TOWARDS A SMARTER WORLD

Meet innovators in content intelligence, omnichannel publishing, machine learning, and enterprise content operations as we all work towards a smarter world.

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Hosted by
Cruce Saunders

Content Strategy Roles and Landscape with Hilary Marsh

Cruce

Hello and welcome to this edition of **Towards a Smarter World**. This is your host, Cruce Saunders and I'm joined today by Hilary Marsh, president and chief strategist of the **Content Company**, a content and digital strategy consultancy.

I've been following Hilary for some years. She has tremendous insight into content strategy and works with organizations on content creation, governance management promotions, including across a lot of association and non-profit. She's been in this space since 1999 and developed and taught a graduate level content strategy course for the **User Experience Design master's program at Kent State University**. She's speaking at national and international conferences as a thought leader and we are going to be glad to hear from her today.

She will also be at **LavaCon** which is coming up at the end of October in this 2018 calendar year. And we're looking forward to seeing her there as well as she gets a feel for technical communicators and other aspects of content strategy from a different vantage point.

So, Hilary, we're really glad that you could be here today. Why don't we start just broadly about the content itself, when we talk about content what in your mind is content?

Hilary

Thanks so much. And really first of all, I'm glad to be here today, Cruce, and I'm excited to finally have a good long conversation with you because I feel like we've known each other for a long time but haven't had that opportunity to do that yet. And it's good that we're starting at the beginning because I think that the discussion about what content is and 'why don't we know that already?' leads to the discussion about what content strategy is.

So content, I like to say that content is the way that our work is manifested in the world and I say that because I found that clients were struggling to talk about 'strategy for what?'. And they think sometimes, not only potential clients of mine, but people out there in the world think of content as this stuff off to the side that maybe the communications department creates or the marketing department creates, but they don't realize that it is our work.

And so content is at the core of what we do. So it's our events and our products and programs and services. And I think that different kinds of content have given rise to different professions, you know, service design, what is that really at its heart but I'm a lot of that is content strategy for services, which is different than content strategy for product or content strategy for support information. But it's all content at the end of the day, whether it's something we deliver to people, through words on a page, whether that's a printed page or a web page or a video or a podcast like this one or a blog post or face to face or on a phone call. It's all content.

And content strategy is bringing all of those kinds of content together in a holistic way. So that it's kind of aware, done in a place of awareness of what else exists, who the organization is that's providing it and the needs and context for the audience that is consuming it, whether it's choosing to buy the product or buy it again or recommend it to somebody else or take or pay membership dues to that association or any goal that we actually have.

Cruce
I'd love to talk a little bit more about the words you just brought up the context. So you're indicating this relationship between content and context. Can you talk a little bit more about context itself? What is that, and how does a content strategists work with us?

Hilary
That gets a little bit into brand. Humans aren't generic and organizations aren't generic either. For example, I said to one client, 'hey, you know, good news, you don't have to be Google, you don't have to share with your audience every fact there is to say that, you know, the FDA might be produced on this topic. What your members want to know from you is what does your organization think about this topic?' And that's important because it's both contexts of 'why are you telling me this' and 'what is it that you uniquely, your organization, wants me to know from you and do because you're sharing this information?'

There's also the other layer of context in truly knowing who your audience is and what they need from you and how they need it. So if your audience is academics, they may have all the time in the world to read your 64-pages PDF and where you start at the beginning, you tell the entire backstory and then you tell them the facts that they want to know and then you go on for more depth.

But if they're in a rush or reading it in their spare time or needing to know the little tidbit of what they need to do today, then that's 64-pages pdf is not really helping them because maybe the information they want is on page 38. But they don't know. So context is, is who you are, who they are, what you have, what they're going to do with it, all those kinds of things.

Cruce
As we start talking about personalization context becomes so important, especially the user context or the reader context or the customer context.

Hilary
Absolutely. So one of the other pieces in there and that question that I asked all the time and I truly feel like a two-year-old is why? Why are you publishing this? Why do you have this initiative? Why are you telling this person this bit of information at this moment? You know, I find that often it's a new line of questioning which is surprising, but until we have the answers to questions like that, we can't determine together, the client and I in partnership, what can you stop publishing? What would people just drink up as much as you have? And what you need to re-think in terms of what you're putting out there in the world and how?

