

EPISODE 163

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:09] 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 guest today on the podcast is Kathryn Lundstrom. She's the sustainability editor at Adweek, where she covers marketing and advertising news through a climate lens. During the episode, Kathryn talks about the types of people and companies she's looking to speak with, why pitches that use plain language are best, where you should actually be sending guest articles, and more. Let's hear from Kathryn now.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:01:00] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, your host in these little chats every week with fabulous journalist. Today with us is the sustainability editor of Adweek, Kathryn Lundstrom. She's going to tell us all about what she's looking for with pitches, what she's not looking for with pitches, and what bugs the crap out of her probably with publicists. I'm so glad to have you here, Kathryn. Live from Austin. Welcome, welcome. Thanks for being here.

[0:01:29] KL: Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be here.

[0:01:33] BB: We are too. First of all, I think you're the first sustainability editor that we've had on here, there's been quite a few climate tech reporters, or they're on a certain beat of climate tech sustainability. But how would you encompass the role that you're playing at Adweek, in relation to sustainability?

[0:01:52] KL: Yes. I mean, we're hyper-focused on the needs of the marketing and advertising community. I see my position as kind of looking at all the sustainability-related work that

happens in that space. That's brand communications around sustainability efforts, and climate work, and how agencies are working with them to build out – agencies are often building out sustainability teams these days to better serve their clients meet the goals that they've set for themselves. I'm kind of covering all of that. There's a lot of action in the space.

[0:02:28] BB: Quite. Quite.

[0:02:29] KL: Yes. Got my work cut out for myself.

[0:02:32] BB: Indeed. How is your inbox?

[0:02:36] KL: Oh, it's crazy. It's always crazy.

[0:02:39] BB: Does that mean you're not of the inbox zero crowd, of which there are few?

[0:02:44] KL: Okay. No, I do. I always get it down back to zero.

[0:02:50] BB: Oh, you touch zero.

[0:02:50] KL: I think that's more of a personality thing. It stresses me out –

[0:02:54] BB: Me too. Me too.

[0:02:56] KL: – to have a number there. I at least click through them all, I skim them all. Well, I skim the subject lines at least and try to filter like what is relevant and deserves a scam, what deserves like an actual response, and what I can kind of just breeze past.

[0:03:14] BB: So not an open for everyone, if I'm hearing your correctly. But a skim, to then see if you open it, would that be fair?

[0:03:20] KL: I do open them because that's what my –

[0:03:21] BB: Oh, you do. Oh, that's right. That's the hold hack. Okay. You're in the club, the rare club, I'd say also of, you open every single one. Wow. Congrats on that. How often do you do that a day?

[0:03:37] KL: I spend a good amount of time in the morning, getting through the first slew of emails. Then I'd say like, once an hour – depending on what I'm waiting for. If I'm specifically waiting for an email, then I'm looking at everyone as they come in. If I'm kind of focused and working on writing something up, but heads down on a bigger piece then, it might be every hour or two that I check back in, Kind of like take a break from my work and go through the new ones that came in.

[0:04:08] BB: Okay. So you got a good cadence of keeping the management of your inbox.

[0:04:14] KL: Yes, yes. I hope so.

[0:04:14] BB: Solid. There you go. Yes. No, you're lightyears ahead of other people I talked with on here. As many people will know, if they listened for a long time. So then, I know you open as you're just mentioning every single email that comes through. But what delights you in a subject line where you're like, "Oh, can't wait to read that one."

[0:04:34] KL: I was like, I was thinking about this and trying to think about what would be actually helpful because I was like – sometimes it's just the kismet of working on something and then having a relevant pitch come in as I'm working on it. That's what's wonderful. I'm like, "You know, I really need an expert on the FTC green guides" and then I get an email pitch that's like, "Expert on FTC green guide." Then I'm like, "Oh my God, amazing. This is perfect." That doesn't happen that often. It does once in a while. But yes, I think the things that really catch my eye usually are data because I feel like this space is – I feel like that's kind of a reliable hit for our readers maybe. People want more data, and more research to back up their sustainability work.

[0:05:31] BB: Yes. What kind of data though? I feel like everyone wants data, but not if it's spaghetti.

[0:05:37] KL: Yes. Yes. That's fair because there is – when I get to like the fourth or fifth report on the same exact topic, like that Gen Z wants to buy more sustainably or whatever. That stops being relevant after a certain point. I guess, marketers are interested in how people are engaging with topics around sustainability, right? There's kind of a wide range of things that are relevant, but it does have to kind of have something a little bit new. I mean, like Morning Consult pitched me something recently that was on how often Gen Z are using plastic water bottles despite their **[inaudible 0:06:17]** towards more sustainable lifestyles. Stuff like that can be interesting. I didn't end up writing about that one, but that one caught my eye when it came in.

[0:06:27] BB: Okay. Okay. For the actual then pitch, so a pitch that you're like, "Yes. Now, I want to respond." What does such a pitch include?

[0:06:37] KL: Yes, I was trying to think about this, again. The reports that are really relevant to what I'm working on are – I always look through those. Then like, connections to sources that I really want to talk to, obviously. Those are also very interesting. But I feel like what it really – if it's not a person or a company that I'm familiar with, in that first pitch, it's so helpful to have in plain language what that company is and what it does. I feel like, especially in this kind of wonky climate space, I often get these pitches where it's like, "This company, with this goofy name, with too many consonants is revolutionizing XYZ using technology, " stuff that it's so vague in the jargon that it's impossible to tell without doing a good amount of legwork what it is.

