

## EPISODE 267

[INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER:**

Welcome to “Coffee with a Journalist” brought to you by the team at OnePitch. Are you looking for a more efficient way to find and pitch the right journalists? Head to our website at [onepitch.co](https://onepitch.co) to learn more. On this episode of Coffee with a Journalist, we’re joined by Anna Mahan, Associate Commerce Editor at Country Living. She’s calling in from Alabama to share what it’s like behind the scenes as a shopping editor—think gift guides, product roundups, and managing a packed inbox during shopping season. We talk pitch tips, subject lines that work, and why affiliate links matter. Let’s get into it!

**[00:00:45] BB:**

Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with A Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, a publicist. We bring on journalists, reporters, editors, people who are making the news happen because us publicists need to have better relationships and understanding of how we interact with all the people on the media side of things. That's why we come here to chat and talk with actual real reporters and editors, etc with us today. And I think you're coming from Alabama. Yes?

**[00:01:14] AM:**

Yes I am.

**[00:01:24] JM:**

I'm so happy to be here.

**[00:01:14] BB:**

There you go. She's in Alabama right now. This is Anna Mahan. She is the Associate Commerce Editor at Country Living. Thank you for being here, Anna. How are you doing?

**[00:01:26] AM:**

Doing good, thank you. It's Monday afternoon, so getting the week started as best as we can today.

**[00:01:32] BB:**

I know. Now, as commerce editor, do you have a Super Bowl time? Like, is Black Friday time the top time for you, or is back to school the bet? Like, what's—what would you say is where you're like, oh my God, I am cranking, leave me alone?

**[00:01:47] JM:**

I would probably have to say Amazon Prime Days, Black Friday. And leading up to the holidays, like, I would say between Thanksgiving and Christmas is like, big, don't bother me.

**[00:2:00] BB:**

Yes

**[00:02:00] AM:**

Yeah. Prime day is probably the biggest, which is coming up.

**[00:02:03] BB:**

You've got that coming up? Okay!

**[00:02:06] AM:**

Yes

**[00:02:07] BB:**

Yes, they are. Okay. Well, again, thank you for being here. For those who are not as familiar, I do. Well, I like to ask everybody who has any outlet they're writing for, how would you describe the coverage of Country Living Specific, specifically?

**[00:02:20] JM:**

Yeah, Country Living. It's a great magazine we really specialize in. When you hear Country Living, it is really more so like countryside living, sort of an escape to slower living. Big audience of people who love sort of antiquing, gardening, cooking at home. Like, you're getting gardening advice, you're outdoors growing your own tomatoes, and then you're looking for recipes to cook with them and things like that, you know?

**[00:02:49] BB:**

Well, for example, one thing that's on here on the homepage is 'so many strawberries, so little time.

**[00:02:58] AM:**

What do you do with them all? I don't know. What do you do?

**[00:03:00] BB:**

'25 recipes to make the most of your farmers market haul.' Okay, that is definitely—you live in the South, you've got so many strawberries, you don't know what to do with them. That is pretty funny.

**[00:03:09] AM:**

Farmers markets, antiquing, thrift store shopping, slow Saturdays, you know, things like that. I mean, we really, we get a little bit into everything. But I think that is really our bulk audience, our bulk readers.

**[00:03:25] BB:**

Dreamy. This escapism—it's kind of nice to travel and leisure, but a very fine vertical of just *Country Living*. Yes, I do love it. Well, specifically for you then, Anna, going into the commerce vertical—we've had a handful of reporters or editors from more like the commerce component to

it, or the commerce element, which maybe involves, you know, affiliate links and selling products and listicles and things of that sort. So bring us into your world now, and your function as it relates to, of course, *Country Living*.

**[00:03:55] AM:**

Yeah, so I'm in the commerce world. A lot of people who aren't in the media world hear 'commerce editor' and they're like, wait, what is that? So I tell people, a lot of times, I'm a shopping editor.

**[00:04:04] BB:**

Yeah.

