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Jered Martin:

Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, brought to you by OnePitch. The guests on our show include some of the most notable journalists from the top US-based publications who covered topics including technology, lifestyle and culture, health, science, and consumer products. We discuss their role, the types of stories they cover, what their inbox looks like, how they connect with sources, and lots more. Today's guest is none other than Erin Griffith from the New York Times. Erin has been a correspondent for NYT since 2018. She currently reports on technology start-ups and venture capital from the San Francisco Bureau. Erin has also been with many other notable news outlets, including Wired, Fortune, and Adweek. During today's episode, Erin tells us about the types of stories she's been focusing on more at the New York Times, the importance of subject lines, one of her favorite stories she's written recently, and more. Let's listen in with Erin and Beck now.

Beck Bamberger:

Hey everyone. Welcome to now Season Two of Coffee with a Journalist. Very exciting today because we have Erin Griffith from the New York Times with us. Erin, thank you for being here. You are busy so we are thankful you are here, especially today. We got some breaking stories.

Erin Griffith:

Yeah, a lot of IPO news flying around, some deal news happening.

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Beck Bamberger:

Yes, yeah. So, let's squeeze this in and we can hear all your juicy insights as you're managing and figuring all that good stuff out. So, first off, a lot of times we like to start with just your inbox, especially being at New York Times, how is your inbox, and how crazy is it with pitches?

Erin Griffith:

You know, it's actually not as bad as other jobs that I've had. I don't write as much. I found when I was at jobs where I was writing one or two times a day, I would get a lot more pitches because I feel like firms just have these kind of filters that are like, "Oh, you wrote about AI, oh, you wrote about some random thing." And so then you just get added to the distribution for that. And so I have generally been focused on consumer tech and start-ups and VC at the Times, and I'm not writing on a regular basis. And when I do, it's often on the news. So, I would say, it's a lot more manageable than in the past.

Erin Griffith:

I mean, when I was doing Term Sheet at Fortune, the method of compiling the news was for people to email it to me. So, I'd have like 400 emails every morning and it was just so much to slog through. And now I'm definitely an inbox, like, 10 person. So, I usually start each morning, I maybe have a hundred emails, and I'll go through and delete most of them and then respond to the handful that I'm actually needing to get back to. But I also don't really write much funding news or off of press releases so generally, I haven't been getting nearly as many of those which is, I guess, good.

Beck Bamberger:

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Wow. So people are learning perhaps. What makes you open the, let's say, 10 out of a hundred that you'd see? Are you ever opening pitches? Are you ever looking at pitches? People like to know this part.

Erin Griffith:

Yeah, not really. I mean...

Beck Bamberger:

Honest answer.

Erin Griffith:

**I definitely keep ones that seem interesting based on the subject, like if it's a funding that has the amount in the subject or it's a company that has the firm in the subject. I mean, generally most funding announcements, I will archive sometimes without reading it but just to have it in my inbox so that way, if it happens that I'm writing a very specific story and I need, okay, I want to find some examples of start-ups that are doing X or Y, I can quickly search through my inbox and say, "Okay, at least I know how to get in touch with this company," so I'll respond.** Generally, it's like the PR firm is no longer working with them and that strategy doesn't really work that well.

Erin Griffith:

I mean, I do keep the funding announcements around just to sort of have my finger on that. I don't know what would make me open a pitch. If it just so happens that someone is pitching me on something that I happen to be working on. **I mean, I often do more pulled back kind of trend stories that are not... They're not going to be your funding announcement that has the headline of Company X raised y but a lot of times if I'm doing kind of a market story, I'm going to have four or five companies in that story talking about like, "Okay, it was really hard to raise our funding because of these macro trends that are happening," or, "Oh my god, there's so much money around, I had 10 investors coming at me, outbidding each other."** And so when I'm working on a story like that, and those pitches come in, I'm always thinking like, "Okay, would this company be willing? Will they fit into what I'm working on, and would they be willing to talk to me?" Not necessarily just about whatever is in their press release, but about certain aspects of their funding. So, I definitely keep those things around for that.

Beck Bamberger:

And you file them or do you have a filing flag system of some sort?

Erin Griffith:

No. No.

Beck Bamberger:

Wow, you just let it ride.

