



CharityComms podcast – Episode 7 transcript

Robyn: Hello everyone and welcome to episode seven of the CharityComms Podcast. My name is Robyn and I'm the events officer here at CharityComms.

Sushi: And I'm Sushi from Scope.

Robyn: So this episode we decided to take a look at why the most important parts of digital aren't always the most exciting or shiny things but are just as fundamental to your charity's comms.

Sushi: There is tons of digital noise so how do you decide what's essential for your charity? And when it's not a brand new app or a shiny chatbot, how can you champion the need for it and achieve buy-in from the rest of your team and senior leadership?

Robyn: To get some insight on this, we spoke to Emma Dalby Bowler and Gareth John from the digital team at Mind. Their presentation at our Charity digital conference back in 2018 discussed how they implemented user personas to improve web content and the experience users had with the website overall. Not a new feature for users into comms but critical for putting your users at the heart of your organisation.

Sushi: We also chatted to Matt Collins, founder of Platypus Digital, to hear his thoughts on how effective use of digital at charities is down to the hard graft of individuals rather than the tools in front of us. Along with some good old-fashioned myth busting, he gave us his ideas on how the sector can upskill, become more progressive and efficient.

Robyn: But, first of all, here is our interview with Mind.

Robyn: Hi Emma and Gareth, it's lovely to have you with us today.

Emma: Hello.

Gareth: Hello.

Robyn: How's it going?

Emma: Yeah.

Gareth: Yeah, we're both great, thanks.



Emma: Thanks, Gareth. I am great but thanks for answering on my behalf.

[Laughter]

Robyn: Sushi is here in the room with us.

Sushi: So, you guys, you're in the digital team and you're digital professionals, how do you rate Mind's attitude towards digital on a scale of totally digital pros, really up there with all the kind of like they get it, everyone is on board and everyone has, you know, got everything they need to do to make it wonderful, or way down with the people who think that Windows 10 is being forward-facing?!

[Laughter]

Gareth: Windows 10 is forward-facing!

[Laughter]

Sushi: Oh, Microsoft boy here!

Gareth: Speaking as as Vista user...

[Laughter]

Emma: I think that's an interesting one because I feel like it has really changed over the two years since I've – just over two years that I've been at Mind. So that's about the point that we had a head of digital and actually digital strategy. I know that there is like a lot of conversation about whether a digital strategy is the right thing to do, or whether it should be across all other strategies. But I think certainly for the point that we were at in our digital journey, we really did need to have a focus on understanding what we were trying to achieve with digital and how it did underpin everything else, but really pull it out to give it some attention, give it some resource. So having that digital strategy has really helped us make sure that when we're making decisions they're coming back to the vision that was agreed by our senior team, and sort of getting that buy-in from other teams that digital really is a big part of their roles. It was definitely in pockets. There were people doing lots of great things but that idea of digital is underpinning all of your work wasn't really there. And I think that over the last two years a lot of the work that we have been doing has been really internal focused and really making sure that people feel that confidence and understanding of their roles and our roles and actually what the opportunities with digital are. So we are definitely not there yet and I think there is lots of things that we are excited about that are coming up but really, yeah, the last two years I think we've



probably gone from a four or five to maybe like up to that seven/eight which has been really good.

Sushi: Oh fantastic. What you're saying is actually really common in the sector. You're right that there is this conversation about should you have a digital strategy, should it be separate? And actually it's reflective of the idea that it needs to be relevant to your organisation and you present a really good example of where you have to have the ability to get buy-in from the rest of the organisation to pull that resource in, and having a digital strategy might be the tool to get that, which is a really fantastic example of how it has to be specific to your organisation.

Gareth: Yeah, I think Emma is completely right. The change over the last couple of years has been pretty phenomenal, since Eve took post as head of digital. I found it really interesting in terms of – kind of connected to digital I suppose – I guess a large part of my role over the last couple of years has been sort of communicating agile methodologies which are tied so closely with digital. That has been like really, really interesting to see how that kind of interfaces with kind of less agile ways of working. But yeah, no, I think it's been good. The other really interesting part I think is – probably not to go into too much depth about this – but working with local Minds as well has been really fascinating. Obviously you've got over 140 organisations with a huge array of different sort of digital skills. Some, you know, are doing stuff that we are kind of not at yet. Some aren't. Some will have, you know, a tiny amount of resource. And that is really fascinating to think about how that can work across the network, how we can kind of work together on that.

Emma: It's probably worth explaining at that point that local Minds – we're federated, so local Minds are all independent charities.

Robyn: Oh, I didn't know that.

Emma: So, although they kind of – yeah, it's one of those things that I think we've been so great at getting the brand and getting a consistent identity across all of those Minds that people don't always understand.

Robyn: Yeah, absolutely.

Emma: But, yeah, so those charities are run as they think right. Obviously they, you know, we have an agreement with them around their level of service and they agree to lots of things, and we support them in a number of different ways. But particularly on something like digital it becomes really clear that there is a different level of engagement and understanding across those different Minds, and there is a sort of different need from them from us and that's one of the things that is yet to be cracked.



Robyn: Cool. So your presentation at the Charity digital conference back in 2018 focused largely around how you use personas to improve the content on Mind's website, improving the digital experience for each persona. So what was the process that led to the decision that this would be the best way to curate and refine your website content and rethink it?

Gareth: That's a really, really interesting question. Yeah, so we carried out like a large piece of research at the end of – the research covered like user interviews, analytics. We did it with an organisation called Torchbox who I imagine are probably familiar with quite a few charities as well?

Robyn: Yeah.

Gareth: It's really interesting. In terms of the personas, like the research really did show us that our understanding of our users was very kind of silo'd and quite, I guess, just a little unenlightened. You know, the research told us a lot about our users. The personas that we use, which we talked through, were very much like needs based as opposed to the kind of standard personas. I think that made a massive difference as to why they were actually useful. It allowed us to identify what we called 'the problem space'. So mapping for each user, like okay, so this person, someone in crisis might be feeling isolated, might be feeling vulnerable, and then, you know, there is kind of worst case at one end and best case at the other end would be, you know, feeling supported and feeling part of a community. So how can we, you know, if we map someone in crisis, say, who is feeling isolated, you know, what kind of stuff can we develop to get them to a point where they're not feeling isolated.

