

EPISODE 196

[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 start your free 14-day trial.

Our guest on today's episode is Alesandra Dubin, a freelance travel writer. Her writing has appeared in Good Housekeeping, Insider, Travel + Leisure, AFAR, Glamour, Esquire and more. During the episode, Alice talks about the process for working on articles from various outlets. The benefit of pitching her evergreen stories. Her HARO alternative Substack newsletter and more. Let's dive in.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:56] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. And as always on this show, we talk to real journalists, real reporters, editors, freelancers and all of the above to better understand how to work with them as publicists. And work with them well and not in annoying ways, which is what we cover on this show for all of us publicists out there. Happy today because we have a freelance writer in the travel and lifestyle space coming live from Los Angeles, Alice Dubin is here with us right now. I love it.

[0:01:29] AD: Thanks for having me.

[0:01:29] BB: Yes, Alice. How is it in Los Angeles on this chilly December day? Not.

[0:01:35] AD: Right. It's brisk. It's brisk.

[0:01:36] BB: Exactly. Exactly. 70 degrees. Yes.

[0:01:39] AD: It's not. It's not bad. It is not bad.

[0:01:42] BB: It's fabulous. It is fabulous. Okay. Alice, you write for so many publications. Do you want to just give a quick rundown for everybody just so we're clear and they understand? Go ahead.

[0:01:51] AD: Sure. I'm a full-time freelancer. And like you said, the travel and lifestyle space. I cover travel, family relationships, parenting, wellness, wellness and health, food, home, style, fashion. All that good stuff. And my outlets include really just a wide range. Insider, Business Insider. Travel + Leisure, Good Housekeeping. Women's Day. Gosh. What are some other titles I can rattle off –

[0:02:23] BB: Today Show. Yes.

[0:02:24] AD: Yes. It's been a little while with –

[0:02:25] BB: Mm-hmm.

[0:02:27] AD: Town & Country, Esquire, Bizarre, Glamour. On and on.

[0:02:33] BB: Has there been something you haven't written for yet, Alice, where you're like, "Ah, I'm just waiting." It sounds like you've hit them all.

[0:02:39] AD: I have to say, I never had a byline in the New York Times. I never had a byline in the Washington Post. Or LA Times for that matter. I'll shoot for those one day.

[0:02:48] BB: Okay, everybody. Put it out there in the universe, Alice. We're going to make that happen. Okay. How's your inbox?

[0:02:56] AD: It's nuts. It's crazy.

[0:02:58] BB: And what do you do about it?

[0:02:59] AD: It's a holiday gift guide season. And I do cover a lot of gift guide product, commerce-type roundups. It's pretty nuts. And I do call for pitches when I have stories for which I'm looking for sources, pitches, product ideas, experts and so forth. I put all of those in my Substack newsletter. All those calls for pitches. I get tons very targeted pitches and a lot of random ones as well that aren't related to my beat. But it's been great.

[0:03:30] BB: Tell us a little bit more on just your management of the crazy then. Do you ever go back to emails from five months ago? Are you a mass deleter? Just to try to deal with your sanity of the things. Tell us more.

[0:03:42] AD: No. I'm not a mass deleter. I'm a mass marker on Reader. I go through and I at least peek at everything. I delete only very few things that if they feel like sort of like inappropriate, insulting. But mostly, I just leave them. My inbox then becomes like a searchable tool. Sort of like a search engine.

[0:04:03] BB: Yes. Very common thing. Yes.

[0:04:04] AD: Yeah. If I'm looking for a pediatric dermatologist, I can actually search my inbox.

[0:04:09] BB: Search your own inbox. Yup.

[0:04:12] AD: And find my expert that way.

[0:04:14] BB: Oh, that's good. A lot of people do this, by the way, which I think is so freaking helpful. Do you then not, Alice, it sounds like, have like a side spreadsheet somewhere? You just instead use inbox as the search file.

[0:04:27] AD: You know, revealing my secrets here. I do have that. I do have a spreadsheet. But it's not –

[0:04:31] BB: Oh, you do. Okay.

[0:04:34] AD: It's not well-maintained. Because I really just use my inbox.

[0:04:38] BB: It's another thing to **[inaudible 0:04:39]**. Exactly.