Cruce
This catalyzation for thinking through content in a new way. It seems like it's very central to the role of the content strategist. Can you talk a little bit more about other roles of the content strategist?

Hilary
Well, I used the word practices a lot. This is about your content, but more than that, it's about your content practices. So it's how your work gets manifested in the world through content. How are you choosing your channels? How are your people talking to each other? I can tell by looking at your content, I can tell your people aren't talking to each other because they're publishing

redundant content or they're keeping online everything they've ever published or they're just throwing it up there and you know, this page had seven unique pageviews in the past year, you know, is that good? But you asked me a different question. You asked what the different roles are.

Cruce
So the content strategist wears so many hats and I wonder if you could speak to some of them.

Hilary
Sure. It's sort of a truism in the content strategy world that it's a form of therapy, and it really is because it really gets to all of those answers to the questions of why I'm and it reveals, internal communications. So a content strategist is often a facilitator. I like to draw the parallel of content strategist to an orchestra conductor, and I like to say that, just like in an orchestra, if every instrument or instrumental section, we're doing their own thing in their own way, it would just be cacophony.

But if they have a conductor and they're playing the same piece of music on there, they're mutual contributions add incredible richness and depth more than they would have if they were by themselves. So, that orchestra conductor metaphor of bringing everybody together and having it be the same piece of music for the audience's sake, that's really the heart of what it is.

So, I as a content strategist, I focus a lot on thinking about the kind of operations governance. How does it get their internal communications, the idea of a central content calendar? So the pieces of glue. Because to me, that is the biggest challenge out there is that everything's happening alone instead of together. There are other content strategists who certainly have other strengths that I might bring in to partner with me on certain projects, whether it's people with strengths and personas, which I do lead, but sometimes it makes more sense to bring somebody else in. Taxonomies, which again I do lead, but sometimes it makes sense to bring in somebody with a different set of expertise. Content models the same thing. So those are different kinds of skills that are complementary but maybe different. I also focus a lot on my work on the quality and readability of the content you're creating so that it can resonate with the audience you're publishing it for.

Cruce

I love the visual of the orchestra conductor. It's one we're familiar with at [A] as well. We talk about orchestrating structure and semantic standards. So on the technical side, you know, so that content can flow from usage to usage and channel to channel without manual transformation. And so that is true on the strategy side too that sounds like. Orchestration of message and the continuity of purpose for the content that starts with that context you're talking about. So we're carrying forward context into guiding that, that purpose for authors. What is the relationship between the content strategist and the rest of the content team, all of the authors that are involved in creating content and, and other stakeholders in the content lifecycle?

Hilary

So I think that my role in a project because at some point I walk away, my role in a project is sometimes to magnify the voices of the content authors who already see what, how it should work, but don't have the internal buy-in for that. So part of my role is often to help them get that internal buy-in and if he is investing in and bringing in somebody from the outside, they're often kind of primed already to do it, do things differently, do them better but ultimately I believe that the subject matter experts need the content authors and vice versa.

So it's got to be a partnership for the content to be truly successful. The subject matter experts have depth and I gave a talk years ago at **Confab** and had an image on the screen of your typical farm silos that we talk about so so very much and I said 'respect the depth' and sort of respect that expertise that comes out of the silos, but helps those people see that they need you as well.

So the organization invests in that depth because it benefits the audience, but it usually needs translation. It usually needs somebody with expertise or a team with expertise and bringing that information to light to make that program shine. And so often I'm facilitating better relationships between publishing experts if you will, and subject matter experts.

Cruce

So to what extent should a content strategist have a formal degree in psychology before?

Hilary

It certainly wouldn't hurt. I think that the idea of understanding the human psyche and communicating from one person to another are very closely connected.

Cruce

What do you think makes an effective content team? So a strategist is in the mix, but what makes an overall team effect that creates great content for various customers and various channels?

Hilary

So I spent five and a half years working at the **National Association of Realtors** and I started out as my title is manager of editorial development, which was really basically editor in chief of the website. And it was the member website for a million real estate professionals, the members of the organization not a homebuyers, consumers. On my team I had four people who are originally content editors and I changed their title to content strategists because people in the organization often thought that their job was mainly to check the spelling and fix their commas and in fact, it was much bigger picture than that. Those folks had kind of departments that they were assigned to and made sure that the work that those departments were doing made its way onto the website well, made its way into our newsletter in time and onto social media.