**[00:04:06] AM:**

So I get to cover all things online shopping—product reviews, trending products, gift guides. A celebrity was seen wearing this and everyone wants to know where it's from. Here's where we found it. Here's where it is. Here's where you can find it, and also all the dupes inspired by the items. So it's really a little bit of everything. It's very fun. And though we are *Country Living*, like I said earlier—antiques, farmers markets, things like that—we cover a little bit of everything. So yeah, like on the *Country Living* side, I did—this past week—I wrote something on Dolly Parton's new collection with Kendra Scott. And I just did Post Malone's new drop with Stanley.

**[00:04:46] BB:**

Yeah.

**[00:04:47] AM:**

Also, I'm thinking—it's summertime: here are my beach bag essentials. Here's why I'm no longer wearing denim—because it's too hot. Here are all the best linen pants you need for summertime. But then we also sort of get into, if you are living more rurally in the countryside during summertime, here are all the best reviews on the best bug sprays we found. Here are the best outdoor activities and playthings we found for you, your family, and your kids.

**[00:05:11] BB:**

Well, inflatable pools as you mentioned, for all ages recently.

**[00:05:16] AM:**

Love the inflatable pools. I'm a big proponent. I just like to lay in them myself.

**[00:05:24] BB:**

Love it. What a fun job. That's very. Okay, so let's then now transition into your inbox. It's usually massive chaos for lots of reporters, lots of editors and so forth. So how does yours look slash, what do you do to be sane?

**[00:05:40] AM:**

"Yeah, it's pretty—it stays pretty full. I think most people in this industry, their inboxes stay very full with lots of pitches, lots of ideas, new things on the market, new collabs happening—which is great. It's great for me. I love getting ideas. I love seeing new things happening on the market. But it can be overwhelming. So I, personally, love starting my day—I have to start my day going through my inbox. I need to get going on it just to get that cleared up. I go through it a few times a day. And it is a lot of really relevant things a lot of the time, and other times it's emails like, 'Here's this luxury brand of new diamond jewelry where pieces, you know, start at \$2,000,' and I'm like, that's just not really totally relevant for my audience.

**[00:06:26] BB:**

Yeah, I was. So I was just going to clarify or ask on you, like, what's the price range you are looking for? The sweet spot.

**[00:06:33] AM:**

Yeah, our sweet spot? Really anything I would say below, like \$200 for basic items, obviously we're going to get into furniture pieces and appliances. You are going to spend, yeah.

**[00:06:46] BB:**

Hundreds and hundreds of dollars like that.

**[00:07:33] AM:**

But yeah, if someone sends me, like, a perfect last-minute Father's Day gift and it's, yeah, like an \$800 piece—it's like, that's not really a last-minute gift for most of our shoppers. No, a last-minute gift is probably like this \$50 thing on Amazon. And for a summer roundup of the best dresses for summer, we're looking at price ranges between \$25 to \$150. Once you start sending me \$200, \$300, \$400 dresses, our audience isn't really clicking on that. So I love it when I have things in my inbox where I can tell the person has kind of looked over our content, maybe familiarized themselves a little bit with our audience, with what we do. Obviously, I know they are looking at so many publications—they don't have time for that all the time—but it really stands out to me when a rep has sort of taken a little bit of time to look at our content and thought, 'Oh hey, this \$50 gingham dress is perfect for your audience. I think it would do really well with the *Country Living* readers. Here are the other pieces.' That kind of stuff really stands out to me, as opposed to something completely off our radar. Yeah.

**[00:08:04] BB:**

Yes, I can imagine. You get the, like, here's a \$2500 graduation gift. Like you do the graduation gift roundup. And it's like, I'm sure you got all types of outlandish ideas for things.

**[00:08:16] AM:**

Like way too much very practical thinking of the average person and the average income is sort of our audience.

**[00:08:22] BB:**

Good. Good to clarify that. So you were mentioning you start in your inbox right at the start of the day. You go through it, you're looking at things. What are the subject lines that are standing out to you?

**[00:08:35] AM:**

Oh, man, I am like so many people. I love a catchy, fun.

