

**EPISODE 179**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER:** Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, 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.

Our guests on today's episode is Colleen DeBaise, from The Story Exchange. Colleen is the Executive Editor at The Story Exchange, a publication dedicated to elevating women's voices along with being a podcast host and published author. During the episode, Colleen talks about her process of skimming pitch subject lines, an example of how a story took shape based on a press release, why she's excited for in-person events to return, and more. Let's hear from Colleen now.

[INTERVIEW]

**[00:01:01] BB:** Welcome everyone, this is Coffee with a Journalist, episode 167. We're getting up there. Wow. They have flown by. I am Beck Bamberger, your host on this wonderful show that we do. With us today, we have the executive editor of The Story Exchange, Colleen DeBaise. She is here coming. Where are you coming from today actually, Colleen? East Coast, right?

**[00:01:26] CDB:** Yes. I'm definitely on the East Coast. I am currently outside of New York City right now. Our office is in New York, but I'm working from home.

**[00:01:34] BB:** Wonderful. Well, thank you for being here, first off. We're happy you're here. Give us, Colleen, for those who are not as familiar, and I like to now do this for every single outlet, because we don't want to assume anything. How would you articulate what The Story Exchange covers?

**[00:01:49] CDB:** Oh, yes. That's a great question. Because we are, we're small, I like to say we're small but scrappy, because we have quite a few nice journalism awards. So, I'm happy

about that. But The Story Exchange is a small nonprofit media company, and we are focused pretty exclusively on women. We like to say we're dedicated to elevating women's voices, and we do that through our articles, also, our videos and we have a podcast as well.

**[00:02:19] BB:** Excellent. What's the podcast called, by the way?

**[00:02:22] CDB:** It's also called The Story Exchange.

**[00:02:23] BB:** There you go. Easy to find.

**[00:02:25] CDB:** We try to keep it easy.

**[00:02:28] BB:** Keeps everything easy. Okay. Colleen, how is your inbox?

**[00:02:33] CDB:** Let me tell you how many unread emails I have, 42,972.

**[00:02:41] BB:** Oh, God, you're one of the let it ride people. Yes.

**[00:02:44] CDB:** Yes.

**[00:02:45] BB:** How do you manage that? Because do just look and even go, like, "Well, today it's 44,000." Is there any process?

**[00:02:54] CDB:** Yes, there's a little bit of a process. I always skim everything. I'm sure there's stuff I miss. But in my mind, there's no point in going through and really opening unless it catches my attention. I usually let this inbox get pretty crowded until I can't stand it, and then I'll just hit sort of a delete all sort of thing.

**[00:03:17] BB:** Oh, you do a massive purge. Oh.

**[00:03:20] CDB:** Yes, but I do skim. So, it does speak to the power of the subject line.

**[00:03:25] BB:** Okay. Oh, let's get into that then. With the subject line, what's criteria that you look for that makes you go, "Yes, I want to open that."

**[00:03:33] CDB:** We get a surprising number of pitches that clearly don't take our coverage area into consideration. I get it. There's a lot of pitches that are real spammy, and so I'm trying to cover a lot of bases, and send it to a lot of places. But generally speaking –

**[00:03:54] BB:** The spray and pray, right?

**[00:03:56] CDB:** Yes, exactly. We have an exclusive focus on women. Like I say, we're dedicated to elevating women's voices. Basically, anyone we interview, whether that's the subject of a profile, or whether it's an expert voice that we include in a story, even if it's just a person on the street type of person, it's always a woman. Right away, if in a subject line it's saying we've got Joe Smith here to be interviewed by you, I know that it's not anything that I'm going to need. So, that helps me pretty quickly eliminate quite a few of the pitches I get without having to bother opening it or spending much time at all. That's definitely a big thing and an easy way.

**[00:04:47] BB:** God. Do you look for the subject line written like a headline, potentially? I knew some people like to experiment with that. Or is it more direct like expert on X?

**[00:04:59] CDB:** I sometimes, if it's is a really good headline, I might take a look at it. But I find that sometimes can be confusing, because then I might think it's like a newsletter that I get. Actually, I kind of like it when I might say press release in capital letters, because then I also know that on a busy day, if I want one of my reporters to be working on something just really quick and easy. If I see press release in big letters, I know it's something that might be easily rewritten. So, that catches my attention. And, obviously, if it's a subject we're interested in. But I like knowing that it is from a publicist from a PR person. And there are times when I just like the ease of knowing exactly what I'm going to get, and if I know it's a press release, then I know that I don't have to do much more. All the information probably will be there, right there for me, and probably more information than I'll actually need. But there's probably going to be some nice quotes in there. Maybe some research, all of that good stuff.