So they were the champions and glue for all the work that the organization was doing. So that's what my content team looked like. The other thing we had was something we came to call the extended **realtor.org** team, which were representatives from every department. So that would jumpstart the idea of internal communications and facilitation, not only communicating from us to everybody what was happening with the website, where we were going to what our social media objectives were and stuff like that from us to them. But it was to begin to facilitate that internal communication from them to each other. So we could all together see commonalities and opportunities to collaborate and work together. On our web team, we had other roles but they weren't content specific roles.

We had a user experience, we had a project manager, and we had a social media manager, whose job it was to just bring us into the realm and world of social media. We hired him in 2008 and so those were other members of the web team that were related. We had a visual designer as well and worked with IT, but none of those were on our content team person then we had teams who helped us with the production because the CMS we used was real trouble. It really not intuitive and especially difficult for people who were occasional publishers who only updated their content a couple times a year.

Resume audio transcription.

Cruce
That's interesting. What, do you think represents the adjectives you would use to describe that effective team of content producers?

Hilary
The qualities in the individuals? I mean honestly sometimes they were very different. The cultures of each of our internal departments were very different. So sometimes they were cajoling and reading between the lines about initiatives that a department had that they might not have even been aware needed to go on the website, but everything really needed to go on the website.

Sometimes they were, I'm really trying to get permission to do their jobs well, to fix the content or make it more likely to resonate and be used by the audience so that the program itself could shine. Sometimes they were just facilitating conversations between one department and another. So, you know, those are very nontechnical skills and very none really not first and foremost about the writing itself, but about all the thinking and the practices behind it.

Cruce
That makes sense. What do you think the components are of a great content strategy?

Hilary
A content strategy statement basically exists to tie the content back to its bigger role in the organization and we do that basically a madlib kind of format that **Sara Wachter-Boettcher** invented. She was the first person I know of anyway, who created this. Other people have talked about it and used it as well, but I think it originated with her. The statement is, here's how we

would describe our content and here's how we would describe how it makes the audience feel and doing that through the lens of why do we have this content at all helps give kind of a flavor to our content and bring to life our reasons for having it in creating it.

So this is what our content is, here's what it's intended to do, and here's how it makes people feel. The components are really digging into each of those, who are we the organization producing it, what is it we're producing and why, and what do we want to happen as a result of that and what does the audience want to happen? So embedded in that are things like success metrics. So what will constitute success for this content? As I set up a few minutes ago, that's sometimes a new line of questioning. I find that for the organizations I work with, sometimes their idea of success is that it's out there and now it's out there. Now, what if two people look at it or it got seven unique page views in the past year. Is that good? Are we happy with that? And how do we know if we're happy with it if we didn't have a goal to begin with?

You know, there's a great quote that I use in my presentations all the time from **Mike Powers** who works at the **Indiana University of Pennsylvania**, which is funny name of a college, but that's the name of the school where he works and he says: 'page views are not your goal. The goal is the goal.' And that gets it to the same thing of why do we have this content and really why do we have this program? So we have this event because we want people to sign up for it. Okay, well did the content help with that? Did people take the action we wanted them to take, which is did the wrong people not sign up for it and the right people sign up for it? So we have to dig deeper than just page views to find out whether we achieved our goals and what role content played in that.

Cruce

We've been having this discussion just too over and over recently with enterprises that are dealing with page based everything, page-based offering, page-based analytics, page-based thinking. And it ends up translating into a lot of metrics that we can't actually use to optimize the customer experience. We're just optimizing pages.

We look at assets, content assets which don't really live on pages anymore. They're represented or assembled into pages, but the asset is something that lives kind of in a lot of places. It ends up being on the mobile App, on the watch and the voice version of the content and multiple geographic localizations of the content or market segment versions or personalization version.

So the asset lives independently of the page. So this whole regime around page-based analytics is just not useful anymore.

I think it used to be, I think it gives us some proxy for interest in, on a particular topic if the 'page' is associated with a particular idea we can begin to track interest in and certain kinds of content. But what if we had an asset-based approach to analytics? I think we'd have a lot more real insight to drive the strategic conversation and the optimization process.

