

EPISODE 138

[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 who write about topics ranging from technology, to lifestyle and culture, health and science. We discuss the types of stories they cover, their thoughts on exclusives and embargoes, their favorite pitches, 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.

Our guest this week on Coffee with a Journalist is Jake Kleinman from Inverse. Jake is the deputy editor at Inverse for he oversees features, special issues, and recurring columns, and franchises. He also writes regularly about movies and television. During the episode, Jake talks about the primary use of his inbox with over 90,000 unread emails, how he works with both PR pros and freelance writers, his advice for working with sources and more. Let's hear from Jake now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:16] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. Hopefully, you are a publicist, looking to understand how to better work with wonderful journalists. Today, we have on Jake. Yes, Jake. I was going to say Jacob. No, Jake Kleinman. He's the deputy editor at Inverse, and he's here to chat with us today. Hi, Jake.

[00:01:16] JK: Hi, Beck. How's it going?

[00:01:37] BB: Pretty good, pretty busy, though. I'm glad we're drinking both coffee. I know everyone can't see that, but we actually have a rare double coffee on this show that is ironically called Coffee with the Journalist. So high five, High five to you.

[00:01:50] JK: I came prepared.

[00:01:51] BB: You came prepared. You got the brief, you met the brief. For people who don't know, and even including myself, because I'm not to in this space. What is Inverse?

[00:02:00] JK: Sure. Inverse is a digital magazine, I would say. We cover a handful of different topics. Big ones are science, innovation, which is tech, but sort of future focused, video games, and then entertainment, which is TV and movies with a focus on alternate worlds, fantasy, science fiction, superheroes, that kind of stuff. So those are the big tendrils of Inverse. We've been around for about five years, actually longer than that. I've been in Inverse for four years, and it predates me by a few. We're owned by Bustle Digital Group as of 2019.

[00:02:30] BB: Yes. There's lots of entities owned under the whole Bustle Group so good to know, Jake, how is your inbox with pitches?

[00:02:39] JK: I knew this was just coming. Yeah, it's not great.

[00:02:42] BB: Yeah. Oh, you knew it was coming. Yes, absolutely.

[00:02:43] JK: I'm pretty bad. I mean, I'm not inbox zero person at all. I checked earlier today, I'm at about 90k unread.

[00:02:51] BB: Oh shoot. That's not a record on this show, though, by the way. Just to be clear.

[00:02:57] JK: I think the problem is I get probably like hundreds of hundreds of emails every day, so it's just really hard to keep up. A lot of them are not personalized, huge PR blasts, not really relevant to what I'm doing. My instinct is to ignore it. I do scan my inbox a few times a day, at least, just to see if anything important comes through. But I'm probably relying more on either people being persistent if it matters, or the Gmail, I guess, artificial intelligence kind of telling me what I should care about, the notifications and sort of like prompts and stuff, so that I can catch the stuff that really matters.

[00:03:35] BB: Now, of those pitches, what percentage are pitches for your inbox, which has the unwieldy number of unread inboxes?

[00:03:44] JK: I think, I mean it's the vast majority. I would say it's probably about 90%. I don't really use Gmail, or I don't really use email that much for sort of interoffice communication. We use Slack for all that, unless it's like a really important announcement, it's not happening on email within work. Sometimes if I'm like trying to hire for someone, recruiting, that'll be on email, so that becomes important. But otherwise, really me responding to various pitches or me emailing PR people and sort of asking for help with articles.

[00:04:14] BB: And as editor, I think this is something for us to distinguish here as we've had more and more editors on here by the way. I don't know if people completely, especially publicist, get the distinction of deputy editor, versus editor, versus how much you're writing. You're a pretty active writer, but how would you crystallize for people who just might want to understand more specifically for your role, how much of the writing or how much should they be pitching you versus writers on your team?

