

EPISODE 112

[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 from the top US-based publications who cover topics including technology, lifestyle and culture, health, science, consumer products, business news, and beauty and wellness. 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 and look for the video page to learn more about our new video series featuring journalists from the show.

This week on Coffee with a Journalist, we're joined by Lisa Lacy, the commerce editor at Adweek. Lisa focuses on retail and the growing reach of Amazon. As the sole reporter for Amazon, her stories gross two plus million views annually. During the episode, Lisa shares how little time she spends scanning her inbox, how she pursues the story behind the scenes, her interpretation of an exclusive and more. Let's hear from Lisa now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:21] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, Founder of OnePitch, this wonderful platform we built so that we could better know journalists and get better pitches to our journalists. Also, I run an agency called BAM, which is how OnePitch was born because BAM Works is all venture-backed technology companies, and we're pitching every day all the time to all these media people. Hence, we are here to understand on this little show what journalists like and also what they don't like, so we don't bug them. Also, what they think maybe the future of journalism looks like because all of us are concerned absolutely about that.

Today with us is the commerce editor of Adweek, Lisa. Lisa, welcome to the show. Lisa Lacy from Adweek. Hi, Lisa.

[00:02:05] LL: Hi. Thanks for having me.

[00:02:07] BB: Thank you for being here. You have, I hope we get interrupted, by the way, with like some cute puppy barks, a new puppy. Start with that. Tell us everything.

[00:02:18] LL: I do. Well, I've always wanted a golden retriever, but my mother was not a fan of dogs growing up, and then I moved to New York after college and always lived in tiny apartments. So –

[00:02:28] BB: So that wasn't going to happen.

[00:02:31] LL: I finally moved to Atlanta and have a house and the space for it, so just finally got this puppy. He's three months old as of today.

[00:02:40] BB: My god.

[00:02:42] LL: He's perfect.

[00:02:44] BB: Is he staying up at night? Like, is he sleeping through the night? How's he doing?

[00:02:48] LL: He is actually. Everybody told me that it was going to be like having a baby. He was going to whine the whole night, the first night. I was prepared for the worst, but he slept right through it so –

[00:03:02] BB: Excellent. He's lucky. All right, Lisa. Well, why don't we – Now, we can officially start. We can officially start in our podcast thing. How is your inbox?

[00:03:12] LL: My inbox is full. Certainly always full.

[00:03:17] BB: What is it full with, pitches or just BS or all of the above?

[00:03:22] LL: Yeah, all of the above. Lots of pitches, lots of newsletter tests, lots of newsletters. Yeah, that's probably the bulk of it.

[00:03:30] BB: And then with the newsletters, tell us a little bit more. Like what are you reading, Lisa, from your beat, specifically in commerce and in Adweek, which we'll get to in just a second.

[00:03:39] LL: I mean, I usually scan most of the big digital sites. I look at some of our competitors personally interested in tech stuff. So I like TechCrunch. I like The Verge. I look at Retail Dive, the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, the usual suspects.

[00:03:57] BB: Got you. Lisa, before we go more into the inbox, we should have started off even more with this. I'm asking this now more often about. It's just because I want to make sure everyone's on the same page. How would you describe what Adweek all encompasses? There's quite a bit.

[00:04:14] LL: There is. I mean, they like to use this phrase, "How marketers do their jobs better." So I mean, that's, I guess, one focus, but we've expanded quite a bit in the last several years. So I mean, they just opened a European bureau, so we've got more folks kind of outside of the US, expanding the coverage there. There's an expanding voice network, so for columnists and practitioners to share their wisdom. There's a lot of branded content, in addition to, I mean, I think the traditional sort of desks where there's a brand desk. There's now a commerce desk. There's an agency's desk and a TV streaming desk. I think that's all of them.

[00:04:58] BB: All the desks, yeah. It's quite wide and it has grown substantially. Okay. Now, back to your inbox, with the pitches you receive, how are you organizing or maybe not organizing them?

[00:05:11] LL: I don't honestly organize them. I get so many emails in a given day. I give it a quick scan. I mean, the vast majority I think of the emails that I receive are not really even relevant, so it doesn't take a lot of time to tell that it's not something that's a fit, and so can just kind of move on. I mean, I'm a single parent, and I have this new puppy. So I really –

[00:05:35] BB: Time is tight.

