

EPISODE 102**[INTRODUCTION]**

[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this weeks' episode of Coffee with a Journalist, brought to you by OnePitch. The guests in our show include some of the most notable journalists from the top US-based publications, who cover topics including technology, life sound culture, health, science, consumer products and business news. We discuss their role, the types of stories they cover, what their inbox looks like and how they connect with sources. Head to onepitch.co and look for the video page to learn more about new series featuring today's guest.

Today we're joined by Ryan Barwick, a reporter for Morning Brew. Ryan specifically covers media advertising and technology for the marketing brew newsletter. Prior to joining morning brew, Ryan was a reporter for Adweek and was a broadcast associate for CBS News. During the episode, Ryan tells us about cleanroom technology, ways he builds relationships with sources, his favorite writer and current read, and more. Let's hear from Ryan now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:15] BB: Hey, everyone, this is Coffee with a Journalist, a podcast where we welcome and bring on journalists who give us insights into pitches, how they don't like pitches, what's in their inbox, what's happened with the future journalism, all this good stuff so we can get better with our relationships with journalists. I'm Beck Bamberger. I have an agency named BAM that works with all venture backed technology companies. And I also started OnePitch which is to help publicists such as myself, get better relationships and better pitches to the journalists we talked to and hopefully have good relationships with to do our day to day job.

With us today, we have Ryan Barwick, he's reporter for Morning Brew, based in Brooklyn, New York City my favorite, favorite spot. I'm not there now because it's January and it's freaking cold, Ryan, but thank you for being here. We're excited to chat with you today.

[00:02:02] RB: Thank you so much for your time, Brooklyn, this is you, and I missed us.

[00:02:06] BB: Yes, yes. It's lovely here. Man, I got to say real quick, before we hop into what's going on in your inbox. Can you give us an overview of Marketing Brew? And what the best pitches overall for the outlet is?

[00:02:21] RB: Yeah, sure. So, Marketing Brew is a newsletter, we were going three times a week, it is now five times a week. There was one reporter then there were two reporters, and now there's five of us on the team. We cover a little bit of everything. I primarily cover like media and technology, talking with media buyers, with all ad tech, and all the intricacies of kind of the industry. But we cover everything from brand marketing, to technology, to the Super Bowl, to whatever the hell's going on, and like the crypto NFT space, so it's super broad. I think we tried to bring a pretty fun voice and explanatory voice to what recovering.

[00:03:02] BB: Yeah. So that's also something is explaining what the impact of X is, what it means for a market, what it means for advertisers and so forth. So, contextualizing?

[00:03:12] RB: Yeah, exactly. I think the best success I've had so far is I'll write an explainer on something as complex as like cleanroom technology, which is this kind of like emerging technology. I've gotten a ton of feedback from people just saying, "Wow, that was confusing as hell." But you put a couple jokes in there, and you made it make sense. That kind of what we're striving for.

[00:03:32] BB: Wait a second, wait a second, tell us what is this clean room?

[00:03:35] RB: A clean room is like a data platform. This is where people are going to stop paying attention.

[00:03:40] BB: Stay with us, everyone. Stay with us.

[00:03:43] RB: Basically, If you're Ryan's brand or Ryan's company, and Beck's company, we can take our data and put it into a cleanroom you know, like a digital platform. And then we can, you know, share that information, you know, privately and securely. It is super complex and super weedy and I did not study computer science. So, I had to interview like 15 people to explain this very complex thing to me. But I think like, to my point, we've had a lot of success

with these kinds of stories where you take a very confusing topic like data and ad tech, and then you write it in in a – I try to write it in English, which I don't think the industry does a very good job of.

[00:04:24] BB: That's true. I think MarTech is a bit scary. That's quite different. And I saw you wrote a piece on cleanrooms back in November, very different than your Wine and Oreo piece that was sold later in December. So, you cover quite the spectrum, as we see.

[00:04:41] RB: I think that is more a product of the newsletter goes out three to five times a week. We try to do three stories in every newsletter. So, I think all of us are doing about one to two just kind of short stories to contextualize the news, when it's actually happening or point something. That's one of the parts about a newsletter is that we can actually have fun with it. And like, “Oh, here's this really silly” – it usually takes 20 minutes to write something like that. Like that was not a major investment of my time. But I think it's worthwhile to our readers to actually, like, point out some funky stuff that's happening throughout the industry.

[00:05:17] BB: I agree with that. And it's so much more and I think gives the value of the outlet and also the journalists to give that context and give the view, especially if it's delineated as, “Hey, this is our viewpoint on it and our analysis on it.” That's way different than a headline you read in the BBC, and it's just what it is. And you're like, “Oh, well, what does this mean?” So, there's that.