[00:04:40] JK: Sure. Yeah. I think a title of deputy editor sort of changes depending on where you are. I do read a lot; I really enjoy it. I also used to be the entertainment editor, so I'm sort of **[inaudible 00:04:49]** connection and I write a fair amount when I want to about various shows and movies. But my focus is primarily on putting together bigger packages, bigger issues, columns, features, that kind of stuff. If someone has a pitch that connects to one of those buckets, it's perfect for me. I just got plenty of pitches that are more specific, and I'll usually just sort of forward those along to the right editor, or respond and be like, "You should really email the gaming editor about this and tag them at that point."

[00:05:19] BB: Okay. So you're playing a little like gatekeeping, and shuffling stuff around, as needed.

[00:05:24] JK: Yeah, absolutely.

[00:05:25] BB: As may be. Do you also get pitches for people who want to write for you?

[00:05:29] JK: Oh, yeah. I got a ton of freelance pitches. That's a big part of my email. Well, I'm working with freelancers, I really enjoy it. Yeah, I mean, I'm happy to talk about that. I know that's not quite the audience here. But it's a big part.

[00:05:29] BB: No, but that's okay. What about a pitch makes you go, "Damn, that's a good pitch"?

[00:05:44] JK: I think that for me, there has to be a promise of something exciting. If the pitch is like, "Hey, we have this person available to talk to" or "Want to see this product, or trailer or something that isn't out yet." If that's clear up front, then I will definitely like click through and see what's happening. If it's more broad, or clearly doesn't have to do with something Inverse cares about, then I'll ignore it. But the promise of like, an obvious story, and obvious project is what gets me to click through.

[00:06:12] BB: And you want to see that in the subject line.

[00:06:14] JK: Yeah. If possible, yes.

[00:06:15] BB: Yes. Okay. Do you have by the way, any great subject lines of late that you love?

[00:06:20] JK: Yeah, I have a couple.

[00:06:22] BB: Okay. Do share, do share. You don't need to say the names and everything, but yeah, we love examples.

[00:06:27] JK: One that I got recently that I'm still sort of going back and forth on was about the Netflix show Cobra Kai, which I'm a huge fan of. The subject line was just, can't get enough of Cobra Kai, Ralph Macchio's memoir is out in October." That's just very clear. It wasn't personalized. I think they sent to a lot of people. But as, maybe they knew that I was a fan. I've written about it a lot. Ralph Macchio's a big name. So my instinct was like, "Yes, I love. This is perfect for me. I'm going to click on it." Then, I've been talking with the PR people about potentially setting up an interview. That one sort of got right to the point, and yeah, a lot of proper nouns is great.

[00:06:27] BB: Okay. A lot of proper nouns, excellent. Okay. Is there may be an opposite example where you're like, "Oh God, I just – no, hard no", like you're almost angry at a pitch?

[00:07:14] JK: I didn't sort of go through any of those. I'd say like, anything that's very clearly, just not for me. If I see the word – if I see metaverse or crypto, I'm just like, "We don't cover that." I'm not interested enough to click on it. I will also say, sometimes people misspell my name, which you think it's a pretty common name.

[00:07:33] BB: What? It's Jake.

[00:07:35] JK: Well, the Jason's or Jay. I'm like, "Well, this is not worth my time." Yeah, it happens.

[00:07:42] BB: God, I think that's – I'm sorry. I've been doing this show for a while, as many people know, but it boggles the mind when I have people on here, and their name is literally Kat, Sam, Joe.

[00:07:56] JK: I get it. I think if you're on the PR side, they're sending a lot of emails. I've gotten emails where it says, "Hi, insert name here."

[00:08:03] PF: Oh, those are the worst.

[00:08:04] JK: I don't hold it against someone, but I'm getting a lot of email. So if something like that is wrong, I generally take it as a bit of a sign.

[00:08:10] BB: Yeah, yeah. It goes into the 90,000. unread inbox. Okay. But Jake, do you use your own inbox as a search tool, for example, like finding pitches where you're like, "Oh, yeah. I kind of remember that one. That was good. Let me look that back up."