[00:05:36] LL: Yeah. I mean, it's probably a reflection of my personality as well. But, yeah, like I go through my –

[00:05:42] BB: Delete and go. Got it. Okay. Are you opening every single email? Or are you just flagging based on subject line?

[00:05:49] LL: I mean, like I can see the message in the preview window. But, I mean, typically, I'm going through them very quickly. I start with the opposite of the most recent, the one I received first, and make my way up. But, yeah, going up quickly.

[00:06:05] BB: Okay. So quick speed pitcher, delete person here. Okay. Now, here's always a question we'd like to cover. As editor, it may be a bit different than reporters we have on. So are you ever forwarding pitches? You do write quite a bunch of your own content still as well, so you're also doing writing? But is there a forwarding mechanism? Are you sharing it to reporters at all on your team? Or are you just – Yeah, how does that work for you?

[00:06:34] LL: Yeah, of course. I mean, I have a reporter who focuses on emerging tech and augmented reality. He also ended up doing a lot of buy now pay later stuff. So anything like Metaverse, NFTs, we'll pass along to him. I've another reporter focus more on CPG. So I mean, he usually – I think all the CPG brands know him by now. But if there's anything that lands in my inbox, I will – Sorry about that.

[00:07:00] BB: There's another pitch right there coming in.

[00:07:03] LL: We'll forward those to him. Then, I mean, if there's something – I mean, I also feel like the TV editor has been in on that beat for an extraordinarily long time and is very well connected. So I don't typically forward things to him because he's usually on top of it already. But if there's relevant news, like we have a reporter who – Sometimes, there are jump balls like plant-based meats or something that nobody really covers specifically, but there's a reporter who likes it, so I get something about that. I might forward it to her, so, yeah, I mean, it's just there.

[00:07:35] BB: So here or there, you do some traffic control it sounds like. Okay.

[00:07:39] LL: I don't delete everything.

[00:07:40] BB: Got it. Okay. This is good for us to know. Okay. So then for pieces you do, like I'm looking at this Barbie piece, she's hosting her first shoppable dream live stream, everybody. This is unprecedented, I'm sure. How did this story come about, and do you have a process for how you do the pieces you do? Or do they come from pitches sometimes?

[00:08:05] LL: On the TalkShopLive with the live stream platform behind that, they reached out about that one. I mean, typically, I like to go down rabbit holes. I like to pull out threads and think about – I think like I don't know if you saw today Chipotle has like a chip-making robot named Chippy. That made me, and I do think that there's a story on kind of robots taking over jobs in the fast food industry and how – I mean, like I don't know about you, but I have a son who likes Happy Meals. But I had this disastrous experience trying to go through the drive-thru not long ago because of this worker shortage.

I do think that there's maybe something interesting in how robots potentially in fast food specifically will perhaps help alleviate staffing shortages. That's kind of what I prefer to do, but something I feel like Barbie – I don't know. There's just something about the Barbie live stream that I thought was interesting and that people might also be interested in, so that was why I jumped on that one.

[00:09:05] BB: Got it. Okay. The thing I was going to add just on the fast food thing or in Chipotle specifically is today I'm walking around in New York, I'm doing my New York thing, and I see this truck go by, and it says **[inaudible 00:09:19]**. Its tagline was avocados delivered fresh, and I'm like, "Only in New York is there a little van that touts that it will deliver you fresh avocado." It was the cutest damn van, but I'm like, "Really? Is that enough of a business that there's a person hawking avocado, delivering?" I just thought there's always something for something. It's just amazing.

[00:09:43] LL: Yeah. Avocados are popular.

[00:09:45] **BB:** It is. I know and California. Hey, normally in California. Anyway, so that's kind of the story inspiration. Do you ever get, and maybe this was a piece with the Barbie piece, exclusive or embargo pitches?

[00:09:59] **LL:** Yeah. We get embargoes all the time. Sometimes, I mean, I feel like it's very –

[00:10:04] **BB:** Yeah. How do you feel about it?