Robyn: And that was from speaking to people who have been through that and getting that experience.

Gareth: Exactly. That's right, yeah. And the personas also included like quotes from users which I think was a really, really valid part. They're really, really helpful in kind of validating sort of hypothesis.

Sushi: Hmm.

Emma: And I think there is also something about different teams have different pots of knowledge that this research has allowed us to bring together. So actually there was really great understanding within our information team, for example, about the experience of somebody in crisis for example. But us being able to put that in the context of their experiences, on this case on the website, but more generally what their digital experiences needed to be. And with fundraising, you know, our Fundraising Team have a great understanding of, for example, of the event participant and what their motivations for fundraising for Mind are, but that was never translated into a



way that was consistent across all of these different teams. That, for me, has been a big part of it as well.

Robyn: We just wondered as well, like it sounds like obviously you guys were talking to your users before this and after this, but it's just the process of how you are utilising that information to shape the end content. But if you are doing this kind of thing on a shoestring, do you have any advice for people on how they can still reach their users? If maybe working with an agency like Torchbox to do this is a little bit out of budget or something, do you have any advice on how you can still sort of garner that information from the people you're working with and the people that benefit from your services? It's tricky, yeah!

Emma: Certainly I think one thing, you know, we've talked about the fact that internal teams have a huge wealth of experience and understanding of users. So actually rather than assuming that that research might not be being done elsewhere or that somebody might not have some insights that you can use, understanding across the organisation what work is being done that can feed into your project is really important. I think asking users, you know, there are low cost ways you can do it.

Gareth: Hmmm.

Emma: We ran a Survey Monkey on our site for a couple of months, I think, to get the right number of people.

Gareth: Yeah. Hugely helpful.

Emma: But, yeah, the sort of people that are visiting your site are going to be the people that are going to give you some really good insight and some understanding. I guess don't assume that everything has to be really technical and complicated. Just looking at Google Analytics and understanding where there is some drop off or, you know, understand where your high volume is, or that kind of thing, all of those things you can do the top line of. And just that top line insight is enough to give you maybe the hypothesis to test.

Gareth: Exactly, yeah.

Emma: Whatever budget you're on, you're never going to make the right decisions immediately because that's why we test and iterate.

Gareth: Exactly. And I think, I mean from my experience of working when I have in kind of smaller places, there can be a huge advantage to that in terms of your ability to be quite sort of quick to change, you know, like quite easy to iterate in a way that can be quite harder in a larger organisation.



Robyn: You also mentioned areas of influence in your talking, working out those points where you can just like get that door open a little bit and be like well this is how it could be useful. Is that identifying people who are more open to it and get them to sort of sell it in for you? How does that really work in practice?

Gareth: Hmm? That's a good question!

[Laughter]

Emma: I think probably a bit of both.

Robyn: Yes.

Emma: So, identifying the teams that were absolutely vital to the delivery of the project. So understanding what those teams' objectives were, what the current pain points – you know, we talked quite a lot at the start of the project where people were having problems at the moment. And having that open discussion was really helpful for us because it wasn't just, "The Digital Team are not delivering what we need", but it's a, "What are the current specific problems that you're having that mean that the website isn't delivering against your team objectives?" And so having those conversations meant that we knew which people had the most to win, I guess, from the project and so were most likely to be big supporters if we went to them and sold in how what we were doing was going to solve those problems that they said that they had. So it's that kind of if somebody is your current biggest critic then they might be your biggest supporter if you can turn it around for them, and I think that has been really helpful for us.

Gareth: I mean I think communication throughout the project has been like hugely beneficial both ways. You know, certainly not all stages of the project – there are certainly quite a few stages of the project where, like, just as much feedback as possible, you know, is good, and as much input as possible is good, so those ideas can kind of get fed in and be documented. I also think just like, yeah, I think if people see your face, especially mine! No!

[Laughter]

Gareth: If they see your face around, you know...

Robyn: It's a shame this is a podcast!

[Laughter]

Gareth: Just imagine! No! You know, it makes a huge difference just to sit and chat with people and I think that's something which is really important to actually like, you know, make the effort.



Emma: Hmmmm.

Robyn: Amazing. Great! Well, just to circle back round to the general theme of the overall episode as well, implementing user journeys isn't like going oh there's a great new shiny chat bot we've created, or look at this amazing app we're going to implement, but obviously it's just as important, so how can you sell it in or get buy-in from senior leadership as if it was something that was just as exciting? Like maybe if your senior leadership were like, "We get it but it doesn't feel innovative or exciting", how can you really bring them round?

Sushi: Because they've got the money isn't it!

Emma: Yeah!

Robyn: The dollar bills are in their pocket!

[Laughter]

Emma: It's again, like it's not a sexy answer to a not very sexy question!

[Laughter]

Emma: It's like really grounding on objectives and your strategy which should lead down to some objectives and making clear that that's what you're looking to deliver. You know, we really want to be looking at innovation and it's one of the things that we're really excited about but, for us, innovation isn't necessarily a shiny thing. Innovation is helping one team understand how the other teams work will help deliver their objectives and really sort of making sure that, yeah, that we are talking to senior teams about how we're delivering objectives with the not-shiny stuff. So celebrating successes – so Gareth talked about the crisis tool which was a kind of project that was happening before the website rebuild but showing that the process that we were going to follow for the website content around user journeys and kind of research based, you know, which research does take a lot of resource and we needed to get that senior buy-in, but showing that the research that the team had done around that crisis talk had created a better journey and experience for people that really needed that support. You had a win that you could show and say we're going to replicate this process across our other work.

Gareth: Hmmmm, yeah. I think maybe other places I've been before it didn't feel – I've not felt the same pressure at Mind for people to be kind of, we haven't had many people kind of just wanting like whistles and bells for no reason.



Robyn: Right.

Gareth: I imagine, I mean a lot of that is down to the groundwork that we do, especially Eve, the head of digital, you know, doing a lot of that kind of communication with other heads and with senior people, to kind of give a little bit more substance to the value of what we're doing.