**[00:08:39] BB:**

Okay.

**[00:08:42] AM:**

I just love something that's not the most basic, like 'the best coffee you'll ever drink.' I always tell someone told me this and that for headlines, and it really has stuck with me: try to avoid 'the' and 'this' at the beginning of your headline because I was doing that a lot, and it really sort of stuck with me. Now I try to get creative once in a blue moon. I'm really tired—I've written so many stories this week. In the beginning of my subject line, you know, you can't win them all, but if you can have fun with it and be creative and make a fun joke or like really get a grabby headline. Grabby subject line. I love that.

**[00:09:16] BB:**

So you're saying, by the way, headline. So some people have said on here that they do like subject lines written as a headline. Like, how would you read it? Do you like that?

**[00:09:25] AM:**

I like that as well. Just because as long as, like the main point is near the beginning so I can kind of see it. I really like that because it just gets the point across. I know what I'm getting.

**[00:09:37] BB:**

You're like, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**[00:09:38] AM:**

A teaser can be fun, but a headline as a subject is also good—you're getting the point across. I already know what I'm getting into, and I think that's wonderful. Like, there's one kind of PR company that represents a lot of firms and emails me a lot, and I really love their pitches. I think they have a really great system down. For example, they had a pretty simple subject on a pretty simple email. But I don't want to say the brand name for—

**[00:10:06] BB:**

But for example, go ahead.

**[00:17:40] JM:**

The brand name was XYZ. It was XYZ's gingham dresses and tops that are perfect for summer—very simple, not the most catchy thing in the world. However, I'm familiar with their brand, so right away, I think, "Oh, it's the brand. I like this brand. Gingham dresses. *Country*

*Living* loves gingham. Gingham tablecloths, gingham dresses—ever. I'm like, oh, our audience likes that. And next, I see 'Summer 2025 happening right now,' relevant for what's going on, super timely. That would be good for me to do this week. So those are three things that have really caught my attention and that I think are relevant for me to do right now. I'm immediately clicking on it. They have my name in the email. Like, please put my name in there, you know, if you can.

**[00:10:52] BB:**

Yes.

**[00:10:52] AM:**

Make it personal. I want personal. And the intro was just right away kind of fitting for the *Country Living* content that I'm writing. It's talking about, like, whether you're headed to a beach vacation, on picnics, or to the farmers market. Like that. Like, we have a lot of all those strawberries. Yes, all the strawberries, all the farmers markets, the antique shopping—you know, make it a little relevant. And I understand these people are probably sending out so many emails, so you can't personalize them all. I don't know if this one was personalized for us, because the pieces they were sending were just so—they went very well with the copy they had written. So it could have been that this was sent to everyone. But it was very fitting for you. Yeah, and the intro just right away got me. It was short and sweet. I had the brand name in the intro, so again, I knew what brand I was working with right away. There were inline links so I could click on something and be taken right to the site. There were images embedded in the email, and there were prices. So I pretty much had all the information I needed in this email. I wasn't left with questions after finishing reading it. That's like my perfect email. That is my perfect pitch. I know the brand name, there are links, there are images, there are prices. And then at the bottom, there was a little bit more background information on the brand if I wanted to know more. I don't want to be left with questions after I've been pitched something. Yeah, I think that goes back to the basics of journalism—the who, what, when, where, why. We want to know everything right away. And that can be kind of hard to do in a quick, short email, but that brand just really did it in such a great way: two short paragraphs—here's what we have, we think it's great for summer, here are our images, here are our prices. And then if you want to know more about the brand, that's also there at the bottom. I just thought it was so quick and easy, so perfect. I don't even know if I'm going to be using some of those pieces in any content coming up, but I'm already going to keep my eye on them because of how great that pitch was. And it was just, I think, a great use of my time, a great use of their work.

**[00:12:52] BB:**

Good job, PR team who sent that. Excellent, excellent. Do you have another example, Anna?

