

**EPISODE 103**

## [INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER:** Welcome to this weeks' episode of Coffee with a Journalist, brought to you by OnePitch. The guests in our show include some of the most notable journalists from the top US-based publications, who cover topics including technology, life sound culture, health, science, consumer products and business news. We discuss their role, the types of stories they cover, what their inbox looks like and how they connect with sources. Head to [onepitch.co](https://onepitch.co) and look for the video page to learn more about new series featuring today's guest.

Our guest on the show today is Michelle Lewis, writer and editor for 9to5 group, including 9to5 Mac, 9to5Google, Electric, and Drone DJ. Michelle covers a wide range of topics, including Apple, Google, Tesla, EVs and drones, and writes about news articles relating to green energy, climate change, and electric vehicles. During the episode, Michelle talks more specifically about her varying beat, elements in a pitch that catch her attention, her process for diving into the why behind stories, and more. Let's hear from Michelle now.

## [INTERVIEW]

**[00:01:28] BB:** Welcome everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist, a podcast that brings on our favorite journalists. So, we can learn more about how they like to be pitched, what they don't like, what stories they're working on, and what they read and consume for other stories, and maybe also what's happening with the world of journalism as the future unfolds.

Great topics all the time, always have a great conversation. I'm Beck Bamberger. I have an agency called BAM. We work with all venture backed technology companies. And then I created OnePitch because publicists need some help in figuring out how to get to journalists and get their pitches read and hopefully get good stories told.

With us today, Michelle Lewis, who comes from 9to5Mac, a really popular publication if you're deep in the Mac, vertical, or just involved in technology overall, which we'll hear about in just a second. But she's the writer and editor there and welcome, Michelle.

**[00:02:21] ML:** Thank you, Beck.

**[00:02:23] BB:** Thank you. First off, for those not familiar, how would you best describe pitching to an outlet, like 9to5Mac? Well, specifically 9to5Mac and what you're focused on?

**[00:02:35] ML:** Well, we are group and so 9to5Mac is part of the 9to5 group. And I guess the best way to describe that group of websites is tech. So, 9to5Mac covers Apple things. Obviously, 9to5Google covers Google and Android. Electric, who I write for covers electric vehicles and clean energy. Connect the Watts is connected fitness. And Drone DJ is exactly what it sounds, which are drones.

**[00:03:06] BB:** Drone DJ, I like that. It's a really specific vertical.

**[00:03:09] ML:** Say, we're like tech futurist.

**[00:03:10] BB:** Yeah, tech futurist, got it. If we may go into your inbox for a moment, are you getting pitches that are all over the place for all things that could be for 9to5? Or are you getting good pitches, tell us about it.

**[00:03:25] ML:** I specifically write about clean energy and also about electric vehicles. So basically, I have built my audience that myself over the last two and a half years. And so, in my inbox, there is currently an email about GAFF energy who just launched a brand-new solar tiles, that are available that is unprecedented. They were launched yesterday at CES in Las Vegas.

**[00:03:56] BB:** Oh wait, you can get a panel through the mail now?

**[00:03:58] ML:** Yes, exactly.

**[00:04:01] BB:** Wow. Does Amazon ship it?

**[00:04:04] ML:** Okay, you're solar.

**[00:04:07] BB:** Okay, we've arrived. That's a good deal.

**[00:04:13] ML:** I've got an email in here about electric trucks, something about, 20% of the US is trucks are now committed to net zero. Going to read a month later. I'm interested in that. I have an email from a net zero, high net worth development in California. We got tips about the new F150 Lightning.

**[00:04:38] BB:** Oh, yeah that's the electric truck you're doing.

**[00:04:41] ML:** Yeah, that's Ford's truck. Demand is much higher than the supply right now. That's a good thing.

**[00:04:52] BB:** Wow, interesting.

**[00:04:53] ML:** It's pretty awesome.

**[00:04:56] BB:** It's a whole new world, Michelle.

**[00:04:58] ML:** What's that?

**[00:04:59] BB:** It is a whole new world in America.

**[00:05:02] ML:** It is a whole new world, Beck. It really is. It's really fascinating.

**[00:05:06] BB:** Wow. So, let me ask, so all those pitches you just mentioned seem very on point. Are you getting stuff that though is ever off point? And what do you do with those pitches?

