

EPISODE 145

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER: 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 who write about topics ranging from technology to lifestyle and culture, health, and science. We discuss the types of stories they cover, their thoughts on exclusives and embargoes, their favorite pitches, and how they connect with sources. Head to onepitch.co and look for the video page to learn more about our new video series, featuring journalists from the show.

Our guest today on Coffee with a Journalist is Bailey Schulz. Bailey is a Consumer News and money reporter for USA Today. She covers stories about travel, tech, and money, specifically for consumers. During the episode, Bailey sheds light on the importance of keywords and pitches, why embargoes result in better quality stories, the right amount of time one should wait before sending her a follow up, and more. Let's hear from Bailey now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:13] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. Today, with us from USA Today, a great outlet that everyone should be looking at probably on a daily basis, if you ask me, is Bailey Schulz. She's the Consumer News reporter. She's with us coming from – Where are you right now, Bailey? Are you in Las Vegas?

[00:01:34] BS: I am in technically Henderson but basically Las Vegas, Nevada.

[00:01:38] BB: Okay, close enough. Close enough. Oh, how exciting. Thank you for being here.

[00:01:44] BS: Yeah. No, thank you for having me on.

[00:01:46] BB: We're going to cover a lot of things like inboxes and all that jazz. But also, just for people to know, I have a handyman in the background here. You know, COVID life, so here we go. Bailey, first, let's start with your – Well, actually, I was going to say inbox. But, no, I

actually like to have people know the context of the media outlet first, even the biggest ones ever like USA Today. How would you summarize what USA Today provides?

[00:02:11] BS: Oh, man. At least with my team, I work with the Consumer News team for USA Today. So we take a very strong consumer approach, of course, our coverage. So our whole mission is to inform readers the best ways to spend their time, the best ways to spend their money. So we're really just trying to get out stories that make a difference to consumers, whether that's in travel, tech, or money. Or, no, whether that's in travel, tech, or money.

[00:02:37] BB: Travel, tech, or money. Good topics. Bailey, how is your inbox?

[00:02:42] BS: Oh, my goodness. It's always full, and I struggle to be that inbox zero.

[00:02:48] BB: Every day, constant.

[00:02:49] BS: Yeah. Have you ever reached it?

[00:02:51] BS: Occasionally and then it will slip out my fingers immediately after. Then it's a month-long process to get it back.

[00:02:57] BB: I know. Isn't that disappointing? You're like, "Yes, I got it." It's like Friday, 4:00 PM. Then you turn around, you're like, "Hmm, 10 more. Great." Great. Good to see. Do you have a process in which you try to get to the zero? Or do you flag? Or do you folder stuff, pitches specifically?

[00:03:16] BS: My method is usually keep it unread as a reminder or a note to myself that it's something I need to follow up on. So that's sort of my method. I'm sure there are better ways to do it too, as far as flagging or folders. I do flag like some things of high importance, of course, as reminders but yeah. No. Like you said earlier, they just keep coming.

[00:03:39] BB: Yeah. Do you ever search, like use your inbox as your own personal search box, Google?

[00:03:47] BS: I do. Yeah. Whether that's trying to find something, trying to find a person I've spoken to in the past or I have used to where if I'm writing a new topic to myself, and I'm like, "Oh, I think I got a pitch on this at some point in the past." So I'll search the keywords and see if there's any pitches from, yeah, weeks or months past that would make sense.

[00:04:06] BB: This is something that has come up 100-plus times here on this show, which is making sure in your pitches you have keywords noted. If you're not calling out, "Oh, a FinTech application," or, obviously, app. Or a consumer product or something like that because so many journalists use their inbox as their own personal search field.

[00:04:27] BS: Oh, 100%. Yeah. So I would say if I don't give back to someone immediately, there's always a chance I'll get back eventually, if a lot of it is tiny. We all get pitches sometimes, and they're not bad pitches, but it's just nothing I'm working on or anyone on the team is working on, and just we don't have the bandwidth at that point. But that's not to say we won't touch on a topic down the road at some point.

[00:04:49] BB: Then for going back to those pitches, is there like the longest pitch it took to get back to ever? Do you have like, "Oh, my God. 12 months later, I actually responded back to pitch."? I'm just curious on that.

[00:05:02] BS: That's a good question, where I think even with stories where I have done areas before, sometimes like these bigger projects, you just get sidetracked with shorter breaking news and so something – Sometimes, I'll start an article, thinking I'll be done a few weeks, and I'll have to put it on the sidelines for a bit and come back to it in a few months. So there are times like that, where just some things just take a while.

[00:05:25] BB: It takes a while. I think the record we've heard on here is literally a year.

[00:05:29] BS: I believe it.

[00:05:30] BB: Yeah, exactly. So you never know when you get that response from a journalist. Okay, Bailey, do you have subject lines that you love?

[00:05:41] BS: I do, though, the word that always gets me, of course – It doesn't always make sense for me to follow up with it, but exclusives always get my interest, of course.

[00:05:50] BB: Okay. She likes exclusives. Okay. Now, what do you mean – But this is another hot topic on this show. What is exclusive to you in your definition?