**[00:12:58] AM:**

Yeah, I would say when it comes, like I said, I really like it. When going back to that subject line, they used the brand name right in there and right at the. Right in the subject line, right at the beginning, I think, like, so what were you gonna say?

**[00:13:15] BB:**

Oh, I was just gonna say a natural question could be humble. What if she doesn't know the brand? So in this case, hopefully they were like, well, she knows it because it's a pocket brand or whatever. If you don't, you'd still put this, the brand name in there.

**[00:13:28] AM:**

In my opinion, I. I think it can help you or it can hurt you if you use it in the correct way. I think they used it in a correct way. It says, you know, like the brand's name. Gingham Dresses. Even if I hadn't heard of them, that would have made sense to brand.

**[00:13:43] BB:**

Yeah, exactly.

**[00:13:43] AM:**

I got another email recently and it was like, very odd. It was the brand name Dash Summer Staple Dash New Collection Drop. And I was just like, what is this? What's going on here? This isn't a cohesive sentence. And then in the email also, no links, no images. It was just, what's going on here?

**[00:14:04] BB:**

You gave a bad example, frankly, because. Yeah. What?

**[00:14:09] JM:**

Yeah, I was. I was very bummed because right away I clicked on the email, which maybe that was their system. I was confused by the subject line. So I clicked. I was like, what is this? What is this brand name? What is this subject line? Very odd. But then when I clicked in the email. Yeah. I was also left with more questions. I really don't know much about here. There's no link, so I'm going to have to click over into my next tab and research it, which, oh my gosh, what a first world problem. But it's like, that's what the job is. The job is to give the journalists lots of information and, you know, sell me on this brand. And I was not sold on this brand by any means. So I think it. Putting, you know, your brand's name right at the beginning of the subject line, it can help you want, like tremendously or it can hurt you if you're not doing it in the correct way.

**[00:14:51] BB:**

Because you just, just man.

**[00:14:44] AM:**

Yeah. And if you are a big brand or say you have a big collab with someone, put that name at the beginning too. Like, I just did a Post Malone and Stanley collab. We make sure those names are at the beginning, of course, because originally I had a headline where they were both at the end, and I was like, wait, what am I doing? When people are reading left to right, they want to see those names. If they don't see those names at the beginning, they might just completely

scroll over that sentence and not even click on it. So I'm doing the same thing. Unfortunately, when I'm going through my inbox, I'm scrolling very fast, and if you've got something exciting, put it at the beginning. Make me click on it.

**[00:15:30] BB:**

Yeah, it's gonna click. So, Anna, then you go through at the top of your day, like, all right, all right, here's the ones I respond to. Are you a let it ride person? As in, like you got a thousand emails unread when you just kind of deal with it, or are you a filer? Are you a deleter? What are you doing?

**[00:15:47] AM:**

I definitely like to file things away. Most of the time I'm trying to respond right then and there. Like, if I really like. And I'm excited about it and I think I can work with this, I'm going to respond right away. If there's something that's like, I think I like this, I think I could work with this. I'm either going to file it and like use for later or use for this specific thing. Like, you know, I might have like themed tabs or seasonal tabs and I'm going to file it away there. Or I might pin it to the top and say, you know, respond to this later in the week.

**[00:16:14] BB:**

So, so real quick, what are your seasonal tabs?

**[00:16:19] AM:**

You know, we've got things for Prime Day, we've got things for Summertime, we've got things for, you know, cleaning Men's and women's gift guys, things like that. Yes. I've got things for kids. I've got things for fall and Halloween, stuff like that. And then I've got like an experts tab when people are emailing me and say, we've got this expert on hand. That's amazing. When someone can already include an expert and get me in contact with an expert, that's less work I have to do. I'm saving those people and I'm saving those emails because I love it. I love that you already have an expert lined up for me.

**[00:16:51] BB:**

Oh, perfect. Okay, so speaking of experts—it's been a long day over here—let's talk about your sources. Like, who are the people you want to speak to? It is more obvious, I'd say, when we have someone on here who's a health reporter at *Time* magazine—oh, they're going to want to talk to a gynecologist, you want to talk to an MD about this thing. For you, who's the source or expert?