**[00:05:17] ML:** I put them in the little trash can.

**[00:05:20] BB:** And immediately like, you don't even open them. You just like, "Well, trashed."

**[00:05:24] ML:** I actually do open everything. I'll do a quick skim and when it is so completely off point, it's like not even remotely what we do. We have these new flowers, like, that's really

lovely. But that is not what we do, then I just delete it. I do very much believe in treating old pitches and the PRs who are pitching them with great respect. I have worked in PR, it is a hard job.

**[00:05:48] BB:** You've been on the other side?

**[00:05:50] ML:** I think people deserve a response. I don't like to be ignored myself. I don't like to do that to other people. That saying, if it gets so full in that inbox, and someone is pitch me, like bananas, then I'll just delete it because I just don't have time.

**[00:06:06] BB:** So, it does sound like you do a good job curating making sure stuffs deleted, you don't let it ride. So, I know some people are like, let it ride. But just go and go and go.

**[00:06:19] ML:** Yeah, I generally do. What sometimes happens is that someone will send me like, and this is perfectly reasonable for other outlets, like an embargoed story, and it's two to three weeks out. I like to make note of that if it's important if it's something I want to cover, but sometimes in the scrum, if it gets lost, and I'll lose it. And so, if I'm prompted on that, I appreciate that.

**[00:06:43] BB:** Oh, so you do like the nudge?

**[00:06:46] ML:** Yeah, I'm good with the nudge. I'm good with that. Because sometimes what happens is it gives me a chance to look again, it doesn't necessarily mean that I'm not interested, it just means that it kind of got lost in the scrub.

**[00:06:55] BB:** Yeah, because there's so much. Now, speaking of all of that, that's coming into your inbox, and you will open them all, which is great. I know not everyone does. How paramount is the subject line for you?

**[00:07:10] ML:** The subject line, it's usually pretty – it's important, but it's not vital. I live or die by the subject line. It obviously tells me what's coming. But if there are certain keywords that grab my interest, I mean, if it's keywords in a kind of common noun sense, like solar, wind, or

like Tesla or Ford, then I'll open it. But usually I will open most things to kind of give it a quick look.

**[00:07:42] BB:** That's generous.

**[00:07:44] ML:** Yeah, I mean, sometimes there's something that's buried, that's really good and people miss. How I approached my writing is that I look for, again, the buried lead. And, and often that could be a couple paragraphs down in a press release. And I'm like, "Ah, there's the bit that's interesting to our readers."

**[00:08:02] BB:** But you spend the time going into that. There's a lot of people who are just like, "It's not there. I don't have time. I have 500 other emails, and so, we're not going to do that." I get that, because how do you survive if you have that many emails coming in?

**[00:08:17] ML:** Yeah. I think it's just a matter of sometimes you can find some really great varied stuff. I think I've gotten good at filtering, looking, curating.

**[00:08:29] BB:** Yeah. I kind of like how you have an approach of, "Wait, what's in here? Let me dig in. Because there's maybe a gem in here."

**[00:08:36] ML:** Yeah, I mean, depends on, it does have to grab me. I mean, I give it about 10 to 15 seconds, to be perfectly honest. But if it's good, then I will sit back and give it good time.

**[00:08:47] BB:** 10 to 15, still generous. Generous, I'd say, Michelle. I'd love it.

**[00:08:52] ML:** Thanks.

**[00:08:53] BB:** Okay, where do you fall with exclusives versus embargoes? And what's your preference for these? I know you're in a fast churn news breaking cycle for what you cover, what would you say?

