

EPISODE 119

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee With a Journalist, brought to you by OnePitch. The guest on our show includes 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.

Joining us this week on the podcast is Alcynna Lloyd, an economy reporter at Insider. Alcynna writes stories on the Economy pertaining to housing and real estate. Prior to joining Business Insider, she was the Digital Media Manager at HousingWire.

During the episode, Alcynna shares the types of pitches that grab her attention, her requirements for an embargo, how economists are landing in her inbox, and more. Let's hear from her now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:17] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, founder of OnePitch. And also, BAM, an agency that works with all venture-backed technology companies doing great things in the world. And we do this show so that publicists and publicists adjacent, maybe some savvy marketers, can know a little bit more about how to work with journalists. What they like? What they don't like? Do they want an exclusive? Do they never want to hear from you ever in their inbox, or their DMs, or wherever and however? That is why we do this show. And I'm really happy today because we have, coming straight from Texas, Alcynna Lloyd, who's the economy reporter at Insider. Previously known as Business Insider, but now just Insider.

Alcynna, welcome. Thanks for being here.

[00:02:02] AL: Of course. Thanks for having me. Glad to join you.

[00:02:04] BB: Yes. Tell us first, before we get into your inbox, what does the economy reporter focus in on? You go into a little bit on your LinkedIn and Twitter and so forth. But for everyone to know, what does that entail?

[00:02:16] AL: Well, my beat specifically for the economy team is focusing on real estate and housing in the rental market. I basically talk about how affordability impacts consumers, or how the market is changing and how it will go on to affect consumers in the long run.

[00:02:29] BB: I'm sure you're busy then right now.

[00:02:31] AL: Yes. Very busy right now.

[00:02:32] BB: Yeah, I would bet. And you came from HousingWire. So that makes perfect sense that you're deep in the trenches of real estate. Were you always interested in real estate? Or was this kind of how you got into it and here you are? Or what would you say?

[00:02:42] AL: I kind of stumbled into it. I actually graduated with a broadcast degree. Yeah, and I interned a bit at CBS. And I covered local news. But after that, I kind of wanted to change something different. And HousingWire actually popped up on LinkedIn and I decided to go ahead and apply. And it worked out. I loved working there. I was there for four years.

[00:03:00] BB: Okay, now, about your inbox. We always get into it here. And it can be a contentious issue and talk about all the pitches that are there or not there. How busy is your inbox?

[00:03:11] AL: Oh, okay. See, if I close my inbox on Friday and open it on Monday, I'll have 300 to 400 emails?

[00:03:18] BB: Really?

[00:03:19] AL: Yes, yeah.

[00:03:21] BB: And is it newsletters? Is it pitches in the weekend? What's all entailed in there?

[00:03:25] AL: It's all sorts of things. Sometimes I get commentary back from readers. A lot of the times it's pitches from different researching publications. Or I'll get embargoed stories coming in as well. Or sometimes it's just people pitching to let me know that they have a source that I could work with probably.

[00:03:38] BB: And do you like those source emails?

[00:03:40] AL: I like those source emails if they come with data.

[00:03:43] BB: Yeah, okay. Clear distinction.

[00:03:45] AL: Yeah. If it's pertaining to a topic that I'm currently covering, I'm more likely to open it versus if it's just, "Hey, you should meet so-and-so."

[00:03:52] BB: Give us perhaps an example. I don't know if you have a recent example. Or, "Oh, yeah. Someone just pitched me that." But how does that pitch look like, "Hey, speak to this person, but let me show you this report or these three bullet points that have numbers?" How does it look?

[00:04:05] AL: Usually, the ones that I really like, they'll start addressing my name. I'm more likely to pay attention to my name, and if it's correct.

[00:04:12] BB: Oh, you like your name in the subject line.

[00:04:13] AL: Yeah. And I like my name to be spelled.

[00:04:16] BB: Also important.

[00:04:17] AL: Yes. Or sometimes people will not necessarily have the right job title. I'm less likely to look at the information in the email itself if the title is wrong, because they might be pitching something that's not pertaining to my beat. But when I do open the email, usually what I like to see is pretty direct. If they're going to add a source, I usually like to see the source at the bottom. I like to see the data that's going to be displayed or shared with me first. And then that draws my attention in.

And then once I see that they have a source willing to talk about it, I'm more likely to reach out to that source because I already know what they want to talk about, versus just tag.

[00:04:49] BB: Your name in the subject line. Got the right title of what you cover. Source on the bottom. Data on the top, in the email.

[00:04:57] AL: Yeah.