[00:10:06] **LL:** I'm certainly open to embargoes. I feel like I've noticed recently that a lot of embargoes are coming in kind of at the last minute. So it will be something that gets sent at like 4:00 PM, and the embargo lifts at 7:00 AM.

[00:10:21] **BB:** The next day.

[00:10:22] **LL:** Yeah. They'll say, "Sorry, this is so last minute but wanted to make sure we got this to you." I have a colleague who thinks that it's all planned, and they do this on purpose so that you end up just writing something quick on the release, and you don't ask any questions.

[00:10:38] **BB:** Do you think that's the case? What do you think about that?

[00:10:40] **LL:** Yeah, I think that that's definitely probably part of it, at least some of the time. For him, he rejects the stories for that express purpose. It feels like you don't respect him enough to get it over to him and let him do his job, he's not going to cover it. I'm probably not that harsh. But I mean, there are times when it's just like, "Look, it's the end of the day. I don't have time for this. Sorry," kind of a thing. I mean, it's obviously like if it's Jeff Bezos leaving –

[00:11:11] **BB:** Then that would be something –

[00:11:13] **LL:** Yeah. Sometimes, you have to cover it, no matter what. But, yes, I do think we have caught on to that tactic of sending embargoes at the last minute.

[00:11:21] **BB:** Then what about exclusives? What is your preference there?

[00:11:27] LL: I had an editor once who would argue that an exclusive was only something that you dug up yourself through your –

[00:11:37] BB: I've heard that on the show.

[00:11:39] LL: Yes. I'm prone to agree with him. TalkShopLive said that this Barbie live stream was a “exclusive,” but we often find out that like it's a trade exclusive, or it's an exclusive for like 20 minutes. So I feel like exclusive is also a relative term.

[00:11:56] BB: Yes. An annoyingly relative term it sounds like, as I talk to people, because many of the journalists would say, “No, exclusive means only me, only me. Not only a timeframe of 20 minutes or only, ‘Oh, I'm the only trade publication,’ or, ‘Oh, I mean, like tech outlets.’” It's like no, no, no, no, no. So it seems still needs to be understood better by publicists as the only, the only only that you would get. Or as your old boss was saying, it sounds like, Lisa, you dug it up yourself. So, yes, it's your own because you're the only one who found it in the first place. That's the probably the safest route, by the way.

[BREAK]

[00:12:37] 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 one pitch 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]

[00:13:01] BB: Lisa, on your Twitter handle, you've mentioned how you're nervous, even when you're on Xanax. So I love that vulnerability you put out in the world. Is there any way to build a viable relationship with you as a publicist?

[00:13:16] LL: Sure. I mean, I feel like I have – I mean, I've been doing this since Scott was a boy, so I have good relationships with a number of publicists. I mean, I think it really just – The

biggest problem I would say with the vast majority of the emails in my inbox right now is just that they're not relevant. Anything that we do as a newsroom see a lot of – It's like the old spray and pray tactic, where there's somebody who is just blasting out a release to the entire newsroom. I mean, I know it can be intimidating to a bully because thinking about like when I've pitched publications with like freelance ideas. I know it can be intimidating when you have like a cold pitch, but I don't think it's too difficult to do a little research and see who the TV editor is or who the brand's desk editor is and to maybe route your pitch to the most appropriate person or at least. I just feel like we're just inundated. It's like that proverbial fire hose just every day, and most of them have nothing to do with what are – I mean, I get tons about like gift guides, so it's here's some products. Just about like holidays, Patrick's Day, Mother's Day. Here's for your –

[00:14:33] BB: Wait a second Wait a second. People are pitching you gift guides for St. Patrick's Day.

[00:14:38] LL: Well, they're pitching like products for any roundups that we do holiday gift guides.

[00:14:43] BB: But for St. Patty's Day.

[00:14:45] LL: Every holiday it seems. There's products that are looking to get into gift guides.

[00:14:51] BB: Oh, boy. Okay. Wow, I learn stuff on here all the time. Okay, so don't pitch you any gift guides. Noted on that front. But, okay, yeah. So, Lisa, if you got an email from someone saying, “Hey, I'm a publicist. Here's who I rep. Could I keep you updated on my clients,” would that be a good way to build a relationship with you? Or is it, “Hey, I'm going to be in Atlanta. You want to get a coffee, like old school, face to face?” What would be the best way?