**[00:17:35] AM:**

Yeah, it—I honestly don't have to talk with them a ton, but every once in a while, like at the beginning of the summer, I just did one on best bug sprays. And so I did need to talk with someone, and oh my gosh, what are they called? An entomologist or something like that. I'm making myself sound not as credible right now, but like a bug expert, an insect expert.

**[00:17:35] BB:**



Okay.

**[00:17:36] AM:**

I don't know right off the top of my head exactly why bugs go to this type of light and why they hate this type of smell. Like, I can research it. But someone who has truly studied it—you know, they're the ones who are going to be trusted. And people are going to love that, and the algorithm is going to push that. So that's who I need to get in contact with. And I think last summer I did a story on, like, barbecue tools and things like that because our food editor was too busy to do it. So Oh, commerce. Have the commerce editor do it. And so now I needed to get in touch with someone in food and someone in barbecuing and stuff like that. So it's kind of random. It is a little bit—it's not as common for me to be in touch with experts, but it is going to be a little bit more in that home field. And I do tend to love a little bit more of the fashion and the beauty thing, so I like to pitch a lot of the fashion and the beauty ideas. And so during winter, I did all of our editors' favorite winter skincare—the skincare products getting them through the winter season. And I needed to get in contact with a dermatologist. And so that's—they—my editor said, 'I really think having a dermatologist or some type of expert, including some type of quotes here, would also help the credibility of the story—not just our editors.' While that is great—recommendations—let's have an expert. So I need you to get in touch with a dermatologist as well. It's a little bit all over the map. I wish I had a little bit more of a specific beat.

**[00:18:57] BB:**

Yeah, I know. Because there's a lot of different types of experts.

**[00:19:00] AM:**

Exactly. There are.

**[00:19:02] BB:**

But hey, okay, what perhaps would be then a powerful pitch. I'm just saying or thinking here is, hey, if I'm pitching you, Anna, okay, back to school. School, I'm gonna do the best backpacks for kids. And then I'm like, oh, and by the way, yeah, here's my backpack brand. And also I have an expert who's in as a chiropractor who's like talking about like the weight of things on your back or whatever. And a child, a child doctor, for example, a pediatrician who like deals with chronic back issues for backpacks. That would be quite the powerful pitch. But yeah, I would love that because.

**[00:20:00] AM:**

Oh yeah, I'm seeing the headline, chiropractor says this is the type of backpack your kid needs for back to school season. And I'm thinking so many parents are clicking on that. Like, I would love that. So I say don't be afraid to pitch. Like, even if it feels a little off the wall, like, I don't know if this editor would need it. Don't be afraid to pitch it because you have no idea what type of ideas are head or what type of assignments they're they have on there.

**[00:20:01] BB:**

So, Anna, could you fill us in about. I'm glad we covered sources. Fill us in a little bit on the affiliate side. Are you doing affiliates? People like to ask when it's a commerce person, like, how do I get into the affiliates game if that's something that is happening?

**[00:20:13] AM:**

Affiliates are key 100%. We pretty much mainly only work with brands that are affiliated in the magazine. In the print world, obviously we. There is more room to be like, check out this small unique business off the road, hidden gym. Whereas digital, it is a bit more like, we want affiliates. This is like a, you know, just such a great opportunity for that affiliate revenue coming in, obviously. And you again, we have other stories that are meant to highlight more unique smaller businesses. But for a lot of gift guides and things like that, we are looking for more affiliate companies. And I understand why a business might be like, oh, I don't know about affiliate. I don't know if I want to do that and like put in that money for that. But I always tell people Country Living is owned by Hearst Publications. Hearst also owns Cosmopolitan, Esquire, Oprah, Daly.

**[00:21:04] BB:**

Yes.

