

EPISODE 152

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this weeks' episode of Coffee with a Journalist, brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious how OnePitch can help you find relevant journalists to pitch, including some of the guests on this podcast? Head to our website at onepitch.co to learn more. Our guest this week on Coffee With a Journalist is Megan Farokhmanesh, a Senior Writer at Wired. As a senior writer, Megan covers video games and the industry that makes them. During the episode, Megan talks about why she has so many sticky notes on her desk, the ways you should and shouldn't format subject lines, her preference for lead time on stories and much more. Let's hear from Megan now.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:53] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee With a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, here with OnePitch. You're listening, because hopefully, you want some scoops on how to get to journalists, which is what we're going to do here today. Today with us, we have a senior writer from Wired Public Magazine. I love Wired. I've been looking at Wired for, I don't even know how long. Because if you're nerds and you like everything tech related, Wired is going to be the publication for you. We'll get into that in just a second. First, I want to welcome our guest today. Megan Farokhmanesh is here with us, as I mentioned, senior writer from Wired. Welcome, Megan.

[0:01:29] MF: Hi. It's so good to be here with you.

[0:01:31] BB: Thanks, Megan. We're happy to have you here. We're happy to be chatting about all the stuff you're looking at. First off, for those maybe not as familiar, how would you describe Wired?

[0:01:42] MF: Oh. Wired is, obviously, we're a magazine. Also, we do a lot of online publication. You have loads of outlets that do breaking news, they have newsrooms that are just on top of everything. We obviously do cover the important stuff. I think for us, we to step back, look at the bigger issues, try to contextualize stuff and try to give you interesting ideas, or a little bit of flavor with your stories. It's more like, the news will happen. Then we'll be there to explain it to you, to give you what's next and give you an idea of what to tell your friends, basically.

[0:02:13] BB: Well said. You also cover everything culture. Of course, gear is a big thing, but security, there's science. There's a lot of meaty stuff in there. Megan, for you, though, specifically, what should us publicists know that you want to write about?

[0:02:28] MF: I'm a video game reporter, which means a lot of things to a lot of different people.

[0:02:32] BB: Yes.

[0:02:32] MF: What I'll say is the way that I approach video game coverage, and I've been doing this for oh, gosh, like more than a decade. I always think of it as not covering exactly the products themselves, but rather the industry around it. I'm interested in the people making games, the cultures that spring up because of it, or just interesting stories that tell us a little bit about what games can tell us about ourselves. I like to center my stories on people. I do a lot of labor reporting, because there's a lot of interesting stuff happening within this very strange industry that intersects tech and entertainment.

[0:03:02] BB: Yeah. In culture, to your point.

[0:03:04] MF: Yeah. It's a huge cultural impact. It's funny, because I think that there's still this misunderstanding that video games are for people living in their basement, or their for little of whatever. It's a wild thing, where video games has such a huge impact on our general culture. You can think about the fact that we have a Mario movie coming out with Chris Pratt. We have a huge HBO show that just went on, The Last of Us. Video games have been around for a long time. We've especially seen in pandemic, how much people relied on them. The thing is, video games are not a basement dwelling activity anymore. Video games are for everyone. Everyone plays them.

[0:03:37] BB: Not basement dwelling anymore. I mean, there's a story you even recently did that talks about how Kmart is something that you could look into virtual reality Kmart. Hey, hey.

[0:03:45] MF: Oh, yeah. I love that story. Basically, for folks who have ever messed around with the virtual world, which a lot of now, with lots of metaverse talk, we'll get to that later, I'm sure. It's this community of people who began with a couple of people who used to work at Kmart's,

who went on to build a virtual recreation of Kmart. I mean, they're thorough. They've taken photos. They've tried to recreate a very specific era of Kmart in the 90s. Because for them, and this is a direct quote, they thought that that was really the peak of Kmart. It's a place for them to roleplay, to pretend like they're working, to interact with people.

Some people use it as just a fun way of feeling nostalgic about their old jobs, which honestly, I respect, because I hate all my retail jobs that I grew up doing. You could not pay me to go back, in virtual world, or otherwise. But they use it to just learn how to roleplay being at work and learning how to do jobs. It's actually strangely wholesome.