Erin Griffith:

A little bit. I mean, let's see, I'm looking now at my filing system for my emails and, let's see. Usually, it's like if I'm working on a particular story. I have one for Airbnb, one for DoorDash. Those are my two main

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companies that I'm covering. I've just various other themes, like, well, I'm also covering the Epic and Apple suit. So, I've that. **I've got themes around an IPO folder, a moral turpitude folder, a folder of recruiters because those are always good sources.**

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, recruiters. Oh, that's a new one. I haven't heard of that. Tech recruiters, people who are finding tech talent?

Erin Griffith:

Yeah. **They often know when a company has to raise money because they're hiring, and they know if there's a bunch of layoffs, or if a bunch of high-profile people are starting to flee a start-up.**

Beck Bamberger:

I've never heard that someone, and we've talked to a lot of people on here, who have actually found recruiters to be of interest. Oh, that's interesting. Maybe recruiters should start pitching you. Hmm.

Erin Griffith:

Well, then I doubt they want to be on the record.

Beck Bamberger:

They probably don't. They probably don't. That's right. Okay. Well, Erin, since you do write less now versus your previous places, where every day you were cranking out Term Sheet for Fortune, for instance. Thank goodness, that's definitely changed. How do you go about creating a story that's maybe not news breaking but definitely takes some meat? So, for example, you've just broke this piece on All Raise, which is a women's organization advocating for female representation in VCs, and they raised a chunk of change to get them now to this next level, all that stuff. I mean, does that come from a pitch? Does that come from you're on a walk and you're like, "You know what I'm going to do?" Where do stories come from?

Erin Griffith:

Yeah, that was just a straight news story that, yeah, that did come from a pitch. And that's for sure more of an exception than the rule of what I normally do. **I put the categories of stories that I do into two buckets. One is enterprise where it's my own idea, and I've done a bunch of reporting around it. And the other is news, and those are generally shorter, faster, and they wouldn't run on the front of P1.** And so those stories sometimes can come from pitches. It's very rare. That happens to be the last story that I know that I'm talking to you but generally that is not the case.

Erin Griffith:

For this instance, it's because it's an important cause and it's an important work they're doing, and it's also important to point out that, despite all of the work that's happening, the progress has still been really slow. And generally, the news side of things, it's pretty much limited to the really big late-stage unicorn companies, the ones that are going public, and sometimes if they raise a really crazy round of funding, but that's so common now that that's not even super newsworthy either. So, that story was definitely more the exception.

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Beck Bamberger:

Got it. And then you'd probably say, so then the likelihood of a pitch actually coming into creating a story, significantly low.

Erin Griffith:

Yeah, especially if it's about a specific company. Unless it's, like I said, the two main companies that I'm covering now are DoorDash and Airbnb, and next year that'll probably be expand to include like Instacart or whatever the companies that are about to go... The ones that are just pre-IPO. Yeah. So, generally, if I'm going to do a story about an individual company, it's pretty rare, and it's usually because I'm so busy covering other stuff. I would like to do more of those kinds of companies. Like, the only one I can really think of that I did in the last two years is I did a profile of Brex, and I did a story about the funding of StockX, which was that sneaker stock exchange.

Beck Bamberger:

Which is oddly popular to me in ways I don't understand still. Yeah.

Erin Griffith:

Yeah, it's so interesting. And both of those were kind of unusual in that, yeah, I generally am not doing those, but they kind of come from my own idea. The StockX one was a pitch, I believe, because of the funding. But it was one of those things where it was kind of wrapped into this interesting cultural phenomenon and my editors were super interested in it so it managed to actually get through.

Beck Bamberger:

Long story short. There's no great straight pathway and pitch probability low on that. So, there you go.

Erin Griffith:

**Yeah, I mean, like I said, it's more like if it's fits into something broader that I'm working on, and a lot of times, especially if it's a pitch from somebody that I have a relationship with, or I know, or I know the company, or I've met with the execs and I am interested in the company, I would like to write something about them, but I haven't quite figured out what it is yet, I'll just kind of file that away and be like, "Oh, well, if, sometime, I end up working on a story about remote work in the pandemic," just to pick a super generic example or whatever, I'll just keep that in mind. But yeah, it's almost always a much broader... We have a general audience and they don't really need to know about every little start-up.**

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Beck Bamberger:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jered Martin:

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Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to see the unique ways OnePitch helps PR professionals and marketers pitch journalists? Head to [onepitch.co](https://onepitch.co) to learn about our new OnePitch score and see how easy it is to find the right journalist to pitch your news to. Sign up for your free account today. Now, back to today's episode.