[00:05:37] RB: Yeah, we try to like, and I think if you read this story, you have fun with it. We're very lucky with the morning brute voices. We try to cram as many jokes in our stories as possible.

[00:05:47] BB: It is fun. It is fun. That's great. Ryan, how is your inbox?

[00:05:54] RB: My inbox right now, I have two unread emails, because I'm saving them for this afternoon because they pertain to a story. But otherwise, I am very militant on reading, or at least opening every email in my inbox.

[00:06:08] BB: Oh, wow. Okay, your way on the other side of the spectrum. So, every email, you're going to open?

[00:06:14] RB: Every email. Now, granted, usually I can see it like, I mean –

[00:06:20] BB: The first couple lines?

[00:06:21] RB: People in PR know, like, if I see that, like this email was written as a template, and it didn't come from a company that – like it didn't come from the PR companies I hire, then like, after four years of doing this, my eyes just instantly glaze over and I know how to move on to the next thing. So yeah, if I see a template, I'm opening that bad boy, and I'm probably not going back in there.

[00:06:43] BB: Gotcha. And then, so you go to zero? Zero at all, like every day, every hour?

[00:06:48] RB: Zero every day. Now, my personal inbox, is –

[00:06:52] BB: Wow. There's only like, 5% of you out there.

[00:06:59] RB: But I have my email open, like literally all day. I just told my editor to this. I believe I sent like 65 emails yesterday, which I'm not proud of, and hopefully that'll carry me through for the next couple of weeks. But I'm constantly in the inbox. And even newsletters, I'm reading newsletters, I'm opening them. I'm checking what's going on. But yeah, zero.

[00:07:20] BB: Wow, you're in your own bracket. I wonder if there's like, you guys all hang out maybe like once a year, it's a journalist fair and like, “Hey, here's the inbox zero people like how do you learn?” It's fascinating how the spectrum is so large on the let it roll group and then the militant, militant, absolute zero of which are rare.

[00:07:42] RB: I'm sure I'm doing it wrong. I don't think this is the best way to do it. But the best way that works for me,

[00:07:47] BB: Then that's good. It works for you. That's what it's about. So, given you read every email, does the subject line then at all matter?

[00:07:57] RB: That's a great question. Not really. I often find that like, a lot of emails that I get with the subject line that say exclusive, I tend to think that that's usually not that relevant to me. Exclusive to me is a story that I'm breaking myself that I'm doing the reporting on like a scoop. I'm getting an exclusive through our agency, it's usually – I like to do that reporting on my terms. Every once in a while, something will come through, if I have a relationship with a specific company, something will happen. But if I don't know you, and it says exclusive in the subject line, my eyes are going to roll pretty hard. However, I will probably still read it. I'm going to think too hard about it.

[00:08:48] BB: That's also rare, I think I've heard. Because some people have their whole thing on Inbar was an exclusive and how much time you give me for an exclusive, but you have the interesting answer of, “No, it has to be exclusive that I do, that I'm breaking, like a scoop.” Wow, okay.

[00:09:07] RB: Well, if I have a relationship with you, and if you want to have a relationship with me, find me on Twitter, I will talk to literally as many people as possible. That's the best part reporting. I love reporting. I love meeting new people. However, like I'm very fortunate at Morning Brew, where I don't really – maybe this is unique to my beat, but I don't really write stories on pitches, but I will find people to talk to on pitches. If I'm writing a story about people needing to go back in the office and I get an email from an agency, a creative agency, and they say, “Oh, we're putting out a press release because we're changing our policy.” Well, okay, that's like supernatural. I want to talk to that person. So, I find sources to talk to, but rarely do I find stories from pitches, I guess, does that make sense?

[00:10:02] BB: Yeah, that's a good distinction too. That is where we kind of heard I would say, for here.

[MESSAGE]

[00:10:09] ANNOUNCER: Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch.

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Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:10:33] BB: So, for stories, then you do and there's quite a lot that you pump out with the newsletter every day. So, as I mentioned, there's Oreo and Wine as the latest collaboration. There's something here on the CTA Recap, you have Twitter follows, to look at McDonald's, what they're doing with BTS, that's another –

[00:10:52] RB: Granted, it was also like the end of the year too.

[00:10:56] BB: Also, that. How do you then come up with, “Oh, I really want to get into that long form story or like, go deep into that piece.”