[00:04:58] BB: Okay. I hope everyone is listening. Very hard to that. Because that is specific and appropriate to take action on. What's a like, "Absolutely, I'm not responding to that email," pitch look like?

[00:05:08] AL: Okay. This might be me being picky, but sometimes people will still think that I work at a different company. So they'll have, "Oh, I read your latest article on this website. Or I read this." And I'm like, "Oh, I don't work there anymore."

[00:05:22] BB: Or that's not even true, because you clearly aren't writing for HousingWire.

[00:05:26] AL: Yes. Yeah. I got that a few times a week actually.

[00:05:29] BB: Really?

[00:05:30] AL: Yeah.

[00:05:31] BB: That bad.

[00:05:32] AL: Yeah. Those are things that bother me. But also, I hate when people pitch not necessarily stories, but they're more or so pitching PR-related content. And the economy teams – Say, if a company launched an initiative that brought them back like a lot of money or something like that. That's not something I normally cover. I'm less likely obviously to dive deeper in the company if that pitch is presented. Because that's not what I would cover.

[00:05:58] BB: Yeah. Okay. Is there maybe another example?

[00:06:02] AL: Let's say something else that I don't like. Really, really long pitches. Yeah, that's something that –

[00:06:06] BB: Seven paragraphs? Three paragraphs?

[00:06:08] AL: Yes. Yes. If straighter to the point, the easier it is to grab my attention. And I'll be more likely to dive in.

[00:06:14] BB: Okay. Shorter the better. And by short, and people have various versions of what short is, do you even like bullet points?

[00:06:20] AL: Well, I like bullet points, as long as I can see exactly what's being discussed. I don't mind obviously that they're not bullet points. But bullet points are usually the easiest way to point out exactly what's –

[00:06:28] BB: Digest it. Get it. Okay. Ooh, I like this. This is good. Now, what if you get a pitch that you go, "Yeah, that's not for me. But someone on my team might be appropriate." Do you ever forward over stuff and nudge it to someone else? How does that work? Because I know every outlet has a different kind of approach on that too.

[00:06:47] AL: Yeah, definitely. If a pitch is more – Let's say if it's a student housing story, I don't typically do that. Not that I couldn't. But I don't typically cover that. But if I get that in my inbox, I'll pass that over to someone else on my team. I'll usually say, "Hey, this email came through. This might be of interest to you." And then usually they decide what they want to do with it.

[00:07:04] BB: And then you can connect them from there. Okay. Now, we have a new little part in some of the stuff we're doing here, which is about exclusives and embargoes, and then also subject lines. Let's start with subject lines. You mentioned just before, "Okay, when I see my name spelled correctly, that's a good plug on the subject line." What else is like, "Oh, yeah, that is an absolute. I'm going to open that email."

[00:07:25] AL: People sending over the emails, if they're paying attention to what's happening in my beat, for example, affordability is like a huge topic right now. And the subject line, if they address my name and they also include this email is about this specific topic. And as it pertains to my beat, I'm more likely to open that email just because I know I'm already looking for stories that feature that topic. It stands out.

[00:07:46] BB: Got you. Okay. This is all excellent. Now, exclusives or embargoes, are any of interest ever to you?

[00:07:52] AL: Yes, definitely. I love – When I get embargoes, it's always nice to see information or data before other teams get access to it as well. With embargoes, the data or the information inside the email has to be something that's interesting. Not something that I could like find somewhere else.

[00:08:06] BB: And for that, since especially there's such a data focus for you, this needs to be unique data from a research group, from a startup that has an unbelievable data set that no one else has. Do you ever have agencies, like federal agencies, state agencies email you things?

[00:08:21] AL: No, not necessarily. I'm signed up for their stuff. But they don't typically send over –

[00:08:25] BB: I was going to say, the government doesn't do pitching really. Okay.

[00:08:27] AL: No, they don't.

[00:08:29] BB: Yeah.

[00:08:30] AL: It would be easier if they did.

[00:08:31] BB: It would be kind of nice. Maybe a good policy thought or an angle on that. Okay.

[BREAK]

[00:08:37] ANNOUNCER: Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to see the unique ways one pitch helps PR professionals and marketers pitch journalists? Head to onepitch.co 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 CONTINUED]

[00:09:01] BB: Building relationships with you, Alcynna, just in this day and age. And you're in Texas, for example, not, let's say, New York City where it's maybe a density of journalists that we know sometimes are there. How do people build a relationship with you these days?