Robyn: That is always what you want.

Gareth: Yeah.

Emma: I don't know; I want some bells and whistles!

[Laughter]

Emma: We're taking our time to get there.

Robyn: There's a time and a place for bells and whistles.

[Laughter]

Emma: And it's.... next year!

Sushi: But the kind of conversation we had with Matt which kind of links to your episode is that it's not just, you know, oh it's just going to pop out of a hat. You know, you've got to do some actual hard graft, like going through every piece of content to make sure it makes sense, understanding all the bits and elements to that, making sure the UX makes sense and all that stuff, that's proper like work!

[Laughter]

Gareth: Thanks! You should talk to my parents –

[Laughter]

Gareth: I'm only joking!

Sushi: I know. So relatable!

[Laughter]

Robyn: Just in case they're listening!

[Laughter]



Sushi: But if you're not on board with that, you know, you can't really operate in this space, because the majority of your work won't be creating a chat bot, creating an app, creating a whizzy tool; it will be doing that kind of like hard graft. Digital marketing is a really good example of this as well. You know, a lot of digital marketing is like really understanding your PPC or your ads or your, you know, whatever tools you use, whatever channels you use, and actually really understanding the channels of your users. So if you're not on board with that stuff you can't do digital in the charity sector really.

Emma: Yeah.

Robyn: Cool. Well we only have one other question. It's just if you have any advice or tips to charities who are thinking of starting a process like the one you had. So maybe they are making some efforts to try and, you know, get the thoughts from the people they're working with and inputting that into the website, but they haven't found, like, a way to do it by personas or something similar, what would you say to charities that are just sort of at the beginning of that process? Any advice?

Sushi: And also to charities who may have smaller budgets would be quite interesting?

Robyn: Yes, we do have a lot of people on smaller budgets listening.

Emma: Yeah. We know that we're very lucky but there is always a need. We've not had all of the budget we would have loved to have.

Sushi: No, of course, yeah.

Emma: But I think the big one for me then, I think both Eve and Gareth have done really well, is being really clear on what the project isn't delivering.

Sushi: Right.

Emma: So we are not, as part of the website rebuild, we are not delivering a brand refresh, we are not creating new fundraising personas, and we're not, you know, answering all of our organisational problems, which I think it definitely at the start felt like people were, as part of the research project, chucking in everything in that was, "And we need this to be improved." And actually that is, you know, as we talked earlier about different teams' impact on the rebuild, that is also the same thing, sometimes these aren't problems that we would expect the website to fix; these are things that we need to go away and work on elsewhere and then bring that insight into the project like this. So being really clear on that, I think, will help with internal stakeholder management and also mean that, you know, a project like this, you know, resources are, and time, you know, people's time, is as much as, you know, a problem as the budgets that you have, because a project like this is time



intensive. So expecting all of these other things to be done as well is kind of setting yourself up for problems and difficulty and kind of feeling like the project hasn't succeeded. Whereas actually, you know, you probably have done a great amount of work; it's just not delivered what everybody expected. Yeah, so that would be one. And I think, you know, we have talked about it but stakeholder communication and explaining how the budget or the resource that you're asking for is going to deliver against organisational objectives rather than just you're going to get a shiny new website. You know, that, for me, is the big thing because that's where people are willing to invest and where people are hopefully going to be excited by your vision and kind of support you.

Gareth: Hmm. Yeah, I think setting aside that time at the beginning of the project, and the resource at the beginning of the project, to look at users, is really, really important. And actually I think it's worth getting confident with kind of why you're doing it. It's super easy to lose sight of your users and ultimately, if you get that right and you've got a really solid understanding of users, and that's where the personas were so helpful for us, because it was a really good way of communicating that. If you keep hold of that, you know, user need, then a lot of the other challenges become a lot simpler to resolve.

Emma: Yeah.

Gareth: And it's really hard because I think a lot of – you know, internal opinion matters hugely. Organisational requirements matter hugely but they are there alongside user requirements. One thing we did actually was, following the research, was to define our own internal users as one of our personal groups, which was quite a good thing to do, just in terms of kind of editors and stuff, you know. But it just meant that, you know, if you were developing something you can say actually this really benefits the people internally as well because they'll have less to do or this will be advantageous for them. Documentation is really, really helpful I think in terms of being able to give that kind of back story right back to the users, internal comms, really, really important, definitely. Also like, yeah, working with agencies is an interesting one and I think, you know, the challenge we've always had, I think, is if you're working with an agency on just development then often they're not getting a particularly great environment to sort of flex their own skills, and it's nice to be able to – you know, what we're doing with Sigma at the moment is we work with them on support and UX and I think that's excellent because it means that they're getting a chance to sort of use their resource in agile ways as well and, you know, it's – I don't know, it's just worked quite nicely. It feels like we're, you know, we feel like we're really working as a partnership. You know, whereas I think it's quite easy, I think, to be like, you know, if you're like reliant on an agency to keep the website up and then you're like sort of shouting at them or whatever, and then like come Monday you're like, "Hey!" It's quite nice to just be able to like all work together.



Robyn: Yeah. Great.

Emma: And one of the things you've just made me think of is making sure a project like this, which requires a lot of resource is an organisation priority.

Robyn: Hmmm.

Sushi: Hmmm.

Gareth: Hmm.

Emma: And, if it's not, then don't do it yet. Put your time into making sure it is an organisational priority and maybe do that research piece that shows where things need to be improved and, again, how they'll deliver against organisation priority which is, sorry, there should be a bingo card for that one or a drinking game! Organisational objectives!

[Laughter]

Emma: But, you know, if –

Robyn: Stakeholders!

Emma: Yeah. If you're not getting that senior buy-in and they're not convinced by this, then it's going to be a horrible project for those people that deliver it.

Sushi: So true.

Gareth: That's a really good point.

Robyn: Absolutely.

Emma: Make the effort to persuade people before you start on it.

Robyn: Lovely. Is there anything else you wanted to touch on? No?

Emma: No.

Robyn: Alright, then we will wrap it up there. Thank you so much for coming in. That was so interesting and just wonderful to hear about all the things you're doing to make sure that all your end users, their services – their needs are met. Sorry, their needs are met!

