

**EPISODE 155**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER:** Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious how OnePitch can help you find relevant journalists to pitch, including guests on this podcast? Head to our website at [onepitch.co](https://onepitch.co) to learn more.

Today on the podcast, we had a chance to speak with Jay Peters, a news writer at The Verge. Jay covers breaking news in consumer technology, video games, entertainment, streaming, and more. He also writes about virtual worlds, the technologies that power them, and the companies trying to make the metaverse happen.

During the episode, Jay talks about the most useful pitches for him personally, lead time for embargoes, his thoughts on the future of the metaverse, and lots more. Let's hear from Jay now.

[INTERVIEW]

**[00:00:59] BB:** Welcome everyone, this is Coffee with a Journalist. Hopefully, you're a publicist wanting to hear about a journalist, because that's what we do here. I'm Beck Bamberger and with us today is Jay Peters. He's a news writer over at The Verge. Great technology outlet. We're going to talk all about it. Jay, thanks for being here.

**[00:01:18] JP:** Thanks for having me. I'm really excited to talk to you.

**[00:01:20] BB:** Yes. All the way from freezing cold, you said Oregon. I'm sorry. It's so cold out there.

**[00:01:26] JP:** It's actually been better this week. Last week was in like, I'd wake up and it'd be in the high 20s. So, we're in like the mid-40s.

**[00:01:34] BB:** In Oregon?

**[00:01:35] JP:** Yeah, it's been kind of cold.

**[00:01:38] BB:** Oh. That's so weird, because I'm a California kid. So, I'm like, Oregon. It's warm, right? So close.

**[00:01:46] JP:** It's usually warm. I grew up here and I don't ever remember it being this cold in the mornings, but maybe I've just forgotten it.

**[00:01:55] BB:** Wow. Okay. Jay, real quick, before we get into your inbox and all these things, what would you describe The Verge as?

**[00:02:04] JP:** The Verge is a consumer technology publication, but we cover a lot more than just gadgets and devices. We cover what is tech policy? And how is that affecting the decisions that companies are having to make? The ways they have to build their products. We cover science. We cover videogames. We cover a lot of things that cover technology, as well as what life may look like in the future. I love to be a part of it. I think it's really fascinating to write about this stuff all day.

**[00:02:37] BB:** I love when it's a journalist. It's like, "I love it. I'm here for it." Jay, how is your inbox?

**[00:02:44] JP:** My inbox is constantly a nightmare. But I've gotten very good at keeping it to a, we'll say, a manageable mess. I actually worked in public relations before coming to journalism.

**[00:02:55] BB:** Saw that. Yes, you made the shift.

**[00:02:58] JP:** I got really good at managing my inbox there. I do not quite inbox zero. It's usually like inbox five. But I found that to be a really good way for me to stay on top of things that come into my inbox every day, and make sure I'm focusing on the things that I actually need to be focusing on during the day.

**[00:03:18] BB:** Inbox five, that's a new one. How'd you land on five? It's just seems like not stressful? Because fives like, okay, it's under 10. That's good.

**[00:03:27] JP:** I like to make it zero if I can. But usually, I keep a few things in my inbox as like, this is a story I'm going to do an interview on in a day or two. And so, that way, I just keep the email right there for if I want to do some research, or if I need to send an email to that person for whatever reason. Keeping just a couple emails floating in there, that doesn't stress me out too much. It's when if it gets past like 20, then I start to panic a little bit.

**[00:03:56] BB:** Yeah. Okay. Ooh, another disciplined inbox person. It's a very wide frame of mind on this show of the let it ride people and then down to zero or at the five. That's a new one, as we were saying. Okay, Jay, what is a pitch that stands out to you from either the subject line or even the contents?

**[00:04:17] JP:** In my day to day work, I'm covering a lot of breaking news at The Verge. So, my general responsibility is to be writing things pretty quickly and get a few stories on the site every single day. So, that means the emails that are most useful for me, respect that urgency that I have to bring to my work every day. One that happened a week or two ago, it just said, "YouTube TV Exclusive", and that was a great one for me, and it was also sent to my colleague who eventually took the story.