**[00:21:05] JM:**

So many magazines. So we use the affiliate partnership skim links. If you get in with skim links, not only could you have the opportunity to get into Country Living gift guides, but all those other magazine gift guides now. So think of all of the thousands and millions of people who now have the opportunity to see your product. So many people clicking on your website, so many people seeing an editor recommend your product, that's huge. So I think affiliate, like joining the affiliate is so important. It's been great for us. I've seen a lot of companies who are not sure about it. I talk with them, I get them in contact with someone who handles all of that. They join the affiliate and they get so excited. We put them in the magazines. They get clicks to their website. People are purchasing and it's a win, win because now I get to put your company in our magazine and now your company is in our magazine and a ton of people who didn't see your company before are now clicking on your website. So it's, it's really a win, win. And I'm in this business because I love sharing things. I love, I love sharing the good news. I'm like, look at this pajama set. I'm obsessed with it. I want everyone I know to have it. So please, everyone, please join the affiliate.

**[00:22:18] BB:**

Please join the affiliate. This is all the things you. You got it. Well, we are not, Anna, going to do our quick rapid fire stuff because you already did provide the answers on that so that we are all set when we did our pitch palooza. Everyone should be checking that out. But question for you, Anna, as we kind of wrap up here. Were you always this type of reporter and wanting to share the things? Because, for example, you were a graduate at University of North Alabama. You were in the Writers Guild of America. I'm like reading your things. So it's journalism, but the, with the light, with the love of the lifestyle content and such. Was this always meant for you?

**[00:22:55] AM:**

This is what I always, I think, wanted to be doing for sure. But I actually started out my career in local broadcast news. So I was what they called a digital News producer or digital news reporter. I was doing nightside breaking news for. It was so intense. It was during the pandemic 2020 presidential. Presidential election. 2020 pandemic.

**[00:23:22] BB:**

WFF, right?

**[00:22:12] AM:**

Yes. WFF 48 News in Huntsville Gray and NBC affiliate in Huntsville, Alabama. And I was just, you know, this fresh little doe eyed college grad wanting to, you know, do my time in news. I was like, I'll do whatever I'm, I really wanted lifestyle or something. I didn't know what I wanted. I wanted the job that paid me. And here was a job offer, I took it and I was basically in charge of getting the news in getting all the facts and getting it on the website, getting it on social media and getting it to the app and it was so intense. Let me tell you, it was great. I learned a lot. I'm very thankful for it. But after about two years I was like, this is a lot. I don't say it is.

**[00:24:08] BB:**

I was in local news too way back when. I was like, nope.

**[00:24:08] AM:**

Yeah, it was intense. And that station did end up starting a lifestyle show which they asked me to help produce. So that was, that's what got my foot into lifestyle and I got a little taste of that and I was like, this is what I want. And so I was producing that, doing some social media for them and also doing a little bit of correspondent work on the show. And I loved it. But I still knew, I think I wanted to get out of the production world, out of the news world. And I was like, I, I, because I did a lot of the digital content that was able to provide me some of the work I could put on a resume to get into the magazine world and this, this side of publication. So it was cool, it was very rewarding. But I'm so happy to be where I am now. I love this type of work. I think it's so fun and like I said, I wanted to be able to share the good news and the fun stuff and the light and happy stuff and it's just so much fun.

**[00:25:00] BB:**

Oh, we call this aces in your places, Anna. So it sounds like you're an ace in your place.

**[00:25:05] AM:**

Yes, I love it. Thank you.

**[00:25:00] BB:**

Well, Anna Mahan, associate commerce editor at Country Living, everybody, if you are getting your strawberries and you need a cute dress to wear with them, put that in the subject line. The name of the brand for Miss Anna. She wants to hear it. She wants to share it. Thank you so

much, Anna. And by the way, avoid this enough. I wrote that one down, Anna. I was like, do not put that in your headlines. Look at you. So proud of you.

**[00:25:32] AM:**

Oh, my gosh. I love it. Well, thank you so much for having me. This has been great.

**[00:25:38] ANNOUNCER:**

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist. Do you want to pitch our next guest or ask them a specific question? Head over to our website at [onepitch.co](#) to learn more about our private networking community for PR pros and apply to join we'll see you next week. But until then, start great stories.