

EPISODE 157**[INTRODUCTION]**

[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious how OnePitch can help you find relevant journalists to pitch, including some of the guests on this podcast? Head to our website at onepitch.co to learn more.

Our featured guest this week on the Coffee with a Journalist podcast is Zoë Weiner. Zoë is the senior beauty editor at Well+Good, where she guides coverage of skincare, hair care, cosmetics, and the beauty industry at large. She's also the host of Zoë Tries It All, a YouTube series by Well+Good. During the episode, Zoë shares she receives between 500 to 600 emails per day, what kinds of companies and pitches she's most interested in right now, her upcoming stories launching for summer, and more. Let's hear from Zoë now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:07] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist, where we talk to a real live journalist telling us how to pitch, how to make a better relationship, all that good stuff. My name is Beck Bamberger, and I'm your host, as always. I don't even know what episode number we're on, one gazillion, something like that. We've been here a long time, and it's super fun.

Today, live from New York City, oh, I'm so excited, Zoë Weiner, who is the senior beauty editor at Well+Good. We rarely have beauty people on here, Zoë, so I'm very excited to be chatting with you today.

[00:01:42] ZW: I'm excited too. I feel like for all editors, but especially beauty editors, inboxes are the mountain of all mountains. So I'm excited to chat. Thanks for having me.

[00:01:50] BB: Yeah. Thank you. Okay, real quick, did you watch the Super Bowl, though, and see Rihanna?

[00:01:57] ZW: I did. Oh, my gosh. She was amazing.

[00:02:00] BB: Yes. And did you notice the not so subtle product placement, which apparently has made her brand go off the charts when she did a little compact moment? I thought that was great.

[00:02:11] ZW: The first thing I did was try to figure out who had the exclusive on the product. It was like, before the performance was even over, it was like, “Who got to run this?” Actually, I forget by the time I think I got to it, everyone had read it. But it was, yeah, very exciting.

[00:02:27] BB: God, okay, we had to put that in real quick. Okay. Zoë, how is your inbox, and how do you organize it?

[00:02:34] ZW: My inbox is bonkers. It's really – Like I don't know if it was like this 10 years ago. I feel like there are just so many beauty products these days that it is very overwhelming at times. I would say I got like between 5 and 600 emails a day, and most of them are pitches. It's a lot, and I feel lucky in the sense that Well+Good, we cover beauty through such a specific lens, which is beauty as wellness and as care. So we're not necessarily going to cover every influencer makeup brand launch, which is a lot of what I get pitched. But it's a lot. So a lot of things get deleted pretty quickly, but I am also a very avid filer. I feel like I would lose my mind if I didn't have my filing system.

[00:03:19] BB: What is the filing system?

[00:03:21] ZW: So I've tried a few different ones over the years, and what I've landed on now is I've been using Gmail Tasks, which I just discovered a few months ago. So I am someone who can't focus when my inbox has more than like 50 emails in it. I really prefer to see it as inbox zero. So what I do is I file everything out of my inbox into different categories. Like I have folders for skincare launches, hair care launches, experts that I want to work with. Everything goes into a folder.

But then things that I want to address but don't want to immediately address let's say then go into tasks. So I have tasks for invites to respond to. I have tasks for freelancer pitches to

respond to so that I can kind of – Instead of like trying to tackle the whole inbox at once, I can then say, “Okay, I’m going to sit down. I’m going to go through the 40 invites that I got this week and look at my calendar and like all the invites headspace.” Or I can sit down and say, “Okay, I’m going to sit down and read through all of these pitches from writers,” and like really be in that headspace because I’ve found that like kind of switching from task to task to task to task, even within my inbox, it makes it really easy to get off track. So that’s really helped me like stay on task.

[00:04:31] BB: I’ve not heard like an endorsement on for Google Tasks on here, this show. Maybe this is the new thing.

[00:04:38] ZW: Yeah. It is new to me too.

