

EPISODE 193

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:10] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, brought to you by OnePitch. Are you looking for an easier way to pitch the right journalists? Head to our website at onepitch.co to start your free 14-day trial.

Our guest on today's episode of Coffee with a Journalist is freelance journalist Jared Lindzon. As a freelance journalist, Jared writes about the future of work for the Globe and Mail and Fast Company's work-life section. Occasionally, he'll also cover personal finance, tech, entrepreneurship, ESG, and small businesses. During the episode, Jared talks about setting pitches aside to run past his editors, his pre-pitch checklist, why embargoes don't tend to land well with his beat, and more. Let's dive in.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:01:04] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, and we're here to demystify all the aspects of pitching, pitching journalists, freelancers, editors, managing editors, reporters, all the things as we are. We're on almost episode 200 here. I cannot believe it, but we're creeping up. We're creeping up. With us today, and we don't always have such a fabulous freelancer, is Jared Lindzon, who is going to tell us all the magical things about his inbox and what he wants to see in terms of pitches. Jared, welcome.

[0:01:38] JL: Thanks so much for having me.

[0:01:40] BB: Yes. Jared, now you are a bit unique from what our typical person is on the show, which is usually the full-time reporter who's only at whatever beat at Bloomberg, or something like that. Being a freelancer is quite different. How would you first describe the work that you touch?

[0:01:59] JL: Oh, boy. There's a lot to unpack there, so I'll try and be brief. Yeah, freelancing is definitely a separate animal from your average reporter. I work with a heck of a lot of editors in

all different parts of the world, in all different kinds of publications. Earlier today, I published a story in the BBC. Last week, I was in Fast Company. In between, I write a lot for the Globe and Mail here in Canada. I have a few specific beats that I hit pretty often, but as a freelancer, I'm pretty open to opportunities of all shapes and sizes.

On the pitching side of things, I typically look for pitches that are pretty specific to the contacts that I have, because it's a little bit more of a lift to try and tackle a whole new area of reporting that I don't already have existing relationships with editors in. However, particularly enticing opportunities will encourage me to pitch like crazy if there is something that is really interesting, or a really interesting experience that I want to try, that I'm going to try and match with the appropriate editor on my end.

Anyway, that is all to say that how I operate in terms of the stories that I work on is pretty different from your average reporter. The reporting process itself, however, should be at least pretty identical.

[0:03:26] BB: Maybe illuminate for folks who aren't as familiar. If they send a pitch to you, do you then have to pitch it further to the right outlet and so forth? Is that typically how you work?

[0:03:37] JL: Correct. Yes. The way I typically choose to handle that and others might have a different process, I get a lot of pitches every week to say the least, and the ones that really – if it's a busy week, usually I just put the good ones aside and then email my editor at the end of the week a menu of here are the three, or four, or five things that really caught my eye this week, and then they will turn around and give me a green light on one, maybe two if they like the ideas. That is how I operate in – I'm busy, but as a freelancer, there's lots of ebbs and flows.

In most jobs, quiet time is appreciated. As a freelancer, quiet time is panic time. When I'm in panic time, I'm getting a lot of pitches and I'm sending out a lot of pitches in a panic to try and get some work before I start worrying about making runs.

[0:04:31] BB: Yes, I see. God. You're getting the pitches and then sending the pitches. Both sides of the equation. Okay, so tell us a bit more if there is a difference here on how to pitch you for then you to pitch your correct editors. How do you like pitches, in other words?

[0:04:52] JL: Yeah, that's a good question. I would imagine that the way you pitch me is probably pretty similar. The difference is if you pitch my editor, you're going straight to the source, but you're also confronting a lot more competition. If you pitch me successfully, the odds that the editor I'm working with is going to carefully read my email, compared to the pitch email. Is almost not even a question. That is where I land. If the way in which I'm getting pitched might not be entirely different. But the easier you make it for me to package the story for my editor, the easier it will be for me to get that approval.

I feel like, oftentimes, I need to work with the pitchers, the PR folks, or whoever it is that's doing the pitch to flesh things out a little bit to get it to a point where I feel like it's ready to present to my editors, because I don't want to give them something, knowing that they'll have a lot of follow-up questions. Sometimes I'll get a pitch and right away, I'll say, my editor would like this, but they're going to want to answer this question that's missing from the pitcher. They're going to want me to look into this before I pitch it. I often take what sets me and beef it up based on the conversations I have with my editors knowing what they're looking for.

[0:06:10] BB: Well, that's quite rare. Because normally, you just get no response, or a response. It's positive. It sounds like you do a lot of, I don't want to say hand holding, but collaboration in order to get it in the right spot.

[0:06:22] JL: Yeah. We can call it collaboration. I don't want it to sound like this is a regular occurrence. This is just for –

[0:06:29] BB: The ones that you want.