[00:09:18] AL: I found, especially since I started working in Insider, the best way to build a relationship is just consistent conversation. I have a few economists that send me over information time to time. And we keep all of our conversations in the same email so it does feel like a continuous conversation. It's not just, "Hey, I'm sending you this new thing and starting a brand-new conversation." We just continue to build on the topics that we have been discussing previously. Plus, adding new additional information. It feels more like you're having a conversation with somebody you know or a colleague, versus speaking to somebody I have no context for, I guess.

[00:09:49] BB: And if someone wants to kind of like broach that relationship with you, is it just an easy like, "Do you want a DM? Do you want an email?" Can you elaborate from here?

[00:09:57] AL: Yeah, yeah. I prefer an email. Just a mail being like, "Hey, here's this information. I work with this —"

[00:10:02] BB: Have clients that are these. Yeah.

[00:10:03] AL: Yeah. And I'll reach back out to you again. And so, that's how I typically –

[00:10:07] BB: There you go. Okay. Now, for story building. And then we'll talk about any stories that you're consuming and listening to, watching or whatever. You had one recent piece on the 2008 housing crisis. You have something right now, just recently, real estate investors snatching up homes and HOAs and law makers battling it out type of thing. And by the way, you write a lot of stuff. Please, everyone, take a look. Because we are banging it out on the article quality and number. It's a lot. It's a lot. How do you come up with the inspiration for the pieces? Or is it more passive? You're looking at the news. You're seeing what's in your inbox and you go, "You know what? Okay, I got to do that now."

[00:10:46] AL: Well, luckily for my beat, there's new data coming out every day. Home prices are always rising. Rents are always rising. There're government reports that are put out every month to basically put a bright spot on the housing market itself. Basically, I'm getting information each and every day. The more I get, the more it's easier for me to put together a story. It's easier to see what's going on in the market.

Also, I do get a lot of economists in my inbox sending me reactions to – Which is super helpful. I'll have the idea for story. And sometimes the stress comes from who am I going to be able to source or who I'm going to be able to speak with. But like I said, those economists will send them over before I even get a chance to start writing the story.

[00:11:24] BB: And economists directly. Not like their publicist. Although, I don't know who has a publicist.

[00:11:28] AL: Sometimes they're publicists as well, but –

[00:11:29] BB: Representing the economist.

[00:11:31] AL: Yes, definitely. But with some teams, I've built up a good enough relationship with them that an economist will just send over something sometimes.

[00:11:37] BB: How fancy to have economists emailing you their thoughts on the latest housing trend market report. Wow! That's great. Okay, Alcynna, I have a little fill in the blank here. And then we'll get into what you're reading or kind of listening to. I'll give you the phrase and then you just fill it in. Okay.

[00:11:54] BB: My favorite sources always –

[00:11:56] AL: My favorites sources always share with me the most important information first.

[00:12:02] BB: You'll never get a response from me if –

[00:12:04] AL: If my name is incorrect.

[00:12:05] BB: You can follow-up with me if –

[00:12:07] AL: If I let you know that I'm going to be reaching back out to you, which I usually always do.

[00:12:12] BB: The appropriate amount of lead time for a story is –

[00:12:15] AL: Sorry. Let me ask. Are you talking how long it takes me to write it? Or how long –

[00:12:20] BB: Yes. You get a pitch and they're like, "Yeah, can you write tomorrow?" You're like, "What?" Do you prefer five days, five hours?

[00:12:27] AL: If it's a straightforward topic, two days is good enough for me. But if it's something that is going to be a little more in-depth, I do take a little while. So maybe like four days or so.

[00:12:36] BB: Four days. pretty straightforward. My favorite stories to write are –

[00:12:39] AL: People stories. I talk about the number all the time. But I love real people examples of how the numbers impact them, or how they fit into the story.

[00:12:48] BB: And that's a common answer too. We hear more and more people want to have the storyline of the human involved and how it impacts them, instead of just the general policy or what the implication is and so forth. That's good to hear. The best compliment I received about my work was –

[00:13:04] AL: That actually came from a source who said that it made them cry.

[00:13:09] BB: What?

[00:13:08] AL: Yes. I wrote a story about a single mother becoming a homeowner and she said that I described it so perfectly that it made her cry, which was –

[00:13:15] BB: Wow! That's got to matter to you. That's awesome. I don't think I've heard someone say like someone told me it made them cry. Wow! You get the crown for that. Awesome.

[00:13:24] AL: Thank you.

[00:13:25] BB: Okay, now, what are you reading, watching, listening? We'll take anything, frankly, because we just like to know what storytellers are consuming story-wise.