But it was a great one for me, because I knew it was a company that we cared about at The Verge. They said it was an exclusive for us, from a company that we really care about. It was just those three words. So, I knew exactly what it was right on the tin. I'm on a Mac, and I just use Apple standard mail program. And so, I see most of my subject lines through the little notification that appears in the top right corner. If there are too many words that exceed far past that notification, and the important thing is at the end of that notification, I might not see it, and I might not care about it. So, this one was a great one, because I could see it all right there. I knew immediately that it's something that I need to be at least considering for The Verge, even though another colleague of mine ultimately ended up taking the story.

**[00:05:33] BB:** Let's talk about that for a second. I was just looking at a tweet of someone saying, "Hey, don't be pitching two, three, four, five, God knows how many people at the same

outlet, the same story. You all talk and everything.” Does that bother you? Or what's your opinion?

**[00:05:48] JP:** It doesn't necessarily bother me if I know other people are getting the same pitch I am. It's when maybe I respond. And I say, “We're going to pass on this one.” And a PR professional asks, “Can I pitch it to somebody else at the publication?” At least in my conversations that I have with my colleagues, the answer is –

**[00:06:08] BB:** No.

**[00:06:08] JP:** – almost always going to be no, because I've talked to other people at The Verge. And we've decided collectively that this is probably not one that we're deciding to cover. And so, I don't like when I have to then tell the person, “Please don't do that. We have already talked with amongst ourselves about this one.”

**[00:06:26] BB:** Yeah. Well, and it sounds like the critical word that you included in that is we, and still they go, “Oh, okay, I guess. That it is.”

**[00:06:37] JP:** Almost every potential new story that I get, I'm vetting in our Slack news room, which a bunch of people are watching at any given time. So, it's like, we come to these decisions, generally collectively. When I pass on something, I'm typically passing on it on behalf of the group.

**[00:06:56] BB:** On behalf of the outlets. Exactly. Exactly. Let's go back to that exclusive that you love so much. There seems to be a discrepancy between what is an exclusive, what is not. So, I'd love to hear your definition and what you feel about embargoes as well.

**[00:07:16] JP:** Exclusive, in my mind, is if you are offering an exclusive to myself or The Verge, then we will be the first ones to have that information ahead of time, and nobody else is going to publish the story at the same time we're publishing the story.

**[00:07:32] BB:** That's right.

**[00:07:33] JP:** That's my interpretation of exclusive. And I don't think I've ever run into people who abused that word. But that's how I would interpret it if somebody's offering me an exclusive. I would say in terms of embargoes, I'm very happy to get information under embargo. Again, my job is covering a really high volume of stuff. So, if I can see things in advance, that helps us as a newsroom, decide if it's something we want to cover, be on top of it for when the news is out. And that way, we're not chasing to follow, like write the news after the fact when there may already be a million other things that we're focusing on.

So, I'm always happy to consider embargoes. I'm not always going to write about embargoes. But it is very helpful to have information ahead of time when possible.

**[00:08:23] BB:** Okay, how far ahead of time, if you could?

**[00:08:26] JP:** Ideally, it's a few days out. We very commonly work with a day out. But that's not ideal. But there's also like, too long as well. If you give me two weeks to do an embargo, just I'm probably not going to get to it until a day or two before the news actually is supposed to come out just because there are things I got to focus on in the near term. So, I would say, maybe two or three days is the magic number. But I also get that there are external circumstances that sometimes mean, you have three hours until an embargo goes live, right? So, the most important thing is, if at all possible, give us time ahead of time, to be able to see the news and we'll do the best we can whenever that comes in.

**[00:09:14] BB:** You talked a little bit about that subject line, to have the exclusive mention, which is great. And then you're also on Apple. So, you're looking at the first couple lines and seeing specifically what it's about.

[MESSAGE]

**[00:09:25] 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]

**[00:09:50] BB:** Are there like three things you love to see in a subject line? Maybe two?

**[00:09:55] JP:** I mean, in the case, like people often put embargo or interview or kind of like a topic word at the very beginning of the subject line, that often helps me right away to know what the pitch is going to be about. I also appreciate knowing if it's about a company or a topic that I cover pretty regularly, because I'm going to click those things if they're about Apple, or Google, or Microsoft, or something in gaming, or virtual reality. Those are the kinds of things I'm going to click on probably a little bit sooner than other pitches that I'm not quite sure are going to fall within my beat, and may not immediately jump out as something that I need to figure out if I'm going to be writing it or somebody else is going to right away.