**[00:09:06] ML:** Yeah, I think everybody loves it a good exclusive. I appreciate it when an exclusive is offered to me. And I recognize having worked in PR myself, that it's good manners

to get back to that person because if I don't take the exclusive, they need to pitch it somewhere else.

**[00:09:22] BB:** Yes, yes. Oh, that's a good next question, though. How quickly do you get back to that exclusive? Like if you see it in the subject line, is that the first email you'll open?

**[00:09:31] ML:** Yes.

**[00:09:32] BB:** Got it. Okay.

**[00:09:33] ML:** I think that comes from experience on the PR side. I just reckon that that person is under pressure.

**[00:09:42] BB:** Got it. Good to know. And then for you, let's say it is an exclusive and it's one that you really want, you had said when we did an earlier video a few hours, what's the lead time for you in the range for an exclusive?

**[00:10:02] ML:** Generally, if someone's got something that's just landed, okay, the Danish offshore wind company Ørsted. It's one of my favorite companies to follow, I believe – they've got the muscles. They're the ones bringing the clean energy off of our shores in the US. So, if Ørsted emails, something breaking, they tend to do it first thing in the morning, and I get that soon as possible. So, PRs have actually done quite well with me when they send something that's brand new. It's sufficiently something tangible, as in, we cover like this happened, this is about to happen. Quite a simple, it's not complex. It's not an analysis.

**[00:10:52] BB:** It's quite simple, yes.

**[00:10:54] ML:** It's very Reuter-sy. Take at the end on our take, our background. And so, I think a lot of PRs have had very good mornings because they're like, "Here it is." I'm like, "Great. It's live."

**[00:11:06] BB:** Oh, that's nice.

**[00:11:08] ML:** The leader is up, because that's what we do. We hit the news fast.

**[00:11:13] BB:** Yep. Got it. That's good to know, for people who like to pitch in and get the placement. Good.

[MESSAGE]

**[00:11:21] ANNOUNCER:** Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch.

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Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

**[00:11:45] BB:** Now, Michelle, you in the last couple years, have been digging deep on the EV space, sustainability, the technology that's making climate change, not the reality that we're facing. What does a story that's meaty and deep take to do? Does it take you hours and hours multiple interviews? Is it something you think about in the shower? And you're like, "I'm going to do that story." Or is it just coming right from your inbox where you're like, "That's a great pitch, let me post that."

**[00:12:18] ML:** The way that we write, I mean, we tend not to do a lot of like deep features. So, Canary Media, for example, they're excellent and they will write longer form pieces where they travel somewhere. I know that one of their writers recently went to Hawaii and checked out what Hawaii are doing in terms of renewables. And that is a great respect for that outlet.

We are more like the kind of we're going to give you the latest on what's going on. Usually, if there's something that I feel quite passionate about, or I feel like it's important, then I'll devote more time to it and I absolutely end up thinking about that kind of stuff in the shower. A little bit

unique about our group is that particularly Electric, is that we are not neutral the way that Associated Press or Reuters is. We are advocates of clean energy, advocates of electric cars and we make that very clear. We make that clear to people that pitch us and we are not unbiased. We make very clear in our writing.

So, I had quite a lot to say about the latest build back better build being stuck because of mansions unwillingness to support it. So, that means that I build on knowledge of watching, for example, a long interview between himself and the head of the United coworkers union, digging into his finances, which is on open secrets. Trying to figure out what the background is I find West Virginia as a state quite fascinating. So, that leads me into a more kind of interested in desire to figure out the why. Because it's so impactful. This one man is is literally impacting the whole planet.

That's where I say, we're not neutral on this at all, and I make that very clear. Actually, what we do is we split the opinion from the facts so that it's super easy for folks to realize what is fact and what is opinion. I once gave a talk at a college and that was what the feedback came. The feedback from the delegates was basically we have trouble discerning what's real and what's not, which is very useful because it was about media and how to separate out fact opinion. And so, I'm really glad that we split out so it's called an Electric's Take or 9to5Mac's Take. And that way they know, we are now switching into opinion. Obviously, no one's reading print anymore and there's no little op ed eyebrow on top of that print.