[Laughter]



Robyn: Thank you guys.

Robyn: What I really love that came out of our interview with Emma and Gareth is how Mind are really focused on understanding the ins and outs of their users' needs, and then weaving that through the foundations of their digital content so that everything they create really serves those needs.

Sushi: Hmm.

Robyn: But also then matching that with the organisational strategy as well.

Sushi: Definitely. And I think I really like the fact that they're paying attention to their internal users because it's so easy to forget about how important they are as a user group. But really getting it right for them means you'll be able to get it right for your external audiences too.

Robyn: Absolutely, yeah. They're a really great example of understanding how important it is to lay those foundations. So what does this look like for the rest of the sector? We asked Matt Collins of Platypus Digital to give us his two cents on how the sector interacts with the side of digital that is missing those bells and whistles, from the areas charities are nailing to what's going amiss and how to move forward on those issues.

Robyn: Hi Matt, it's so great to have you here. It's the first interview we've got back in our original office so that's great, back where we did some of our first interviews.

Sushi: Ah yes, the first interview with the snowball mike!

Robyn: There you go, Sushi is here too.

Sushi: I am here! Hello.

Robyn: So welcome, Matt.

Matt: Hello. How's it going?

Robyn: Good, thank you. How are you today?



Matt: I'm not too bad, thanks.

Robyn: Not too bad, yeah?

Matt: Thanks for having me!

Robyn: It's great to have you here. So we thought we would just kick off with some questions about how you got started in the sector, what kind of path led you to founding Platypus Digital. Tell us about that? Weave us a tale!

Matt: Probably the – this is going back quite far – I was about 11 years old and I was driving in the car with my Dad and I think –

Sushi: Oh my goodness, what a tale!

Matt: Yeah. Well I think, like a lot of people, I was talking about what I should do when I grew up, and he said, "Well, whatever you do, you should ideally try to make it something that improves people's lives in some way, like even in a little way." I was, "Oh right, so does what you do improve people's lives?" Because he did little bits of radio and like paper reviews and, being a kid, I thought well that's obviously what he does all the time and, "Does that actually improve people's lives, Dad?" And he managed to, you know, twist the words so that it showed me that it did improve people's lives and that's definitely the way I should go.

Robyn: Yeah, absolutely.

Matt: So, from a very early age, I was thinking, "Yeah, I should definitely do something that – blood, sweat and tears is going to go into something, it might as well do some good." And I met a guy at university, who I lived with for a year, who was a big leftie, fair to say, and he said he didn't want to do something that just increased the profits for shareholders and helped shareholders buy bigger swimming pools.

Robyn: Yeah.

Matt: He wanted to do something that was going to have more impact in the world. I was really shaped by those two things. So that is what led me to only ever work for charities, which is all I've ever done in my career.

Robyn: Amazing.

Matt: Yeah. I worked for Childline in Manchester when it was its own charity back in the day. I went through lots of different charities like St John's Ambulance and stuff like that. And I set up Platypus Digital five years ago now. So, yeah, that's probably a sort of quick version of my story.



Robyn: Amazing. So was it that you worked in those charities and then you realised there was sort of this gap that you knew that you could create a corporate that could fulfil that need that charities had?

Matt: Yeah. There was an awesome meet-up called NFP Tweet-Up quite a few years ago now. It brought together people who were interested in how digital is changing the sector and how campaigns were being built around this kind of new tool, this new way of doing things, and I met so many inspiring people there who shared so many inspiring ideas. I thought well we are on to something here and then my kind of paid roles towards that time leaned more towards the digital side of things, building campaigns and always on recruitment campaigns through social media, things like that. So I started Platypus because I thought well digital is the way that things are going and that's the way that people's lives are changing.

Robyn: Absolutely.

Matt: And this should be something that actually changes people's lives or raises the money to change people's lives.

Robyn: Amazing.

Sushi: Cool. And you're the one that said it so I'm not out of turn by saying this, but you said – it was quite a while ago – but you've seen charities grow, change, evolve, what are some of the things that you've seen change particularly when you think about digital in the charity sector generally?

Matt: Well I think when you talk about change in the charity sector in the last, you know, 10/15 years say, there is probably kind of three categories of charity that you're really talking about. There is the really big charities, the kind of household names, the sort of top ten, the Oxfam, Save the Children, Shelter, all of that kind of thing, and the transition, certainly from the outside, and that is where we see kind of most of the changes, is a much more focused user experience. So if you use the Wayback Machine tool to see what websites looked like even –

Sushi: Oh yeah, that's fun!

Matt: That's always a fun tool.

Robyn: I've never done that. I'm obviously out of the loop on that one.

Matt: Oh, check it out.

Sushi: It's so good.



Matt: So look back at the relics of, say, the Shelter website. If you go back to even just 2013 there is all sorts of stories. It was the bank of Mum & Dad, it was what to do if you've got a rotten landlord, and it was that carousel thing where internal teams can't agree on who gets the real estate space on the homepage and so they all get it by having this rotating image that serves nobody. There is lots of information on the homepage. Now you've got like Donate, Get Involved, Find out More, and that's it. It's very, very focused on what the user actually wants. So those big charities know that that's the changes they have to make if they're going to have a big impact. Probably the medium sort of sized charities, you know, they've still got a digital team of four, they've got a roster of agencies that are either on retainer or come in for project based work for PPC and campaigns and stuff like that, and that hasn't changed a huge amount, I have to say, in the last 10 years. And then the small charities, God love them, well they were just being left behind, and they're just as left behind as they were in the beginning unfortunately, because it all comes down to sort of resources. So I think people can really overestimate the pace of change in that regard. You know, it was Bill Gates that said people overestimate the pace of change in two years and underestimate the pace of change in 10 years. You know, in two years you think everything is going to be different and it's not really that different. We're still going to be using Facebook, we're still going to be using Twitter and email and stuff. But in 10 years, you know, when he was talking just about 10 years ago, was when the first iPhone came out, and now everyone is glued to their screens. Everyone! You know.

Sushi: Wow.

