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Jered Martin:

Welcome to Coffee with a Journalist, a podcast by OnePitch, featuring well-known journalists from the top US-based publications covering technology, lifestyle and culture, health, science, products and services and more. The goal of our show is to uncover the real person behind the real stories we love to read. We discussed their beat in news coverage, what their inbox looks like, the types of pitches they receive and lots more. Today, on the show, we're speaking with Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins.

Jered Martin:

Jennifer is an entrepreneur and small business reporter for Business Insider. She joined the publication in 2018. And prior to then, she was a blogger, social media coordinator, stylists, makeup artist and freelance writer. Today, on the show, Jennifer tells us about how she prioritizes her daily schedule, what she looks for most in a pitch, how important the subject lines are, the types of pieces she tends to write and more. Let's hear more from Beck and Jennifer on today's episode.

Beck Bamberger:

Hi, everyone. Welcome to Coffee with a Journalist. I hope you have your coffee, I hope you are cozy. We're in what? Season two, I think now, of Coffee with a Journalist, which is great. Jennifer, do you have some coffee with you right now? Or is it too late in the day for you?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

It's actually a little too late in the day. I sometimes will get a second cup of coffee or try to just do some tea, but I actually forgot either one of them today.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, yeah. Mine's already gone myself, so we got just water and whatever else we can. It's rare that we have someone actually drinking coffee on this show, ironically. But you are from Business Insider, as we just covered. We're so excited. I'm sure you're quite busy because we're recording this right now in the midst of about to be the retail flurry that happens in the fall/going up to the holidays. And we're just happy you're here, spending some time with us.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

I'm happy to be here. Thank you for having me.

Beck Bamberger:

Let's talk first, my favorite part, about your inbox. Oh, and by the way, before we even talk about the inbox, congrats on your recent marriage.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Thank you.

Beck Bamberger:

You just got married. This is great news.

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Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Yes.

Beck Bamberger:

Hence you have the dual last name going.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Yes.

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Beck Bamberger:

Love it. Okay. Okay. Your inbox, your inbox. How crazy is it in there? Are there a lot of pitches? Do tell.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Oh, yeah. The inbox is like a never-ending journey every single day. I feel like I get in to work in the morning, or log on these days, and there are already at least 30 in my inbox waiting for me from either the previous night or early in the morning. And sometimes I'll ignore those because I have to just prioritize looking at the news and figuring out what I'm covering that day. And then from there, it's just constantly pouring in. So I don't even know how many I usually get on a daily, but it's probably close to 150, 200 emails a day.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. That's quite the batch. Now, with all those that you do get, how do you manage and filter? Do you read every single subject line? Some people, they will open every single one, which is crazy to me. But how do you manage it?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

I don't know how anyone would do that, but I definitely have a system for myself that really helps. I'm a very organized person. So for me, I'm visual. I like to keep things organized with labels and filters. So first thing I do is typically organize any important emails or ongoing threads with a label. Sometimes it's like calendar and events, so that's something I know that is coming up. Or maybe a current event to cover.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

And then I'll have PR pitches or possible sources. That's actually one that I use to file away any pitches that I get that I think, "Oh, this founder or CEO seems really interesting, but I don't really have the time right now to do anything on them." I can put it in this bucket for later, and maybe revisit them. So it runs the gamut from current stories I'm working on, story ideas, pitches, studies and reports. Any companies that send me studies and reports that might be of interest for our readers, I'll file those away as well. That way, when I'm working on a piece that might be relevant to that report, I can access it easier.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

So for me, it's all about labeling, all about color coding in my inbox. But then I would say as far as actually getting to the daily grind of all these emails that I get, that are not labeled, before I even go into that process, it's definitely just scan through the subject lines. If nothing jumps out at me, just trash it. I have to be super selective these days, because there are so many founders, so many entrepreneurs who want to be covered, and it's great.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

And there are so many great ideas, but we just can't cover everyone. So it really is all about that subject line for me. If I don't understand what you're trying to communicate, or if I don't understand what the business is by the time I scan through that subject line, probably going in the trash bin, unfortunately.

Beck Bamberger:

And then it's gone? It's gone forever? It's not in your system? Mm-hmm (affirmative). Makes sense. Now, you mentioned that you'll save a report, some data that comes out, something like that from a pitch. Do you return back to those three weeks, three months, a year later? I know some people do return to those, but almost in a timeframe that you go like, "Holy cow, I can't believe they resurrected that." Does that happen for you?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Yeah, sometimes. I wouldn't say a year. I think by that time, usually reports and studies are a bit outdated. Or there's been something else that comes out that's more interesting, or more relevant. But I would say that yeah, maybe a few months from now or maybe even six months tops, I might return to something. But I would say usually the timeline for me would be a couple months.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Probably by the time it's like three months old, not likely to look at it because there's probably something that's come out since then. But yeah, I'll definitely return to them. And especially because I write a lot of evergreen pieces, so just because a report comes out does not mean I'm going to write an article about that. But if I'm writing an article that's related, I will return to that report to see if there's some interesting insight for that net graph or that lead.