**[00:15:10] BB:** Yeah, exactly. Good. What are you reading, watching listening to consuming, Michelle? It sounds like you get a lot of sources and they're listening to a lot of things. What do you have for us?

**[00:15:23] ML:** I usually start my day by reading the Carbon Brief, which is UK newsletter. And it is extremely comprehensive about all things, clean energy, and electric cars. The New York Times, I have a really bad habit of reading in bed, really bad.

**[00:15:43] BB:** Now wait, like print or digital? Like, you read it on your phone?



**[00:15:46] ML:** Digital, really bad. Print, I tend to read on my sofa or outside if it's a sunny day. I read different outlets. I suppose I am a news junkie. I've got my push notifications for the post in the New York Times, and I look at all different – I think that's how I start my day, like most journalists do, is you look and see what's going on and you're curating in your head. That's interesting, but I don't need to know that. The news yesterday, interesting, but I don't need to read it because I have too much stuff I have to cover in my – yeah, I actually do a lot of reading online. I'm not currently subscribing to any print papers, probably because I need it faster. I do have a lot of subscriptions online. I try to read books in my phone.

**[00:16:39] BB:** [inaudible 00:16:40].

**[00:16:42] ML:** Lock my phone.

**[00:16:43] BB:** Okay, lock your phone, like stay quietly.

**[00:16:46] ML:** Actually, what I will tell you about is a book that I recently read is by Christina Patterson. It's called *The Art of Not Falling Apart*. She's an excellent writer, confession. I do know her, she's a friend. And basically, it's about how we cope when things go wrong. And that's really relevant right now, to pretty much everybody.

**[00:17:19] BB:** That's true.

**[00:17:19] ML:** I mean, I checked in with a friend in Colorado this morning, who just barely escaped the fires and with COVID and her family. I'm like, "Oh, 2022." So, Christina deals with issues like that, in a kind of funny way and a touching way. And she says, when things like this happen, I need to get wine. Christina, she's British, and there is some validity to that, wine and potato chips can solve a lot of problems.

**[00:17:53] BB:** Wine and potato chips, yes.

**[00:17:56] ML:** Exacly.

**[00:17:57] BB:** I like that. Well, congrats to your friend. Okay.

[00:18:02] **ML:** Netflix, millions of series right now.

[00:18:05] **BB:** But which ones?

[00:18:05] **ML:** Really good ones. Let's see. White Lotus was really great.

[00:18:11] **BB:** Oh, it was. Oh my gosh, especially with your luxury travel background, for sure.

[00:18:15] **ML:** Absolutely. Yes. We went through a phase where we were watching Scandinavian crime thrillers.

[00:18:23] **BB:** What?

[00:18:25] **ML:** We do the line – that was fun. We spent a few good, few weeks, if not a month in Scandinavia, watching them hunt down murderers. That was pretty great.

[00:18:37] **BB:** I love some true crime. Cool. You have a wide content.

[00:18:45] **ML:** I suppose that reflects my career, really.

[00:18:47] **BB:** It kind of does. I like it. Well, speaking of careers, what Michelle, do you think the future of journalism looks like?

[00:18:55] **ML:** I had this a 10-year relationship. I used to work with – I'm a dual citizen. I'm a UK and US citizen. And I worked for the National Council for the training of journalists for 10 years, nearly 4 years on staff, and then 6 years as a consultant. One of the wonderful things about that job is that as head of accreditation, I would travel to all of our accredited journalism courses at colleges and universities across the UK, and meet with the lecturers and the course leaders and talk about what they needed to do to meet our standards. And every time I visited University, I would take a panel of three editors or writers or journalists. What that gave me was a really fantastic bird's eye view of everything that was going on in terms of the local editors, national editors print, online broadcast.