Matt: So in 10 years' time things could be different, so the mobile, obviously, revolution, if you like, has changed things a lot but mostly that's just mobilised, if you like, a lot of the stuff that was around before, I would say.

Robyn: I think so.

Matt: So it's very much dependent on how much money you've got as to how much change there has been if I'm totally honest.

Sushi: Hmm.

Robyn: Definitely.

Sushi: Yeah.

Robyn: And your audience, because depending on how it impacts the way you interact with your audience really depends on how they interact with digital themselves.

Matt: Absolutely, yeah.



Robyn: Which is really varied.

Matt: Yeah, which varies hugely from age group, you know, resources they might have. Although these days smart phones are so cheap that probably all your audience has some interaction with digital media generally. But, yeah, it comes down to money unfortunately.

Robyn: So what would you say that charities are missing or maybe even ignoring with digital today and what are the consequences of the fact that they're missing these things?

Matt: The things that charities are missing? It's interesting. I would never lump all charities together.

Robyn: Yeah.

Matt: So when I talked about the sort of three categories of charity there, I think you've got to kind of think about that, because it's very easy to come in and say, "Charities are behind in digital" or "Charities are doing great at the digital." You know, it's just such a broad sweeping statement to almost be completely meaningless, I'd say.

Sushi: So true.

Matt: So, what charities are missing very much depends on the charity. I think most of what a lot of charities, certainly in that kind of medium-sized charity, what they're missing, and certainly in the small size, is probably a lack of willingness to get their hands dirty and do some of the really boring stuff that actually serves their charitable purposes.

Robyn: Yeah.

Matt: So, a lot of what we talk about can actually be quite London centric. So if you think about what charities are like outside of London, so you know a charity in Dorset, say, they identify a problem in the community, they rally people around that problem, and some of the online tools you need to do that are, you know, the basics for your big London charities, and they solve that problem. You know, and that's how they go about doing things. And in terms of the tricks that they might miss in digital, it's irrelevant and you don't need VR to do something like that. You don't need to have a podcast strategy to do something like that. You know, you just need to attack the problem that your charity is there to solve. So there is a lot of elements of digital marketing in particular that are really boring to do. Everyone thinks, "This is going to be shiny, it's going to be the ice-bucket challenge or it's going to be no make-up selfie and it's going to be super-exciting all the time." What they don't think of it as, for certain specific areas, is the scale.



Like, you sit down with PPC, or you sit down with Google Ad Grants, or you sit down in User Experience and learn it as a discipline, that's hard work. For a lot of people it's too boring and they're not interested. They just want to do the shiny things.

Sushi: Yeah. And that is – I think what I find most interesting is watching digital teams, digital professionals, struggling with this idea of trying to demonstrate their worth, and that worth not looking shiny, and they will be doing hard, hard graft and really good stuff, and they'll be building the foundations, and they'll be saying stuff that, you know, five years down the line someone from maybe – someone who is new will come in and say – and they've been thinking, "I've been saying this for five years" which is really frustrating for them but it's interesting watching that and seeing them say stuff that actually it is mundane, and it is boring, and it's not super-exciting but it needs to be done. So you may have seen on the old Twitter last week that Joe Saxton, driver of ideas at nfpSynergy, wrote an article claiming that there is no digital revolution in charities and probably never will be. Do you reckon there is any truth in this?

Matt: Oh for sure.

Robyn: Yeah.

Matt: Definitely there is some truth in it. Joe makes a number of really, really good points. I imagine a lot of people reacted very badly to it because it's not what they want to hear.

Sushi: Hmm.

Matt: It might be a bit demotivating for some people. It's also not as big a problem as people might potentially think it is. So there is a lot of things he is right about. He is totally right about the handwringing around the problem of skills in charities. You can spend a lot of time going, "Oh there's just not enough skills in organisations. You know, it's a real problem for the whole sector", again, without understanding the nuances of charity sizes, so the people who responded to things like that and the people who don't. And, you know, it's not a problem for the charities who are really focused on their work and getting on with building the right tools for the right people at the right times in the right formats. So in terms of the training side of things, obviously skills in the sector can be a problem but it does depend on your role. As long as your training is right for the role that you're actually in then that might be the most important thing, rather than the training that you have in all digital marketing skills. The problem with training generally is that, you know, it either has one of these things or two of these things: it's run by experts, so people who are channel agnostic in particular, they're not just pushing their own organisation's channels, that it's run by people who actually understand the sector as well, so a really big overlap there. A lot of



the training you will see is very commercially driven and sort of customer acquisition focused and so on.

Robyn: Yeah.

Matt: So it doesn't have the nuances that charities generally need. It also – I hate to say this – does need to be profit-making. The reason I say that is that if you go to free training then you've invested very little beyond the time you've taken to go to that. If you've invested a certain amount of money, research does show that you're much more likely to implement the skills that you've actually learnt. But along with that, and if you had all of that, and my kind of vision for all of that if you like, is that there would be sort of a digital skills academy, or a digital marketing skills academy, and it would have, you know, courses in all the main things you need to know about. But it wouldn't just be hey, choose your course, you come along and then you leave. There would be a really strong training needs analysis for your role, what you actually need, and it would be, you know, channel agnostic experts who would analyse that and not just take your word for it.

Robyn: Yes.

Matt: Because if you go to the doctor and say, "Doctor, I've got a cold", you know, that's your diagnosis but they need to make a diagnosis.

Sushi: Yes.

Robyn: Yep.

Matt: They would, you know, give you the right mix of tools for your job, but they would also look at the organisational context that you're going to bring those skills back to.

Sushi: Hmmm.

Robyn: Hmmm.

Matt: So the mix of skills in your team, the direction of the organisation, and if those things aren't right then you're probably not going to get any value from it so you shouldn't bother doing it.

Sushi: Hmmm.

Matt: And beyond that, once they've done all that, and you've done your training course in search engine marketing, for example, and then you go back to your desk, how many times have you been to a training course, gone back to your desk and not used it?



Sushi: Hmm.

Matt: It's not just down to that person to do everything. What really needs to change when they get back to their desk is that their boss goes, "Right, this is so important that I need to carve out 25% of your week just to dedicate to this and it's always on top of all the other things that need to be done." When you get back to your desk and get thrown into a round of meetings and your attention is being pulled left, right and centre, you just don't get the chance to do it.