[00:06:01] BS: I've had things where sometimes we will get a head start on a report or news. But exclusive, for me, and the things I think could really make a difference, especially if it's something that is in an area that interests me and interests our audience are those exclusives where we're talking to people. Or we have some sort of information that no one else has. Anything that we think that will connect to our audience and help drive readers to our website and urge for a print version would be interesting to us.

[00:06:36] BB: Okay. This is good. Do you have a preferred amount of time you want to have an exclusive be your opportunity? For example, I pitched you today, and I say, "Hey, Bailey. I have an exclusive for you." Do you want 24 hours to get back, 48 hours? You want a week to like pass on it or not because that's the pressure publicists are so often under. Yeah.

[00:06:55] BS: I would say the more time, the better, where I understand that things are usually moving quickly. Sometimes, you don't have that much time to give a reporter. But, yeah, the longer, the better, just so we can have time to talk to editors, figure out and approach things. Yeah. So I think you mentioned a week. That sounds great. I know that's not always possible but –

[00:07:16] BB: Okay. A week-ish, yeah. That's a long time but okay. But for you to pass on it, or you to write the piece? Just to clarify.

[00:07:24] BS: Yeah. That can include writing it as well. So I guess it kind of depends on whether or not that week is doing the reporting and the writing and the interviews. Or it's just, "Oh, hey. Here's this. You can think about for a week," But –

[00:07:35] BB: Okay. Good to know. Good to know. Embargoes, are those ever of interest to you?

[00:07:40] BS: Yes, definitely, where I think, especially if we get something under embargo and, like I said, something that interests our readers and our audience, it's always nice to get that sort of heads up to get the best reporting done in advance as possible. I think it just makes the stories better in the end when you can really think things through and get your approach to as much research as possible. So I'm a big fan of embargoes, where I think it has a better product at the end.

[00:08:09] BB: Okay. This is good to know too. Bailey, now how do you come up with some of the topics and the things you go through, as in are you like taking a shower? Are you walking down the street or you like have your like quiet time? Specifically, I'm wondering why you wrote this NyQuil chicken piece.

[00:08:28] BS: Oh, man.

[00:08:29] BB: Which was a – It's a TikTok trend. I understand that. But was it like bubbling up, and you're like, "Okay, I got to write something."? Or were you like, "You know what? I want to do a TikTok trend piece. Guess what? Chicken titan, Nyquil. Let's do it, NyQuil chicken."

[00:08:42] BS: Yeah. That was a fun one.

[00:08:43] BB: How did that come to be?

[00:08:45] BS: I'm trying to think of where that would originate. That was a really fun one where it was very unique topic. That one I got to do a deep dive with all these experts in like folklore and people talking about just, yeah, yeah, how these sort of online rumors spread. It can just get so out of hand. So that one might have been an idea from a colleague of mine who kind of gave me a tip to look into things, if I remember right.

[00:09:13] BB: Oh, God. Okay, Bailey, I love this quote that you got from an assistant professor at Miami University that says, "Every week, we have a new Tide pod challenge, a new NyQuil chicken, a new Blue Whale suicide challenge. I don't even know Blue Whale suicide challenges.

But the fact is this is absurd. So do you have a practice in which you get stories to your inbox or that you get on your author page?

[00:09:38] BS: Oh, it's a huge mix. Sometimes, like I said, colleagues will tip me up or, "Oh, hey. I caught this thing. You should look into this." Others are ideas that can come from just whatever is trending or what's happening in the world. Yeah. Others are just breaking news, where things happen, and you have to jump in and cover it. So it's a huge mix.

[BREAK]

[00:10:01] ANNOUNCER: 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 journalists to pitch your news to. Sign up for your free account today. Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[00:10:26] BB: For breaking news pieces because we don't have so many people on breaking news that come on here, are you just waiting for the ball to be handed to you from an editor?

[00:10:35] BS: For some things. I am not as involved in breaking news as other people at USA Today. Occasionally, there are big topics, like we've been doing a lot of the Elon Musk Twitter coverage lately. So when things evolve there. The day-to-day for me is not always breaking news.

[00:10:51] BB: Thank goodness. That's a hard beat to be on, if you asked me. Okay, Bailey, I have a fill in the blank section. I will tee up the phrase, and then you could fill it in. Does that sound good?

[00:11:02] BS: That sounds great.

[00:11:03] BB: Okay. My favorite sources always –

[00:11:06] **BS:** I love the ones that get back just quickly, easy to talk to. Yeah. Those ones are always great.

[00:11:16] **BB:** You'll never get a response from me if –

[00:11:19] **BS:** I think, for me, it's those pitches and emails that you can tell it's being sent to dozens, if not hundreds, of people and doesn't match my beat or my area of coverage.

[00:11:32] **BB:** Not good people. I think we've heard this many times on here. You can follow up with me if –

[00:11:37] **BS:** I would say if you haven't heard back from me in a day or two, feel free. Yeah. If it's one of those pitches where it doesn't line up or it doesn't make sense, sometimes it just doesn't work. But I'm never upset if people get back to me a couple of times.