[00:11:08] RB: Something I kind of pay attention to or like, tools the industry is using. I've written multiple stories about, okay, there's this new technology that a company is selling, or that the industry is beginning to adopt, and there are different versions of this, whether that is a cleanroom technology, or I did a story about these companies that they create lists of publishers for brands. So, if I'm Ryan's brand, and I don't want to be on these sites, there's a company that kind of comes in, they're called brand safety companies that kind of come in and do that work.

So, I like to pick like, this is something we talk a lot about, something that's very narrow story that also goes very deep. Those stories are really exciting to me and those are the ones that like, because it's a newsletter, there's a lot of other stuff I write that I write pretty quickly. But those are the stories that I'm actually like proud of and are actually indicative of the beat that I'm working.

[00:12:07] BB: And again, because you read every single email. In the last maybe a year, in 2021, did anything this long in depth ever come from a pitch?

[00:12:17] RB: Yes, actually.

[00:12:19] BB: Give us an example. Give us an example.

[00:12:20] RB: I wrote a story about these companies that we're selling artificial intelligence, like writing tools, and I can pull up the story now.

[00:12:31] BB: Okay, I'm looking at your list too.

[00:12:34] RB: We'll call it copy AI. That was one of it. Basically, these robots, these tools that companies were creating to write tweets, to write content to write Instagram captions. So basically, these companies don't or agencies don't really have to lean on copywriters anymore. And this is something that like, I feel like it's a technology that kind of existed.

And then when I got a pitch of one of them, I was like, "You know what, I've heard of this, I want to talk to you." I can't remember. I'm sorry. I don't remember what their specific email was. But it was basically like, we are an artificial intelligence copywriting machine. So, when you get something like that, it's like, "Okay, I'm curious about that." And then it turns out, there are several of them. So, I talk to all the companies and wrote it out. It was really interesting. But again, it was based on a specific tool that the industry was starting to adopt.

[00:13:30] BB: Okay, so that did convert to one of these pieces.

[00:13:36] RB: We're not the only company I spoke with, too.

[00:13:38] BB: Yes, of course. Because usually, I know, some people have told us on this podcast that they use pitches as kind of a little signal symbol, where a way I'm getting five pitches this week on X, maybe there's something going on with X, even though I otherwise

wasn't going to do anything. If I just saw one pitch. So, sometimes it's a trend piece that you kind of go, "Oh, wait a second. Something's going on."

[00:14:01] RB: If you can put your client within the context of a trend that is not like super obvious, like, "Okay, we have something to talk about like Superbowl or something."
"Investments are being made here, here, and here, here's an example of this, talk to my client."
But that will raise an eyebrow.

[00:14:20] BB: Okay, we talked some exclusives, Ryan, for just a quick second, and we know you want to do your own exclusives as in a scoop. Do you ever do anything with embargoes? Or what's your preference with those?

[00:14:31] RB: Yeah, I generally like, first of all, please do not send an email with the entire press release. And then at the bottom, say, "This is embargo until Friday." That's not how it works. Granted, I'm not going to write a story on that anyway. But that's not how it works. And if you're working in PR, you no better. You're all very smart people. But as far as embargoes, I'll say, "Hey, we have an embargo. Can you agree to it?" Yes, I will always say yes, because I'm very curious what's on the other side of that and we respect embargoes. Previously, our newsletter only went out three times a week, so it could be a little pricey to be like, "Oh, okay, well, we don't have a newsletter." It'll come out on Friday, not Thursday. Now, we're five times a week, so that's less of a concern.

[00:15:15] BB: Okay. Yeah, because you're –

[00:15:17] RB: Yeah, I accept and respect embargo, and it's always funny when embargo is lifted, and 10 writers all wrote the same story. That's always fun.

[00:15:25] BB: Yeah. Does that piss you off?

[00:15:28] RB: No. I mean, it's just kind of a nature of the business. I would hope that each 10 reporter has their own unique spin on something. I will say, I'm not that original and creative. But think Morning Brew, we get the flexibility to have fun. So, I would hope, obviously, the reporters

that the Associated Press are complete bad asses. But I would hope Morning Brew, voice is exciting enough.

[00:15:59] BB: Ryan, are you reading, listening to, streaming, frankly, anything we'll take as we get all our ideas from here, any stories that you're loving right now that we can also love and explore?

[00:16:10] RB: Any stories that I'm loving that I can explore.

[00:16:11] BB: Yeah, books, Netflix, Broadway show? We don't care. What you got?

[00:16:18] RB: I'm watching this show called, and I can't get any of my friends to watch it, but it's called South Side. It's on HBO, HBO Max.

[00:16:25] BB: I love everything.