**[00:10:42] BB:** That's a good distinction, I think, for so many is like, what's the timeliness? If you see an exclusive, it's like, I'm going to open that real quick. If it's embargo, maybe I punt that. Help me out in the subject line to understand where to put this for my very limited time that I have, especially for breaking news people, such as yourself. Got you.

By the way, what do you love covering right now? Because you have a wide array. We know you love technology. But do you have something you're like, "Oh, I'm freaking loving." Anything Apple, Twitch, Echo? I mean, you got all types of stuff going on here.

**[00:11:14] JP:** Something I'm really starting to dig into is kind of virtual reality. And I hate to use this word, but metaverse stuff.

**[00:11:22] BB:** Yes, I know.

**[00:11:23] JP:** I don't like the word itself, because I feel like meta is kind of making it a thing. But what I think is more interesting is these virtual communities and social spaces where people hang out, they forge friendships, they play games together. There are all sorts of interesting virtual groups that kind of are starting to become more prominent now. And as companies like Meta, and there was reports that Apple is making their headset, it seems like there's going to be technology that continues to enable these virtual spaces.

So, I'm interested in learning more about not only the hardware that powers them, but what are the social dynamics or just interesting places to explore and hang out within these totally virtual worlds. That's something I'm really starting to dig into and really liking to learn about.

**[00:12:15] BB:** Okay. How are you feeling about these virtual worlds? Do you think this is going to really happen?

**[00:12:21] JP:** I don't think it's going to happen at the scale that maybe Meta or, yeah, Meta or perhaps Apple really want them to. I think, it's, you have to buy in many cases, really expensive hardware, you have to cover your face with a VR headset. You have to maybe buy an app or subscribe to an app. There are so many hurdles, in many cases, to being able to actually visit these virtual worlds, as opposed to you can just open your phone and go to Instagram or Facebook and find a group that way. That is a much lower barrier to entry and one that I think makes just more natural sense to a lot of people. So, I think, my guess is that these metaverse worlds will exist and continue to grow. But I don't think they'll – I don't think we're all going to be doing everything in our whole lives in virtual reality. That just does not seem what – to me, seem like our future.

**[00:13:15] BB:** We're not doing Ready Player One.

**[00:13:16] JP:** Yeah, we're not. I don't think so.

**[00:13:18] BB:** I hope not. Jeez, Jay.

**[00:13:21] JP:** That doesn't sound very fun to me, personally.

**[00:13:25] BB:** Doesn't to me. I will say the same. Okay. relationship building with you, Jay. If someone doesn't know you, is there any way for them to get to know you? Because do you have any preference in your opening of emails towards those you actually recognize?

**[00:13:42] JP:** I'll generally look at the subject line in the first couple sentences of every email that I get. So, if you're pitching me on a topic that is within my wheelhouse, based on other things I've written, or stuff that I tweet about, or posts about on The Verge, at least look at it. And if it's interesting to me, then I'll follow up with that person to maybe ask more questions, get some more detail about whatever the announcement or the potential tip is. I'm really open to learning more and talking with people. But that's only if it's on things that I think are really interesting or might be beneficial of my coverage at The Verge. I get people pitching me on a really wide array of stuff because I've written on a really wide array of stuff.

**[00:14:28] BB:** Yes. Kind of makes it hard.

**[00:14:29] JP:** But there are a lot of people who pitch me, who clearly have like really followed and read my work and understand where my interests are. And those, I'll definitely talk to those people who are reaching out to me.

**[00:14:41] BB:** Mm-hmm. Okay, this is good. Jay, we have a little rapid-fire question here.

**[00:14:46] JP:** Sure.

**[00:14:48] BB:** Yes or no on these things. So, are you ready?

**[00:14:50] JP:** Yes.

**[00:14:50] BB:** Video or phone interview?

**[00:14:53] JP:** Phone.

**[00:14:53] BB:** Yeah, phone has come back man. Phone is back. Bullet points or paragraphs?

[00:14:58] **JP:** I'm going to say short paragraphs.