[0:04:37] BB: Wow. The application of that and why you would want to go back to. Fascinating. Exactly. It's about culture, and the weird things humans are interested in. You just have to acknowledge that. My God. Okay, Megan. How is your inbox?

[0:04:53] MF: Oh, gosh. Well, I think as a journalist, it's really important to keep yourself organized and really put together, which is why mine is a disaster, because I am that, I'm terrible at that. My inbox for the start of the year, I wanted to get it to Inbox zero.

[0:05:08] BB: Everyone's is, by the way. I'm just saying.

[0:05:10] MF: I know. I know. Oh, my gosh. I remember talking to a journalist who was saying, she has 80,000, or something. It was insane.

[0:05:17] BB: Oh, I've heard worse. I'm here, just so you know. Up to the half millions. Yeah.

[0:05:22] MF: That stresses me out so bad. I got to say, I'm not quite there. I haven't actually accomplished my goal of inbox zero. I would say, we're sitting around like a cool 100 right now, which for me is pretty good.

[0:05:32] BB: That's pretty good. I know you tried to get to zero. Do you delete, or do you just search later for perhaps, stories that come up? How do you suss out what you refer back to, if ever?

[0:05:45] MF: Yes and no. The problem is that I will see an email that I think is important. Either depending on who it's from, or what the subject line is, I'll be like, "Oh, I need to read this right

now.” I’ll read it and then be like, “Cool. Okay, I’m going to bookmark this for later. Let me mark it as unread.” It goes back into the mess that is my inbox. Or, I don’t read it, because I want to remind myself that, “Hey, that’s something important I need to check on,” which is also not the best way to handle it. I’m just all over the place. Honestly, I do a lot more with physical notes to remind myself, like my desk is always covered in a million stickies.

[0:06:17] BB: Oh, sticky. Oh, I haven’t heard sticky notes so much. Okay. What are the stickies say?

[0:06:22] MF: Oh, I mean, they’re completely deranged. It’s like, some of them will just have a date, or a code for something. Some of them actually have story ideas, but it’ll just be something random, where it’s like, “Pokemon resellers,” and that’s it. Sometimes I’m like, I remember exactly what I was talking about, or sometimes I’m like, “What was she thinking about?” I do try to – the physical act of writing something down. Sometimes I pick up the sticky note, or I put in front of me, or I just try to do something, the physical act of it helps me remember way more than anything that is digitally in my inbox.

[0:06:54] BB: Okay, more analog happening here. The sticky note method, that’s a new one. That’s a new one on here.

[0:07:02] MF: Yeah. My desk looks like, those – the joke about the crime boards, or cops who work off-duty, or trying to connect the thing. It’s like that, but without murder.

[0:07:11] BB: Yea. Out of murder, except a story you’re going to kill. Maybe. Okay, for subject lines, do you pay attention to them, or that doesn’t so much matter?

[0:07:22] MF: I am a skimmer. Because sometimes I can look at who sent it to me, because I do get a lot of spam. I’m like, this is not clear for me. There’ll be like, here’s a politician who wants my money. I’m like, I don’t know how you got in here, but you don’t belong here. I do try to look at them. Sometimes, yeah, they’re varying degrees of helpfulness, I’d say, or you can tell they’re not really for you. They’re not aimed at you, but someone who just –

[0:07:44] BB: Straight employ. Yup.

[0:07:46] MF: Yeah. It's frustrating, because I'm like, my inbox is not the front world, sea world. You can't just splash me with anything you have.

[0:07:51] BB: The front sea world. Yeah. Okay, so you're a skimmer. It's not so much perhaps the subject line. Is there anything that absolutely stands out, though, in a subject line that where you're like, "Oh, I'm going to open that up"?

