

EPISODE 124

[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.

Today on Coffee with a Journalist, we're joined by Melissa Angell, a staff reporter for Inc. Magazine. Melissa has been a reporter for a number of years and with multiple news publications, including Law360, American Banker, and The Street. During the episode, Melissa shares an example of a real pitch that led to her attending an event, explains how her inbox contributes to the stories she writes, her top three pitching preferences, and more. Let's hear from Melissa now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:17] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, Co-Founder of OnePitch, and we made this lovely podcast to help publicists learn how to better work with our journalist friends because we all need help in learning how to make our relationships better and more fruitful, more pleasant, positive. All the great things because we need publicists, and we need media people and journalists in our lives to get all the stories out there that we do. I also run an agency, BAM, that works with all venture-backed technology companies. That's kind of how OnePitch was born, out of BAM and the need that we need to help relationships develop better between journalists and publicists.

So here we are on our little podcast and today with us, Melissa Angell. She's from Inc. Magazine. She's a staff reporter covering all types of topics. We'll get into it with a bio ethics minor, by the way. I like that. I like that, Melissa. Welcome and thank you for being here.

[00:02:13] MA: Thank you for having me.

[00:02:14] BB: Yes. So Melissa, I always start, how's your inbox? What's in there?

[00:02:19] MA: Has anyone ever started the show saying it's not crazy? Because mine is.

[00:02:23] BB: No. Well, I've had maybe three in the 160 perhaps of these now, at this point. Maybe three. Maybe three who's like, "Oh, let me look at my inbox. Oh, I have two." I'm like. "Wow." Very rare. Very rare. So go ahead. Tell us more.

[00:02:37] MA: I admire that. Yeah. I just opened up my inbox. I have always wanted to be part of the inbox zero crowd, and I just have never achieved that. Right now in my inbox, let's see. Actually, thanks to a pitch, I'm going to an event today. I had actually missed the pitch. It's an Apple event. Thanks to the lovely PR person. They had followed up, and I was able to catch it. So that was something that was top of mind. Yeah. No. It looks like a great event. I'm really looking forward to it. So really glad for the follow up because otherwise it would have just been missed in this sea of emails.

[00:03:15] BB: Okay. So that gets me to the follow up question. Everyone likes that. Do you like follow ups? How many are too follow ups would you say?

[00:03:23] MA: I don't mind the follow up because it helps me out a lot of the time. Because we get so many emails on a day-to-day basis, and it's easy to miss things and especially really just interesting events. So I think if you follow up and it's on a really timely event, feel free to nudge me that same day, especially if the event is tomorrow.

[00:03:46] BB: Okay. So that's good. Okay. Good to note. Now, do you have like a limit, though? Like you don't want to have five follow ups or just the one and done is good.

[00:03:54] MA: I think once we passed the three to four threshold, that's when it starts getting a little bit excessive, right? Third time's the charm maybe. After that, I'd say let's maybe settle down there a bit. Try something new.

[00:04:05] BB: Got it. Okay. That was a good example, though, you pulled. So to keep some level of calmness in your inbox, especially because it does not hit zero, as you just described, Melissa, do you file? Do you save? What do you do with pitches?

[00:04:21] MA: I found it helpful to use the little color tab within an hour. But I only do that when I return from either a vacation or if I'm out sick. I don't do that on a regular basis. I only do that really when I have a big amount of emails I need to tackle. But on a day-to-day basis, I usually take some time. I start off my mornings. I kind of try to imbue that Mark Cuban method, where he takes time out of his day. He looks at the subject lines. If it catches his eye, he'll open it. He's very quick to scan just the first few sentences. I've read that that's how he determines if he'll reply to an email. So I've kind of just started to try to handle that a bit.

But I will say that sometimes when I'm just working throughout the day, I have my Outlook notifications on. So sometimes, I totally bypass that subject line, and I see just straight to the body of the actual email and that little push notification that I see on my laptop screen.

[00:05:25] BB: Then does the subject line prompt you to open? Or are you just like, "Oh, yeah. Let me look at that thing again." Like how important is the subject line?

[00:05:32] MA: I think the subject line helps get my eyes on it. But I try to also just, even if the subject line doesn't immediately catch my attention, sometimes people bury the lead, totally understandable. When I have time, I'll go through just the emails that I've received during that day, that week, and kind of try and go and just click through all of them to see if anything's lurking there as well.

[00:05:57] BB: Okay. It sounds like you have some system, Melissa. Some system that is working.

[00:06:02] MA: I like to think that.