Hilary

I find sometimes that it's outside of the content world altogether. So for example, I do work with lots of associations, their metric might often be member satisfaction. So how do we know that if we publish, or is it true that if we publish more news articles that our members will feel like they've gotten more value out of their membership? So, you know, sometimes we just have to benchmark and learn where we started out and then do a thing and figure out whether that moved the needle. So part of it is that we don't always know where we're going to but we're never going to be able to have any kind of metrics unless we start by documenting where we are today.

Cruce

Yes, indeed.

Hilary

I don't know whether that translates exactly to kind of a more product-focused company, but certainly the organizations I work with, the things that they have in common is that they are about the content. So I worked with internets, I work with associations, I work with higher education university sometimes. So those are very much not an entity with marketing people and tech support, and some of the common departments or divisions that other kind of more product-focused enterprises would have. The organizations that I work with, their content is what they do.

Cruce

Okay, switching ideas, how technical should content strategist to be?

Hilary

You're probably not going to be surprised at my answer, but for me, it's not about the technology because technology changes so quickly. I'm more in the driving the car place than I am and the look under the hood place and I always have been. I mean at one point I helped organizations choose content strategy. So before I worked at the National Association of Realtors, I was an independent from 2001 to 2005 and during that time CMS selection was one of the things I helped with sometimes but it was always from a business perspective. So whether it used to this kind of code or that kind of code, it didn't matter. I was on the side of is this helping the business accomplish what it wants to accomplish? I was leaving the how part always to IT. So as technical as I ever got was determining content types and what templates the CMS would need to have. And I've given talks about that topic, which is technical but not.

Cruce

Yes, this is one of the reasons we've been so avid about introducing the content engineer. Content engineering as a practice independent of content strategy is that it's so related but it's all about what's under the hood

Hilary

Somebody needs to do that, but that's never been the thing that I've done and I don't think you can have an equal amount of depth and practice and experience in all of the facets. So, I quickly realized that the part where I could feel like I would make the biggest difference was not in that piece.

Cruce

That makes a lot of sense. What guidance do you have for folks interested in a career and content strategy or new strategists getting started?

Hilary

Yes, I've been giving that a ton of thought. As you said in my bio, I developed and taught the first graduate-level content strategy course and worked with an instructional designer at Kent state to create this course. I've been in the process for quite a long time of developing a content strategy school and I'm learning a lot about best practices and online learning in addition to the work that I did. I think that there's a common core of skills to learn about content strategy and they're kind of all the things that I've talked about already, but then it's also figuring out what are the pieces you're most passionate about.

People don't usually do content strategy right out of school. I think you need a degree in business savviness in order to do it. I've seen a few exceptions but not too many. So I guess for someone aspiring to be a content strategist, it would be to go on twitter, follow the **content strategy hashtag**, go join the **LinkedIn groups** that I own with 31,000 people. Or go on the **Facebook content strategists group**, which is pretty amazing and learn and read from people's blog posts and people's writing.

There are a lot of really smart people writing about all the different aspects of content strategy and see what speaks to you and, and reach out to the person. I mean, we're an unapproachable bunch and we'd be happy to have conversations about how we think about content strategy, what we think about content strategy. There are meetups in almost every city. I have a **list of them, on my website of all the meet-ups** I know of and all the online content strategy groups as well.

There are so many sources to learn and soak up information. There are great books out there. There are conferences they can attend. It's very much a hands-on the field more than it is a strictly academic field and that might change over time. There's only one full academic program that I know of which is based in Austria. There are other courses offered in other contexts, whether it's strategic communications or storytelling, which is more of the marketing sort of side of things or user experience because content strategy sort of has different kinds of next door neighbors depending on which aspect you want to focus on. So it's really exploring it. I know that's sort of the simplest way I can sum it up.

Cruce

Thank you, Hilary, for everything you do to both catalyze the community around content strategy, help make it a welcoming one for everybody involved and also get new content strategists started. That's a not in any one person's job description and the fact that you've taken responsibility and the leadership role and in the community has been a really instrumental for a lot of people in the industry so thanks for doing that.

Hilary

Thank you for saying that. Yes. I feel really passionate about sharing what I know and every venue I can think of.

