess the summary of that advice is; don't be

intimidated. And actually it's ok to just start small and try stuff out. Because if you think about it, that's agile in and of itself, right? Just give it a go and see what works for you.

Robyn: Amazing – thanks so much Chris

Chris: No worries

Robyn: That was fantastic

Chris: Thank you very much for having me

Sushi: I really like the Cloze test in that one – it's so simple and low-fi. Totally adaptable for charities of all sizes.

Robyn: Yeah it's great – personally, I'm a fan of the flat white test as, much like Chris, I'm a bit of a coffee fiend. Although I'm not sure I could handle three in a row!

That's all for part one. We really hope you enjoyed it and you found it useful. We'll be back soon with part two, where we'll be hearing more from Brani and Zoe. Hopefully we'll see you there. Bye!

Sushi: Bye.

Robyn: The CharityComms podcast is produced by Robyn Lewes and Sushi Juggapah. Don't forget, that if you'd like to access any of the slides from the presentations referenced in this episode, that you can find them under the past events section on the CharityComms website. You can also get in touch with us if you've got any questions, or if you want to get involved with the podcast. And you can find mine and Sushi's details, on the About us section, again, on the CharityComms website. Thanks for listening!

Sushi and Robyn: DONE!

[Laughter and cheers]