[00:16:26] RB: Yeah, no one knows about this. It was one of the funniest shows I've seen all year. But it's a comedy. It's not a deep dive investigative story.

[00:16:35] BB: But sometimes you need a break, though. I love some of this.

[00:16:38] RB: It is so freaking funny. It's about southside of Chicago and it is absolutely hilarious.

[00:16:45] BB: I love it. Okay, I'm adding it to my HBO list right now. Okay, perfect. What else you got, anything else?

[00:16:50] RB: I just read this book by Jay Caspian Kang. It's called *The Loneliest Americans*. I think, J. Kang, who's now at the New York Times previously, I think it was like kind of freelancing for a while. I think he's the best like living writer in the country. He's a columnist for the New York Times. His story is kind of about Asian Americans and why their experience is kind of under – maybe not under reported, but kind of it stands for a million different things and doesn't stand for

anything. So, just a really, really fascinating book. I think. Jay is like literally the best writer alive right now.

[00:17:29] BB: Interesting. This book, it just came out. It just came out in November. And we have a BAM book jam. We call it in my agency. So, we're going to hit this person up. We always love our authors who are reporters too. I love the title here on the publisher summary, a riveting blend of family history and original reportage that explores and reimagines Asian American identity in a black and white world. Named one of the best books of the year in NPR.

[00:17:57] RB: It was fantastic. I listen to Jay's podcast too, which is also great, Time To Say Goodbye, fantastic.

[00:18:05] BB: Do you know Jay, personally? Should I hit you up so we can –

[00:18:09] RB: No. No, I do not.

[00:18:11] BB: Okay, I'm going to add this to my card. When we get it scheduled, I'll invite you to our chat that we have with the author's once a month, or once a quarter after we read the book.

[00:18:21] RB: Sure. They're the same thing I'm saying here, which is a great book.

[00:18:25] BB: I love it. Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

[00:18:27] RB: No, I don't think so. I think that's – I read the New York Mag, and the New Yorker, and I try to read everything, but I usually can't.

[00:18:34] BB: I know. That's the problem with today. I also feel that what a timing, I don't know, I'm a kid from late '80s. So, I don't know, there were very limited things back then. But it's like, there's so much great content, visually, TV, all the things right now. How do you keep – it's hard. It's hard. I love it. What a joy to be alive right now for storytelling.

[00:19:00] RB: Yes, it is fun. I feel very lucky and I've worked in a lot of different newsrooms, and I feel very lucky to get to do this. It is absolutely a privilege and I try to think – I try to remind myself that every day.

[00:19:13] BB: You might have just teed up then the last question for today, Ryan, which is what do you think the future of journalism looks like?

[00:19:21] RB: That's a good question. I guess, I don't know, everyone has already said newsletters. That's kind of cliché considering our work at Morning Brew. I don't know what the future of journalism is. I'm not super optimistic considering the backbone of journalism in the place that the New York Times, The Washington Post's hired from was relatively local journalism outlets which no longer exists in the same way. So, not super optimistic there. I used to work at – I was a fellow at the Center for Public Integrity, which was a nonprofit investigative newsroom. Run obviously, by you know, it was a nonprofit. So, it was all grants.

Unfortunately, it seems like the future of journalism is going to be something more akin to a nonprofit. I hope that's in like 50 years, or 100 years. Although, I think that's like unfortunately. But CBS and NBC, they're always going to be around. The New York Times is always going to be the greatest paper in the world. So yeah, I mean, I'm just kind of not optimistic from small players, but it seems like everyone else is going to do okay. Fingers crossed.

[00:20:34] BB: Yet to see, but at least you're writing a very popular newsletter right now that I hope everyone listening to is going to sign up for because it is fun and lighter and has a twist in his context, and it is a great newsletter. So, Ryan, thanks for –

[00:20:49] RB: Thank you so much.

[00:20:50] BB: Yeah, you are welcome. Thank you for doing this with us today, too. It's been just a joy, way to kick off the new year, drinking our teas and coffees, and hopefully I'll be in New York soon again. I'm looking forward to it.

[00:21:01] RB: Yeah, thank you so much for your time. I really, really appreciate it. Marketing Brew, subscribe. I promise you, there will at least be five jokes, and there will be even better stories. So, just please, I think we have a really fun time and it's a fun read.

[00:21:16] BB: There we go.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:21:17] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening in to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Ryan Barwick from Morning Brew. If you enjoy listening to our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts and anywhere else you listen to podcasts. If you have a moment, please leave us a review to share your thoughts about the show and today's guest.

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[END]