Cruce

You wrote a question on **social media one time that you're not a content strategist if...**

Hilary

I put that up, almost like a random question on twitter and tons of people replied. I thought it'd be fun. And people had great answers. I put it on **LinkedIn** and I put it on **my website**. You're not a content strategist if, for example, if one of the things that I said is, if you're not involved in discussion about why the organization is producing the content you write, other people had other amazing answers that if you're recommending solutions that are not actually possible to do and sustain, if you seek tools, solve content strategy problems. That was one of my favorite answers.

Cruce

If you don't think about how content is created, managed and delivered from Scott Abel.

Hilary

Yes, they were great answers. I loved all the answers.

Cruce

If you think governance is a big bag of rules. If you think content is just about marketing or from another side of the community about a documentation or technical communications. I don't think, you know this idea that the content belongs to one department or something.

Hilary

I agree a hundred times with that because I think a lot of companies do that. They think 'oh content is something that the communications folks do. It's not what I do'.But that's not true for example, in the organizations I work with, one of the departments that they usually have is a department that advocates for the profession on Capitol Hill or at a state level or whatever their focus might be. So those people are so deep in their expertise, they're really good at what they do. They do really important work, but they'll say, we published a comment letter about HR-4-32-B and I'm like, can you please speak English because I don't understand what any of that meant. Meanwhile, it's an issue that's of integral importance to the organization, but this is not a communications department problem. It's a translation problem.

Cruce

There's a need to recognize content conversations that are happening between the organization as a whole and the public. Stitch that together wherever they're happening inside of an organization and it seems to me like the true content strategist, the one with it in their bones, has the instinct to try to connect those conversations into a coherent, whole, not just kind of meet the editorial objectives of a particular department.

Hilary

No, what you just said, stitching it all together. That is the essence of content strategy. Content strategy is the definition I learned- I learned two definitions in 1999 that are still so very true. One is 'content strategy is who, what, when, where, why, and how of a publishing information' and my roots are in publishing. That's how I started my professional career so rather than just writing, this is about like being the editor in chief or the orchestra conductor of everything so what that means is a sense of prioritization and of connection as well.

So that stitching it together is why it exists at all and extracting that value out of the mind of the subject matter expert and translating it for the audience and putting it into the context of what everybody else is doing. It gets back to the organization's strategic goals.

Cruce

So that is a perfect argue to what are some of the signs we can talk we can look to, to prove to executives that a content strategy is effective.

Hilary

So, I'm in the last stages of completing a big research project, content strategy research project, looking at how associations are adopting a content strategy, so their adoption rate, maturity rate and that kind of thing and one of the things that I did was interview four different CEOs to ask them that very question because I wanted to make sure that our presentation about our research wasn't designed with an audience of communicators in mind, but rather have an audience with CEOs in mind. So I called CEOs who I know and respect and ask them how do they know and it was really interesting that their answers fell into two buckets.

One is that the things that they offer, we're more successful and other is that the governance was such that everybody knew what role they played. So that the CEO wasn't getting sort of that arbiter role and wasn't put in the position of being a mediator between different groups who both I thought my contents the most important, all my content is the most important and those

kinds of conversations really should never get to the CEO level. So the content strategy is effective when the operations of it run smoothly and when the results are what the organization wanted.

The following section has been removed from the audio portion of the podcast but preserved here in the transcript.

Cruce
[ASAE foundation](#) advanced association leadership survey. Can you tell us a little bit about the survey results that came out of that?

Hilary
So there's an association for everything, right? So this research project was funded by the association of associations, which sounds silly, but it's where people who work in associations go to learn how to do their jobs better and have people advocating for their profession because it's a profession in itself and then, the folks at the same foundation saw that content really is what associations do and yet your organizations weren't necessarily all thinking about it strategically, so they had and there was no way to even have that conversation about well, what does that even mean?

Everyone hears this term content strategy and they may think that it means content marketing strategy, which is what social media channels, should we be on and how do we use them the most effectively, which is really only one small piece of the conversation and so people have a different understanding of the term content strategy and yet there are all kinds of threats or potential threats to different associations from, for-profit organizations that may be targeting their same audiences with similar or better content. So how to associations measure how they're doing, understand where they could go so this has been a big ongoing research project for the ASAE Foundation.

