

EPISODE 128

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist brought to you by OnePitch. The guests on our show include some of the most notable journalists from the top US-based publications who cover topics including technology, lifestyle and culture, health, science, consumer products, business news, and beauty and wellness. 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 our new video series, featuring journalists from the show.

Our guest today on Coffee with a Journalist is Devindra Hardawar, a Senior Editor for Engadget. Devindra covers product reviews, analysis, and New York City's burgeoning tech scene. He is also a part-time film critic and co-host on one of the longest running movie podcasts online, The Filmcast. During the episode, Devindra talks about his preference for personalized pitches, his thoughts on exclusives and embargoes, the many things he's doing outside of writing stories, and more. Let's hear from Devindra now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:19] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, and we're here to help publicists, communicators learn better, understand more about how to work with our wonderful journalists and media friends. We all need each other in this working relationship of PR and media. So this show is for you to understand that better, and so we feature wonderful reporters, media editors, freelancers on here to detail what makes them open pitches, respond, and work better with their publicist.

I run an agency named BAM that works with all venture-backed companies, doing crazy great things. I also started OnePitch to solve this better relationship building issue that I think conflicts media and publicists on and on and on. So we're here to solve that today and overarchingly.

With us today, I'm very excited, especially for tech nerds. If you like some stuff, gamers, this is for you. We have the Senior Editor of Engadget with us, Devindra Hardawar. He is here, answering all of our questions and coming from – Devindra, where are you coming from right now? Atlanta-ish you say on your Twitter.

[00:02:23] DH: I'm coming from Atlanta-ish, yeah. Peachtree Corners, which is a suburb outside of Atlanta. Yeah.

[00:02:28] BB: Okay. Okay. A New York person at heart, though. I see.

[00:02:32] DH: Yeah, yeah.

[00:02:32] BB: Okay. Me too. Well, thank you for being here. Let's first start with an overview of Engadget. Especially if people haven't been on it in a while, there's quite a lot of sections on there. How would you describe it?

[00:02:44] DH: Sure. Engadget is a technology blog. We're one of the first to tech blogs back in the day I believe at Weblogs Inc. So Engadget has been around for a while, and we used to be about every single little bit of news about new phones and computers and everything. We still do that. But now, we are taking a deeper look at how the tech affects us as people, how we live with it. We cover entertainment. We cover environmental news. We cover tech health, biotech news as well, and cars as well. So we're doing all sorts of stuff. But really, it is about technology and how it intersects with humanity.

[00:03:18] BB: I encourage everyone to take a look at the multiple tabs that are now on there. Always good to see. Okay, Devindra, what does your inbox look like?

[00:03:27] DH: Oh, hell, probably. That's my inbox. I definitely do not understand inbox zero people because my philosophy of email is basically you always have mail. Like there's no need to put on the email notifications because you'll always have mail. So I always have mail coming in, especially my work inbox. My personal inbox is something I barely even take a look at.

The thing that's been the most helpful to me is Gmail is important. It's sort of like a filter. If you mark emails as important, it's sort of like learns the sort of emails that will be more important to you over time, and that sort of helps like filter out from the crap. So that is my main thing. I never – I will clear my important folders. I try to keep that clear, at least once a week or so. But my overall inbox I'll never clear because it's just pointless.

[00:04:12] BB: Yeah. It's just pointless. You know what? I almost want to have a conference for all the media now that I have interviewed for this show because there are two schools of thought and then a random empty zone that two schools are the absolute zero people of which is rare, insane. Then the 250,000 unread and you just let it ride people. Are you more in that camp?

[00:04:33] DH: It's the only way to go because there's just too much. There's too much to deal with. You have to just let it ride. Otherwise, I'll be selecting all and mark as read everything.

[00:04:43] BB: Wow. Well, I appreciate the honesty that always comes on this show. Okay. So now, you're using kind of that Gmail feature that's kind of tagging up the important stuff. But what do you do with the pitches that come in? Do you open everyone? Do you let them ride unread? Do you file them? Do you flag them?

[00:05:01] DH: Yeah. I try to in the morning, in the afternoon, maybe sometimes at night. I try to like go through my important folders, and I do have some like my favorite sources and stuff and favorite companies I have filtered so that they always hit the important folder. So, really, that is the thing I tend to look at. I just hop in there, and I use the keyboard shortcuts to kind of clear through them.

If I have way too many, if I've been away for a couple of days or something, or if it's been like over the weekend, I just scan the subject lines and may just do a mass that mark as read. I don't open them because, yeah, I either know you, or I can tell from the subject if it's important to me. As majority of things, I can just like clear and not even touch and that makes my life easier. Yeah.

[00:05:38] BB: There you go. Okay. We touched upon it a little bit on the video series that we did. So I want everyone check that out. But if you had to say the three elements of a pitch that you go, "Damn, that's a good pitch," what would those be?