[00:06:05] BB: Okay. I do want to get a little bit into what you cover. Some folks that we have on here are very niche, very focused on a certain industry, a certain beat. Some only follow –

Some are only reporting on Meta, for example. That's pretty clear. Yours covers a wide spectrum at Inc., money, strategy, fresh starts. I'm looking to just kind of all – The lineup of stuff, inspiring achievement on pet-friendly workplaces. I mean, there's quite the range. So what would you say that you're covering today?

[00:06:35] MA: It's definitely a buffet of topics, which I like. But if I had to boil it down, I would say at the end of the day, I'm covering small businesses, entrepreneurs, fun founders, with a specific focus on small business lending. Then I also cover a lot of healthcare and cybersecurity as well.

[00:06:55] BB: Okay, cool. So quite a range. You, for story inspiration, have a way in which you think about stories. For example, some people are like, “Oh, yeah.” Well, actually, this has never actually happened on the show. But I had this vision that like journalists are like, “Oh, let me go on my creative walk. And on my creative walk, I'm going to think about the next three storylines I'm going to do because they've been thinking. I've been inspired by this.” Do you have a process in which you think about how you make your stories happen?

[00:07:23] MA: I have thought about a lot of my stories, actually, when I take walks. I love walking.

[00:07:29] BB: You are the walking brainstormer person I've been looking for. I knew it.

[00:07:33] MA: Maybe I'm the first. So I love to – When I – I live right near the waterfront, which is really nice. I live in Brooklyn in Greenpoint. Sometimes, I will go for a walk, and I have Outlook on my phone. I'll kind of scroll through my inbox. When something catches my eye, I'll kind of think about it as well. It's kind of two birds one stone, right? I'm getting my steps in. I'm thinking about my next story. So I love to multitask.

[00:08:04] BB: Okay. Then do you like jot it down? Do you make a note? Does it just stay in your brain? What happens?

[00:08:12] MA: I have a Notes app.

[00:08:13] BB: Oh, yeah, the Notes app. There you go.

[00:08:14] MA: I do, and it's a little longer than I'd like to admit. But I just organize it just numerically, and I have a running list. When I tackle a story, I will remove it from the Notes app, and it goes more into a formal Google Doc, where I start the story process. From there, it's just reporting a regular story once it gets approved.

I found some really interesting stories from my inbox. Even if it's not a pitch itself, where I focus directly on that subject matter, I'll find some really good sources in my inbox as well from pitches.

[00:08:52] BB: Melissa, do you have stories that come out of pitches?

[00:08:55] MA: Sometimes, yes. I've found some really neat stories from my inbox itself. Even if it's not a great fit at that moment, sometimes I'll either tuck it away and kind of think about it for the future. Or I've even searched my own inbox when I'm looking for sources when I'm on assignment as well. I'm thinking maybe there's something here and usually there is.

[00:09:18] BB: Quite interesting. Okay. Then sometimes, you're pulling up on your color tabbed ones perhaps. Do you ever do the searching in your inbox?

[00:09:26] MA: Oh, yes.

[00:09:26] BB: That so many journalists do. Okay. Yeah, see.

[00:09:29] MA: All the time.

[00:09:30] BB: I think this is a mystery unknown. I mean, I know it now, doing all these interviews. But you search your inbox like your own personal Google for sources.

[00:09:38] MA: Yes, yes. Completely.

[00:09:40] BB: Yes.

[00:09:40] MA: I think Google, Gmail, and G Suite is a little bit better for this compared to Outlook. I'm also just team Google personally but just because I think the interface is a little bit smoother, right? But Outlook does have that capacity as well. So we're on Outlook, and that's what I've been using and trying to finesse and learn to make a system that works for me, basically.

[00:10:02] BB: Okay. Three elements to a pitch that you want to see, Melissa, what would they be?

[00:10:07] MA: I would say timeliness. Why does this matter now? Then just to step back, why does this matter to our audience specifically? What's unique about this pitch? Why is this a story in the first place?

[BREAK]

[00:10:25] ANNOUNCER: Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to see the unique ways OnePitch helps PR professionals and marketers pitch journalists? Head to onepitch.co to learn about our new OnePitch score and see how easy it is to find the right journalists to pitch your news to. Sign up for your free account today. Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[00:10:49] BB: Do you have a recent pitch that you're like, "Oh, my gosh. They nailed it," that you would share or could share-ish?

[00:10:55] MA: Let me look at my author page.

[00:10:58] BB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Maybe something came from there. Oh, that would be great because now we know it actually converted.

[00:11:03] MA: Yeah. I'm leafing through it right now.

[00:11:07] BB: Okay. I'm on the edge of my seat.

[00:11:08] MA: I wrote the story from a pitch that I received. It was about a study, and it was about how dog owners are less likely to basically go into the office if they became dog owners during the pandemic, and they were more likely to pursue remote roles over in-office roles. That was completely a pitch. I saw that and I thought to myself, "I really hope we get to do this one because how neat."