[0:08:04] MF: Yeah. It's like, you think about the inverted pyramid for journalists, where you want to get top most important facts. It's like that, where if you in the subject line managed to tell me what the thing is, where it's happening. It depends on what's going on. Because of my inbox, especially covering games, I get a lot of different things. Sometimes I'm getting invites to events to see a game hands on. I generally like to go to those, because I like having the chance to speak with people. Maybe they'll say something like that. Maybe you're offering me an interview, so that's in the subject line. Maybe you're just keeping me informed about something and I actually do appreciate just news flash being like, "Hey, this game is coming out on this date." Which is helpful, just for me to bookmark.

[0:08:42] BB: Okay. She likes invites to live events, watching the stuff.

[0:08:46] MF: Oh, I love invites.

[0:08:47] BB: Oh, okay. Well, one of our questions is relationship building, how can people make relationships with you. Is it an invite to anything game related? Or is it just even an invite of, "Hey, I have a lot of game clients. You want to go to coffee? I'm in Brooklyn."

[0:09:02] MF: This depends, right? It depends on what it is you're trying to pitch me on, or who your client is. If you are coming to me and you're like, "I have somebody who wants to talk about Bitcoin." Or very often wants to talk about the metaverse. I'll look at it, it's like a VC, or someone who I don't think is actually going to be relevant for my audience and my stories, I don't want that. I'm not going to sit down and talk with you, because I think it would just be disrespectful to both our time, because if I'm not going to use any of your stories, you should go find somebody who will.

I generally do like to sit down with people who if I've worked with you before and I know you're a good PR person, or you have a good idea of my work, you haven't just found me randomly, I'm very happy to sit down with you. I do prefer to actually have a conversation with people,

because I really want to have that face-to-face interface, even if now it's just video-to-video phase.

[0:09:48] BB: Yeah. Okay. This is good to know.

[MESSAGE]

[0:09:52] 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 journalist to pitch your news to. Sign up for your free account today. Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:10:16] BB: Then what do you feel about exclusives, or embargoes?

[0:10:20] MF: Oh, my gosh. I love them. If you show up with those, I just already am just so ready to see what you have to offer.

[0:10:26] BB: Oh, okay.

[0:10:27] MF: Yeah, exclusives. Listen, every journalist loves an exclusive. They're not always for us. They're not always a fit for whatever reason it is. When you have someone who offers you a good one like, oh, that's the best. Honestly, because being a journalist is hard. You're doing so much work on your own. When somebody is like, I have brought you a tasty treat. It's like, "Oh, fantastic." I would eat lunch. Yeah, I'd love to eat this cupcake.

[0:10:46] BB: Thank you. Thanks for telling me. Yes. Perfect.

[0:10:50] MF: It's similar with embargoes, too. The most important resource I have its time. If you come into me with something that is really important, and you're like, "Hey, here's an embargo." If you could give it to me, even two days ahead of time, you are saving my life, because it gives me the time to sit down, to think about it, to write something that I think will be actually good for readers that I think is interesting. Also, gives me the chance to ask questions

and try to get more information and the process that I think is helpful for people who want to come to Wired and read about videogames.

[0:11:20] BB: Yes. Okay, so at least two days for embargoes. At least. Emphasize at least. Okay. We covered the relationship building with you, Megan. I do have this little rapid-fire question set. Are you ready for this?

[0:11:34] MF: Yeah. Oh, my gosh. I talk so fast and blow through everything so fast. I'm like, oh —

[0:11:38] BB: Oh, it's great. Yeah, it's great. This is good. This is so good. Okay.

[0:11:40] MF: Rapid fire. Let's go.

[0:11:42] BB: Yes. Video or phone interview?

[0:11:44] MF: Video interview.

[0:11:45] BB: Bullet points, or paragraphs?

[0:11:48] MF: This is a funny question. Just because I used to work at Axios. I'm breaking rapid fire, but I used to work at Axios and we wrote in bullet points. If you are sending me quick information, bullet points. If you actually are sending me something that requires a little bit more explanation, paragraphs. I keep being like, no, I want both, depending on the situation. I'll have to fickle.

[0:12:05] BB: Okay. That's okay. Short or long pitches?

[0:12:08] MF: Short.

[0:12:08] BB: How short?