[00:04:40] BB: Yeah. And it seems productive for you because some people as we’ve heard are just like, “Let it roll. If I have 59,000 unread emails, fine.” Then we have these inbox zero people and then everything in between, so quite interesting. Okay.

[00:04:53] ZW: I know. I remember when I first started at Well+Good. I would be there till like eight, nine o’clock at night, answering emails. Finally, my boss was like, “You need to understand.” She was like, “If you sat down and responded to every email, you would never write a single story. You would never do any single other part of your job.”

[00:05:10] BB: Yes. That is truth, and no one has said that on here so clearly, Zoë. So thank you for saying that. It is impossible, impossible, for any journalists, in my opinion, to respond to every single pitch. People have tried. People have tried. But I don’t see how that usually works, so.

[00:05:25] ZW: Yeah. I’m definitely not responding to all of them. I think the sorting through and figuring out what is relevant and what’s important and then kind of whittling it down from there has been really helpful for me.

[00:05:37] BB: So do you then consider the subject line?

[00:05:40] ZW: Yes.

[00:05:41] BB: What makes a great subject line?

[00:05:44] ZW: I needed to be really clear. I needed to be really clear and really not misleading. So if Supergoop is launching a sunscreen, I want to know Supergoop is launching a sunscreen. Here's the embargo date. Then like especially because I keep everything so filed and so like individualized, I really like to see like, okay, this is what this email is going to tell me, if that makes sense. I don't need – I mean, every now and then, I appreciate something fine.

I got a really fun email last week from a publicist who represents a Japanese brand called Shinko, and it was just like Japanese sleep tips that were inspired by ingredients from the thing. I actually thought that was interesting. Yeah. I think things like that where I'm like, "Oh, this is kind of a different in, and the subject line is telling me something a little bit different." I like that too, but I don't need bells and whistles and curls. Keep it straight forward.

[00:06:35] BB: Okay. Straightforward, direct. Then for a pitch itself, what captures you the most?

[00:06:44] ZW: I think, I mean, first and foremost, it has to feel like a product that Well+Good would cover. As I said, we don't – A lot of the pitches that I get are related to products, and then it's my job to kind of figure out like where the story is within those zillions of products.

[00:07:00] BB: Because there are so many.

[00:07:01] ZW: Yeah. I think like products that really feel new and innovative and have interesting science. I think if you have a product like that, and you can use the email to simplify the science for me to like take a quick look at the email and say, "Okay, this is something I want to learn more about," I think that's great. I think products that really do feel real and different and revolutionary.

I have a big pet peeve of people putting in subject lines or an email copy like that something is the first or the best or the newest, when it is just not. I think like no one's keeping track of those things. But that's another big no no for me. If it's not the first or the newest, don't say that.

[00:07:42] BB: Don't do that. Don't say that. No. It's just not the truth. Yeah. It's not – Oh, God. Yeah. Okay. So pet peeve, don't say first. What are some other like word trigger words for you of like, "Oh, God. No. That's just not true."?

[00:07:55] ZW: I mean, I'm always really wary of clean and sustainable and kind of like all those beauty buzzwords that don't necessarily mean anything, and so much of it is branding and marketing. I know that people are represented. Like that's so much of a brand new mission. I think everybody's calling themselves clean these days, so that's not what really draws me in. Other things, I think, outside the realm of beauty in particular, anything that's like because I work for a wellness website, I get so many weight loss-related pitches and shedding for the wedding.

[00:08:26] BB: Really? Seriously?

[00:08:28] ZW: Yeah. I used to cover a lot of fitness before I moved into primarily beauty, and like that was the biggest thing for me was subject lines that were just downright offensive about weight loss. I'm someone like I will respond and say, "This is offensive. Take me off your list." It's either an automatic delete. Or if it's really egregious, I will say something.

[00:08:46] BB: Wow. I'm surprised to hear that. That's still being pitched.

[00:08:49] ZW: Yeah. It's a bummer.