[0:06:30] JL: The ones that I think have some potential, that are well aligned to what my editor is looking for and that just – I can see the question that my editor is going to ask and response already and I'm preempting that by working with the pitcher to get that answer even before I bring it to my editor.

[0:06:47] BB: Got you. Got you. Okay, so what is a good pitch to you then? The elements of it, yes.

[0:06:55] JL: Yeah. I feel like, it's probably pretty consistent with what a lot of folks have said on this podcast. But reiterate some of the best practices for sure. I think top of the list is relevancy and just an acknowledgement that you have a base understanding of who I am, who I report for, who the pitch is targeted for, what their audience is. Don't pitch me something that's already been published, because then we go through this whole process only for my editor to say, "We already covered this last week." Don't pitch me something that I've never written about before, anything close to it, because I don't know what to do with that.

Similar best practices, relevant, well targeted, demonstrating a base level understanding of who my audience is and who my editor's audience is. Then all the good stuff, like compelling angle that something counterintuitive, something latching on to broader trends, or upcoming events, or just the calendar cycles. Right now, we're in end of year trends territory. Soon, we'll be in New Year's resolution territory, those sorts of things.

Then, whatever you send should have some data to back it up, whether that's internal, or external. Don't send me something that is a trend that has no data to back up, but it's a trend and is there for a thing that you've probably made up. Yeah, I think all the elements are probably pretty consistent with how you would pitch any other journalist.

[0:08:20] BB: Okay. Good intel to have. I think I can ask this of you, because you're in a unique spot of also getting the rejections from maybe editors. What do you do when you're like, "Ah, okay, that one struck out. That didn't work." How do you receive a rejection and pivot from there? Is it just moving on, or you'd pitch them something else next week? Or, just given that you also do pitching yourself?

[0:08:46] JL: Totally. I will say, the first couple of years of freelancing are by far the hardest. It gets a lot easier with time once you have relationships. At the beginning of my career, I'm now 10 years deep, years one and two were defined by rejection. Right now, it's less of a hard no and more of a conversation about why it didn't work. I'm getting much more detailed responses now, because I have established relationships. Back in the day, I made it my goal to be rejected on a regular basis, because I thought that the rejections would all get me closer to where I

wanted to be in my freelance career. That was true. I pursued rejection, knowing that if I had a one in a hundred chance, I need to get a hundred pitches out there.

Yeah. I think, I got really resilient, which is important for any freelancer, especially in the early days. Then over time, through these relationships with editors, some of which have lasted the entire duration of my freelance career. There's some folks I've been working with for a whole decade now and others, certainly a few years on average. There's a little bit more of a back and forth. Often, I get a reason why a pitch is declined. Maybe that's something that I benefit from that most pitchers don't get in response. It's more of a dialogue these days than just a hard no, or a no response.

[0:10:09] BB: Got you. You did pick, I know Jared, a pitch that really resonated with you. Do you want to share and elaborate with us?

[0:10:17] JL: Yeah. Well, before I came on, I did a quick look at the last five or six stories that I have pitched. I'm sorry, that I've published, and only one of them came from a pitch.

[0:10:30] BB: Oh, shoot.

[0:10:31] JL: Yeah. I don't know what that means exactly.

[0:10:34] BB: Well, tell us more.

[0:10:36] JL: I mean, that's not an average. That just happens to be at this particular moment. I look to see, yeah, which pitches have been successful lately and there's only been one and not only did that pitch result in a story, it actually resulted in two stories. I thought that that was particularly unique. This pitch was from Forrester. It checks a lot of the boxes for me, because it basically, it's a very brief pitch. It's one opening sentence. It is three trends that are in bold, and so data to back up those trends. Then just a quick note, if you want to copy the report, let me know. Yeah. For me, that's a home run. That knocks it out in the park.

[0:11:23] BB: Perfect. I love that it's one line, build a point, data with all the things.

[0:11:29] JL: Yeah, exactly. Like I said, from that came not one, but two stories. One has already been published and the other is coming out in a little while.

[0:11:39] BB: Do you ever get exclusives, or embargo pitches?

[0:11:43] JL: I get a lot of those.

[0:11:44] BB: Huh. What do you do with them?

[0:11:46] JL: I can tell you that the enthusiasm around embargo pitches is much greater on the public relations side than on the media side, at least in my beat. Listen, I understand that there are some beats where being first is everything. Politics, entertainment, having the exclusive, having the scoop before anybody else, you're going to win over that audience. There's a lot of value there. In my world, which we should mention, I write a lot about the future of work. I write a lot about tech. I write a lot about big trends that the data that people pitch me might be under embargo, or exclusive, but it's based on a pretty broad trend and they're probably not the only ones that have looked into it.