I'm working with two other consultants that we proposed. We proposed the project and we won against, I don't know how many other folks who bid on the project and so while we're not so it's been a year and a half or a year and change so far that we've been working on this and we are almost complete with the report and it's been two major surveys and lots of interviews with, um, with representative samples of people at different associations.

So the first thing we had to do was think about if we want to make a quantitative look, take a quantitative look at what associations we're doing with regards to content strategy. We really had to break it down into its pieces to say, are you doing this? Are you doing it a little, medium amount or a lot? Just first get the landscape, how many people are doing this? And also by breaking this notion of content strategy down into its tasks, we could help people understand what we even meant by a content strategy and so we identified 17 different tasks that we thought comprised content strategy. They range from stakeholder interviews, content audits, analytics, content models, metadata, so the range of writing to promotion to technical to governance kinds of issues about roles and responsibilities.

We really tried to cover all the aspects in content strategy in our initial survey then we interviewed so we grouped associations by kind of beginners or haven't even started yet if they said no, we don't do any of those things. Beginners were those who had done 1 to 6. The intermediate was 6 to 10 or whatever and then advanced was using more of those tactics and it was a, a way to start the discussion and start to make the whole effort quantifiable. Then we interviewed a representative sample of people at each level and each size of organization to probe more deeply and get the qualitative information and the stories to compliment what we learned from the survey.

We did another survey to really develop a level deeper quantitatively in terms of how much value did you get from each of the tactics? How difficult were they where do you think you want to go next? Then we interviewed again a subset of people who responded to that second survey. So, the stories we got and the information we got were pretty fantastic and we learned of course that most people are at the beginner stage, second in intermediate and a few at the highest levels and different tasks are different levels of difficulty for different associations and sometimes and they found different amounts of value with different tactics as well.

Resume audio transcription.

Cruce
What are some of the steps that we can take to make content strategy a part of an organization's operations overall if it's not already? Who should take the lead driving that change?

Hilary

I mean that was one of the things we probed in our study as well. It looks different depending on who's in charge. It looks different. The content strategy looks different if a marketer is leading the effort or communications or in the association world. I have found more than one instance where the people came from education and if you think about an association at the biggest picture level, it exists to educate its members and maybe that's through a magazine or maybe it's through news or maybe it's through anything but you could see it in some way that education is why the organization exists and I think that mostly true.

I think that it's sort of bigger than that. So those were the biggest areas we found in terms of who is leading content strategy and usually the person who's leading it is the person who sees that the organization could go further and be more successful or retain more members or attract more members, if it's content are more cohesive. So it's whoever gets that light bulb of a thought is the person who tends to lead the effort and make the passionate business case to the CEO about why it's important to invest in this effort because that's how we're going to work together and mitigate the threats from for profit-organizations.

Cruce
Yes, it's interesting.

Hilary
I mean, does that resonate with you and what you're hearing from your company as well?

Cruce
You know, in the enterprise it's a little different because we have so many tiers involved and the strategy usually doesn't make it all the way to the C-level as a chartered initiative. It is mostly being enacted in the enterprise within silos and so the reporting up to a CMO or reporting up to an a VP or somebody responsible for customer experience and so the people leading and innovating change and progressing systems around content are sometimes kind of director, director level, sometimes VP level and occasionally we have been working with C-level folks, CMO or CIO types.

But creating the cross-functional and cross-enterprise conversation is the real challenge and especially as we look to enact change within content systems. A lot of that change depends on cross-functional conversations, some of which are just getting off the ground in a committee or some other kinds of or have a mutual recognition among peers that have these problems aren't

going away by themselves in terms of the scaling issues around content and the challenges that everybody's dealing with. Trying to publish more material than ever to more places than ever. It's out of those kinds of conversations that we're seeing the recognition of the need for cross-functional orchestration roles and the content strategy conversation is just naturally emerges from that.

Hilary

So, to some degree, I think that the fact that our technical tools aren't serving us well is kind of a symptom of the fact that people are working together and creating content in a common way and having a common understanding of top priority audiences and having a common understanding of how their work fits into and supports the organization's goals. You know, how it just works its way down into, right in our content doesn't even sound like it's from the same organization and it has nothing in common with the way those people are creating their content over there and we need to sort of start with the root and build it back up in a new way. I think to make it work better

Cruce

Sure. I feel like the customer experience is so cross-functional nowadays that we can't have the luxury to silo anymore. We have to talk to everybody involved in that, experience, whether it's presales, post sales, the lobbying folks, the operations folks, the people dealing with events, the people dealing with even internal kind of functions like recruiting and onboarding. But not all of those kinds of experiences are dependent on content from different places to create something that's coherent and meaningful to a customer.