[00:06:09] **BB:** Mm-hmm. Okay. So, tell you what's inside the subject line. Yes. Give you the preview. Okay. Now, once you are inside with the pitch, are there any elements you like to see consistently? I know, you have a couple of examples you were going to share with us.

[00:06:24] **CDB:** Yes. So, I'll talk about one –

[00:06:27] **BB:** Not naming names.

[00:06:27] **CDB:** Well, no, unless you –

[00:06:27] **BB:** Hey, if you have a great shout out for publicist friends, yes, great name.

[00:06:33] **CDB:** I don't even know who the publicist is, actually. But in this particular case, I can tell you why it got my attention. So, I can tell you the content of it, if that works. Because we have a focus on women, we like to look at entrepreneurial women, and we're always interested in what like a woman business owner, or what any sort of woman entrepreneur is doing. If it's a well-known woman, we know that that could make a nice, easy, quick take for us where we can write that up, and it's something that might trend well for us, and might bring some traffic to our site, so that some of our longer pieces also get some eyeballs on it.

But for instance, we got a press release the other day, and the subject line said, "PRESS RELEASE", all in caps, so I knew right what it was. It was about Giada De Laurentiis, who's a celebrity chef. Right away, there's a name I know, and it was about her announcing a line of pasta. That hit a lot of sweet spots for me. I knew it was a press release. I saw that was a well-known woman, and that she was announcing a product line. So, there's an entrepreneurial woman doing something innovative, and that made for a very easy turnaround of content for us. We did a quick little piece on it. Something that was also nice when I opened it up is that not only was there a press release, but there were photos. Everything was just made so, I guess, maybe you could call it turnkey. Everything was very easy and it was just easy to turn that into a short post for our site.

[00:08:21] **BB:** Okay. Oh, that was a great example. Do you have another?

**[00:08:25] CDB:** I do. Let's see.

**[00:08:27] BB:** We love examples.

**[00:08:28] CDB:** Another one that I think is just – actually, I have two other examples. Well, let's see how much time we have. Something that I actually have been eager for, especially since we are post pandemic now, is I am really eager for media invites. I really feel like my networking took a hit in years we're all working remotely. I still spend a lot of time working remotely. So, I'm really eager for media invites and I don't see half as many events as I used to see. But I really want to see events coming back, and invites where the media is welcome to attend, or maybe it's an event for media.

One that caught my attention, this was last year, actually. The Collision Conference which is a big conference in Toronto, the organizers of that reached out to probably thousands of journalists but they did the reach. They reached out, they put in the subject line. They put Collision 2022, Media Pass, making it clear that here if you are a member of the media, we want you to attend. We are your point person. This is what you're going to need to do. If you want to attend, here's the form you need to fill out. Here's the link to the schedule of events. Here are the speakers. It was all right in there and made it very easy.

So, I ended up going to the conference and ended up doing a lot, got tons of story ideas, did quite a few pieces that I filed from the conference and ended up following up and doing a lot of profiles of really cool innovative women that I had met or heard at the conference. Yes, so things like that have definitely been catching my eye. I always like to kind of joke about this. But journalists can totally be bought by free drinks or coffee or something like that. If there's anything like that, stick that in the subject line too, that will definitely get the journalist attention. I'm kidding about being bought, by the way. We can't really be bought.

**[00:10:42] BB:** Exactly.

**[00:10:44] CDB:** But it will get us out of the house.

**[00:10:45] BB:** You can be enticed.

**[00:10:46] CDB:** We can be enticed. Exactly, exactly.

**[00:10:50] BB:** Let's use that. Yes.

**[00:10:51] CDB:** Yes. I do think a lot of us are looking for that now. It's been too long, I feel.

**[00:10:56] BB:** Yes. If it's a good quality event, then it's like, "Yes, why not." Which we can go – well, I'll tell you more after we wrap this thing up, Colleen. We got stuff going on. Anyway, for OnePitch, particularly.

[MESSAGE]

**[00:11:11] 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]

**[00:11:34] BB:** So, you gave us some great examples. Wonderful. Are there ever exclusives or embargoes you're interested in?

**[00:11:41] CDB:** Not in my position now. I formerly worked for some pretty big-name publications. I'm a former editor for The Wall Street Journal, and I also worked for Entrepreneur Magazine and Inc., and Business Week. When I worked for those more high-profile publications where the competition is pretty intense, I think that was always of interest. Although, if memory serves when I was at The Journal, there were a lot of rules about whether we could agree to embargoes and things like that. But I do know that when you work for the bigger name

publications, that's always, always attractive to know that you're being offered something exclusively.