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Beck Bamberger:

Just as background. Got you. Related to how you come up with stories, and I'm looking at your latest list, you just had on the CEO of Spotify, you had something about craft breweries, you had best platforms for scaling your side hustle. You have a wide realm of what you write about, although retail and small businesses is definitely the focus of it. How do you come about deciding a story to do?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

I tend to look in a lot of different places. Obviously, the news and what's happening, what is trending among entrepreneurship or what industries are doing well, what companies are coming up, that's all stuff that I'll consider. But I'm also looking for the breakout stars or the people who are just proving really, really successful business strategies that they can explain how they did it. And then that way, other entrepreneurs can replicate that. They're providing replicable success, so that's really important.

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Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

And I think there are so many different businesses and ideas and founders out there that to me, the most important thing is, **can you prove your success? And can you give us some really helpful tips and advice that other entrepreneurs or even aspiring entrepreneurs can utilize? And actually, it's not just a success story of I did this from one to a hundred in a year, but there's nothing to back that up. There's no tactic, it's a lofty like, "Oh, I just did my best, or I dreamt it up."**

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

That's not the kind of stuff that's helpful. So we try to be helpful. And that means we need to really vet entrepreneurs and look for the most interesting information, and even data behind their success.

Beck Bamberger:

Got it. So it's the sharing, it's indicating? And then really, what can someone read to take away and implement themselves?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

You guys do, by the way, I have to give credit to Business Insider, with a different angle on the funding announcements, which are very cliché in this tech world that we're in. But you guys do the analysis of the actual deck, which I think is so critical and interesting. Because you read an article and you're like, "Oh, these people got \$10 million, but I want to see what exactly convinced people to give you \$10 million." So I think that's really great.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

That's actually great to hear because that's something that we are always trying to tap into, and we've found that our readers really like those. So I think it's like you said, that visual, tangible results of we earned this much, but here's exactly how we did it. And people want that, they want something that's replicable. They want something that they can copy and paste, and maybe put their own spin on, but they want some sort of reference or guideline for them.

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Beck Bamberger:

I like that.

Jered Martin:

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 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:

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I have a little word game to play.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Okay.

Beck Bamberger:

Word association. So I'm going to give you a word and then you tell me whatever comes to mind. Are you ready?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Yes.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Food.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Burger.

Beck Bamberger:

Drink.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Coffee.

Beck Bamberger:

Of course. Hobby.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Sewing.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, do you sewing?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

I do. I haven't for a very long time, but I did a lot in high school and college.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, I used to sew. Anyway. Funding.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

VC.

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Beck Bamberger:
Founders.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:
Entrepreneur.

Beck Bamberger:
Spotify.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:
Music.

Beck Bamberger:
OnlyFans.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:
Sex.

Beck Bamberger:
For those who don't know, would you like to explain that one?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:
Yes, yes. OnlyFans Vance is a platform that sex workers, as well as some celebrities, have created accounts on to offer this insider look at their lives, or explicit photos, videos. It really runs the gamut. Not all people are on there for only porn, but it's the latest platform where a lot of people are able to make a living and potentially, promote themselves like some celebrities on there.

Beck Bamberger:
Fascinating. Like we need another platform, but there you go. IPO.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:
Asana.

Beck Bamberger:
Instagram.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:
Influencer.

Beck Bamberger:
Entrepreneurship.

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Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Invention.

Beck Bamberger:

Journalism.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Truth.

Beck Bamberger:

Pitch.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Convincing.

Beck Bamberger:

Inbox.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Stress.

-

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, my gosh. By the way, does it stop on the weekends? Do you get pitches on Saturday?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Sometimes, yeah. And that's when I'm like, I really ... sometimes I get pitches either really late at night, which sometimes it might just be someone on a different time zone or something. But then on the weekend, unless I'm working on something super timely, which it doesn't really ever happen on the weekend, I'm like, really? You got to, come on, spend some time with your family. Chill, relax.

Beck Bamberger:

Do something. Yeah, yeah. I hear you. Well, speaking of relaxing on the weekend, doing something like that, is there anything you're reading right now or listening to, or watching that you love? I get all my book recommendations from this podcast, by the way.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Awesome. I am reading ... well, I've actually been going through, off and on. I tend to do this with books where I'll start something and then I'll read half of it, and then I'll start another book. And then start reading them simultaneously. But I am currently working on *She Said*, by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey.

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And then the other one, I'm actually really excited about. Let me just make sure I'm getting the title correct.