The trend we've been seeing within enterprises is at least content communities of practice or centers of excellence or a knowledge sharing communities being formed just completely from a grass-roots level in order to have those conversations. But I really think that in order to make the biggest difference that ultimately we need to get the C-level involved from a leadership position in order to charter actual functional groups that transcend silos to help to stitch together the strategy and engineering practices across the different parts of the organization.

Hilary

Other things that I like to say is a content strategy is an HR issue. So, all the things that you were just talking about, which I spent a lot of time thinking about as well and talking about with my clients, get to both organizational culture. Also how people's job descriptions are cast. For

somebody to change their behavior and start participating in or championing the idea of a cross-silo or cross-departmental team that has to be part of what they're measured on. Their internal success is measured on.

If you want somebody to do something, you have to put it in their job description and motivate them and reward them for acting differently. I think that the other piece that has to happen to make that possible is to change, is to reduce the volume of what you expect everybody to do and to remove the lowest value activities and content, if you will from everyone's plate because we need the depth, we can't dismiss the value and critical importance of the depth of experience that anybody brings. So if now they're going to also have to not look down and the depth but also look across to put a better context in what they're doing. They need time for that. So instead of volume, we're probably talking about doing less but do it better so that we have time to do those cross-functional things that we must do to serve the audience better and must do to set that context better

Cruce

And also have time to be able to work on the process around the content. I mean we are seeing departments being asked to deliver literally to 2x the content that they were last year in some cases. So there, they're being asked to do more not less and those departments are also having to copy and paste that content into more usages so they end up–

Hilary

Right. So, having that whole process transformed will make an enormous difference in the time that they have to think about their work more creatively.

Cruce

Yes, I think the organizational leaders involved in setting forward the overall organization strategy would do well to consider that expression of that strategy is in the form of content. We call it content, but to your point, at the very beginning of our discussion today it's an expression of the entire operating basis for an organization.

Hilary

I really had trouble articulating it for so long, but I had to find a way to get across the point that we're not talking about something extraneous here. We're not. It is your work.

Cruce

It is the expression of the work of the organization and that expression is what is creating the experiences for our customers, and our members, and our candidates, and our stakeholders, and our constituents. It's the expression of what we do that creates that experiential interface layer between the organization and the rest of the world. So content is this experiential interface layer for everything a company is.

I absolutely love this conversation. Thanks so much for your time. I'm looking forward to seeing you at **LavaCon** what will you be discussing.

Hilary

So the name of my talk, which I've given before, although I'm completely rethinking this time, it's called *Managing the Politics of Content*. So it's very much along the lines of all the things we've been talking about today. Because content is political. And it's political because people who are responsible for creating a program or a product are passionate about what they do and they are not first of all rewarded for doing it differently, or working with other people to do it, or working in partnership and they're afraid of a threat from a person from outside of them in their own head. They're handing over their baby to somebody else.

That's the conversation that we have to change because by working together we can get a better result for your thing. We're in partnership to help your program shine, but that is a new concept to someone who has deep subject matter expertise and has been responsible before for soup to nuts, from having the idea of the product to make sure it gets out there in the world. And it's hard for them to let go. And that's where the politics come in and the need for trust and for thinking about your culture differently.

Cruce

Terrific. If our listeners would like to follow you and your work more closely, what is the best place for them to look?

Hilary

Probably twitter. I do tweet a lot about the US political environment because I cannot help myself because it's so very upsetting. But probably twitter, or LInkedIn, or my website (contentcompany.biz).

Cruce

All right. And if you would like to see Hilary and myself at **LavaCon** check out the website. There is a referral code (ATEAM) that will get you a discount and we hope that we'll see you there. For those who are listening in on the podcast, we appreciate your participation in this conversation. Feel free to reach out with further questions that we can pass onto to Hilary as she helps to be such a wonderful center of gravity for, for the content strategy, an industry which has evolved and changed so much since she started. Thank you.

Hilary

Thanks so much for the talk today. I appreciate it.