[00:05:51] DH: Key words. A pitch that is directly related to something I like and I cover. I think those are the strongest ones. Something that tells me, "Hey, this is an important company or something coming from an important person or something new from a person who used to work at a major company," something like that, like very clear, concise pitches with, "Hey. Also, this is an exclusive for you specifically." The more somebody can personalize a pitch I think makes it the better for me. Yeah.

[00:06:17] BB: Yes, yes, yes. Okay. Is there a subject line you've seen lately that you're like, "Oh, I loved it."? Immediate open.

[00:06:26] DH: Immediate open. Probably like, yeah, exclusive news from former Apple executives, something like that. Like, yeah, yeah, yeah. I've had something like that recently, and that's helpful. They at least tells me, "Okay, I should prioritize this."

[00:06:38] BB: Exclusives versus embargoes, how do you feel about such?

[00:06:42] DH: I mean, honestly, I wish the world were more fair, and everybody just kind of had a way to get the news. I don't mind embargoes because I think that's the fairest way to get news out there. But if I'm working with a company, and I really know them, and I ask for an exclusive or the PR person offers an exclusive, I'll certainly look at that. Those are always a good thing. It's not something I prioritize too much because those stories tend to almost feel like PR in themselves sometimes.

[00:07:07] BB: Yeah, yeah. They can be lower quality, for sure.

[BREAK]

[00:07:12] ANNOUNCER: Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to see the unique ways OnePitch helps PR professionals and

marketers pitch journalists? Head to onepitch.co to learn about our new OnePitch score and see how easy it is to find the right journalists to pitch your news to. Sign up for your free account today. Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[00:07:36] BB: You mentioned on our video series about you want a week heads up. You're planning a lot of things in advance, and you're an editor too. So I'm sure that planning is more robust. What is it about the week that gives you enough time? Or maybe walk us through a little bit of why that is? Why do you need that lead time to do a good job on a story?

[00:07:55] DH: Basically, like my schedule is just like a Lego blocks. It's a Lego blocks of stories upcoming and news hitting and podcasts I have to plan, things I have to plan. So it is just like if I need to fit something new into that Tetris puzzle, I need to be able to move other things. So that's the key. I know that's not always possible. Sometimes, companies just have like, "Hey, hey. This is being announced tomorrow." That's fine if I know you or I know your company or if it's within my beat, and you're just like, "Hey, we have this news coming in hot." That's totally understandable too.

But if you're a new company, if you're kind of launching something from scratch, I need time to prep a story, talk to you ideally, test out a product. That all takes time. Also, I'll probably need to move other things around too. Yeah.

[00:08:37] BB: To accommodate that. So you better really know or have a relationship with you if you're bumping some other stories I imagine.

[00:08:42] DH: Exactly. Yeah.

[00:08:43] BB: Okay. How do you go about selecting the stories you do? For example, you got best laptops for gaming and working piece that was just published. You have some budget TV stuff. You've got those breaking news people. You have the Axie Infinity tied to LinkedIn job. Like you have a wide scope that you do. How do you sort through? Does it come from pitches?

[00:09:06] DH: I mean, not always. Like the way we work too. Some of the guides, I do the product guides. That kind of comes from our commerce side. So we kind of plan out those things in advance. Some of those were written like last month or months ago, and now they're just going up. We also have news shifts once a week, where I just go in and like I just hit breaking news. So that's like whatever pops up, I'll go in. So that's where the Axie Infinity thing came from.

Then the main things I take are just like, hey, product review pitches. I do a lot of laptop reviews. I do a lot of like gaming hardware and PC hardware and things like that. So the pitch is, "Hey, this new –" I'm just thinking of like Apple's thing, right? Apple's dropping some new laptops, and I just wiped my desk clean. I clear out everything. I make time. I got to focus on those.

But if it's like a particular system from Dell or Asus or some other company, then I have to look at like, "Is it interesting? Is it new? Or are you doing something. Should I be doing this? Should somebody else on the team be doing this?" There's a lot of stuff that goes into that.

[00:09:59] BB: That's good to know. Now, you mentioned something here about like going on the news desk. I know like some people, like you do shifts and like, "Oh, breaking news. You got to be on the desk." Do you do that too at Engadget? Someone's like, "All right, you got a 10-hour shift. Sit there."?

[00:10:11] DH: Yeah. It's not that long, thankfully. It's only like three hours for us and it's once –

[00:10:14] BB: Oh, that's good.

[00:10:16] DH: Yeah. It's once a week. But sometimes, it's a lot of stuff that you have to write at once at times. I cut my teeth on breaking news when I started in tech journalism, like over a decade ago. So I'm totally used to that pace. It's just not something I want to do all the time. My favorite stories are the ones where I can take that week, take that time to sit back and write a really good story, an original story. Yeah.