Sushi: Hmmm Hmm.

Matt: So your organisation needs to change things fundamentally to allow you to implement the skill if it was important enough to go to. If it's just a day out of the office go to one of the excellent CharityComms conferences and be inspired there. But if it's training you're looking to genuinely implement, you need time to implement that.

Robyn: That's true.

Matt: So that your boss and your boss' boss needs to be convinced of the value that that skill will bring to the organisation.

Sushi: I love the idea that you're diagnosing what needs to happen in an organisation for the organisation, because, as you say, a person is part of a team, part of an organisation, that creates a mix that should be able to achieve x, y and z. It's such a fantastic idea. When are you launching?

Matt: Oh it's tomorrow!

Sushi: Oh yeah!

[Laughter]

Matt: Yeah. You can be the first guest, trainee.

Sushi: Wonderful!

[Laughter]

Sushi: So do you think charities are somewhat fixated on social media? Why is this and how do you think this is hindering their digital strategy?

Matt: Well yes, in short. It's still fixated on social media, about-

Sushi: Why? Why are they?



Matt: Well, I think the reason charities are fixed on social media, well a couple of reasons. One is what I mentioned about social media being free in our own lives and so we think that's where we start because we all know what Facebook is.

Robyn: Free marketing! Hooray!

Matt: Free marketing. So we start there and so we invest there. So we just go from what we know, so we invest there. A few years ago I wrote an article in the Guardian called 'Charities need to stop wasting their time on social media'. If you just Google that you'll definitely find it!

[Laughter]

Matt: If you haven't read it already! And I think on the day I responded to 350 tweets from people who were broadly negative about the points I was trying to make.

Sushi: Quite a headline, quite a headline.

Matt: It was a good headline.

[Laughter]

Matt: I think a lot of people read the headline and then responded to the headline. And there is three or four response pieces. CharityComms ran a debate on it which was great fun; I really enjoyed that.

Robyn: Yes.

Matt: And it got a lot of debate going in the sector, I think it's fair to say, and I stand by every word of it, to be honest. Because – well why are charities so fixated on social media? I think the charity sector's values are very open, they're very honest, they're sharing, they're about connecting to people, and that's all absolutely brilliant. That is what social media allows. It allows us to connect with people in a really sort of human way, in a one-to-one, interactions online that may never happen in person, and that's really brilliant. And so investing in that I think reflects the values of the sector but it doesn't really go back again to what the charity is trying to achieve. Typical charity digital team is maybe like four people. So you might have a, like I say, a Head of, who often is, you know, busy with a really big website redevelopment project which is going to take up so much of their time. Very often you'll have a social media officer; often a manager on top of that as well. It's a hungry beast, social media; it needs feeding every day so it's very resource intensive. So you have to share new stories and you have to do this engagement. But really if you're trying to reach new people then Facebook will let you reach maybe 5% of the people who have opted in to hear from



you. They'll let you get to 5% of them with their algorithm. So if you want to reach people then you can get at least four times more by email; you can get more content out as well. And if you want to reach people you should be trying to reach them on search marketing generally because those are the people that want it. Your charity right now has people frantically Googling, sometimes frightened people, lonely people looking to connect, they're looking for that information and if you don't serve them in those places then, you know, you can really, you can fail them really. Now I know social media has a good place and I know a lot of charities are using it really well, and if you don't use it really well then it's not so great, and if you're using it really well brilliant, you know, carry on. I'm not saying everyone should shut down their Facebook pages straight away. But I think that, because it's so friendly and because it's so entwined with our personal experiences of digital marketing, it gets more investment than it should.

Robyn: So digital has largely been considered to fall into the remit of comms, but it impacts every area of a charity. So how can comms teams get people to see digital as part of everyone's job?

Matt: Well first of all I think everyone would like whatever their discipline is to be part of everyone's job wouldn't they?

[Laughter]

Matt: A fundraiser would say, "I think fundraising needs to be part of everyone's job doesn't it?"

Robyn: Everyone is a fundraiser at Macmillan.

Matt: Yeah, there you go!

[Laughter]

Matt: Finance would say, "Finance is everyone's job though isn't it?"

Robyn: Yes, this is true. I feel like you're setting me up to tell me that it just can't be done!

[Laughter]

Matt: Well I think it can be done and you just, again, have to question does that need to happen?

Robyn: Okay.

Matt: So, first of all, does digital need to be part of everyone's job? That, again, is thinking everyone just needs to be a generalist whether they like it or



not. They just need to know about this stuff and they need to know how to do it. If they're being trained on how to do it and they're not going to do it, because it doesn't actually benefit their job or there is no time to do it, it doesn't need to be part of their job and they need to think about the progression of digital generally. It can also be skipping ahead a maturity model before you're ready. So if you think about the centralised model of digital, whereby a centralised team is delivering all of your organisation's digital needs, and the rest of the organisation isn't, the next stage is more hub and spoke where that central digital team is there for oversight and quality control and training, but other pockets of departments are learning to do it themselves and delivering it to benefit their own objectives. And then, you know, they're in Nirvana which nobody has got to, it's honeycomb and everyone is just doing it and it's being done to a high standard.

Sushi: Is it called honeycomb?

Matt: It's called honeycomb.

Robyn: I've not heard of that one.

Matt: Yeah, have a look!

[Laughter]

Matt: I mean it's as enticing as it sounds!

[Laughter]

Matt: So if you're trying to make digital a part of everyone's job before you've truly established a centralised team that is high performing and delivering great work but is hampered by capacity, then you're skipping too far ahead and you don't have the oversight in place, and then people go, "I don't understand how to use this." And then the centralised team doesn't have the time to show them, and the whole thing falls apart, and you're actually further back than when you started because people have their faith destroyed in it.

Robyn: Yeah.

Matt: So you need to be careful of that I would say. The other thing you really need to be doing is making sure you're not trying to convince people to do things before they really understand what you're trying to convince them to do.

Robyn: Right.