[00:11:40] BB: That was from a pitch that you just got landed there for you.

[00:11:43] MA: Completely.

[00:11:44] BB: Yeah, see. It can be done, everybody. Okay. It can be done. I do want to ask about the exclusive embargoes, but I don't think they pertain to you necessarily, Melissa. But let's just say. Do you ever get exclusives or embargo pitches?

[00:11:57] MA: I do and I always appreciate receiving an exclusive, given how valued scoops are really in our industry. I'm pretty flexible, though, with embargoes, and I'll always agree to one. But I think what's important to remember here is that if you send over an embargoed announcement, it's always a best practice, in my opinion, to make sure you ask if the recipient is willing to honor that embargo. Because I have friends who are in the industry and someone sends a newsy item. They say it's under embargo, but they didn't get the journalist to actually agree to honor that.

[00:12:28] BB: Agree, exactly. I feel that that is assumed too often. Then there's dismay when that assumption is not met. But that's an assumption, and I think that's the failure of the pitcher to just think like, "Oh, of course." They're going to relate to that or honor that, but they haven't explicitly stated. So that's a little dangerous, I think. Okay. How should people make relationships with you, Melissa, at this odd time post-pandemic-ish environment?

[00:13:00] MA: It is a weird time. We thought it wouldn't be a weird time in 2022, right? But here we are. I am always open to doing just virtual calls. Video calls are fine or – I've done virtual

coffee, and I know it sounds awkward. But it doesn't have to be, right? I have started meeting again in person. But I think my personal preference, it definitely will depend also just in terms of what the COVID cases look like in my community. If there's a huge surge going on right now in New York City, I am less inclined to meet you for coffee than if we could just do the same thing over video.

[00:13:41] BB: So you're open to the videos, but coffee depending on transmission rate perhaps?

[00:13:46] MA: Yes.

[00:13:47] BB: There you go. But smart. Do you pull up like the New York Times? You're like, "Hold up. Let me go check the numbers. Let me check the numbers."

[00:13:55] MA: This is my toxic trait. I check it every day.

[00:13:57] BB: Oh, you do?

[00:14:00] MA: I'm an information overload person.

[00:14:03] BB: I used to too. I would look at that little graph and go, "Oh, no, Oh, no."

[00:14:07] MA: Right? It kind of helps inform your habits, though.

[00:14:11] BB: It does. It did.

[00:14:11] MA: It's not the most bulletproof because there are problems with data reporting. But if you see the slight uptick of cases, it kind of signals maybe there's a wave, and maybe I should be a little bit more cautious.

[00:14:27] BB: Exactly. Okay. So any public system should know, "Okay, hold up. If I'm asking for a coffee maybe in three weeks, I got to keep in mind whatever variants could be happening there. That could be wrong for a meeting." Okay. This is good. Thanks, Melissa.

Okay, a couple more questions. Then we'll get into what you're reading and writing and listening to. Well, not writing because we're covering that but consuming otherwise and storytelling. I'm going to ask a fill in the blank thing. So I'll give you the statement, and then you fill it in. Does that sound good?

[00:14:56] MA: Sounds like a plan.

[00:14:57] BB: Here we go. My favorite sources always –

[00:15:00] MA: I would say have catchy subject lines in their emails.

[00:15:05] BB: Okay. Short but catchy.

[00:15:07] MA: Yes.

[00:15:07] BB: Okay. You'll never get a response from me if –

[00:15:11] MA: You're rude.

[00:15:12] BB: Easy enough. No one's ever said that before, Melissa. No one has said that. I'm like, "Thank you for saying that." You're an asshole, no response.

[00:15:21] MA: I've had people follow up and say, "Why haven't you responded to me?" That's just something that I think could be worded a little bit more kindly perhaps.

[00:15:33] BB: Yeah. That's out of bounds. Okay. Speaking of, you can follow up with me, we touched on this a little bit, if –

[00:15:41] MA: It's either super timely. Feel free to give me a nudge, and I'll understand. Generally, I think the 24 to 48-hour time window is pretty appropriate as well.

[00:15:51] BB: Okay. I like that. The appropriate amount of time for a lead story is –

[00:15:57] MA: I think it depends, depending on the story, right. It could be a week, right? If we're talking about how long it's taking the source, if I understand you correctly. I've been on stories for months.

[00:16:09] BB: Yeah, yeah. There are these ones that take that long, which I don't think people – I'm going to expand it to the general public. Understand that some journalism, especially investigative journalism, frankly, takes months and months and countless hours for pieces to come out and hundreds of interviews. It really is a testament to the service of journalism in a functioning democracy. That's a whole other thing we'll get into in a second about the future of journalism. But last fill in the blank here. My favorite stories to write are –

[00:16:38] MA: Ones about healthcare.