Beck Bamberger:

By the way, for those who don't know, that was the sexual harassment story that helped create the Me Too Movement. And what I love about it is it's, I believe, the New York Times reporters who wrote the story. So it's a story about how they came to find this story. And they were the ones that basically unraveled the Harvey Weinstein stuff. So it's a fascinating story within a story because it's about how journalists erect out of the ether, a deep, highly researched story. It's super fascinating. I read that too.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Yes, it's so interesting. And I love stories like that. Same thing with the movie, Spotlight. Anything that really delves into investigative journalism, I just geek out over because I want to know exactly how they did it, who they talked to, what documents they found.

Beck Bamberger:

Exactly.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

All of that fun stuff. I'm also reading in advance of Launching While Female, by Susanne Althoff. And I was really interested in this because it comes out later in the month. And I was really interested in this because Susanne actually taught at the school that I went to, Emerson College. I unfortunately never had a class with her because I didn't take any publishing related classes, but she talked to, I think it was over 100 female founders and just tried to figure out, what are the barriers to launching a business when you're a woman? And especially, a woman of color or minorities.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

And so I'm just beginning it, so I'm hopefully going to finish it within a couple of weeks. But I'm really interested in just how she dives into all this data and the surveys that she did. And it's something I've always been interested in from the moment I started on this beat. Access to capital is really something that, it's just so off balance. You see so many of the same people, same types of startups or same founders getting funded and getting VC. So it's really interesting that she's trying to bring this issue to light and really research it more, dig deeper into it. And I think it's cool. She teaches at my old college, my alma mater.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes. Oh, fascinating. Oh, and how fun. Now, how did you get an advance copy?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

I'm a journalist, so ... you know. Yes, that's the fun part, because I get to read it. And then hopefully, talk to her about it and maybe write something about it. So that is always also a really fun part for me is seeing some interesting books about entrepreneurship and if they're not released yet, but they're looking for press. And sometimes they're really interesting. Obviously, I can't cover every single book that's released about entrepreneurship.

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Beck Bamberger:

Yeah, of course.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

But it depends. And if it's got a really interesting angle, it could be worthwhile.

Beck Bamberger:

Nice. I need to get on this. How do I get an advance copy of books? We have a book club-

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Oh, nice.

Beck Bamberger:

... within a band that we're always ... and we try to get books that are within the quarter launching. So we're getting the hottest off-the-press type of stuff. So anyway, might have to hit up Susanne. Jennifer, what's your take on the future of journalism? With some context. Let's back it up with some context.

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Beck Bamberger:

So I'm scanning back up on your long, long, long, long, long, long, long resume of all the various things you've done. And as we talked about, so you're recent. 2016 graduate, so it's not like you've been in the industry 25 plus years, and we have folks on here who have. But what's your take on the future of journalism?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

No, it's interesting, even just from there. I haven't been in the industry for as long as so many other seasoned journalists, but **I think it's interesting how when I was in college, the focus was still on print.** They were still trying to make sure that journalists were going to be multifaceted and very fluent with digital media, but I declared my focus in print journalism.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

And now, I think that it's funny to think about that as even being something you had to do. Because today, I don't know what Emerson does at this moment, but I think that at this point, it's like maybe you can go into either broadcast or digital. But that print specification is not really the most promising for your career outlook. And I think that anyone who studies digital journalism will be fine in print as far as the learning and the techniques and everything that you need to know.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

So I really think that, obviously, as we know, **digital is the future. And unfortunately, print is just never going to be the same. But I also do think that it's multifaceted. And I think that something that we've even seen at Business Insider is our subscription just growing so much, that really indicates to us that**

people are willing to pay for high quality journalism and inside information if there's a story that hasn't been told from any other outlet. Or even if it's just access to more high profile people.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

I think we're crossing that bridge now where, before, we were in a place where everyone expected content to be free. But especially now with streaming services and Netflix, Amazon Disney+, all of these companies, you have to pay for their content. They're not allowing things to be free, so neither are we. Journalism has to be paid for. We're also a business. And so I think that subscription model is just going to grow, as you've seen with Business Insider, and so many other companies are also starting subscriptions.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

To what degree? Not really sure. Obviously, there's still room for free content and news, but I think that for the most part, there has to be some sort of business model there where you are paying for content that you're consuming. Because, how else are we going to survive?