**[00:12:31] BB:** Oh, of course. Okay, good. For everyone to note. Colleen, you already mentioned actually a little bit of like, “Hey, I like events. I want to be there if they're good quality stuff.” Is that the way to make a relationship with you? Or do you have a technique you prefer over that?

**[00:12:47] CDB:** For me, that's still how I prefer to meet a really great PR person and begin a relationship with them. I feel that maybe it's old school of me, but I do really like being able to put a face with a name, and it's just – I just think it's the best way, still, to build that relationship, with some exceptions. I have quite a few. I'm thinking of different PR people I've worked with over the years. And yes, but I think at this point, I think, all the ones that have really been great, I have met with at some point or another, so I still really value that in person connection. I just said there's nothing like it.

**[00:13:28] BB:** It's the best.

**[00:13:28] CDB:** It really is. I cannot agree more, because there's just magic to connecting in person and all that good stuff. We're doing our newer series for OnePitch, which is called Coffee with Journalists. So, just having morning coffees and certainly – I'll tell you more later. But yes, just our community coming together, publicist, journalists, little conversation starters with our fun little mugs, all that good stuff. Yes, to being in person.

**[00:13:53] BB:** Colleen, to wrap us up before we also highlight any of your things you want to plug. We have a little rapid-fire question section, and I would love your quick takes on the answers that you prefer. Are you ready?

**[00:14:06] CDB:** Sure.

**[00:14:09] BB:** Great. Video or phone interview?

**[00:14:11] CDB:** Video Interview.

[00:14:14] **BB:** Oh, bullet points or paragraphs?

[00:14:16] **CDB:** Bullet points.

[00:14:17] **BB:** Okay, yes. Do you have a why?

[00:14:19] **CDB:** They're just easier to see.

[00:14:21] **BB:** Yes, me too. Short or long pitches?

[00:14:24] **CDB:** It depends. If it's something – well, gosh, this is supposed to be rapid fire. A short pitch to get me interested, but maybe even an attachment that's a press release that has all the information I might want, or a link to where it can find more information. So, you don't want it to be too short.

[00:14:46] **BB:** Okay. Images attached or Dropbox zip file? You're just alluding to that.

[00:14:51] **CDB:** If it's one or two images, they can be attached. Anything more than that definitely Dropbox.

[00:14:58] **BB:** Email or Twitter DM?

[00:15:00] **CDB:** I don't do Twitter. So, email.

[00:15:02] **BB:** Actually, we got to update that, by the way.

[00:15:05] **CDB:** Yes. What is the now? Freaking X or whatever?

[00:15:08] **BB:** X. I was just like Threads, no, X. Jesus. Okay.

[00:15:12] **CDB:** I am using LinkedIn more now.

**[00:15:15] BB:** Me too. Yes, yes.

**[00:15:17] CDB:** There's just too many issues with Twitter. I've been getting some pitches on LinkedIn and I feel like there's a professionalism to LinkedIn. Yes, so I would be receptive to LinkedIn of any of the platforms.

**[00:15:31] BB:** One follow up or multiple?

**[00:15:34] CDB:** Multiple because –

**[00:15:36] BB:** Oh, multiple?

**[00:15:37] CDB:** I miss half of them. They fall through the cracks. Yes, it's fine.

**[00:15:42] BB:** Wow, I almost spilled my coffee for that one. Okay.

**[00:15:44] CDB:** I'm just being realistic, because I'm going to miss so much stuff that it doesn't hurt to do multiple.

**[00:15:52] BB:** There you go. Direct or creative subject lines?

**[00:15:54] CDB:** Direct.

**[00:15:55] BB:** Press release or media kit?

**[00:15:58] CDB:** Both.

**[00:15:59] BB:** Time that you usually read pitches, or NA, all the time?

**[00:16:05] CDB:** Well, the time, like, how much time do I spend reading a pitch? Like one pitch?

**[00:16:10] BB:** Yes. This refers to do you have like, you know what, at 8am every day, eastern standard time, I go through, I do the whole thing? Or is it just like constant? Some people are just like, “Yes, it’s just constant. Just constant.”

**[00:16:22] CDB:** They're constantly coming into my inbox, which in for my particular purposes, if I were a PR person, I wouldn't bother to send me anything between the hours of like 6pm and 8am, just because I don't check my emails much at night. But I do a big search in the morning when I'm reading all my newsletters and things like that. But throughout the day, if things pop up, I'll be in front of my computer. and I'll be looking at my inbox. So, I miss a lot of stuff that comes in like overnight.

