

EPISODE 143

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist brought to you by OnePitch. The guests on our show includes some of the most notable journalists write about topics ranging from technology to lifestyle and culture, health, and science. We discuss the types of stories they cover, their thoughts on exclusives and embargoes, their favorite pitches 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.

Today on the podcast, we're joined by Emma Kershaw. Emma is a contributor to PEOPLE Magazine, along with being a contributor to Cosmopolitan, Apartment Therapy, BuzzFeed, and other publications. During the episode, Emma starts by talking about what it's like to pitch articles as a contributor, weeding through trend pitches in her inbox, why it's important to share all the details about new products before they launch and more. Let's hear from Emma now.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:01:15] BB: Welcome, everyone. I am Beck Bamberger, and this is Coffee with a Journalist. Hopefully, you're a publicist wanting to hear about journalists, because that's what we do here. Today, we have Emma Kershaw. She is a contributor to PEOPLE, Cosmopolitan, BuzzFeed Apartment Therapy to name a few. I'm so excited to have you, Emma. Welcome.

[0:01:36] EK: Thank you for having me. It's such a pleasure to be here.

[0:01:39] BB: Yes. Where are you right now in the world, by the way?

[0:01:42] EK: I'm in Manchester in England. About three hours from London.

[0:01:46] BB: Fabulous. Okay, I can hear the English accent. Exciting times in England, I'm sure we could get into, but we're going to we're going to get into that. We're going to talk about

your inbox and pitches and all this great stuff. Emma, for you, let's just go right into it. How is your inbox in terms of pitches?

[0:02:05] EK: Well, at the minute, it is so chaotic. I'm trying to keep on top of them, but there's just so many every day. At the minute, there's a lot of holiday gift guides, a lot of Taylor Swift solace with the new album coming out.

[0:02:21] BB: Yes, yes.

[0:02:22] EK: A lot of holiday decor stuff.

[0:02:24] BB: Okay. Oh, decoration stuff. Okay. Got it. Because you are a contributor to various publications, are you getting pitches from publicists, and of course, then you're pitching also for your content to be in various publications?

[0:02:40] EK: Yeah. It is a good mix of both. I will get quite a few publicist pitches, and I will – if it's a good fit, I will be happy to pitch them out. Then, I will also be mindful to pitch my own ideas. Because when I first started out, it was mainly my own ideas. I don't want to lose that. Then I do enjoy pitching publicist's ideas, and especially if it's time – I love a good timely story.

[0:03:09] BB: What would you say the ratio is of you pitching, or using publicist pitches to aiding your pitches?

[0:03:16] EK: At the minute, I'd say, it's about 70% publicist pitches, theirs and my own. Yeah.

[0:03:23] BB: Very good.

[0:03:23] EK: I think, at this time of year as well, because there's so many holiday pitches, and Halloween and then Thanksgiving as well, which we don't have Thanksgiving over here, but because I contribute to so many American publications, it is on my radar and I'm always thinking about the American holidays that I wouldn't normally have to think about.

[0:03:43] BB: I never thought about that of being not based necessarily in America, but then dealing with all the pitches and all the holiday stuff that is in America and you got to focus on that. Learning something.

[0:03:53] EK: Yeah. Even that, like summer hours as well. A lot of the publications that are right for, they had summer hours. I think it was between – I would think of the whole day, which is the holiday in May.

[0:04:07] BB: May. Oh, Memorial Day? I was the most confused. Yes, go ahead. I think it's Memorial Day. Yes.

[0:04:12] EK: Between Memorial Day and Labor Day, it's summer hours. Then I've got to program my brain to not all I think of the time difference, but then think that people are going to finish work at 1 p.m. on a Friday. That does impact my own pitching with the time difference.

[0:04:30] BB: The summer hours. Wow, I didn't know that there's summer hours necessarily in newsrooms. Probably not breaking news necessarily places, but I imagine in more the publications you're working with.

[0:04:44] EK: Yeah, definitely. I think, more lifestyle publications and entertainment publications. Like you said, as opposed to hard news.

[0:04:53] BB: Because your breadth of content is so wide, Emma, and this is a show listened to by publicists, what are pitches you want to get?