[00:10:37] **BB:** Okay. Good to know. What are you reading right now or watching or consuming? Obviously, you do a lot of podcasts, Devindra. But we always like to ask like what other stories are you consuming?

[00:10:47] **DH:** What other stories? I mean, I'm doing a lot of stuff. I also do other podcasts. I've been doing a movie and TV review podcasts since 2008. So I'm always watching stuff.

[00:10:56] **BB:** It's been a while. It's been a while. Yeah.

[00:10:57] **DH:** Yeah. I've done a lot of podcasts. So I'm watching Tuca & Bertie right now, which is a great animated show that the new season just hit HBO Max. I'm really enjoying that. I'm watching Ms. Marvel on Disney+. I wish I had more time to –

[00:11:09] **BB:** How is that?

[00:11:10] **DH:** It's great. It's fantastic. I feel bad when people ask me about what am I reading because that's the one thing where it's like I spend my whole day reading kind of. So I need to find more time for nonfiction stuff. But I have the new book from Jeff VanderMeer here, so that's something I'll be diving into soon. I try to go to science fiction or just something kind of fun when I can.

[00:11:31] **BB:** Yeah. I feel you. That's why I have now expanded the question to listening, watching, walking by and reading a billboard. Hey, we'll take that, like whatever it is. Because, my God, when you sit in front of the computer all day, and you're writing, and you're typing, and you're reading what's on there, maybe your cup in this is dry for appetite of reading anything else in words. So there you go. Well, that's good.

Okay. So you've been long in the podcast game, as we know. You've been long a bit, Devindra – You were in VentureBeat. You've been Slash Film. You've been doing that. It's been a while. What do you think the future of journalism looks like?

[00:12:10] **DH:** I mean, how depressing do you want to get right now because –

[00:12:13] BB: Whatever you want to do.

[00:12:14] DH: Things are not looking great for journalism, in general. We're seeing consolidation of a lot of outlets under private equity brands, I believe. Yeah, Yahoo, my parent company, is now a private equity company. Thankfully, they're treating us well. But I know I have a lot of colleagues elsewhere, working for many other outlets, where they're dealing with things like staffing issues or layoffs or not having enough budget to actually do their jobs effectively.

I think there's a deep relationship. There is something we have to figure out for journalism because online journalism has relied on ads for so long and some events and stuff too. They used to do that at VentureBeat, and they still do. But the revenue is tough, and it seems like the only way to survive as a media company now is to basically have a benevolent rich person as your owner. Not everybody can afford that. Not everybody can have that or be like a long standing thing like the Times. It's just really hard, and I hope we can find some sort of solutions.

I'm really into the newsletters that some journalists are doing. Less so into Substack as a company, but journalists being able to do their own thing I think is a very, very good thing. So Patreon and things like that are a great way to like support individual journalists. I have one too for my movie podcast, so it's great. Those are good things to have. It's just the industry as a whole is in trouble, and I hope we figure out some way to keep it going.

[00:13:29] BB: I agree. Well, Devindra, I hope you're fabulous podcasts on films and all things tech and gadget because it's great continues and prevails.

[00:13:39] DH: Thank you.

[00:13:39] BB: I could tell you I really love it. I could tell you, yeah, it's so great. I listen to your podcasts too. By the way, do you want to throw in a plug?

[00:13:45] DH: Sure. I mean, a whole bunch of plugs. At Engadget, we're doing the Engadget Podcast. So I co-host that with my colleague, Cherlynn Low. We do that weekly. So you can go check that out and subscribe to that. For movies and TV, I do the Film Cast at the filmcast.com.

So, yeah, if anybody has any – If you want any viewing suggestions or you want to dive into the latest movies and TV shows, I do that. I've been doing that forever. So check that out.

[00:14:08] BB: What's your favorite must watch movie right now?

[00:14:11] DH: Must watch movie right now? I'm trying to think. I'm trying to think. Like Everything Everywhere All at Once is the movie that is –

[00:14:16] BB: Oh, my god. Is that not brilliant?

[00:14:18] DH: Yeah. Probably going to be my favorite movie of the year so far. It is definitely my favorite at this moment. So incredible film that hits on many different layers and kind of has everything I love about movies and filmmaking in it. And it stars As Michelle Yeoh, who I also love, so yeah.

[00:14:33] BB: Plus one, plus, plus, plus, plus, plus. Fantastic and I love that. Thanks for the plug.

[00:14:38] DH: Thank you.

[00:14:38] BB: Devindra, thank you so much for being here. Devindra Hardawar, he's the Senior Editor at Engadget. Check it out. Check out that film, and check out his blog and his podcast and all the great stuff you're writing. Thanks for being here.

[00:14:50] DH: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:14:52] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Devindra Hardawar from Engadget. If you enjoy listening to our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and anywhere else you listen to podcasts. And if you have a moment, please leave us a review to share your thoughts about the show and today's guest. To learn more about the latest tools on OnePitch and to subscribe to

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[END]