[0:04:39] AD: **[inaudible 0:04:39]** my relationships. I just call on my relationships and people that I know. People whose names come to mind. Because we have a longtime working relationship. And I know they're responsive and –

[0:04:48] BB: Yeah. Reliable.

[0:04:48] AD: – Uber. Those are the names that come to mind when I'm looking for things.

[0:04:52] BB: Mm-hmm. Can you demystify a little bit for us, Alice, how the freelancing world works? And I asked that because we've had a handful of freelancers on here recently. And I'm unsure that all publicists get that, "Hey, as freelancers, you got to pitch the stories you want to do in some cases." It's just not, "Oh, pitch me an idea and I write it up the next day." Nor is that how it works for reporters. They usually have to talk to their editors and so forth. But how does your process work when you get a pitch from a publicist?

[0:05:21] AD: Yeah. I will say I do pitch stories, but it's somewhat more rare that I pitch original stories. And I actually have to discipline myself to do more of that. It's on my goals list for next year is to remember, and follow through and keep pitching if I have a story from real-life or from my travels that I know is a good idea. Just keep at it and follow through. Because it's very easy for me to not just pitch my original ideas and just work off of assignments that I get to my inbox. It's fine. And I do get those monthly. And those are my bread and butter. But they're often driven by things like SEO versus original ideas that speak to me.

[0:06:05] BB: Oh. Okay. So, then, are you ever having success with just pitches from a publicist that comes in just randomly and you're like, "Oh, let me just pitch that originally?" Or is it more so you're trying to fit in from a pitch how that's already working in an assignment you have?

[0:06:22] AD: It's the second. I say it's pretty seldom that somebody would pitch a story based on an angle of a brand founder or something like that. And I would say, "Wow. That founder story is a really great idea as pitched." It could happen. But it rarely does.

[0:06:39] BB: Okay. This is so helpful to know, I think. Because now people I hope in listening to this go like, "Oh. Wow. You're already writing things that you have assigned to you. You need to produce it." You're not like, "Well, let me – you know what? I'm going to pitch this today." No. No. No. That's not what's happening in your world.

[0:06:54] AD: Right. And sometimes it does. And everybody's different.

[0:06:56] BB: Sometimes. True.

[0:06:57] AD: Yeah. But for me, my process is more driven by assignments. And again, those assignments are often driven by things like SEO. We're trying to move people where they are. This is what they're searching this time of year. And this is what we're going to give them this time of year.

[0:07:12] BB: Mm-hmm. Good to know. Ooh. We have a listener question, Alice, that comes from Viviana Wiewall from Eventbrite. And Viviana has asked, "What's the best pitch you've seen recently? And what about it captured your attention?"

[0:07:29] AD: Okay. I searched my inbox in preparation for our talk today and I found few subject lines that I thought were sort of relevant to the discussion. It's not that any of these subject lines individually is an absolute winner every time. It's just more sort of thematically why they work.

And one of those I guess angles for a subject line is when you're pitching products, which, again, I do write a lot of commerce-driven stories, product roundup, gift guides, so forth. A lot of times people are pitching things that are just in such crowded categories. It's like – I don't know. A lip gloss. A piece of carry-on luggage. Something that there's just –

[0:08:04] BB: Oh, God. Yeah. Water bottle.

[0:08:07] AD: Water bottle. There's really not – it's really hard to differentiate in those categories. I find that what works and what cuts through the clutter is if you can kind of position the product as a dupe. That is something really sells a reader in a headline. Here are some examples.

[0:08:26] BB: Yeah. What do you mean? Tell us.

[0:08:26] AD: The ultimate dupe travel destination to visit this season. For an example of that might be like – the dupe might be, "Oh, if you really want to visit the snowy Alps and have that sort of like European dreamy Christmas markets, whatever, here's the equivalent in the US for which you don't need a passport. And it's cheaper and blah-blah-blah." Get these high-top sneaker dupes at this mass market retail.

[0:08:52] BB: Oh, okay. Dupes are in.

[0:08:54] AD: Dupes are in.

[0:08:56] BB: Dupes are in.

[0:08:56] AD: These are actual dupes you need this summer are all under \$15. I think that, basically, readers love the like sort of insider advantage of a headline that promises to help that is going to get this coveted –

[0:09:07] BB: The thing that they want. Yes.