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

And I think that also changes things. In college, I was always so interested in investigative journalism or features and profiles. And that stuff is great. And actually, Business Insider does a lot of amazing pieces like that. But I also think that there's a huge appetite for bite-sized pieces where readers just want to know the one tip that they need to know for the day, or that one piece of insight they need to know for the day. And so pieces don't always have to be super long.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

We don't always have to publish 1,000, 2,000 word story to get to the bottom of what readers want. Sometimes they just want a 400 word story. And that can still be really high quality, and it can still be maybe even a really great interview. But you just break it down into smaller pieces. So I could interview a founder or a CEO of a company. And instead of writing a huge 2,000 word profile on them, I could do a couple 400 word, maybe 300, 400 word stories about specific insights that they gave. Or specific topics that they talked about during that interview.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

So I think it is transforming into something that you're creating more content for varying interests and a variety of different people who want different things. But at the center of it, it has to make money obviously, to survive. And ...

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah, it does.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

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Unfortunately, we've seen so many publications folding and layoffs, so that can look really discouraging. But I think when I look at how long, even just for the past few years that I've been at Business Insider and seeing their growth, they really are a testament to being able to grow in the midst of an industry that's actually having a lot of difficulty.

Beck Bamberger:

Something could be said, too, to your point on, oh, it's a shorter story. And Business Insider does such a great job with that, where they put the bullet points of the main summary right at the top. And you're like, cool. I read the headline, I can read the summary, and then I'm like, "Ooh, okay. I want to know more." Boom. Then you go throughout the whole article.

Beck Bamberger:

I think there's just a lot of smart things that's going on over there. That is a showcase of how you can monetize, have gated content, still have some that you can access otherwise, but the gated content model and so forth. Super interesting. I'm glad you're at one of those places right now.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Me too. I am very grateful to be at Business Insider, and doing what we're doing. I think that they're very innovative and always trying to improve from the last story. And ultimately, the thing that I've always been drawn to as an employee there is just how well they cater to the readers. If readers are the ones that we are writing for, we should be writing what they want to read, obviously.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

And it seems like a very basic thing, but I think a lot of publications lose sight of that because they want to do that ultimate journalism or that dream goal piece. That's great, and you should pursue those pieces. But you also have to know that your job relies on making readers happy. And if they're not enjoying your stories, then you're not going to enjoy your job.

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Beck Bamberger:

I think that's the quote of the day. They're not enjoying your stories, you're not going to like your job. That's it. Well, let's move to the last part here, Jennifer, which I personally enjoy. Sometimes these are very accurate. Sometimes they're just silly, but we have a fun time with them, which is our math libs. So I'm going to tee this up to you and then I'm going to read back what we get. Are you ready?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Yes, I'm ready.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. First off, a catch phrase. Any catch phrase.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

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Drink the Kool-Aid.

Beck Bamberger:

Drink the Kool-Aid. Yes. How about a scare phrase that you hear in journalism?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Sorry, I'm going to get super technical about this. You mean from the point of view of a journalist? Or someone-

Beck Bamberger:

Yes.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

... critiquing the ... okay.

Beck Bamberger:

One person in the past has said correction; that was their scary word.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Off the record.

Beck Bamberger:

Off the record. How about a empowering or a happy buzzword that you hear in journalism?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Pivot.

Beck Bamberger:

An adjective.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Fuzzy.

Beck Bamberger:

Fuzzy. Man, I'm hearing some good ones lately. Part of a pitch.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

The new normal.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah, yeah. The new normal. Okay. Another adjective.

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Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Iridescent.

Beck Bamberger:

Iridescent. Look, you're on fire. Another part of a pitch.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Historical success.

Beck Bamberger:

An amount of time.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

26 minutes.

Beck Bamberger:

Great. An adjective.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Sticky.

Beck Bamberger:

A singular noun.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Screw.

Beck Bamberger:

A topic.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Small business.

Beck Bamberger:

A verb ending in I-N-G.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Running.

Beck Bamberger:

Running. And then just any old verb you want.

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Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Withholding.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Are you ready, Jennifer?

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Yes.

Beck Bamberger:

Here we go. To me, tech journalism is drinking the Kool-Aid. It consists of off the record conversations, and pivots on the daily. If a pitch has a fuzzy the-new-normal phrase, I will absolutely respond to it. However, if a pitch is iridescent with historical successes, you can expect no reply from me.

Beck Bamberger:

If 26 minutes goes by and you don't see an email back from me, you can just assume I am not sticky about it. And the best stories always have a screw, and are usually about small business. The best way to reach me is by running it over to me, but you can also just withhold it from me.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Nice.

Beck Bamberger:

I love it. I think the first line, tech journalism, drinking the Kool-Aid, was the perfect one for this. Jennifer, thank you for being on today. This was a lot of fun.

Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins:

Yes, it's been great. Thank you so much.

Jered Martin:

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Jennifer Ortakales Dawkins from Business Insider. If you like our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts and anywhere else you listen to podcasts. If you have a moment, please leave us a review to share your thoughts about the show and today's episode.

Jered Martin:

To learn more about the latest tools on OnePitch, head to our website at onepitch.co and see the unique ways we're helping public relations professionals pitch journalists more effectively. 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.