[00:13:35] AL: This is probably really boring. But right now, I'm diving into like 20-page report on how the pandemic has fueled a home buyer migration. And because of home buyer migration, more people are working from home. It's increased housing demand. I've been reading all about that. Because right now, as people talk about whether or not there's a housing bubble, I need to know every way possible how a housing bubble could arise and what the factors are. Just learning about how the market is changing is something that is really interesting to me right now.

[00:14:04] **BB:** And that definitely sounds like more of a work thing. Is there anything that you're doing that's just like, "Oh, for fun, I'm watching this Netflix thing."

[00:14:10] **AL:** Okay. Yeah, definitely. I just finished the Ozarks.

[00:14:14] **BB:** How was that? It's on my list.

[00:14:16] **AL:** Oh, I loved it. I'm so sad that it's over. I definitely hope they have another spin-off coming up soon. But it was so good.

[00:14:22] **BB:** Oh! Wow! Wow! Wow! Okay. Okay. That's great? Anything else, even like podcast-wise or anything?

[00:14:28] **AL:** I haven't been listening to a lot of podcasts recently. But outside of Ozarks, if we talk about television – This is embarrassing. But I'm a lover of reality TV.

[00:14:37] **BB:** Okay, okay. What's your favorite right now?

[00:14:40] **AL:** The Housewives. Oh, gosh.

[00:14:42] **BB:** Wait, which one, though? Which one?

[00:14:44] **AL:** Sadly – Not sadly. I've seen all of them. But right now, Beverly Hills.

[00:14:48] **BB:** Beverly Hills. Okay. An old school one. Okay.

[00:14:51] **AL:** It's a great way to decompress after a long day –

[00:14:54] **BB:** And it is like so fanciful. And silly, I'm not up to speed on The Housewives. Oh, no. The original one was OC, right?

[00:15:01] **AL:** Yes, OC. Yeah.

[00:15:03] BB: Okay. And then it was LA, I believe. Now there's like 20 other franchises. Oh my God. How do you keep up? There's like a new franchise popping up every other day I feel like.

[00:15:11] AL: There are.

[00:15:13] BB: Wow! That's a lot of content. Oh, awesome. Well, hey, we take all types of stories here. We don't have any bias towards any of them. Great. And you know, sometimes you got to take a break from the serious stuff of the world and storytelling of the world.

Okay. Well, speaking of that, Alcynna, just a last note. And you're a rather newish journalist. You haven't been in the industry for like 37 years or something. What do you think the future of journalism looks like?

[00:15:40] AL: Well, honestly, I feel like the future of journalism with social media, whether it be TikTok, whether it be Snapchat or Instagram, it's really evolving to become more accessible to every type of reader. I see in the future that more media companies are going to try to reach out to readers in that manner. Meet them where they are. I definitely expect to see a rise and I guess more social media reporters or people that share a lot of their work that way, versus the traditional route of, let's say, just like a published article on a website.

[00:16:11] BB: Less, maybe thousand-word piece or 800-word piece written and more forms of it on different platforms. Would you tell your college-age self anything else differently?

[00:16:23] AL: Yes. I would tell myself that I think a lot of people my age, when they enter new industry, they often have this thing called imposter syndrome, where they don't really think that they fit where they are. But work hard. Keep putting the time. And you love what you do, definitely you're not going to feel like an imposter for long. I'm very happy that working at Insider I've had the opportunity to definitely see how my writing has grown and how, I guess, my writing has impacted the industry. Definitely just keep believing in yourself. I know that's a generic thing to say, but it's true.

[00:16:55] BB: I love that. That's good to hear. Because I think everyone at many levels can still have imposter syndrome, especially if you're entering a new field, of course, too.

Well, Alcynna, we have covered all the things for today on this little tiny podcast of only so much length, because we don't have 700 hours here to go. And we got lots of stories to report on. At least you do. That's for damn sure. Looking at your lineup and the industry you're covering. My God. Godspeed, speaking of. And I hope everyone listening here got some really good insights on spelling names right, putting the name in the subject line, giving enough time, two to four days, for example.

Alcynna, thank you so much. Thank you for being here. This was really lovely.

[00:17:35] AL: Thank you. I had a lot of fun.

[00:17:37] BB: Yes, thank you. Have a good time. Enjoy Texas.

[00:17:39] AL: Thank you. All right. Bye.

[00:17:42] BB: Bye.

[OUTRO]

[00:17:44] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee With a Journalist, featuring Alcynna Lloyd from Insider. If you enjoy listening to our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts and anywhere else you listen to podcasts.

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We'll see you all next week with a brand-new guest and even more insights about the journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.

[END]