[0:09:08] AD: – product at a cheaper price or more accessible way. Positioning as a dupe is kind of like a little bit of an insider angle. And then, of course, editors love the engagement, and the clicks and the revenue. That reader enthusiasm.

[0:09:21] BB: Of course. Of course. Okay. Dupes are in. What else?

[0:09:26] AD: Another subject line that I'll say, style that kind of grabs me is one that has some actionable thing in it. It makes me pause and say, "Okay, I'm going to –" this email is asking something of me. For instance, mail or opt-in: Here's this thing that you might be interested in.

[0:09:47] BB: Mail or opt-in. What is that?

[0:09:49] AD: Well, that's another little –

[0:09:51] BB: Tell us. See. I need to know this.

[0:09:56] AD: – is please don't send any product samples without opt-in.

[0:10:00] BB: Oh, I see. This person is telling you, "Hey, I have something for you. But I need you to tell me it's okay to send it."

[0:10:05] AD: Exactly. Like here's a review sample for you. A press sample. But please don't send it if it's not at all on my beat or something I would never cover. It's just a waste of the marketing spend. Also, I'll never generate coverage from it. And then it just annoys me when it's sitting in my living room and I'm trying to figure out how dispose of it.

[0:10:24] BB: Okay. You liked how that person was like, "Oh, just checking that it's okay –"

[0:10:29] AD: Yeah. It's sort of – well, and it's a clear sort of directive. In this email, you can do this thing. And that might be useful to you. Or another example of that might be I found one that's LA event invite. And it's the following. This brand's holiday at Paramount Picture Studio. Basically, these examples. First of all, they're very literal. They have information.

[0:10:50] BB: Yes. They're direct.

[0:10:52] AD: No bluff. They're direct. And then they also indicate, well, clearly spell out an action that's requested on my part. Opt-in. RSVP. Come to this event. Whatever. It's a little nudge that tells me, "Oh, open this. Take a look at it. Because there's something in here that you might want to do."

[0:11:10] BB: Good insights there, Alice. Thank you for sharing that. And thanks, Viviana, for the question.

[BREAK]

[0:10:00] ANNOUNCER: Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to learn about the unique ways OnePitch helps brands engage with the right journalists? Head to onepitch.co and create your own custom media list in five minutes or less. Now back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:11:41] BB: Okay. Are there ever exclusives or embargos that you want to get, Alice? Or are you like, "No. That just really doesn't pertain."

[0:11:48] AD: I would just say it's rare. But I would just say if you're going to have success with an embargo or certainly an exclusive, just like make it a good one. I really don't like the kind of inbox clogging bait and switch subject line that's like we're offering you this exclusive. And then it's like, one, not at all related to my beat. Or two, just really not a thing that anybody would jump through hoops to make this exclusive. Or three, not exclusive. If you've given it to other people. Be really mindful. Don't toss those words around.

Mostly for my reader, I do a lot more sort of evergreen stuff than I do news-driven stuff. It's not great for me. In some cases, it works. But just I would say use them sparingly and smartly.

[0:12:33] BB: Yes. Okay. Good to demystify that. How can people build a relationship with you, Alice? Or, frankly, do you even want to build a relationship with any publicist?

[0:12:42] AD: 100% I do.

[0:12:44] BB: Oh, okay. Tell us more.

[0:12:44] AD: As I said, it's just such a relationship-driven business. And there is zillion publicists out there. There's zillion writers out there. But it's the ones that I know I can depend on that are responsive, that are smart, that follow through, that are giving me – connecting me with brands or experts that are really going to be useful to me and are worth knowing. That's what it's all about. And those are the ones are top of mine. Those are the ones that I remember.

I absolutely want to build those relationships. And I also want to know that they're not transactional. I love a quick little holiday note or a little, "I saw on Instagram that your son is a championship soccer player." Or whatever. I just love like one-offs that –

[0:13:25] BB: Oh. So, you do like the little like personal flare then. Just like – so it's not like, "Here. Cover this."

[0:13:31] AD: I do. I mean, I like them to be sincere. And you know. You know the difference.

[0:13:34] BB: Yes. You know. Yup. You know.