Beck Bamberger:

Let's talk about some of your favorites. So, I will just give you a word and you tell us your favorite in that category. Take-out food.

Erin Griffith:

Mission Chinese.

Beck Bamberger:

TV show.

Erin Griffith:

I guess I've just watched The Crown so I'll say that.

Beck Bamberger:

Perfect. Saturday activity.

Erin Griffith:

See, I hate this because I'm just giving all these PR people some fake line to put in the first line of their email to me, and they're going to be like, "Erin, I love The Crown too." And I'm going to be like, "No, you just listened to this podcast, which, good job doing your homework. But come on."

Beck Bamberger:

Now, you can filter. You can give fake answers here. So then when you know, someone says something about it, oh, that's fake. Fake news. Fake news. No, go ahead. Okay. So, Saturday activity.

Erin Griffith:

Yeah, sitting in the park.

Beck Bamberger:

That sounds nice. Guilty pleasure song. Oh, this is a new list they came up with. Okay. Guilty pleasure song.

Erin Griffith:

I don't think there's such thing as a guilty pleasure song. I think if you like a song, it should just be a pleasure.

Beck Bamberger:

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I'm with you on that. Book.

Erin Griffith:

Favorite book? Well, I recently read Severance, which was great and it had a lot of parallels to pandemic life.

Beck Bamberger:

Hmm. We're going to talk more on books in a second here. Place to visit in San Francisco.

Erin Griffith:

Oh, Twin Peaks.

Beck Bamberger:

Good spot. Article you've written. Okay. Favorite article you've written.

Erin Griffith:

I did a big story on, it was about digital nomads traveling around, and that was a really fun one, and I really enjoyed talking to all the people who were brave to talk to me for it.

Beck Bamberger:

Social media platform.

Erin Griffith:

Twitter, obviously.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes. And then last one here and I'm like, "Oh, I know who I'd answer." Okay. Celebrity.

Erin Griffith:

Favorite celebrity. I'm just watching this show called Bajillion Dollar Propertie\$. One of the actors in it is named Drew Tarver and I just recently discovered him from Comedy Bang! Bang! and some of the songs that he sings are so hilarious so I'm going to say that for now.

Beck Bamberger:

That's perfect. Okay. This ties into our next section, and I've expanded it because it used to be just like, well, what are you reading. But now I've expanded it to what are you reading, listening to, consuming in quarantine, blah, blah, whatever. Yeah. You got any favorite books, shows? How was The Crown, by the way? Was it good?

Erin Griffith:

The Crown was great, binged that. I've been going back through and watching West Wing, which-

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Beck Bamberger:

Oh, classic. Classic.

Erin Griffith:

Yeah. Now it's Christmas season so I'm also watching all the Christmas episodes of all the TV shows, which is actually really depressing because their takeaway message is the real meaning of Christmas is being together with family. And it just really doesn't hold up or it doesn't resonate in the same way that it used to. But I'm also a big print magazine fan. And so I get a lot of print magazines and I try to force myself to read them because otherwise, I can't even get through a whole long-form article on my phone without getting distracted by pings from a million different things. So, it's nice to sort of put the phone aside, or go out for a walk and sit somewhere and read and not have your phone.

Beck Bamberger:

Doesn't it feel like a luxury too, by the way?

Erin Griffith:

Yeah, a little bit. A little bit.

Beck Bamberger:

Ridiculously luxurious to hold a magazine and be like, "Oh, let me flip through. Someone wrote this five months ago?" I mean, you're like, "I'm holding an artifact. It's amazing."

Erin Griffith:

Yeah, Whenever I see a long-form, like Fortune, or New Yorker, or Wired, or whatever article float by in my feed, I'm always like, "Nope. Going to get that one in print and read it there."

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, that's a good filtering system. Because then you're like, "Okay, now I see it in print. I don't need to do that right now."

Erin Griffith:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

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Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Lastly, almost lastly, Erin, here for what we have today, and I have to tell you answers have been very positive as of late, but you just answer how you wish, which is the future of journalism. What do you think?

Erin Griffith:

**Yeah, I think I feel pretty anxious about it, to be honest. I think the sort of trust that has been eroded in recent years is really scary. It's really crazy to think about the fact that our country has just separate**

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**news universes and you can't even have conversations sometimes with people on an agreed shared set of facts. So, that really freaks me out.**

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah.