[00:08:26] JK: I've definitely done that, especially if there's a topic or a project coming up that I want to do something with. I might just be like, "Well, I don't know. We want to do a big special issue about black holes." I might just like search black holes in my inbox and see if anything recently has come that's relevant. Definitely done that before and it's worked. I also do a fair

amount of like, sometimes I start things or even go as far as creating folders within my inbox, where I'm putting the really important stuff. So I can go back and say, "Well, here's all the best freelance pitches I got from last month are the best PR pitches" and keep some sort of track of them within the chaos of my inbox.

[00:09:01] BB: Yes. Do you ever find like that you miss something? In other words, do you like a follow up?

[00:09:08] JK: Do I like a follow up? Yeah, I think just a follow up. I think, especially like I said earlier, sometimes I miss stuff if someone's pitch really helps. Sometimes it gets a little – I've had a few where people just like the fifth or sixth follow up is like, I think at that point, maybe too much. But there definitely been times where it was a really good PR pitch, and I missed it, and I was very thankful for the person for following up.

[00:09:30] BB: Okay. That is welcome. We'll do a little portion on our fill in the blank section. I will also cover that or I'll take that out. But for you, Jake, in this time, in this, I don't know what to call it post-COVID, in this current time. How does a publicist attempt or actually make a relationship with you?

[00:09:49] JK: Yeah, it's difficult.

[00:09:53] BB: End of story.

[00:09:54] JK: I think that, you know, when you work with a publicist a few times in a row, it definitely helps and there's a little bit of trust there. I've definitely also had the opposite experience where like the same person keeps on sending me bad pitches. I'm like, "Well, I guess this is not going to work." I would say that, especially when it comes to a publicist who's representing a brand that we really care about at Inverse, I found it really helpful to just have a meeting, whether in person, or on Zoom where you're not talking about one specific article, but you're just like, "Let's just get to know each other a bit, and talk about how we can work together in the future." Whenever I've done that, it's been really successful." So I'm a fan of that.

[00:10:31] BB: Okay. So just more general, not like trying to hard pitch you with one particular thing, but just in general. Okay. This is good.

[BREAK]

[00:10:39] 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]

[00:11:03] BB: Do you ever like an exclusive or embargo?

[00:11:06] JK: Yeah, I'm a fan of that. Embargoes are great because it makes things easier for us, whether it's on the science side. A lot of the studies that come out are embargoes. As opposed to everyone, basically with an embargo, you don't have to write it as fast as humanly possible to beat everyone to the punch. We know when it's coming, we can plan ahead. We can get the article out at the same time as like the New York Times and not stress about it. On the other hand, it's great too. You see a movie, and you want to review it. You don't have to literally like write the review on the subway ride home because the embargo was a week later. It's great.

[00:11:41] BB: Okay, so embargoes, yes. Exclusives, do those ever happen?

[00:11:44] JK: Yeah, occasionally. I think that we've gotten a few over the years and sometimes some of them we push for. A little bit rarer, but yeah, if it's a good one, I'm all for it.

[00:11:52] BB: For you, what's – just to clarify, because that seems to be a hot topic all the time. What is an exclusive?

[00:11:59] JK: I would say, it's something that we can publish and no one else is publishing at the same time. Sometimes there's a time that's exclusive. We might be able to publish it a few

hours before everyone else gets it. Or sometimes, it's actually like, okay, only you are going to talk to this person and that's even better. Either of those is fine by me, as long as it's laid out. I've had a few experiences where you think it's exclusive, but then it's not really exclusive and that can be frustrating. Like other people have the same interview. I also had experiences with embargoes, where you think the embargo is at a certain time, but like some other side got the exclusive and they're publishing it before we do. That's always pretty frustrating.

[00:12:34] BB: Yeah. Oh, oh, oh. What happens then for you?