[0:13:36] AD: You can't fake the fun. The way that people can build relationships with me is really it starts through my Substack. I launched my Substack originally like I think many other writers who launched Substacks. It was an alternative to HARO really.

[0:13:52] BB: Yes. Yes. We're all familiar.

[0:13:55] AD: **[inaudible 0:13:55]** and so filled with crap these days. And they're so anonymous. You never know what you're getting. If it's plagiarism.

[0:14:02] BB: It's the Wild-Wild-West on that. Yeah. You don't know.

[0:14:06] AD: This was a way for me to call for pitches in a way that felt more sort of like one-on-one. They're going to a more targeted list of publicists who signed up versus God knows what. And they're – also, I'm receiving pictures from individuals rather than who knows what. Like spam bot is behind those on HARO or whatever else.

I put all my calls for pitches there. I also put kind of like personal anecdotes, industry musings. And I do make it a bit of a personal. It's a space that, of course, is a professional space, first and foremost. And my readers are almost entirely publicists. But it also shares a little insight about what's going on with me and contextualizes me in the world. It definitely sets up to have a personal relationship with me if people want to respond in kind.

[0:14:58] BB: Mm-hmm. Okay. Personal flare and attention, Alice. Now, building on that further, is it like, "Yeah, if you're in LA, invite me to a coffee, smoothie, something, beach walk." I don't know. Do you even like that?

[0:15:14] AD: I guess I don't know if my earlier comments implied that I might. I actually don't really have a lot of bandwidth for in-person stuff.

[0:15:22] BB: Oh, okay. Good to know. Don't see you in person. Good.

[0:15:25] AD: Yeah. Really, I prefer digital communication. Communication by email when it comes to professional relationships. Often, if I'm doing sort of personal or one-on-one, that's often like a function of my consulting business. If it's like let me pick your brain for an hour over coffee. I do that through my consulting arm. Yeah. That's part of my business.

[0:15:48] BB: No in-person. Good.

[0:15:50] AD: I mean, of course, if it's an event that's relevant.

[0:15:55] BB: That's different, I think.

[0:15:56] AD: An event, or a press trip, or some opportunity for FaceTime other than just like I want to pick your – someone telling me that they want to pick my brain.

[0:16:04] BB: No. I hate that.

[0:16:06] AD: What's in it for me? Because I do that. I charge for that usually.

[0:16:09] BB: By the way, who is using that phrase anymore? It's so cringe.

[0:16:14] AD: It is kind of just a red flag.

[0:16:15] BB: It's the equivalent of moist in a professional setting.

[0:16:18] AD: It doesn't work.

[0:16:20] BB: Right. It's like you help me. I don't have any context. But just like let me just – oh, God. No. I just had to put it out there, Alice.

[0:16:27] AD: Not at this point as a sort of senior-level person doing what I'm doing. If I was junior, and it was different and I was looking for friends in a new city or something. But just sort of at that point – at this point in my career and my busy personal life as a working mom, it doesn't really intrigue me to do that kind of thing.

[0:16:27] BB: Oh, I'm loving this conversation. No. It's just real. That's what we're trying to do on here, is let's spill what is true and real. And not waste anybody's time, frankly. Yes. I hope it's very loud and clear for everyone listening. Do not invite Alice for an hour smoothie to pick her brain in LA. Anywhere. Yeah.

Alice, we have a quick rapid-fire question sheet here. I'm going to fire these off to you. Here we go. Video or phone interview?

[0:17:17] AD: Oh, my gosh phone. Please.

[0:17:19] BB: Phone. Please.

[0:17:20] AD: In most cases, there's just no need for a video. If there is a need, if there's some kind of like product demonstration or something, sure. But that's very rare. I can't even think of an example of that.

[0:17:30] BB: Bullet points or paragraphs in your pitches?

[0:17:32] **AD:** Bullet points.

[0:17:33] **BB:** Short or long pitches?

[0:17:34] **AD:** Oh, short.

[0:17:37] **BB:** How shorts?

[0:17:37] **AD:** Bullet points?

[0:17:39] **BB:** Bullet points. Three? Five?