[00:15:19] LL: I mean, I guess it depends who the clients are. I'm certainly open to getting coffee with folks who are in Atlanta. I know it's a little different than when I was in New York. But I mean, it's like when it works, it's like a mutually beneficial relationship, right? I mean, there are times when I need sources. I need somebody to comment on something. I have my sort of established stable of people who I know I can reach out to who are going to get back to me, who are going to speak in plain English and not just shoot a bunch of jargon at me. I mean, I'm

certainly – I don't want to keep going to that same pool of people all the time. That editor I mentioned before, he used to call it the penalty box [inaudible 00:16:04]. They're going to go in the penalty box.

[00:16:09] **BB:** Oh, I see. Yeah, you got a mix of your sources.

[00:16:12] **LL:** Yeah. So I mean, I'm always up like if their relevant, if they're intelligent. If they know what they're talking about and can speak to the topics that I'm interested, I'm always willing to meet people. It's just the problem is that there's so much that isn't –

[00:16:29] **BB:** There's so many people. Yeah.

[00:16:30] **LL:** Yeah.

[00:16:31] **BB:** Yup, yup. Okay, Lisa, I have a fill in the blank little section here. So I'm going to give you the phrase, and then you could fill it in from here. Does that sound good?

[00:16:42] **LL:** Yes.

[00:16:43] **BB:** Okay. My favorite sources always –

[00:16:46] **LL:** They get back quickly, and they speak in plain English.

[00:16:50] **BB:** Good answer. You'll never get a response from me if –

[00:16:54] **LL:** If you call me Lacy or if your pitch is irrelevant.

[00:16:58] **BB:** So they mess up your last name. They put it first. Oh, boy. Oh, boy.

[00:17:01] **LL:** I get that all the time. I was just joking with a colleague today that there's somebody who keeps sending an email with, "Hey, Lacy," in the subject line, and this is like three or four times now. They haven't figured out.

[00:17:14] BB: No, no, no, no. Okay. You can follow up with me if –

[00:17:18] LL: You're always welcome to follow up with me. But if it's not relevant, I'm probably not going to respond.

[00:17:24] BB: No response. Yes. The appropriate amount of lead time for a story is –

[00:17:30] LL: It really varies, right? If it's a quick hit like this Barbie thing, a couple of days is reasonable. I think the only problem is when it's like it's an embargo. Shortly before the embargo lifts is when things get a little tricky. Obviously, if it's more of a deeper dive, it would maybe be a little longer than that. It just sort of depends what the story is.

[00:17:55] BB: Okay. This is good to know. My favorite stories to write are –

[00:17:59] LL: Back when I was a technology reporter, we had to do this exercise where we came up with – What was it called? It wasn't a beat primer. It was something that was like a statement that described our beats. I always said that I like to write about how technology changes consumer behavior and where that presents opportunities and challenges for brands and marketers. So those are my favorite stories.

[00:18:23] BB: Okay. What a cool exercise, by the way. That's nice. I like it. The best compliment I received about my work was –

[00:18:33] LL: Robert Klara, I believe he's – What is his title? I think he's a senior editor maybe at this point. He's been at Adweek for a long time. I call him the Adweek goat. He's also one of my close personal friends, if I'm in the interest of transparency. But like anytime Robert ever likes anything that I wrote, it's always like –

[00:18:51] BB: It's a high moment.

[00:18:52] LL: Yeah.

[00:18:53] **BB:** Oh, that's nice. What does he send, by the way? Does he just send you a quick text or like an email?

[00:18:58] **LL:** Yeah. Slacks or emails or texts. Slack or text.

[00:19:03] **BB:** Slack or text. I like it. Okay. Lisa, what are you otherwise consuming story-wise, articles or books or news, Netflix, podcast? We'll take all of it. So do you have anything good you love?

[00:19:17] **LL:** When I do have off time, I have a pretty stressful life.

[00:19:21] **BB:** I would imagine.

[00:19:22] **LL:** Outside of work and my child and the puppy, I usually like – True crime is my obsession.