[0:12:10] MF: I would say, I don't need a lot of fluff. I don't need you to fluff my ego. I need you to tell me what it is that makes the story interesting, or what it is about the subject. Pretty much like an any pitch, I just want to know if this person who are not your client, is this a story you'd

want to read? Because if you bring me something that you don't think is interesting, and you don't really care about, why would my readers?

[0:12:31] BB: Why would? Yeah.

[0:12:32] MF: Yeah. I really think it's important to just respect everyone's time involved.

[0:12:35] BB: What a great lens. If it wasn't your client, would you want to read it? Yes or no?

[0:12:41] MF: Yeah. I like to respect everyone's time.

[0:12:44] BB: Yes. Okay, images attached, or Dropbox, or a zip file?

[0:12:48] MF: Images attached. I do not like to go to a second location. Mine, if I can avoid it.

[0:12:53] BB: Same. Then you got to punt. Then you have to do this whole – It's a whole thing. Okay. Yes, agree with that. Pitches in the morning, or in the evening, or no preference?

[0:13:04] MF: In the morning. I like really it. First hour of my day, I like to sit down with my coffee. I go through my inbox and I do the thing right and reading emails and then not deleting them, or unreading them. I like to at least have a grasp on what my day might look like and what things I need to prioritize.

[0:13:21] BB: Email or Twitter DM?

[0:13:24] MF: Here's the thing. I like a Twitter DM if you are a developer source, that kind of thing. Because for me, I realized that you – as long as you're doing in a safe way, I want you to reach out to me in a way that feels comfortable for you. I know that email can feel a bit weird. It's also like, if you're emailing me with sensitive documents, I want you to go to a specific email, which is my proton email. Whereas, if you have a PR pitch for me, do not ever pitch it to me in my DMs, because that is a sacred ground for other people who have a problem, or something they really need to talk about with me.

[0:13:54] BB: Okay. Yup, very clear. Next one, one follow-up, or multiple?

[0:13:58] MF: I like a healthy three.

[0:14:00] BB: A healthy three. That is healthy. Okay.

[0:14:04] MF: It's like, I will often either see a pitch and be busy. Or perhaps, read it and then do that thing where my brain gets distracted, and I didn't write on a sticky note. It's like, I like the second one, because it gives me a chance to be like, "Okay, here's something I really need to look at." If you still haven't heard from me, and it's something that you actually think is a good pitch for me and you know I'd be interested in, that third one is when I'm like, "Okay, this person is reaching out again. I'm finally going to really take a look at it."

[0:14:29] BB: Okay. Direct, or creative subject lines?

[0:14:33] MF: Oh, my gosh. Direct. Do not ever send me creative subject lines. Some of them, I will get them and I'm like, "What does that mean?" I appreciate the urge to be creative and I think it's really great when people can use email, I guess, as a creative outlet for other people. You don't need to do with me. I just like when you tell me right away what I need to know.

[0:14:51] BB: Okay. This is a polarizing – It has been so far a polarizing question for people. Interesting so far. All right, press release, or media kit?

[0:15:02] MF: Press release.

[0:15:03] BB: Press release. Okay. Attached, I'm assuming.

[0:15:06] MF: Attached. Please attach. Yeah.

[0:15:09] BB: Attached. All attached.

[0:15:09] MF: Yeah. I like to have all the information right there. A media kit, because Wired, we like to do our own arts. We have an art team that prefers to gather images themselves, or create stuff. We try not to use just screenshots and stuff as much. For me, it's a media kit is it's like, you handed me a box full of stuff. I don't want to have to take the time to go through the entire box. I just want the list on top of the box.

[0:15:30] BB: Yup. Got it. Is there anything, Megan, as we're getting close to wrapping up here that you're looking for pitch-wise, particularly, like right now in time?

[0:15:41] MF: I am very interested in telling stories that center on people. I know, I said that before, but what I mean is whether you have someone who has a really unique, interesting story, or someone who's working on something that is meaningful in some way, or has an impact. Or if you have a story where even if it's not directly about a person, it's like, hey, here's a policy that is going into effect, something like that, that impacts the employees. A good example of this that might have sounded boring is I had a company who, they were instituting a menstrual leave policy for their employees. That sounds very –

[0:16:13] BB: Wah, wah.