[00:16:40] BB: Ones about health care. I like it. Okay, Melissa, or is there anything you're reading, listening to podcast-wise, watching, whatever, anything like that?

[00:16:50] MA: Yeah. So I have been reading a lot lately. I'm currently rereading parts and leafing through *The Fran Lebowitz Reader*. She has just a terrific voice and style. I think very sardonic and satirical. I love satire. I've also been working my way through *The Great American Read*. It's this list of 100 books that's curated by PBS. I think it's basically this quest to select America's favorite novel. But what's neat about it is –

[00:17:18] BB: Right. Wait. It's also – Wait, wait, wait. Oh, it's on PBS. Okay. It's a PBS thing. Okay. Great, great, great. Okay.

[00:17:25] MA: So I found some really neat finds on that. To answer your question, though, I recently read *The Every*. It's by Dave Eggers, and that was really neat. I picked it up when I was in San Francisco last year, and it's actually a sequel, and I didn't know that. So I had started reading it, and it didn't really make much sense to me. So then I looked it up, and I saw, “Oh, this is the second book.”

[00:17:47] **BB:** Because you picked it. You're probably so confused like, "What's happening here?" Okay. Oh, wow. Okay. I see it on Audible right now, *The Every*. Oh, interesting. Okay. Adding it to my thing. Adding it to my thing.

[00:17:59] **MA:** Yeah. The first one is *The Circle* in the series.

[00:18:02] **BB:** *The Circle*?

[00:18:03] **MA:** Yeah.

[00:18:04] **BB:** Okay. The – Okay, okay. I got to get my stuff together here. Okay. *The Circle* and then *The Every*. Okay, awesome.

[00:18:10] **MA:** I recently watched *Goodfellas*, and that's because I guess I have a thing for list. But every year, I have a renewing New Year's resolution, where I work my way through the IMDB top 250 list.

[00:18:25] **BB:** Oh, me too. Me too. I want to watch all the great films. I go to Sundance every year when it's happening. Yes. Films, I mean, great films, you remember films, there's something about the storytelling and the richness of a fantastic film that like never – Now, with my fiancé, I would be like, "Oh, remember that one we saw in 2013 about," blah, blah. I'm like, yes. Like I remember in vivid detail what some of these movies are, and I love that. So you're just consuming that list too. Dang, you're a list person. I love one.

[00:18:56] **MA:** I guess I am.

[00:18:57] **BB:** Yes, you are, Melissa, all the way. Well, maybe – I don't know how you list out journalism's corrections or the redeeming qualities of why it should be around. But do you have any thoughts on the future of journalism?

[00:19:12] **MA:** I do. I've been thinking a lot about local news as of late. I really got my start in local news, and *The Atlantic* did a really terrific story on this last October, where they took a look at this vulture hedge fund known as Alden Capital. It was this long form piece of journalism. It's

worth every minute because it talks about how Alden is basically gutting a lot of newsrooms, basically local news outlets.

It opens up by taking a look at the Chicago Tribune, which is just this iconic American newspaper that used to be in the Tribune Tower. The journalist who wrote the story was discussing how the Tribune now is – It's no longer in that space. When he was on assignment, he was describing how it was reduced to a newsroom that's no bigger than a chipotle. I guess it's no secret that the news industry is one that continues to consolidate, especially with local news outlets and a lot of print mediums. Everyone's been asking the same question. How do we create this sustainable model that cultivates local news that can also pay journalists a living wage and operate in this capacity that is sustainable and allows it to persist?

I do think, though, that Axios has started to do a really interesting job in tackling this with Axios Local. I mean, if that succeeds, I think that could be a blueprint for a lot of other models potentially as well down the line.

[00:20:44] BB: Yet to see. Yet to see. I say that you're optimistic, yet questioning.

[00:20:51] MA: I agree with that. I think you have to, though, right? I don't want to be a cynic.

[00:20:56] BB: Yeah, you have to. You're a scientist, look at you, and lawyer background. Yeah. You got to come with that analysis. Good. Well, I'm hopeful. I hope we have hundreds more of these episodes here on little OnePitch in our little coffee corner here. But, Melissa, thanks for being on today. Melissa Angell from Inc., staff reporter, check her out. Send her some good movie recommendations. I think that would – I'd take them too. I love it. Thanks, Melissa.

[00:21:24] MA: Thank you. It was a blast.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:21:27] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Melissa Angell from Inc. Magazine. If you enjoy listening to our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and anywhere else you listen to

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[END]