[00:15:01] **BB:** Short. How short? Two sentence paragraphs?

[00:15:05] **JP:** I try not to make my paragraphs longer than three or four sentences, and I'm sure many people can find many examples of me breaking that own rule that I just said. But I try to keep pretty tight paragraphs in my own writing, and I guess that's what I like to read.

[00:15:21] **BB:** Okay. Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[00:15:24] **JP:** I'm going to say, images attached, if only because I'm often forwarding emails to other folks at The Verge, and it's often easier to make sure that things just get carried across from place to place by forwarding.

[00:15:41] **BB:** Yes. That's a good point. No one's brought that up before Thank you for clarifying. I would agree. It's way easier for that. "Oh, here's the link. Here's the thing."

[00:15:48] **JP:** Plus, with Dropbox or Google Drive, I find sometimes that there can be so much stuff that's just uploaded to a Google Drive or a Dropbox that I maybe get lost in a bunch of different folders.

[00:16:01] **BB:** Yeah, like, where is it.

[00:16:02] **JP:** We always appreciate having more information. But there sometimes can be a lot to sort through.

[00:16:08] **BB:** Mm-hmm. Pitches in the morning or at night?

[00:16:11] **JP:** I'm more of a morning person. I'm usually online and about eight o'clock in the morning Pacific time. And I really try my best not to check my work stuff after I sign off. So, pitch me in the morning is what I prefer.

[00:16:25] **BB:** Okay, email or Twitter DM?

**[00:16:27] JP:** Email, by far. My email is probably the best way to get in touch with me, because I'm keeping a pretty close eye on it during the day. I keep it pretty organized. I find that Twitter DM or Facebook DM, it's just more inboxes for me to manage. So, I really try and centralize it all into my email.

**[00:16:48] BB:** One follow up or multiple?

**[00:16:50] JP:** Just one I get. I get a lot of people who do multiple, multiple follow ups, and sometimes I legitimately do miss something. And typically, a one follow up will be enough for me to see that. And if it's interesting for me to say, "Oh, I'm sorry, I missed this", and continue the conversation from there. But you can assume if I don't get back to you after one follow up, then it's probably not something I'm going to reply to.

**[00:17:15] BB:** Mm-hmm. Direct or creative subject lines?

**[00:17:17] JP:** Direct, 100 times of 100. That's a personal preference through the volume of things that I might have to write in any given day, that just a super direct, straightforward subject line that tells me what it's going to be about. That makes my job much, much easier.

**[00:17:33] BB:** Mm-hmm. I could probably guess what the answer to this is, but press release or media kit?

**[00:17:39] JP:** Hmm. It kind of depends because some press releases give me all information that I need. And some media kits have information that I can take out to write a post as well. So, I'll say both, question mark. It's not a case by case basis for that one.

**[00:17:57] BB:** Okay, good to know. Do you, Jay, have anything you want to promote or plug? This is your time for us to hear about you bragging about your work, et cetera.

**[00:18:06] JP:** I appreciate when people read my stuff at The Verge. I'm really proud to be writing for The Verge and I think we do great work. So, the place I'm going to promote is the

place where I post the most stuff every day. So, just read us at The Verge. We really appreciate it.

**[00:18:20] BB:** Read us at The Verge. Not a paywall. Hey, plus, plus. Good to know. I really have to say, the branding, you will have the colors and so forth, like the dark background, I love it.

**[00:18:32] JP:** We did a big redesign last year, and I really like it. I'm a big fan of the way the site looks.

**[00:18:39] BB:** Yes, it is sharp. Jay, thank you so much for being here today. This was so fun. I hope we aren't ever in a metaverse situation where I have to look at you through goggles. And it's just great being here. Appreciate you.

**[00:18:53] JP:** Yeah. Thanks for having me. It was really fun to talk to you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[00:18:55] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist featuring Jay Peters from The Verge. For more exclusive insights about the journalists on this podcast, subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter at [onepitch.co/podcast](https://onepitch.co/podcast). 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.

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