Just by the nature of my reporting, those sorts of things don't really matter to me very much, nor do they seem to matter to the editors that I work with. Often, an embargoed pitch, or publishing well after that embargo is lifted and the competition we're up against is pretty minimal, just because it's a pretty niche subject area.

[0:12:52] BB: Good intel there.

[MESSAGE]

[0:12:57] 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]

[0:13:19] BB: By the way, Jared. Do you have any way to manage your inbox overall? Because not only are you receiving all these pitches, but then you're also, I'm sure, pitching like mad on the outbound side. Do you have a thing you use?

[0:13:32] JL: Oh, boy. I have a few things.

[0:13:34] BB: Tell us. Tell us.

[0:13:35] JL: I'm not going to say they're recommended for everybody. They just happen to work well with my brain in particular. Learn through years of trial and error. I'm one of those crazy people that strives to have zero unread emails in their inbox. Yeah, listen. I'm very rarely there. But I can tell you right now, I'm looking at the number, I have 22 unread emails and I would say, probably four or five of them are just things that I got while I was having my lunch just now that I need to get back to you. The rest are items that I have flagged for follow up by leaving them as unread. I've read them. I've just left them as unread, because I get that notification and I know to go back to them. Those are often the ideas that I'm going to send to my editor at the end of the week, or in panic time.

Then at the same time, I usually write a note, I keep a notepad next to my desk. Again, not saying it works for everyone. It just happens to work for me. I like the physical feel of crossing out items on a to-do list. I like writing out my week.

[0:14:33] BB: Me, too. Oh, my gosh. Me, too.

[0:14:36] JL: There's something about it that just clicking just doesn't do it.

[0:14:40] BB: The click is not satisfying. No. The crossing out, by the way, do you use a thick marker, or a thick pen?

[0:14:47] JL: I have a designated pen for all of these. Yeah. No, it's a good, thick, black pen. I literally have a pad of paper next to my desk at all times. Legal pad. Every week gets its own page. On the left side is my to-do list. On the right side is the days of the week written out with individuals to-do lists under each. In that to-do list, if I send a pitch on, let's say, a Friday, I put a note on my calendar, follow up with this editor on Tuesday, or whatever. Assuming I haven't heard from them, I have that item in my to-do list now to make the follow up. That's how I keep myself organized.

[0:15:28] BB: I swear, half of tasks seem to be just the follow-ups.

[0:15:32] JL: Yes. Like I said, over the years, that's gotten better for me. When I first started out, I had to be really on top of following up, because I was pitching like crazy. I was not hearing back from a lot of the folks that I was working with. Now, most of the editors, again, I've been working with them for years and years, and they do get back to me eventually almost all of the time. I know the editors well enough that this editor might take a week. This other editor usually takes two days. If it's been three days for that editor that normally takes two days, it's worth a nudge. But the editor who normally takes a week, I'm not going to bother her until a full week has passed.

[0:16:09] BB: Mm-hmm. Because you got to know the little ins and outs and everything. Mm-hmm.

[0:16:13] JL: Exactly. Takes a little while to get used to that sort of rhythm.

[0:16:18] BB: Understandable. Well, Jared, before we get into our rapid-fire type of questions here, do you like to build relationships with publicists? Or is it more, you're trying to work relationships with the journalists, the editors?

[0:16:31] JL: Yes. I mean, often people say like, what are the relationships that are most valuable to you? They want to help me by making connections. We can connect you with people in the industries that you report on. At the end of the day, maybe it's a psychological thing. It's very easy for me to get the attention of the folks who are pitching me. It's very hard to get the

attention of the people who I'm pitching. Often, I'm weighed a lot more heavily in the direction of trying to strengthen relationships with editors.

However, there are a handful of folks who operate in this niche future of workspace that I'm in, that I have fairly good relationships with. I've met them in person. Over the years, we've worked together on a lot of stories. There are certainly some valuable connections that I've made over the years. Just because of the nature of my work, one side of the people who are pitching me have a lot to gain, and I have maybe a little bit to gain. Because like I said, a lot of the stories I write aren't from pitches anyway. The upside for me is a lot smaller compared to the editors. I'm pitching who are basically in charge of my livelihood.

[0:17:39] BB: Yes. That's a little different.

[0:17:42] JL: Yeah. Those relationships to me are life and death as a freelancer. I still value relationships with people who have stories to pitch me, but I can't take the time to go over a coffee with everybody, because that's the other thing. It's too much. But the other thing is, a lot of journalists will be on the clock when they have these meetings, just to chat through ideas, to get to know you. They might resist it, because they don't have time for it. But for me, it's an actual loss of time that I'm not compensated for, where I could be doing something that does generate revenue for me. I need to reject a lot of those invitations just purely out of economics. I can't afford to spend as much time talking with PR folks.

[0:18:29] BB: Yup. No, totally makes sense. Totally makes sense. Thank you for being so candid, Jared. This is helpful.

