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New president encourages members to find their own voices within AM&P and their own communities as well.

BY CHRISTINA FOLZ
“If you were going to start from zero and launch CNN today, what would it look like?”

Jean Ellen Cowgill’s question captured the essence of her work with TicToc by Bloomberg and her advice for how media and publishers need to shift their thinking for the modern era.

“It almost certainly wouldn’t be cable-centric,” she says, “because that’s not where the viewer focus is now. Viewers are focused online and on video. It’s fascinating to think how different a communication channel start-up would look today compared to the 1980s.”

Cowgill, former president of Atlantic 57 and now global head of digital strategy and business development for Bloomberg Media and general manager of TicToc by Bloomberg, gave the opening keynote at AM&P’s 2019 Annual Meeting.

As Cowgill explained some of the thought process behind the creation of TicToc — Bloomberg’s wildly popular, quick-hit mobile news brand — she explained that one key consideration drove many of their decisions.

“Millennials are no longer an up-and-coming segment. They are not something to adapt to in the future. They are here now,” she says.

According to the Pew Research Center, all members of the Baby Boom generation will have reached the retirement age of 65 by 2030 — with an average of 10,000 Baby Boomers reaching retirement age every day between now and then. By contrast, as of 2014, Millennials became the largest segment of the U.S. workforce. They now also represent the largest segment of management positions. Half of Millennials in leadership positions are director level or higher.

“They are no longer the future because they are already in charge,” Cowgill says. “They are the new guard.”

The days of organizations and leaders thinking about Millennials as an emerging trend are behind us. Unfortunately, in many organizations and in many media strategies, that is not the case. She poked fun at the issue by referencing a tongue-
An in-cheek browser app that would change every instance of “Millennial” to “snake people,” which results in delightful headlines such as “Snake People Have Finally Ruined Marriage,” and “Snake People Do Use Credit Cards!”

“Whatever your industry, the future of your membership is based on Millennials, who are only going to continue to rise in their influence and their leadership and are already leading teams, businesses, and budgets,” she says. “If associations want to be relevant to this new guard of leadership, they need to understand what the media picture looks like for this group, what their fundamental expectations are from any content provider, and what it might look like to be a true partner to them in their work, careers, and goals.”

Cowgill says people are hungry for unbiased, fact-based information. Bloomberg’s latest audience research reveals the frustration with bias, but analytics show that straight-up facts by themselves are not enough. “What they say they want is unbiased analysis. This generation is demanding a more narrative-driven, storytelling-driven approach that gives them the facts in a story,” she says.

However, it’s important to remember the new guard grew up with technology. For them, the entire world’s worth of information has always been in their pocket. If one media source isn’t providing them the relevant information they need in a form that’s convenient for their fast-paced lives, they will find somewhere else to get that information.

“They are saying, ‘Give me a kind of explainer, and give it to me in a way that is engaging, that fits into my life, that is quick, that I can check on my phone, and if it’s a video, I can watch in 30 seconds to a minute but I come away smarter,’” Cowgill says. “And they want it with a narrative that helps make sense and contextualize what’s going on.”

To address these needs, TicToc has three types of news items:

- Brief, snippet videos with a headline, what’s happening right now
- Short videos (30–60 seconds) that provide context as stories develop
- Long-form videos that provide deeper background of developing stories

“Think about how to take those biggest pieces of intellectual property and reuse them, recycle them, repackage them at the moment when they’re most relevant,” Cowgill says. “It sounds obvious, perhaps, but so many organizations barely do it, and there’s so much more they can get out of the content creation and storytelling work they already invested in.”

Changing your publishing strategies to include the new guard doesn’t have to be scary or painful, but it is absolutely necessary for any association that doesn’t want to disappear, she says.

“Many organizations may not be able to completely scrap everything they are doing, start from the very beginning, and build the new, effective media strategy they desperately need,” Cowgill says. “The next best thing is to seriously sit down and ask, ‘If we started from zero right now, what would we do? What information do our members need? What’s the best way to get that information to them when they need it?’ Then start working toward that.”