[00:11:52] **BB:** Okay, next fill in the blank. The appropriate amount of lead time for a story is –

[00:11:57] **BS:** I think the more the better with these sort things. If you're giving me something, an embargo maybe, and want this – Somebody requires fair views being set up, maybe like a week or so is great that – Yeah. As much lead time as possible is always appreciated.

[00:12:15] **BB:** My favorite stories to write are –

[00:12:17] **BS:** I would say the ones where it feels like you're making a difference. Yeah. Where you have some real world impacts.

[00:12:25] **BB:** Do you get people writing to you, by the way, who say, “Oh, my gosh. Thank you so much for that.”?

[00:12:29] **BS:** Not – With some stories and that is always the best positive feedback but –

[00:12:35] **BB:** Yes. I'm sure the negative is for real.

[00:12:38] BS: Yeah. Just this story that came out, I think it was last week, with another colleague where we're writing about rising utility costs this winter, and it had some good feedback on that. Just really kind people who read the story and reached out and saw how some Americans are struggling to just pay the bills. Some of them reached out and said, "Oh, I'm going to start a GoFundMe for this person and try and get things paid off." So that's always a great feeling when you see that real roll impact.

[00:13:06] BB: That is good. I've never gone into it with anyone on this show. But on the opposite, do you get, let's say, reader feedback that is nasty?

[00:13:18] BS: Not with everything. There are occasionally people who won't like a story, who will share their thoughts. But very rarely is it like a personal attack, which is –

[00:13:33] BB: That's good. I'm pleased to hear that, I guess, if I could be pleased. So, okay, that is good. That is good. Okay, Bailey, what are you reading, watching, listening to? We'll take anything. You got something on Netflix, we want to hear it.

[00:13:49] BS: I'm trying to get – Find a new Netflix show. I ran out of all the ones I've been watching lately, where I was doing the new Game of Thrones for a while, and that's done now. I do the Dahmer one on Netflix, and that's over now. So I need to find a new show on Netflix.

[00:14:03] BB: People, send Bailey some recommendations. Have you done – Well, it's not on Netflix but White Lotus. Have you watched that?

[00:14:10] BS: I saw the first season and I – It was honestly just mentioned that the second season was out, so that might be my next move.

[00:14:16] BB: It is back. Might want to do that. It's so good. It's so good. Someone else told me yesterday too, it is on Netflix. That Love Is Blind, it is absolute trash. It really is. But there's something oddly endearing about it. This is very lowbrow television, though, just to be clear.

[00:14:34] BS: I had been a – My trash TV that I'd watched was Bachelor, Bachelorette for a while. I'm taking a break. It just got to be a little much but –

[00:14:45] BB: Yeah. It's a whole new – It's another level but good to know. Okay. You're open to suggestions, awesome on that front. Anything you read, by the way? Are you just reading all day so much that you can't take anymore?

[00:14:57] BS: As far as like free time, I do try and read like I like things that aren't news articles, just to mix it up. But my husband bought me a Book of the Month Club for my birthday, which was nice. So I'm going through those month by month, which is, yeah, a great gift and highly recommend.

[00:15:15] BB: Oh, I like that. What a thoughtful gift too because it's one of those like boxes, but it just shows up, and it's a book.

[00:15:22] BS: It's great. Yeah.

[00:15:23] BB: Is that my understanding?

[00:15:24] BS: Yep.

[00:15:25] BB: Oh, I like that. Okay. It's giving me ideas, excellent. Bailey, do you have any thoughts on the future of journalism?

[00:15:32] BS: That's a really good question and something I think about a lot but don't have a lot of answers to.

[00:15:39] BB: You're just happy to be in it.

[00:15:40] BS: Yeah, yeah. That's just it. Or I'm sure things will evolve and change as they already have. I have a lot of optimism and then I'm being naive, but I can't picture a role without journalism in any form. So, yeah, I don't have any – I wish I knew exactly what things would look like in 5, 10 years. I don't. But, yeah, it'll be interesting to see how things look in the future.

[00:16:08] BB: Do you think too how consumers get news will evolve perhaps? Obviously, TikTok has been talked about a lot as a way, and it means Gen Z gets all its information, apparently. Thoughts on that.

[00:16:20] BS: No. I think it's something I've been trying to wrap my head around a lot, where it's already changing so much where how many times you see people print paper nowadays,. But, yeah, I think it's – Everything is online now. But as far as finding ways to reach people when they are online, that's been, yeah, something that has been a challenge and something that I'm guessing will continue to evolve. So we'll see.

[00:16:45] BB: All we can have is the optimism, Bailey. I like where you're sitting with that. Bailey Schulz, thank you for being here today. You are the Consumer News reporter at USA Today. Everyone listening, Bailey's looking for Netflix shows. So send her your recommendations.

[00:17:00] BS: Yes, please. No, thank you for having me on.

[00:17:02] BB: Thank you, Bailey. Take care.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:17:05] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Bailey Schulz from USA Today. To learn more about the latest tools on OnePitch to subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter, head to our website at onepitch.co. We'll see you all next week with even more insights about the journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.

[END]