Matt: So I was trying to think of it in terms of the kind of entrepreneurial mantra of help the unaware, inspire the interested and reassure the intent. So that just means that if someone is totally unaware that there is any kind of problem, your job is not to show them how to do Facebook ads for themselves. Your job is to show them what the problem is, where the need is and what the opportunity might be, and then just leave it for a while and then come back and see where they're at with that. And if then they're at the point where they're interested, that's where you don't even then show them what to do and get them to do things, you just need to inspire them. So you need to show them examples of what your organisation has done using this particular tool, what other organisations have done using this particular tool, what other corporations have done using this. You know, just inspiring them and showing them what's possible. That's what you need to be doing to get them to the next stage. Then, when they're intent, you know, when they're ready to actually make a change and take on the skills for themselves, it's not actually even then that you would tell them what to do, it's that you would reassure them. Because a lot of people will think, "Oh actually, you know, I've learnt how to do this but I'm actually a bit, well I'm not really sure I should have done because it's a big change we're talking about here." That's where reassurance is really important. You know, you need to show them, "Well, we're here to help. We've got, you know, say, monthly catch-up sessions to check in how people are using the tool. Don't worry, the director is totally behind all of this and he is going to be talking about at our next quarterly meetings." You know, just reassuring people that the support is there. And it's actually only then that you should be showing people what to do and how it benefits them.

Sushi: Yeah.

Robyn: I think that's very fair in the sense that if you're doing those things in the first place you are kind of – well, for one thing, you're considering what digital means to your organisation, you're considering who really falls under the umbrella of needing to know that kind of thing. I think a number of people we have spoken to, including, I swear, John Wear when he was at Anthony Nolan, and it's like holding, you know, maybe a monthly catch-up, or maybe you can do a lunch 'n' learn and then it's maybe – so it doesn't have to be necessarily going out there and being like, "Did you know? It's not just me; it's you as well. I can't believe you're been shirking your responsibility."

Sushi: And he said it was very, you know, it was almost like picking where people were, understanding where people were and adapting to that kind of approach. He didn't want to give us a definitive answer almost because he was like, "It's very much about the person."

Robyn: Contextual. Which, again, almost diagnosing really.



Matt: Yeah, exactly. But before you even try and make digital part of everyone's jobs you really need to sit and have a proper think about why you're doing that.

Robyn: Hmmm hmm.

Sushi: Hmm.

Matt: You know? I feel like there is a bit of an unspoken thing, an unspoken kind of cultural agreement that we all agree that this needs to be part of everyone's jobs, and it's not necessarily true. You need to sit and think why does this need to be part of everyone's jobs? Do they have time to deliver all of this? Are there resources in place for me to oversee this and quality assure it. You know, what is the organisation trying to achieve generally and why is it not being achieved now? You know, I think we can just jump to well it just needs to be part of everyone's job and we're all just agreed on that. You need to take a step back and think why?

Robyn: I think that's a pretty stone-clad answer! So we tend to hear time and again from the small charities and, to be fair, we may have covered this, so if you feel like you've sort of covered it that's fair enough, but just to pose it again, we do tend to hear from smaller charities that making most things work on a shoestring is a bit of a challenge. As we've spoken about, sometimes it does just take a good decent-sized budget to really do that stuff you'd love to achieve. But if it's just not there, how can small charities keep up with the pace of change, if it's even necessary to do that, what does that even mean?, and make the most of the opportunities digital has to offer to them?

Matt: First of all, I think that the pace of change that we talk about with digital generally is massively overstated. So, again, there is this sort of unspoken acceptance in the digital world, if you like, the pace of change is simply dizzying, and the tools we're using tomorrow, they're all going to be gone the next day, and then the day after that there will be a whole new set, and it's not true. So we were using Facebook 10 years ago, we were using Twitter 10 years ago. Do you know what? We're still using them.

Sushi: Yeah, that's true.

Matt: And the new tools that have come up in those times have gone because they simply didn't have the traction and they weren't as good ideas as the ones we have now. I think the pace of change is massively overstated. I think what people in small charities should be able to do, and do you know, there should be assistance in doing this, and I think there is some knocking around, is understand what they should use for the resources that they have, just like everyone else. If they don't have huge resources to do this then the honest answer is they're going to have to make some really



tough decisions about what they prioritise. That's not going to be new to any small charity listening to this. They make tough decisions every day about the work that they're going to do because they have the same number of hours in a day that everyone else does but there are far fewer of them delivering that work. So they know how to deploy their resources in the way that has the maximum impact. So, again, I would always go back to their charitable objectives first. You know, what local problem potentially is that charity trying to solve and are there some free tools that can help them do it? If there is not, that's okay, they're a small charity, they don't have the resources to implement whole new CRM projects or pay for a massive advertising campaign. But they do have the resources and the willingness to rally the community around the problem they're trying to solve. You can use Facebook groups to do that. You can use a WhatsApp group to do that. You should use email to do that because that's going to be free up to the ceiling of people that you probably have to communicate with. You can do that for free. All of that is just going to require a bit of time. And you should remember that there are, dare I say it, offline ways of delivering some of this stuff. You know that offline world that we occasionally forget about? You know, where you can just pick up the phone and really inspire someone by just speaking to them on the phone?

[Laughter]

Sushi: But that offline is almost always now complemented with something digital. You know? Even when you talk about this offline conversation, offline interactions, you are very likely to match it with the WhatsApp groups and the Facebook group and things like that.

Matt: If you can, definitely, but it's a lower quality interaction, let's face it. You know, if you've got – if I had 10 people in a room and I was saying, "Guys, we need to solve this local problem," compared to 10 people on a WhatsApp group or on an email, I'd have them in the same room every time.

Sushi: Yeah.

Robyn: Hmm, I think that's really powerful and also definitely very true. I think, like, there are times where charities are completely – the smaller charities – are just spreading themselves very thinly, trying to go above and beyond to achieve things, and I think partly it's sometimes because maybe if you go to events like the ones we run, you see these big fantastical things at other charities with the budget of Cancer Research UK are achieving, and you just think, "We could never do that." And sometimes that's a harsh reality to come to terms with and the challenge is coming away and thinking, "But what we are doing is serving its purpose and we're doing it well."