[00:08:51] BB: What?

[00:08:51] ZW: It's a bummer. Bikini body, new year, new you, lose the holiday weight, like all of that. It's terrible. Like we're not going to cover – I don't want to see it in my inbox.

[BREAK]

[00:09:04] 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]

[00:09:28] BB: I truly am shocked by that. What else is on the positive side? Like what is fresh? What is something like, “Yes. We're seeing this in beauty, and I'm here for it.”?

[00:09:39] ZW: I think new approaches to anti-aging is something that I'm really excited about. It's actually something that was one of our trends for last year. But there's been so much backlash and conversation and just like changes in the way that I think we as society approach anti-aging, and I'm really excited when I –

[00:09:57] BB: Well, even the word anti-aging.

[00:09:58] ZW: Yeah, exactly. I think I have – We could do a whole other podcast on my thoughts on that term. But I think like what I'm really interested about right now is how brands and publicists are not necessarily marketing it in a different way, but I think like helping to push the conversation forward. Because I think people are now concerned thinking about skincare and concerned about “anti-aging” at younger ages, and brands are introducing such cool science and such cool messaging about prevention.

That's what I really – It's all about like cellular health science and antioxidants. That is something that I'm like, “This isn't making people feel bad, and it's innovative.”

[00:10:35] BB: That is.

[00:10:35] ZW: So that really excites me. Cellular health is like my really –

[00:10:38] BB: Cellular health. Yes.

[00:10:40] ZW: It's a favorite of mine.

[00:10:42] BB: Yes. Okay. Do you ever want, Zoë, an exclusive or an embargo?

[00:10:48] ZW: Embargo? I think embargoes are great because it means that we get the information about a product long before it's launched, which gives our team time to test it. Ideally, like we'll have four weeks to be able to test a product to really say, "Okay, it does what it says it does," or it doesn't.

An exclusive, we rarely – I try to think the last time we did a beauty exclusive. If it feels really right for us, we'll take it. But I feel like so many of these pieces in beauty are like, for example, "What was the press powder that Rihanna used during the Super Bowl?" Someone definitely had that exclusive, and like that's just not quite in our wheelhouse. So we don't do, I think, as many as probably other beauty publications do.

[00:11:25] BB: Maybe somewhat related to that, since we are talking about pitching, you have had a number of articles, "Oh, I'm a podiatrist and this is how you do this." "Oh, this is what it means. I'm a cardiologist, and this is what this means when you're out of breath on the stairs," and things like that. Do you want pitches that are in that vein of here's this expert, ideally a doctor I would imagine, and here's them explaining something we're maybe experiencing?

[00:11:51] ZW: Yeah. I love that type of pitch. I think the only issue, it's really rare that I'll get a pitch like that in my inbox, and that's what the story is, if that makes sense. Those stories so often will come from just like getting a podiatrist on the phone or getting a dermatologist on the phone and kind of seeing what they have to say. I think stories are more interesting that way. Honestly, I think when I get like those I'm a – It's like, "I'm a dermatologist, and here's how to get the clean girl skin from TikTok." I get like 25 of these in pitch, let's say.

That's another pet peeve, by the way, is like all of the TikTok trends. Some of which are like kind of problematic, not things that you would cover.

[00:12:30] BB: Bogus.

[00:12:31] ZW: Just like I don't need another vanilla girl, clean girl, whatever girl in my inbox. It's enough.

[00:12:38] BB: Don't have girl in your pitch. Don't. God.

[00:12:42] ZW: Or things that were trending like a year ago, and it's like, "The hottest new skin trend is slugging." It's like, "Why?" It's just – I don't know. That's another beauty tip, I guess.

[00:12:52] BB: **[inaudible 00:12:52]** in your pitching. No, no. Okay. Zoë, we have a little fast-paced yes or no type of thing. Shall we go through that just for fun?

[00:13:03] ZW: Yeah.