[0:16:14] MF: Yeah, it sounds like kind of in the weeds. The thing is, that was something that – I mean, think about how often that's done.

[0:16:20] BB: All the time. Yup.

[0:16:22] MF: Yeah. It's like, to acknowledge. It was good, too, because their language wasn't just for women. It was like, people who have periods. To me, it's demonstrating you care about your employees, you're being welcoming, you're being inclusive. Also, this is a policy that not unsurprisingly was a little bit controversial for people who don't have periods. I think it's just demonstrates a real understanding of the well-being of their other employees that I really like to see.

[0:16:45] BB: That was a piece you wanted to cover.

[0:16:47] MF: Yeah. I mean, I did cover and I really was happy with how it came out.

[0:16:52] BB: I didn't see this on your list of all the articles. Oh, my gosh. Okay.

[0:16:56] MF: Oh, gosh. It was when I was working for Axios. It's likely part of a –

[0:16:59] BB: Oh, I was going to say. Okay. I was like, “Wait a second. Wait a secone.” Okay. Okay. Got it. A great example. Human focused and human first. I hope, everyone takes that

away. Megan, last thing for you here. Is there anything you want to promote, are working on, want to discuss, show up to your fan group? Anything like that?

[0:17:19] MF: Wait, before we wrap up, can I talk about some of my subject lines and stuff that I get in my inbox?

[0:17:24] BB: Yes, yes, yes. Okay. Let's include that. Let me start with this. Megan, are there subject lines that are atrocious to you?

[0:17:32] MF: Okay. I want to actually have three, for example, that I think –

[0:17:35] BB: Oh, you have three. Great. Live ones. Great. Great, great, great.

[0:17:39] MF: I have one that's a good one, one that I think is a bad one. Then one that is like, "Why did you send this to me?" Okay, so we'll start with the good one. The first one is Tunic by Finji gets Arabic attitudes localizations. That is good, because it tells me what the game is, who made it and what's going on. The fact that it's Arabic getting added to localizations is something I actually care deeply about. Because funny story, a lot of games do Arabic localizations horribly. This is something that I'm interested in and I have put out calls for about to talk to people. It's like a pet project of mine to track it and maybe have something bigger in the works. I like that, because, again, it's everything I need to know and I can look that. I was like, I'm going to respond to this person, because I want to know what's up. There's that one.

[0:18:20] BB: That's an excellent one. Great. Straightforward.

[0:18:24] MF: This one is one of the more, I guess, creative ones. Sorry to this person. It's no offense to your writing.

[0:18:29] BB: No, we're not going to name the person. Go ahead.

[0:18:31] MF: We're not going to name the person. But it is Voltaire the vegan vampire earns his green fang, February 27th. I don't know what that means. I don't know what kind of game this is. I don't know who Voltaire is. I don't care. I assume the game is coming out on February 27th. Other than that, it's like, I don't – That sounds like a silly thing to me. It doesn't make any sense. I get a lot of email things that just feel like a word salad. Another one?

[0:18:58] BB: Okay, is this the bad one?

[0:19:00] MF: It's a bad one. Or, Jack in the name in this one. This is a bonus bad one. Or Jack the name of the game, because it's under embargo. Co-pp eco conscious floating island survival sim announcement trailer. Embargo. That to me is someone handed an AI a bunch of video game words and was like, "Okay, we need you to write the email." That's what it came out with. That's the thing where my eyes will just glaze right over it. I don't understand what it's saying to me.

[0:19:24] BB: Yeah. Oh, man. Thank you for those live examples. We love those.

[0:19:28] MF: I have one more for you that's my favorite, because it's –

[0:19:30] BB: Oh, yes.

[0:19:30] MF: This one has nothing to do with anything I cover. It's clearly someone who just hit every journalist they could.

[0:19:35] BB: Play and play. Yeah, go ahead. Here we go.