[0:05:04] EK: I do love, like I said, a timely pitch. A lot of the content that I cover is trend related. Whether it's interior design trends, or a celebrity trend, or a TikTok trend. With those type of pitches, they will come from publicists mainly.

[0:05:24] BB: Oh, and they will come from publicists. Okay, so that's good. Celebrity trend. Then opposite side of the question, what do you not want to get that's a pet peeve of yours that you keep getting, perhaps?

[0:05:36] EK: I keep getting a lot of NFT pictures.

[0:05:39] BB: Really?

[0:05:41] EK: Yeah. I'm not even too sure what that is. That is a difficult one to navigate, because I've never covered an NFT.

[0:05:50] BB: You must just be on some horrible list.

[0:05:52] EK: Yeah, yeah. Then at one point, I did get a lot of politics pitches, most specifically, US politics, and I've never ever covered politics before.

[0:06:03] BB: Yeah. No. Emma, for you, what's a good pitch look like? Maybe, what are even the elements of a good pitch?

[0:06:11] EK: Okay, so with the elements of a pitch, well, I've mentioned this before. Timely. Because I do work on mainly trends and stuff like that. Then with a good pitch, I always say, it needs to have the basics of the company, or the product. It sounds so simple, but I found that some publicists won't put that in, because I think they'll automatically assume that you know what it is. I think from my perspective as well, being in a different country, if it's a US specific product, then I do need a bit more background information, because some websites, even some of the big ones like Home Depot, I can't get on that website, because it must be location specific.

[0:06:59] BB: Oh, really.

[0:07:01] EK: Yeah.

[0:07:01] BB: Oh, I never thought about that. Oh, okay.

[0:07:05] EK: If you send me a Home Depot product, say, someone's pitch, then I'll need the information and I'll need that all in the email, because I can't click out and look on the website myself, because I can't get on it.

[0:07:17] BB: Another song of that.

[0:07:19] EK: It's trying to jump through hoops a few times with the differences, but I make it work as best as I can.

[0:07:27] BB: For you, especially with so many consumer trend pieces that you cover, what's the best way for publicists to give you the assets, the imagery and so forth?

[0:07:38] EK: Usually, so in an email, I always like it when it comes to a Dropbox link.

[0:07:43] BB: Okay. You like Dropbox.

[0:07:45] EK: Yeah. Then with the Dropbox link, not a zip file. Because it's so hard –

[0:07:50] BB: Not a zip file. Okay.

[0:07:51] EK: - to dealing with all that. It's easy when it's all individually laid out. Then also, this is another simple thing as well, but with the imagery to have the credit included, and for me not to have to go back and ask for the credit, because if it's a timely quick story that I need to be writing up that day and say that I'm writing it in the morning, my time and then, I don't know, say it's PST time and the publicist is asleep, then I can't get that credit. It needs to be included and ready.

[0:08:25] BB: Yeah. Now included on the actual file name itself, or just somewhere, anywhere that you can reference easily. I know what you're exactly talking about.

[0:08:33] EK: Yeah. Anywhere that I can reference it easily, really, because that is one of the main things with the imagery, and it's a very important thing to have them. When it's not included easily, then it is more work for me to go back and ask for that. Yeah, it becomes a whole thing sometimes.

[0:08:52] BB: Yeah, especially with the time zones and stuff. Okay, give the credit image for all your images upfront, easily into Dropbox. No zip files, basically.

[0:09:01] EK: No zip files.

[0:09:03] BB: No zip files. Okay. Now Emma, we went over this, but I want to loop back on this with just all the pitches you do get and then of course, the pitches you're sending to the publications as a contributor. Do you have a way in which you organize pitches that come in to you?

[0:09:18] EK: I do have a spreadsheet, because I'm such a typical Virgo. I'm obsessed. Everything is organized and key coded and color coded.

[0:09:27] BB: Wait. On a spreadsheet, though?

[0:09:30] EK: Yeah.

[0:09:30] BB: Wow. Wait a second. What does this spreadsheet look like? Oh, I've never heard this before.

[0:09:36] EK: Let me get it up.

[0:09:37] BB: Oh, yes. Let's talk about this.

[MESSAGE]

[0:09:41] 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 journalist to pitch your news to. Sign up for your free account today. Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:10:05] BB: Describe, describe, of course.