[00:13:03] BB: Okay, rapid fire. Here we go. Video or phone interview?

[00:13:08] ZW: Phone.

[00:13:09] BB: Bullet points or paragraphs?

[00:13:11] ZW: Bullet points.

[00:13:12] BB: Short or long pitches?

[00:13:14] ZW: Short.

[00:13:14] BB: How short?

[00:13:15] ZW: As short as possible. If I need more information, I'll ask for it.

[00:13:19] BB: I want to see someone pitch into bullet points and get a story on that.

[00:13:23] ZW: Yeah, right? What is it?

[00:13:25] BB: Oh, this is giving me an idea. Oh, no. Jared is going to be so mad. Of like a pitch fest or something or like a pitch hackathon, where it's like who could write the pitch in the shortest amount of words that then gets picked up to a panel of media or something. They're like, "Yes, seven words, done, story."

[00:13:41] ZW: I love that.

[00:13:42] BB: That would be amazing. Okay. We will talk about that later. Okay. Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[00:13:48] ZW: Images attached.

[00:13:50] BB: Okay. Pitches in the morning or at night or who cares?

[00:13:53] ZW: It doesn't matter.

[00:13:54] BB: Email or Twitter DM?

[00:13:55] ZW: Oh, God. Never DM me. Email only.

[00:13:58] BB: Never DM Zoë, everybody. Okay. One follow up or multiple?

[00:14:04] ZW: One. Oh, my gosh. One.

[00:14:06] BB: One. One and done. That should be a tag for all journalists. Okay. Well, we talked about this, but just to clarify. Direct or creative subject lines?

[00:14:15] ZW: Direct.

[00:14:16] BB: Press release or media kit?

[00:14:17] ZW: Media kit. I like to have the pictures.

[00:14:20] BB: Okay. That's good. Zoë, for those who don't know you yet, maybe they haven't been to New York to have a coffee with you or whatever, is there a way people can build a relationship with you?

[00:14:32] ZW: Yeah. Instagram is kind of my communication of choice. I feel like –

[00:14:36] BB: Really?

[00:14:38] ZW: Yeah. That's still the beauty stronghold. It's funny. At beauty events, nobody has business cards. It's just, "I'll follow you."

[00:14:43] BB: Instagram. Yes.

[00:14:45] ZW: In that situation, I'm like, "Don't DM me." But you can track me down on Instagram, I suppose. I go through my Instagram like bulk DMs I would say once a month. So it just may take me a second to get back to you.

[00:14:57] BB: Good hot tip on the Instagram. Okay. Is there anything you want to promote, mention, highlight? This is our time to mention you.

[00:15:08] ZW: Yeah. Come on over to Well+Good. We've got some great beauty coverage. As we're getting into, hopefully, some warmer months, we have everything you need to learn about sunscreen and some really exciting sunscreen things happening for summer, which is my nerdy beauty passion. You can follow us on TikTok and get some of that information too @iamwellandgood.

[00:15:27] BB: Wonderful. Zoë, thank you for being here today. How exciting.

[00:15:32] ZW: Of course. Awesome, awesome. Beck, thank you so much for having me.

[00:15:35] BB: You have some good sunscreen. I'm going to follow you on Instagram. You are so welcome. And do not put girl in your pitch, people. No girls. No vanilla or anything. No girls. Okay.

[00:15:51] ZW: Oh, definitely. That's good advice.

[00:15:53] BB: That is good advice. That's just good advice in general. Don't be calling people girl.

[00:15:57] ZW: Yeah. I was going to say don't give me like a, "Hey, girl," if we've never met either.

[00:16:00] BB: Oh, God. Oh, no. Oh, no. Zoë, thank you so much. Appreciate it. You have a good one.

[00:16:09] ZW: Thanks, Beck. You too. Bye-bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:16:11] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Zoë Weiner from Well+Good. For more exclusive insights about the journalists on this podcast, subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter at onepitch.co/podcast. 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]