[0:19:39] MF: The line is, One-third of adults aged 45 and older feel lonely. Surprised?

[0:19:44] BB: That's the subject line?

[0:19:44] MF: That's the subject line. Which one, okay, if you've ever spoken to your parents, this is not surprising information. You should call your mother more. Also, it's clearly not. It has nothing to do with me and I get a lot of that weird email stuff, where I feel like I must be put on a list. It's very annoying.

[0:20:01] BB: For fun, did you just open it just to see like, does it has to do with gaming at all?

[0:20:05] MF: I opened it, read the first line, was like, "Nope." I couldn't tell you what the rest of the email said. I opened it because I was like, "Why is this here?" Then immediately deleted it. I also, if I could talk –

[0:20:16] BB: Yes.

[0:20:17] MF: I'm a chatty person.

[0:20:18] BB: Keep going, Megan.

[0:20:19] MF: Okay. I also want to talk about – let's talk about some body issues, where if you send me an email, and let's say I open it. Let's say, it's a really good subject line. If in the actual body of the email you were saying something deranged to me, I am not going to respond to you. I have a really good example of this.

[0:20:34] BB: Oh, yes.

[0:20:35] MF: Oh, ho-ho. I have a great example. I had someone reach out. He did the thing where he followed up, so finally I opened it. It was for a product of some kind. In the actual body of the email, he goes, “Can I send you the product to get in your hot little hands?” I don't know. No, thank you. That's an instant, no. I'm going to pass. I just feel like it's a little gross and creepy. I'm not. Yeah, not interested. I feel that way about a lot of body emails, where I think I know, PR people keep tabs on us. That's totally understandable. I want you to know who I am. I want you to know my work.

However, if you are overly familiar, if we've never spoken in person and you pop it in my inbox, you're like, “Ha, ha. That one tweet.” Sent me and here's a pitch. I know you're watching me, but I don't want to know you're watching me, you know what I mean?

[0:21:20] BB: Yeah. Yeah. Just to be clear, you're talking about what's in the body of the pitch, not references, well, and/or to your body. Because I was like, “Oh, hot hands.” Oh, yeah, that is –

[0:21:33] MF: We'll say both.

[0:21:33] BB: Both. Yeah, I was just going to say, it's both. All the above. Okay.

[0:21:36] MF: Yeah. Don't talk about anything related to my body, and certainly, don't put anything weird in the body of your email. That's just a good rule of thumb, I think.

[0:21:43] BB: That's just a good rule. I agree. Well, Megan. On our final note here, is there anything you want to promote, mention, hype? Should we follow you on Twitter, etc.? Obviously. But what else?

[0:21:57] MF: Oh, my gosh. Well first, I'd love if you follow me on Twitter. My name is @Megan_Nicolette, which is unfortunate, because I've been told that an underscore in your name is terrible branding, but I've had it for such a long time. I don't want people to go through the gauntlet of trying to get my name correctly. It's already bad enough. I think it's annoying as well. Yeah, please follow me on Twitter. I will always post my stories there. Sometimes I post pictures of my cat, if that's something you're into. Sometimes I just like to go on little rants. Honestly, that's the biggest thing. I have a lot of projects I'm excited about, but I can't tell you about.

[0:22:30] BB: Okay.

[0:22:31] MF: They're so secret. Yeah.

[0:22:32] BB: Well, we'll have to be watching, but not watching too hard where you know you're being watched. Yup. As you mentioned.

[0:22:38] MF: Yes, Twitter, exactly.

[0:22:40] BB: Exactly. Oh, Megan. Thank you for being here today. Thanks for telling us about your coffee, your stickies, your gaming, your everything. We'll be watching. We'll be watching for your fun projects coming out.

[0:22:52] MF: Thanks so much. This was so fun.

[0:22:54] BB: Thanks, Megan. Take care.

[0:22:56] MF: You too. Bye-bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:22:58] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist featuring Megan Farokhmanesh from Wired. For more exclusive insights about the journalists on this podcast, subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter at onepitch.co/podcast. We'll see you next week with even more insights about the journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.

[END]