[0:10:07] EK: Okay. I do have two tabs. I'll have a tab where it's purposes pitches, and then my own ideas. The purposes pitches, it will start with the working title to send it when they send it. Then I'll list the publications that I want to send it out to. Then the date that I sent it. Then I've got three tabs, like follow up one, follow up two, follow up three. Then the outcome.

[0:10:35] BB: Okay. Well, that's very Virgo of you. You're on it. On it. Okay, so if you get a pitch and you're like, "Nah," this NFT, or whatever, do you just delete? You don't save them for any reason?

[0:10:48] EK: No. I won't save them. At the beginning, I did try to reply to every single email.

[0:10:53] BB: Oh, gosh. No.

[0:10:55] EK: I always say, you probably know yourself. If you reply to every single email, it can be sat there for three hours, and then you refresh the page. It'll be the same amount and more. Do you have to be picky with who I reply to? Yeah, it's not a personal thing. I think, I need to tell myself that people won't take it personally, if I'm not going to reply.

[0:11:18] BB: I think that's a pretty known thing in the land of publicists. No reply is definitely not a personal thing, because I think all of us just know, there's just the sheer volume that we're competing against. In an opposite way, what a delight when we do get a response.

[0:11:37] EK: Yeah. An NF T pitch, that will just be a no reply. No way. Then one that will work, but not necessarily for now. Like, I might not reply now, but then you could get a reply in a month, two months, three months, because it could be relevant further down the line. I will keep it on the back burner.

[0:12:01] BB: And you will keep it on your spreadsheet.

[0:12:02] EK: Yeah, on the spreadsheet.

[0:12:04] BB: See. That's spreadsheet. You get on the sheet. That's good news. Okay. I love it. Emma, let me play with you this fill in the blank, if I may. I have some phrases, and then you can just fill it in. Does that sound good?

[0:12:19] EK: That sounds good.

[0:12:20] BB: Here we go. My favorite source is always –

[0:12:24] EK: Reply by the deadline. That is such a simple thing as well. Say, if you put out a journal request, and you'll say, "My deadline is the 30th of October," for example. You could get an email on the 2nd of November with someone wanting to be included, but you've already filed a piece.

[0:12:46] BB: Yeah. What are you doing?

[0:12:46] EK: Just a simple thing. Yeah.

[0:12:49] BB: Yeah. I wonder if people think, "Oh, well, their deadline isn't hard, or what?" I don't know. It doesn't matter. Okay. You'll never get a response from me if –

[0:12:57] EK: You got my name wrong. That is a big one.

[0:13:00] BB: Really? What do people say?

[0:13:01] EK: Okay, so I get Emily a lot, which –

[0:13:04] BB: Okay. Emily.

[0:13:06] EK: Is it pretty similar. The other day, someone called me Jack.

[0:13:11] BB: Really? No. Totally wrong. Nothing. Nothing.

[0:13:16] EK: Yeah. It's nowhere near.

[0:13:18] BB: Oh, yeah. Okay, that's bad. Getting your name right. Okay. You can follow up with me if –

[0:13:23] EK: I'd say, if I've not replied in five days.

[0:13:28] BB: Okay, five days. The appropriate amount of lead time for a story is?

[0:13:35] EK: I'd say, that one varies a lot, just because I'm writing for such a wide variety of publications and –

[0:13:41] BB: True, true.

[0:13:43] EK: Evergreen stuff. More timely things. To give a rough timeframe, I'd say, anything between two days and two weeks.

[0:13:52] BB: Okay, two days, two weeks, the whole range. That's good to know. May be hard to answer question here. My favorite stories to write are –

[0:14:01] EK: Everything. Everything. Lifestyle.

[0:14:06] BB: Especially it looks like, if it's about relationship timelines for celebrities, for example. That seems like it's one of your hot takes as of late.

[0:14:14] EK: I love the relationship timeline at the minute.

[0:14:18] BB: We saw this, too.

[0:14:19] EK: It's nice to be able to delve deeper into that and do my own research and learn things that I didn't necessarily know before while I'm writing these.

[0:14:28] BB: It must be super fun. Okay, Emma, besides all the celebrity stuff that you must consume on the daily, what do you listen to, read, watch other stories that you consume and you love, especially right now?