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— JEAN ELLEN COWGILL, GLOBAL HEAD OF DIGITAL STRATEGY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT FOR BLOOMBERG MEDIA AND GENERAL MANAGER OF TICTOC BY BLOOMBERG
PUT PEOPLE FIRST
(IT’S NOT JUST A MOTTO)

BY STEPHANIE KERN

On the last day of the 2019 Annual Meeting, outgoing AM&P President Larry Hoffer sat down for a Q&A with Ken Crerar, president and CEO of The Council of Insurance Agents & Brokers (publishers of the multi-award-winning Leader’s Edge). This 10-time-per-year magazine takes a deep dive into the world of commercial insurance and group benefits distribution “with as much analysis and scrutiny as perspective and humor.”

Hoffer: If you were to wipe the slate clean in your publications department, what would it look like? Would Leader’s Edge still exist?

Crerar: Leader’s Edge would still be here — because it’s about people and that wouldn’t change. Leader’s Edge focuses on the world of risk from a global perspective. We like to say that without risk there can be no progress, so we explore those things. The magazine digs deep into the issues facing the commercial insurance brokerage industry and helps our readers better serve their clients.

Hoffer: Tell us about the square shape.

Crerar: My publications department purposely gave it that unique shape. We literally wanted it to stick out from the top of a briefcase. It’s easy to grab, and it grabs your attention.

Hoffer: Leader’s Edge is a bold publication in an industry not known for its boldness. What were your goals for the magazine?

Crerar: The No. 1 goal is always to get it opened. The insurance industry (if you don’t work for it) is boring, but the people in it are exciting. So when we focus on the people, we can be less boring. We were aiming for a cross between Vanity Fair (cocktail-party smart) and The New Yorker (actually makes you smarter). And the cover of the magazine always makes a big impact. If you print something uninteresting on the cover, nobody is going to pick it up. So the covers get the readers in — but then there still has to be more.

Hoffer: Does the team you have in place have to be pushed out of the box?

Crerar: Yes — I push them, and we fail sometimes. And that’s OK. At the end of the day, it’s about making the people in the industry smarter about what they do. But if you write about an industry instead of its people, readers are going to be bored. You must put people first. If I can make insurance exciting, you can certainly make your industry exciting. And for us, it’s not about making money — it’s about moving the message along.

Hoffer: What do you say to people with smaller budgets who say they could never do what you do?

Crerar: Stop making excuses. Leader’s Edge doesn’t have an enormous staff. We

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— KEN CRERAR, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE COUNCIL OF INSURANCE AGENTS & BROKERS
use freelancers and consultants. You just need one smart person to drive it.

Hoffer: We live in a world of information overload. How do you know you’re connecting and resonating with your members?

Crerar: We listen to them and work to continually build a relationship of trust with them. Most people don’t have time to read the things they should be reading, much less what they want to read. Readers know that Leader’s Edge is going to make their life and job better, so they value it and make time for it.

Hoffer: What factor does your company culture play in its success?

Crerar: I take the culture of our company very seriously. One factor I look for in every employee is some kind of entrepreneurial spirit — they shouldn’t be sitting there waiting for something to happen. Also, I wanted to create an environment with a sense of community. We renovated our office space about three years ago to accomplish just that. I added warm colors throughout the office, shorter desks so people could see each other, an espresso bar, a big farm table for lunch breaks, etc. — all of which are much more inviting and conducive to work than traditional office environments.

Hoffer: If you weren’t doing this, what would you be doing?

Crerar: If I wasn’t doing this, I would do something in vocational education. The current generation is missing out on great, creative things that don’t require a classroom, and some kids would really benefit from this. We’re also losing the ability to work with our hands. We simply haven’t been able to move the dial at all in K–12 education. The big question is “why?” So that’s something I have a lot of passion for right now.

Hoffer: What makes your association publishing team unique?

Crerar: I’ve pulled together some of the best, smartest people to do the job. I don’t lose a lot of people, and I’m proud of that. Building trust with my board of directors has been the most important factor, though. They trust me and my entire team. If your board is dabbling in your operations, you need to get them out.

Stephanie Kern is editor for the American Staffing Association. Association Media & Publishing thanks Stephanie for covering this session from the AM&P Annual Meeting.