[00:19:29] **BB:** Are you a My Favorite Murder – Murderino?

[00:19:32] **LL:** I don't do a lot of podcasts.

[00:19:34] **BB:** Okay. So you want a full book it sounds like.

[00:19:36] **LL:** Well, or like I like the documentaries. I feel like working on – Like I just redid a dining room table set. So like working on that and having a true crime documentary in the background really is honestly about as good as it gets for me.

[00:19:55] **BB:** Working on a broken table and a documentary on true crime. Yes. What was the documentary, by the way?

[00:20:01] **LL:** I watched a bunch of them. I really liked – There was that Night Stalker one I think on Netflix, which is very good. One called Monster in the Shadows on Peacock, which is really messed up but really good. I thought the Black and Missing documentary on HBO was really good. Then that We Need to Talk About Cosby on Showtime was really very good.

[00:20:23] **BB:** Yes. Yes.

[00:20:24] **LL:** I'm looking for the next –

[00:20:25] **BB:** Then looking for the next one. Okay. Oh, there's only four episodes though on the Night Stalker. See, like I want something that has like multiple seasons, multiple episodes because I want to like get in there. I really think Netflix has completely changed us too in that sense. You see all those memes where people are like, “Oh, watch something for 11 and a half hours? No way. Oh, it's broken up into 12 40-minute segments. Oh, sure thing. Let me binge the whole thing.” It's interesting how we like or now associated and indoctrinated into long form but like in little short episode type pieces. Anyway, very interesting how that manipulation has occurred. Oh, man. Anything else in the true crime space?

[00:21:08] **LL:** That John Wayne Gacy thing on Peacock was pretty good. That's actually the only reason why I subscribed to Peacock.

[00:21:13] **BB:** Oh, really? Just for that.

[00:21:15] **LL:** Yes. So I may cancel. Well, but they have that Girls5eva thing too, which is also great. So it's not all true crime. I do like comedy as well.

[00:21:25] **BB:** Good to know. Good to know. I like it.

[00:21:29] **LL:** With strong female leads, yes.

[00:21:31] **BB:** So good. It's so good. Okay. That's a good batch though, Lisa. I think we're good with that question there. Maybe not as – Maybe it's funny or maybe it's dark. We'll see if it relates to this. But what do you think the future of journalism looks like?

[00:21:47] **LL:** I'm optimistic. I feel like there will always be at least an appetite for good stories. Whether there will always be outlets for good stories, [inaudible 00:21:56]. Robert Klara and I were talking earlier today about the Chippy, the chip-making robot, and how he said that he

thought that eventually robots will be doing our jobs. But he and I will probably be dead by then. I don't know if I agree. I agree with him in a lot of things. I don't know if I agree with him on that. I just think like we are still – I feel like when my career began was sort of the moment where there was really lush journalism gangs versus **[inaudible 00:22:29]** drying up, and the business model had to rapidly change.

Then it became kind of all about clicks. So there's been – I mean, I guess, like my career started with kind of the birth of digital journalism. I think that that kind of chase for clicks hasn't always resulted in the best content, and I would hope that publications of the future kind of figure out how to keep good work without going out of business. I would certainly be at a higher pay grade if I knew how to do it myself.

[00:23:00] BB: Yeah. Lisa, that's partially optimistic I'd say. You're truly optimistic. We've been hearing a lot more of the neutrally optimistic I'd say on the show, which is way different, by the way, than maybe 40 episodes ago or when we were in like season one, where it was like, "Oh, god. I better wrap it up as soon as possible, and this is it. Next year, it'll be over." Anyway, things really evolve. So Lisa, thank you for being on the show today. This was really great and a lot of fun, and I had no idea about Barbie and also the chip robot. So you learn stuff and something here all the time.

[00:23:37] LL: Hey. Well, I'm glad I could pass it along.

[00:23:42] BB: Thank you, Lisa Lacy from Adweek. Appreciate you, Lisa. Thanks for being on today.

[00:23:47] LL: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:23:49] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist featuring Lisa Lacy from Adweek. If you enjoy listening to our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and anywhere else you listen to podcasts. And if you have a moment, please leave us a review to share your thoughts about the show and

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[END]