[0:18:36] JL: Anytime. I mean, yeah. As much as I would love to be closer with the folks in the PR world, the reality is, yeah, they don't pay my salary and the editors do.

[0:18:46] BB: That's right. Perfect. Okay. Could you then go through this rapid-fire question for us, or question list? Here we go. Video, or phone interview?

[0:18:56] JL: Almost no preference, unless it's early in the morning, or late in the evening, in which case, I don't want anyone to see my face.

[0:19:01] **BB:** Honest answer. Bullet points, or paragraphs?

[0:19:04] **JL:** Bullet points.

[0:19:05] **BB:** Short, or long pitches?

[0:19:07] **JL:** Short. Probably, short.

[0:19:08] **BB:** Always short.

[0:19:09] **JL:** Short with an opportunity to dive in elsewhere, if needed. A short pitch followed by a formal press release, a link to a study, somewhere where if the short pitch interests me, I can learn more without having to email back. That's my preferred mode.

[0:19:24] **BB:** Okay. Okay. Fair enough. Images attached, or Dropbox zip file?

[0:19:30] **JL:** Don't send me images.

[0:19:33] **BB:** Okay. Perfect. NA.

[0:19:35] **JL:** Yeah. Just because you're taking up a lot of space in my inbox and again, by the nature of what I report on, images are almost never necessary, at least until later on in the reporting process.

[0:19:47] **BB:** Good point. How about Twitter, or X DM, or just email?

[0:19:52] **JL:** I respond to both if I know you and we follow each other, which I think is a requirement anyway. Feel free to hit me with a quick DM. But generally speaking, email is preferred.

[0:20:03] **BB:** Got you. One follow-up, or multiple?

[0:20:06] JL: One follow-up. Yeah. Like I said, I keep my inbox at zero unread. I will acknowledge the email and look at it at least briefly before deleting it. I don't have time to respond to everything, but I do look at everything. It's very unlikely that the follow up is going to change my mind. Less is more.

[0:20:26] BB: Less is more. Direct, or creative subject lines?

[0:20:30] JL: Depends on the content. It's a cop out, but it really does.

[0:20:35] BB: Okay. Press release, or media kit?

[0:20:38] JL: Press release. Just give me the facts. I don't want to go digging through a pile of headshots and corporate stats to find it.

[0:20:45] BB: Mm-hmm. Particular time you read pitches? Sounds like, it's all the time.

[0:20:50] JL: Yeah. When work is slow, which is anybody's guess.

[0:20:55] BB: Fair enough, fair enough. Then lastly, are there any sources you are particularly interested in hearing from, or need?

[0:21:03] JL: Are we looking for specific names and organizations, or just broad categories of folks that I'd like to hear from?

[0:21:09] BB: Usually, I was thinking broad categories, but yeah, you got some names.

[0:21:12] JL: I don't have any names. No, I definitely don't want to be inviting anybody. I would say, one area that could do a better job of pitching is academia.

[0:21:23] BB: Okay.

[0:21:24] JL: There's a lot of self-serving data in the corporate world. Not saying it isn't good data. Some of the time, good insights. But the academia tends to be more neutral, tends to have

a little bit – carries more weight in the newsroom for sure in academic study, versus a survey monkey survey that a company put out with leading questions to serve their purposes. Academia, but they don't really have the infrastructure to pitch, because it's not as much in their interest. I would say, I would love to hear more from academics and academic institutions that are the areas that I'm reporting on.

[0:22:00] BB: Good to know. Jared, is there anything you would like to promote, emphasize, elaborate on, anything we can highlight for you as we wrap up here?

[0:22:09] JL: I would just say my website, jaredlindzon.com. It's got all my most recent articles, if you want to check that out. I do a little bit of, oh, a lot of reporting and a little bit of public speaking on the future of work as well.

[0:22:22] BB: Keep that in mind, people. Yeah. Keep that in mind, people. You need a speaker? Here you go.

[0:22:28] JL: Yeah. If you want someone to talk about either media best practices, or the future of work as a freelancer, I do get a little bit more freedom to do those sorts of engagements when other reporters are a lot more limited. That is something I enjoy doing. Yeah, would welcome the opportunity.

[0:22:44] BB: Jared, thank you so much for being on today, drinking your Diet Coke and not coffee at this hour.

[0:22:50] JL: I appreciate it. It is, like I said, it's Diet Coke hour, not coffee hour. But thanks for having me anyway. Diet Coke with a journalist.

[0:22:57] BB: Thanks so much, Jared. Appreciate you. This is Coffee with a Journalist, everybody. Thanks for joining.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:23:03] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, featuring freelance journalist, Jared Lindzon. For more exclusive insights about the journalists on this podcast, subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter at onepitch.co/podcast. We'll see you next week with even more insights about the journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.

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