**[00:16:59] BB:** Good to know. So, don't send it overnight. Sounds like? And then what types of sources do you look for, if any?

**[00:17:07] CDB:** Actually, this reminds me of the third pitch I was going to share with you, which was an expert source and it made it clear. Well, I really liked this one. It was, I got pitched earlier this year, when there was sort of a big news story that Target, the big chain store had Pride merchandise, and it was being – which was great. It was for Pride Month, and nice to see. Then, there were a lot of complaints about it from I think in certain states. Then Target was moving some of the merchandise to the back of the store, and then that was causing some controversy.

Because we write content for entrepreneurial women, some of whom are running businesses, we like to sometimes provide services or tip articles about should you put Pride merchandise in your stores? Or how do you best celebrate Pride in your store? So, what was nice was that when I – so, I got a pitch that was that reference, the Target's sort of bad decision to be moving its Pride merchandise, and the subject line mentioned Target and mentioned Pride, and it mentioned that there was an expert who could speak on this. I thought that's great. So, that caught my attention. It was nice to know that there was an expert available, and I think that even in the pitch there was a very good quote that we could use as we're kind of building out a story that we can use in the story too.

**[00:18:44] BB:** Good.

**[00:18:45] CDB:** Yes. I forgot what your original question was. But I would say expert is great.

**[00:18:49] BB:** Yeah. Experts. Do you like experts? Clearly delineated why et cetera.

**[00:18:54] CDB:** Yes, as long as it makes sense for our coverage area.

**[00:18:58] BB:** Okay. Is there anything else you want to promote, highlight, expand upon, Colleen? We just like to give you the spotlight here, if you got something like a book, like an event, anything you got.

**[00:19:10] CDB:** We're always looking for entrepreneurial and innovative women to interview. We have a podcast. So, our podcasts are usually interviews with entrepreneurial or innovative women doing really cool things. Every once in a while, we do a deep dive in our podcast and we cover an issue that is gender related, in some fashion. We're working on a pretty intense one where we interview – this year marks the two-year anniversary of when the Taliban took back control of Afghanistan, and there's been obviously so many restrictions on women, unfortunately, in that country, and we take a look at that and we interview a number of women who were able to leave Afghanistan, and we take a look at where they are now and how they're feeling about the situation. We even interviewed women over Zoom, actually, who are still in Afghanistan. So, that's been a, yes, really intense and in-depth podcasts that we're working on that should be coming out in a couple weeks.

**[00:20:15] BB:** Fantastic. I will be looking for that. Excellent.

**[00:20:19] CDB:** Yes. It's more optimistic than you might think. We're finding a lot of kernels of hope. So, that's good.

**[00:20:26] BB:** And as a reminder for everybody, the podcast is the same name as the outlet, The Story Exchange. Easy to find. Perfect. Colleen, thank you for being here today. What a joy.

**[00:20:38] CDB:** Yes, my pleasure.

**[00:20:39] BB:** More women, great. By the way, I love these 40 women run public companies. I was reading this, I'm like, "Oh, I love this, 40, love it."

**[00:20:50] CDB:** We update then, what's good to see is that I think a couple years ago, some –

**[00:20:54] BB:** There were two?

**[00:20:55] CDB:** –maybe it was Stitch – yes, totally. It was like Stitch Fix or someone, they were going public and we thought, "Oh, let's see how many public companies there are that have women founders." It was so – and no one else had tracked this. We couldn't find any anyone else tracking it. So, we decided to do our own research, and I think it was maybe we found, it was like 23 companies, out of the hundreds that have gone public. Only 23 had women founders. So, in a relatively short amount of time, we've almost doubled that number.

**[00:21:27] BB:** That's encouraging.

**[00:21:29] CDB:** That's encouraging. Exactly.

**[00:21:29] BB:** Colleen, thank you, again. Appreciate our time and have a great rest of the summer.

**[00:21:35] CDB:** Yeah. Wish you were closer, we could meet in person.

**[00:21:37] BB:** Well, I'm coming in September, so I'll talk to you in just a second, yes, on all the events and all this stuff going on. So, there you go.

**[00:21:44] CDB:** Cool.

**[00:21:44] BB:** Great. Thanks so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[00:21:46] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist episode featuring Colleen DeBaise at The Story Exchange. For more exclusive insights about the journalists on this podcast, subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter at [onepitch.co/](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.

[END]