[00:12:39] JK: I mean, there's not much you can do. I'll give you one example, where there was a movie trailer coming out, and the PR people that emailed us a couple days ahead of time and said it's going to come out at whatever noon. Here's an early link you can write something so you'll be ready to go when the trailer comes out. Then some other site published the trailer like three hours earlier. I emailed the PR people and I was like, "What's happening here? Did they break the embargo?" Turned out that other side had an exclusive, but they said basically, you could just write about it. You just like take their trailer, and it's fine. It's all good. But it was a little frustrating.

[00:12:39] BB: That is very frustrating. If you have like a little black book of people I don't talk to, that's where I would put them. Okay. For you, Jake, you cover quite a breadth. I mean, your background is wide, rolling stone, laptop magazine. You had life hacker. How do you determine what you were going to write, especially as deputy editor?

[00:13:38] JK: Yeah. I've definitely covered a lot. I started in tech journalism. I did gamble. I freelance for a while and sort of cover whatever I could. At Inverse, like I said, my focus is very much been on entertainment. When I have the time to write, that's what I'm sort of the most keyed into here. If I have a couple of hours to spare, I might write an opinion on a new movie, or like take an interview with an actor, that kind of thing.

[00:14:02] BB: Take an interview with an actor.

[00:14:04] JK: Why not?

[00:14:05] BB: Why not? Yes. That said, as I'm sometimes putting together bigger packages, where like, we did one about Vikings recently. If I can, I'll also just sort of like, "How can I contribute to this? What's something I can write that goes into this?" That might not be entertainment, it might just be like, I have an opinion on Vikings and I have an idea for a story that I wanted to write myself.

[00:14:27] BB: Oh, yeah. I imagine I will get a long answer for the next question, Jake. But you tell us what are you watching, listening to film wise, series wise, podcast wise? We'll take audible. What you got?

[00:14:42] JK: Yeah. As you may have guessed, I've watched for work. It's been very busy these days with House of the Dragon, The Game of Thrones show, Rings of Power, The Lord of the Rings show, Marvel and She-Hulk, and Star Wars now has Andor, which premiered today. That's like, somehow, I've managed to watch all of those things, which is mind boggling.

[00:15:03] BB: By the way, that is mind boggling. Are you like, "Yes. Oh my God, all this great content" or you're like, "Oh God, how am I going to watch all this content?" How does that feel and sit with you?

[00:15:11] JK: It's both.

[00:15:12] BB: Okay. Yeah.

[00:15:12] JK: It's a lot of fun when all this stuff is happening, and we're interviewing people and reviewing it, and everyone has really interesting opinions about stuff. It's definitely better than when there's like nothing out. You're just like, "Well, what are we going to write about this week?" This is like, this is the most I've ever experienced, or at least for a while, it's most I've experienced where like, I'm struggling to keep up a little bit these days. I'm not even the entertainment editor, I'm just trying to help from –

[00:15:40] BB: Yeah, yes, yes. So yeah, it's nice, but it's maybe one less show, especially with Disney. It has both Star Wars and Marvel. I don't know why they decided they had to overlap two shows. Yeah, I'm not in charged with that stuff.

[00:15:53] BB: Yeah, you're not in charge. Yeah, exactly. There does seem to be, you probably know this better, just like seasonality to it, though. Like the fall is when like, still, it seems like all the shows hit, even all the way to the Kardashians. Why is it September in October that everything seems to drop? Is that just me? I don't know.

[00:16:11] JK: Yeah, it's a good question. I think it's tradition from network TV **[inaudible]**
00:16:14] October, that's when things premiere. Obviously, like the rules have changed because of remain. So now things come out all the time, especially with Netflix, there's a new show every week.

[00:16:24] BB: My God, yes, there is. It's kind of astounding, isn't it?

[00:16:29] JK: Yeah, it's a lot. Thankfully, what's nice about Inverse is that we have some pretty clear barriers in what we cover and what we don't. We don't have to worry about reality TV, or documentaries, or dramas. We're really focused on the more geeky stuff.