[0:17:41] **AD:** Yep. Three to five. Embed a logo, image if relevant so I can just get – at a glance and link to more information. Tell me there's more information. If this founder is a unique woman of color founder story. I'd love to tell you. Maybe give me that heads up and then I can pursue it if I want more.

[0:18:03] **BB:** Mm-hmm. That's it. Email or Twitter DM?

[0:18:06] **AD:** Oh, I'm not on Twitter right now.

[0:18:10] **BB:** Whatever. Yes. Yes. All the reasons.

[0:18:13] **AD:** Yeah, I just can't.

[0:18:15] **BB:** Right away. What do you think's going to happen with that? Is it the next Myspace?

[0:18:19] **AD:** I don't know. I mean, I don't know. I don't know what's going to happen with it. But I actually have a sort of a bigger problem with it right now with social media, which is that I've been off and on. I've actually installed and uninstalled various social media apps on my phone since October 7th Hamas attack because of the spike in anti-Semitism that is all over. Social

media has become a very inhospitable place in a lot of ways. Just very anti-Semitic rampant. When it becomes too much for me and I uninstall some of these apps, you will have no use reaching me.

[0:18:58] BB: That's right.

[0:18:58] AD: – that way. For sure, I always prefer email for communication.

[0:19:04] BB: Good to know. One follow-up or multiple?

[0:19:08] AD: I honestly think multiple is fine.

[0:19:10] BB: Really?

[0:19:11] AD: I think it's fine. Just space them out and don't be aggressive language.

[0:19:15] BB: Yes. Direct or creative subject lines? You already hinted at this. But just to nail it. Yes. Direct. And then press release or media kit?

[0:19:25] AD: I'm going to say press release usually but with a live link to photos.

[0:19:31] BB: Ooh. Okay. Live links. We like that. What time do you usually read pictures?

[0:19:37] AD: Whenever.

[0:19:37] BB: Whenever. All the time.

[0:19:39] AD: Literally, I don't think there's like a right time of day or week. There's no magic bullet there. We're all working when we're working at various different times. Different time zones. When we have insomnia and so forth. I'll read it when I read it. And I don't think there's any wrong time to send it.

[0:19:52] BB: Perfect. Any sources you're particularly looking for right now?

[0:19:57] AD: My deadlines are usually so swift-moving that I don't think **[inaudible 0:20:00]** by the time this comes out.

[0:20:04] BB: Perfect. Perfect. Well, then, Alice, last words, last things that we could just highlight, promote, tout, shower you with praise on. You tell us.

[0:20:15] AD: Well, again, I would just love to make another call out about my Substack newsletter. That's really the best way to develop a relationship with me. Always to understand what I'm working on. Because in almost all cases, I'll post my calls for pitches in the newsletter. It's the most kind of direct way to communicate with me. And it's free. It's totally free.

[0:20:37] BB: Yeah. It's free. It's like your own personal HARO.

[0:20:39] AD: It is. And then I also have – you can upgrade to paid and get my extra industry insights and pay world content. And also, I do Zoom ask me anything sessions. You can get that addition if you want it. But if you don't want it or need it, you'll always get my calls for pitches, and PR job leads and so forth for free in my newsletter. What is it? alicedubin.substack.com, I think? I should know that.

[0:21:04] BB: Okay. Let's double-check it. But yes. We'll put in the show notes too, by the way.

[0:21:08] AD: Oh, perfect.

[0:21:08] BB: Perfect. Follow, get Alice's personal Substack so you can get all the pitch ideas and ask everybody. How wonderful. Wouldn't that be neat if every publicist, journalist did that?

[0:21:20] AD: I mean, there's a lot of us doing it now.

[0:21:23] BB: There is a lot. I think though, it's the most helpful when it's freelance. Because your reach is so broad. Versus you're a reporter at Bloomberg just covering AI shenanigans. Anyway. Anyway. Alice Dubin, thank you so much for joining us today. Freelancer of all the

outlets in all the land based in la la land. LA it is. Do not invite her to a smoothie to pick her brain, everybody. Just send her an email.

[0:21:50] AD: Yeah.

[0:21:51] BB: That's it. Thank you, Alice. It's so fun having you. Appreciate you.

[0:21:55] AD: Have a good one. Bye.

[OUTRO]

[0:21:57] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for tuning in to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, featuring Alesanda Dubin. 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.