Matt: Yeah, and that's what those small charities need to remember, is that they can come away from that and think, "Oh wouldn't that be fun to try?"



And it probably would be fun to try but there isn't any charity with "use digital" in its charitable objectives. It's there to change lives and that's what you have to be most proud of. If a big charity has got a huge problem and the huge resources to tackle that problem and digital is seen as a great way to do that, then brilliant, that's what they should do. But if you're a small charity changing lives of a relatively small number of people locally, you should be damn proud of that. Because, whether you're doing that through email, you're doing it face-to-face, or whatever your service happens to be, the important thing is that you're changing those lives and you should be really proud of that.

Robyn: Great.

Sushi: And also, ultimately, resources are always relative. So even the big charities will always say that they don't have the resources to meet their needs anyway. Because of that relativity thing, you do have to think of it like that when a small charity is faced with that problem of I don't have enough money to do this thing, the bigger charity has to feed a bigger beast so they just don't have the money to do their thing too, even the Cancer Researchers. So, if you had any advice on how to future proof your digital investments, what would you suggest to charities? What's the thing that they should think about? How do they make sure that their digital investments are as future-proofed as possible?

Matt: Well if future proofing is preventing something going obsolete then I think we may be seeking more certainty about the future than is actually possible.

[Laughter]

Matt: And, again without going too grand, I think as human beings we are always looking for certainty in the future and if you're a fundraiser you're very used to making projections and revising those projections half way through your financial year, and you'll also be more than aware that a lot of that is unfortunately guesswork, and the very concept of projections is trying to create certainty where certainty doesn't always exist. So to say that you can future-proof something, like you're basically saying, "I know what will happen in the future and this thing will still be fit for purpose in that time." Now if you're building something in proven technologies, or using proven channels, you have a far better chance of that being the case. So, you know, if tools have been around for a long time, if you've seen them work in your organisation, you've seen them work in other organisations and you've got the numbers to back that up, and it's a lot of the established channels that you can do that with, then you're going to have a much better chance of doing it. But if you're looking for certainty in the future then nothing is going to change and my investment would definitely have been the right one, then that's very difficult. It is very difficult. Depending what you're looking for, you



know? I think the pace of change, again, is overstated but, you know, there is a human need to think that the future is all going to work out okay and I can future-proof certain things, and it's just hard to do. Again, that doesn't mean you should just go blindly into decisions and just go, "Oh, it doesn't matter, we don't know what the future will hold, let's just throw all our money in this new unproven social media network" or whatever. But you should accept that you can't future proof things.

Sushi: No.

Robyn: But I think that's why those meet-ups, like you were talking about nfp Tweet-up, and there are so many different meet-ups these days where people are talking about what their charities are doing, just exchanging ideas, and I think those things help you just have a clearer idea of what's going on, and maybe just give you a bit more of a steer as to what is worth investing in, what's maybe not going to work, and all relative to what you're trying to achieve with it as well. I think that's really important.

Sushi: And Zoe Amar, in her episode, talks about the idea that if you're a charity that has got, you know, a slightly bigger charity and you've got a substantial team, you know, your senior leadership team should be – they should have a person that is dedicated to horizon scanning. Not that that's their full job but they have that in their kind of remit, that they know that they should be seeking the next opportunities, they should be working out what would be the right investment for the charity so that they can feed that back into the charity and you can make as informed decisions as possible.

Matt: Yeah. I mean most charities are operating in these silos because they're very focused on solving the problems that they were created to solve, and that can lead to, you know, blinkered thinking and not having enough attention on even what's coming up in the next quarter, never mind the next few years. You can only ever get educational sort of guidance on what's coming up in the future from horizon scanning, for sure. But, you know, planning is a big issue generally in charities. You know, briefs can come in very late and directions can be changed at a moment's notice, and so that's a sort of broader problem in terms of planning. But, yeah, you should be looking outside your organisation as much as possible and it's up to us to create the networks that make that possible and not thinking that everyone has to do everything. You know, you don't have to. You need to do the things that work for you.

Sushi: Hmm, definitely.

Robyn: Well that is about all we've got for you today so we'll wrap it up there. Thanks so much for coming in. It has been very enlightening and it's been a total pleasure to chat to you.



Matt: Thanks so much for having me.

Robyn: I really like how Matt called me on using sort of the phrase “Pace of change”, because really his stance on that encapsulates his stance on how the charity deals with digital generally in the sense of you’ve got to be constantly connecting it back to what you’re users actually need, how your organisation works, how you interact with those people you’re supporting, and therefore what is most useful to them. And, you know, getting caught up in what seems like is the next thing that you need, or the next thing that every charity seems to be jumping onto because that is the most innovative thing that you could be doing at this time, and therefore you might feel like it’s the best thing you can do for your users but really, when you consider how it’s really going to feed back into your organisational goals or into the way that you work on the ground, it might be completely irrelevant.

Sushi: Definitely. I really liked his idea of creating digital marketing academies. Just the idea that you would really embrace learning and understanding how something can work for your organisation, and actually being quite honest about the fact that we, as a sector, aren’t, you know, as skilled sometimes. You know, we do have a lot of skill in the sector but we sometimes are, you know, unable to support people to develop. So I think anything that could basically raise the level of skill across the board for people for their very specific needs is really exciting. I hope he does it!

Robyn: Yeah!

[Laughter]

Robyn: We’ll be first to put our names down, Matt!

[Laughter]

Robyn: Great. Well that’s it for this episode and this is actually the last episode from Sushi and I as I’ll be leaving CharityComms at the end of April. I’m heading to The Health Foundation so I’ll still be a member of CharityComms and I might still cross paths with you all at an event hopefully. To everyone who took part as a guest, helped us check the sound levels, gave us the space to record when the office had a blackout, or any kind of support, we just want to say a massive thank you for that.

Sushi: Yeah, and we’re handing over the batten to the CharityComms team and the podcast will be on a short break while this transition takes place so please bear with them.



Robyn: Yes, so watch this space. Thank you so much for listening. It has been a real pleasure creating these episodes for you and having the opportunity to speak to the wonderful people who have been featured. Bye for now!

Sushi: Bye for now.