And then I moved into the training side. So basically, providing training courses for journalists and giving them the skills that they needed in order to succeed. While I was doing that role, I was editing at The Guardian on the news desk in the mornings or in the culture desk. So, it was extremely relevant, it was useful because I kind of work, figure out what we needed, and then go back and build courses for that. What is overwhelmingly clear, especially doing this role, and having that experience is that journalists need to be very flexible. And you definitely need to learn to be a jack of all trades.

**[00:20:32] BB:** Yeah, that's for sure.

**[00:20:32] ML:** Yeah, I mean, I think the days of stay in your lane are long gone. My time at Time Inc, you do what you're supposed to do, and don't even think about stepping into someone else's space. So, if you wanted photos for your section, you would ask the photo editors to source it for you. And then they would provide it when they were able to source them. And when they were ready. Now in my role, I find the photos myself for my own stories. I edit them myself, I upload them myself, I do all the media.

**[00:21:01] BB:** You do all of it, yup.

**[00:21:04] ML:** Yes. Mobile journalism is what it was called in the UK. Particularly for local reporters, they simply do not have the budgets to split these jobs. And so, if you're going to go out on the beat, if you're going to go cover, let's say a crime in your town, we would basically teach them how to use their phones to record the video, to edit the video, to edit the sound, and then upload those stories on their websites as soon as it was ready. Because they have to do it all. So, they've got to write it, they've got to edit it, they've got to upload the video, they've got to find the photos that are take the photos, you've got to be flexible. You've got to be enthusiastic about embracing new skills, learning new things. If you're not learning, you're not surviving in journalism.

**[00:21:50] BB:** You need to be able to do it all, completely.

**[00:21:54] ML:** Afraid so. But the good news is, is that there are resources out there to help you do that.

**[00:22:00] BB:** And there's a lot, online, in person, at your current workplace, if you can get a job in there, all that good stuff.

**[00:22:07] ML:** Yeah. Even formal and informal. So, you can could take classes, we used to put on courses at the NCTJ that were provided by Google. Google has a lot of tools that journalists can use, or informal. WordPress brings in Block Editor, our IT guy teaches all of us how to use Block Editor and it's pretty great.

**[00:22:32] BB:** Are you then optimistic?

**[00:22:36] ML:** If I'm totally honest with you Beck, I really have no idea where we're going.

**[00:22:41] BB:** That's okay.

**[00:22:44] ML:** That may have been brought on by the way that we live now. I mean, I think that I live very much in the present now because of the pandemic. I'm not pessimistic. Because I still absolutely believe that. We are completely vital. We've got to tell stories, and we've got to tell the truth. It's becoming hard. A lot has to do with – I mean, since we all now have access to our analytics, I've always explained like, when I'd go in and speak to students on journalism courses at universities, what do you all read? And they would typically choose the broadsheets, well, as they're known now, The Times, The Guardian, Telegraph. And I'd say, "Well, which paper has the largest circulation?" And consistently, I'd get quiet blank looks.

I'm like, "The largest circulation in this country is The Sun. You should read everything." I have to know what the different perspectives are. That fits more of the UK model. The US model is more polarized. So, where are we going? That's a really excellent question. But I do know that it seems to me that the industry is bouncing back a bit. A lot of people are hiring and they're diversifying. And I don't think we're going anywhere. There's definitely an audience and a need for good information.

**[00:24:09] BB:** Yeah, that will not go away, for sure. Michelle, thank you for being on here today. This has been lovely. I learned some new things too. I learned some things about how to pitch and that you read every email and that you look at to see the little kernels of gems that could be an email that is so good. I love that. Thank you for doing this. And thank you for writing for 9to5. We'll be reading up.

**[00:24:33] ML:** Beck, thank you for talking with me. I enjoyed it.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a journalist featuring Michelle Lewis from nine to five group. If you enjoy listening to our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes,

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[00:24:35] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening in to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Michelle Lewis from 9to5 group. If you enjoy listening to 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 guest.

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[END]