Erin Griffith:

**I'm encouraged by some of the trends that we're seeing around people actually paying for the news because if you think back five years ago when we all were pivoting to video, and chasing ever-diminishing returns for advertising, and trying to pander to very unpredictable social media distribution feeds, that was not good. So, I think moving to a subscription world is better, although there's definitely drawbacks to that too around who gets access to quality information.**

Erin Griffith:

**But I think retraining the world to pay for quality information is working in some respects and that's encouraging.** And the whole sub sec move I think is super cool too. I worry about people getting newsletter fatigue, but I also, I read a bunch of them and I think it's awesome, and I think it's really cool that so many talented, smart people are making their own way too. So, I hope that that's sustainable and continues to be a good outlet in the year when so many awesome journalists have unfortunately lost their jobs. **I feel really mixed. It scares me that the local news and market is just completely just decimated. Those jobs are going away. They weren't paying very well, to begin with. All that kind of stuff really does make me nervous. But I hope that new things grow.**

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Beck Bamberger:

Things emerge. Things could maybe emerge. We'll see. All right, Erin, the last part here, kind of my favorite part, well, it depends on the answers, but we'll see, is this Madlib. So, I'm going to give you the phrase and you give me whatever word, and then I will read you back the little mad lib, if that sounds good. Sometimes they're shockingly accurate. Other times they're just silly. But sometimes they're shockingly accurate. So, let's see. Let's see what we get today. Okay. First, what is a catchphrase? Any catchphrase.

Erin Griffith:

Time to build.

Beck Bamberger:

Time to build. Yes. How about a scare phrase you might hear as a journalist?

Erin Griffith:

What's a scare phrase?

Beck Bamberger:

Like deadline or...

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Erin Griffith:

Oh, correction.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, correction. Mm-hmm (affirmative). A empowering buzzword that you might hear as a journalist.

Erin Griffith:

On the record.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. An adjective.

Erin Griffith:

Orange.

Beck Bamberger:

Orange. A part of a pitch.

Erin Griffith:

Hello.

Beck Bamberger:

Hello. Another adjective.

Erin Griffith:

Windy.

Beck Bamberger:

Windy. And then another part of a pitch.

Erin Griffith:

Let me know.

Beck Bamberger:

Let me know. Oh gosh, I use that sometimes. Okay. Amount of time.

Erin Griffith:

A week.

Beck Bamberger:

A week. Another adjective.

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Erin Griffith:

What.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh no. Okay. A singular noun.

Erin Griffith:

Business.

Beck Bamberger:

Business. Okay. A verb ending in I-N-G.

Erin Griffith:

Crying.

Beck Bamberger:

Crying. And then just a verb.

Erin Griffith:

Jump.

Beck Bamberger:

Jump. Okay. So, just for clarity sake, why don't we change that last what one? Okay. Let's just... Wait, what's an alternative adjective we have?

Erin Griffith:

Drawing?

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Okay. We can use that. We can use that. Okay. Let's start from the top here. Okay. To me, tech journalism is all about time to build. It consists of corrections and on the records on the daily. If a pitch has an orange hello, I will absolutely respond to it. However, if a pitch has a windy let me know, you can expect no reply from me. If a week goes by and you don't see an email back from me, you can just assume I am not dry about it.

Erin Griffith:

Yikes.

Beck Bamberger:

The best stories always have phones and are usually about business, and the best way to reach me is by crying to me but you can also jump me. Erin, does this not sound accurate?

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Erin Griffith:

Oh god. That would have been very bad.

Beck Bamberger:

So, yeah, we had to course correct on that, but otherwise people crying to you, people jumping you, that sounds accurate to me.

Erin Griffith:

Oh my god. Oh my god. I'm going to get fired. Okay.

Beck Bamberger:

We course corrected Erin because we are good about being adaptive or whatever tech word you want to use. Erin, this was so fun. Thank you so much. Thanks for the laughs today. I hope this was a little bright spot in your IPO whirlwind.

Erin Griffith:

Yeah, thanks a lot.

Jered Martin:

Thanks for tuning into this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Erin Griffith from the New York Times. If you enjoy listening to our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and anywhere else you listen to podcasts. And if you have a moment, please leave us a review to share your thoughts about the show and today's guest. To learn more about the latest tools on OnePitch, head to our website at [onepitch.co](http://onepitch.co). We'll see you next week with an all-new guest and even more insights about the journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.