[00:16:45] BB: Yeah. Yeah. That keeps the parameters around it. Yes. Jake, I do have my little fill-in-the-blank section. Are you ready to play? Are we ready?

[00:16:53] JK: Yeah. I'm ready.

[00:16:54] BB: Um, here we go. My favorite sources always?

[00:16:58] JK: I want to say something about like, they value the journalism, which I guess means like, I don't get an angry email if the reviews a little critical, or the interview sort of takes a turn because of something interesting. I want to work with PR people who want to help us, and also get – we're trying to be balanced journalists. We're not like extensions of PR.

[00:17:18] BB: That's right. Damn straight. You'll never get a response from me if, well, first of all, your name spelled wrong. But also –

[00:17:25] JK: Yeah, the name spelled wrong is a big one. I guess to throw in a few days, like if you pitch something that I'm not, that we don't have, whether it's politics, or fashion, or like the metaverse. Yeah, those are areas where –

[00:17:38] BB: Noted. The appropriate amount of lead time for a story is?

[00:17:42] JK: I love to have a week at least, maybe even more. We can do it in a day if necessary. But I feel like for a good story, you want to have some time to really think about it and write it.

[00:17:52] BB: And lastly, even though again, we could probably surmise from everything you've said so far, but my favorite my ultimate favorite stories to write are?

[00:18:01] JK: Yeah. I'd say to repeat myself a bit. Interviews with really awesome people are always the best. If that's something that a PR person can help set up, I'm always really grateful.

[00:18:10] BB: Yes, good to know. Juicy and named entity for interviews. Cool. Okay, Jake. To wrap us up here. What do you think the future of journalism looks like?

[00:18:21] JK: Yeah, it's a good question. It's a tough one. I think that for a while now, journalism has been in a bit of a tough spot. I've been in places where it's been good and some places where it's been bad. But I think that it will continue in some form. And I also think that sort of counter intuitively, but the last few years have been really great for journalism. As the world has struggled and fallen apart, in some ways, value of journalism has become really clear to people to help – to tell what's really happening. I'd say, like, even at Inverse, where we're not necessarily covering the hardest hitting news, during the pandemic, our science reporting was really incredible. A lot of people turn to us for that. The entertainment stuff too, the gaming entertainment like giving people an escape, and helping them find the right things to distract themselves with was really valuable and I don't think that's going to go away. I think a lot of the stuff that Inverse does has a lot of longevity, and I think people will need that in the future, regardless of where it comes

[00:19:16] BB: I agree. Do you speak to – just as one last thing – to people who are maybe in college or are thinking of doing journalism, and they ask for your advice?

[00:19:27] JK: I haven't done a ton of that. Every once in a while, someone will reach out to me and I'll offer them some advice. But I'm not personally like going to my alma mater and speaking or anything.

[00:19:37] BB: Yes. Okay.

[00:19:37] JK: Not yet.

[00:19:38] BB: Yes, not yet from the wise old yet. Good. But I bet soon enough, and it's fun too. I just did that for an entrepreneur club at San Diego State University. It's so fun. My other problem though is I can't really tell how old people are. I'm like, "Are you 19 or 39?" I don't know. I can't tell. I don't know if that's a [crosstalk 00:19:59]. I really can't tell age ranges these days. Anyway, that's a whole other topic. Jake, thank you for being here and doing this today. Jacob is the deputy editor at Inverse owned by Bustle. If you got something nerdy, this is your guy.

[00:20:16] JK: Thanks so much, Beck. It's really fun.

[00:20:17] BB: Yes, thank you. Take care.

[00:20:19] JK: You too. Bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:20:21] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist featuring Jake Kleinman from Inverse. To learn more about the latest tools on OnePitch and to subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter, head to our website at onepitch.co. We'll see you all next week with even more insights about the journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.

[END]