[0:14:45] EK: At the minute, I'm in a bit of a reading slump. I do try and read a lot. Usually, it's non-fiction in the morning, fiction in the night, but I'm in a reading slump.

[0:14:55] BB: Non-fiction in the morning, fiction in the night. Okay, I like it.

[0:14:59] EK: It's very specific. I've recently read *The Miracle Morning Routine*.

[0:15:05] BB: *The Miracle Morning Routine*? Magnificent. Yeah. *Miracle Morning Routine*. Okay.

[0:15:11] EK: It gives you various different steps of how to enhance your life and enhance your mentality and just feel better and get your day off to a good start. It'll be exercise, meditation, reading, sitting in silence. I do try and incorporate that and especially with the pandemic and with me, I've got my own set routine, necessarily because I'm working on mainly American hours. When I didn't get out, I will try and incorporate this miracle routine to set myself up for a good start.

[0:15:45] BB: Oh, okay. Wait is the author Hal Elrod?

[0:15:50] EK: Yes. Yes, that's right.

[0:15:51] BB: Okay. Okay. Wait, and it's six-minute miracle for busy people. Oh, look at that. I'm so into this. Silence, affirmations, visualization, exercise, reading, scribing. Life savers, as he says. Oh, this is a handy little thing. Okay. Emma, so great. What else? This is immediately helpful.

[0:16:15] EK: Okay, so my new thing in the evening now, now it's getting colder, is having a bubble bath and putting on a TED Talk. I mean, motivational TED Talk.

[0:16:29] BB: Emma, I want to be in England with you right now being like, “Is it time for our bath, and our TED talk?” I just love this. I love this. Then let me ask you, how do you curate your TED Talks? You just go on the website and you're like, “Okay, let me scroll through”? Or are you looking for some influencer who posted something?

[0:16:46] EK: No. I'll literally just go on YouTube and I'll scroll down. Oh, that is how I'm feeling today and I'll put it on. Last night, it was about failures and how to turn your failures into success and how to reprogram your brain to not get down on the bad things.

[0:17:05] BB: Yeah. I love that thing.

[0:17:05] EK: Because we do tend to do this.

[0:17:07] BB: Yeah. There's a lot of bad things out there. By going, Wow, Emma. I love this. Fiction in the morning, or excuse me. Non-fiction in the morning, fiction in the evening, possibly TED Talk, bubble bath. Love it. Love it. This is so good. Emma, just to close this out here, what do you think the future of journalism looks like?

[0:17:33] EK: I'm thinking that we're definitely heading towards a more just digital news, digital journalism, all of that stuff. It's been coming for a long time. Now even more so with a lot of magazines cutting the print issues and going online only. I think, it's only going to expand and gear more towards a digital world. I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing, because there are so many opportunities with being digital. I think, we've seen that in the pandemic, especially in journalism, and me being able to do it from home and write for these outlets, based in London, based in New York, based in LA and still be able to do it, then yeah.

[0:18:18] BB: Just digital. Digital all the way. Don't be afraid of it, necessarily. Except if you can't click the damn Home Depot link, if you're in another country. What is that?

[0:18:30] EK: Yeah. That is a driving big issue.

[0:18:33] BB: Yeah. Emma, until today, I never thought about that, of websites not viewable to a journalist just based in another country. Of course, that's a total reality. Wow.

[0:18:45] EK: Yeah. It does make it difficult sometimes. I could sit here and name quite a few that I can get on and I've got to work my way around it. I've even had had times when I've had to get the publicist to go on the website and screenshot it, so I can see what they say.

[0:19:04] BB: Wow. Yeah, fascinating. I never thought about that. Well, Emma Kershaw, thank you for being on today. Emma is a contributor to lots of publications. Check it out. PEOPLE, Cosmopolitan, BuzzFeed, Apartment Therapy, to name a few. Emma, so great having you on, and I'm going to try the bubble bath, TED routine. I'm going to try it tonight.

[0:19:25] EK: Do it. It's life changing.

[0:19:27] BB: Cannot wait. Thank you, Emma.

[0:19:29] EK: Thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:19:31] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Emma Kershaw, contributor for PEOPLE Magazine. To learn more about the latest tools on OnePitch, and to subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter, head to our website at onepitch.co. We'll see you all next week with even more insights about the journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.

[END]