I understand that sometimes, that wording is something that's decided at a certain level. But man, it's really helpful to just have a plain language. This is what they do. This is what they do for their clients. This is what they do for marketers. This is what they do for brands. Something – how am I going to have to explain that to readers because that's going to require some translation already? Plain language is awesome.

[0:08:04] BB: Plain language, plus, plus.

[BREAK]

[0:08:08] 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 CONTINUES]

[0:08:32] BB: Okay, exclusives embargoes, do you like?

[0:08:35] KL: Yes. Sometimes, yes. I think exclusive interviews can be useful when there's an announcement coming, Embargoed data and reports that I was talking about, I appreciate getting an embargo ahead of time, so I have a chance to look through a report and decide whether that's something we want to cover before it's public. What's less relevant is, embargoes on campaigns for me because I don't cover campaigns generally speaking.

If I get an embargoed campaign from a fast-food brand, that's never relevant to me. It's often like, "Okay. This is embargoed for tomorrow." I'm like, even if I was going to be interested in writing about that. I can't turn it around in that short amount of time anyways, so that's not a helpful embargo.

[0:09:30] BB: That's not helpful. Oh gosh, gosh. Ideally, how long do you want for an embargo where you're like, "Oh, I really want this, but I need X."

[0:09:39] KL: I would say like three days to a week –

[0:09:43] BB: Yes, reasonable.

[0:09:45] KL: Yes. Because, I mean, for stuff like that, it's not like I'm going to spend – it's not a big feature that I'm going to spend weeks reporting, usually, if it's a report. It's just something I have to work into my schedule. So yes.

[0:09:59] BB: Yes, and it's popping up. You don't know what's happening, but you want it.

[0:10:02] KL: Right. Yes, three to five workdays, I feel like.

[0:10:07] **BB**: Okay. Fair enough. Fair enough. Do you have, Kathryn, like an ultimate pet peeve? I usually don't ask people that directly. But just because you know, we're chatting.

[0:10:16] **KL**: Yes, I tweet about it every so often.

[0:10:18] **BB**: Yes. We see. We see.

[0:10:20] **KL**: When people send me guest posts or guest articles, that's never, never, never something that I'm going to oversee. That's a different part of Adweek. They need to be talking to Will Russo, my colleague, and they need to pitch it through a different channel. We have a contributor forum that needs to be filled out. Those are just cluttering my inbox. They're never – we're never going to post an article that's already been written.

[0:10:53] **BB**: Yes. Now, do you do these [inaudible 0:10:55] though, Kathryn? Do you forwarded over to anybody? Do you send it along? Are you just like, "No, I just don't reply"?

[0:11:00] **KL**: I used to until that team told me to please stop doing because they get inundated with them, and that's just not the process.

[0:11:10] **BB**: It's not. Yes, totally.

[0:11:12] **KL**: If those pitches aren't coming through the correct process, then it's just extra work for them. They're already fielding like a bazillion requests. So yes, the process has to be followed. It's not that hard to find. It's a quick Google.

[0:11:23] **BB**: It's not. No, it's not at all. I bet ChatGPT could even tell you.

[0:11:27] **KL**: Yes.

[0:11:28] **BB**: Exactly. Okay. Kathryn, for someone who doesn't know you, maybe they're like, "But Kathryn, I never go to Austin. How will I ever form a relationship with you, et cetera and so forth?" How best can people build a relationship with you?

[0:11:44] KL: Yes. I was thinking about this too because there are a few PR folks who have followed them from brand to brand even, they're really good at just bringing me timely stuff, which is awesome. I was looking back at when this one PR professional first reached out to me, and it was on – it was a really clear subject line. It was about the Colgate recyclable toothpaste launch. I was like, "Oh, interesting." That's a brand that we would pay attention to, like big CPG brand. Making something recyclable, that's relevant to me.

Then we connected and she was just like, "Hey, let's just jump on and talk about it." Sometimes I have time for that, sometimes I don't. I did in this case, and then she was like, "Look, I actually really care about this stuff, and this is my area too." I feel like she's one of the few people who works in this little niche, where PR overlaps with sustainability. She knows the space well, so I kind of trust her instinct when she brings me pitches now, which is rare, but really cool when it works.

[0:13:02] BB: That is great. Do you want to name that person, by the way? Give her a shout-out. Put her out there.

[0:13:06] KL: That's Lauren Dam, she works for EPCM.

[0:13:10] BB: Hey, we love a publicist shout-out. Okay. Okay, Kathryn, I have a quick, rapid-fire question series. I'll give you the prompt and you tell us what the answer is. Sound good?

[0:13:21] KL: Okay. Yes.

[0:13:21] BB: Here we go. Video or phone interview?

[0:13:24] KL: I could go either way. It's more what other people are more comfortable with, but I'm happy with phone all the time. I mean, we don't have to be putting makeup on before we do this.

[0:13:32] BB: Okay. Yes, that's true. Bullet points or paragraphs?

[0:13:36] **KL**: Bullet points.

[0:13:36] **BB**: Short or long pitches?

[0:13:39] **KL**: Medium, short.

[0:13:41] **BB**: Medium.

[0:13:42] **KL**: On the short end.

[0:13:43] **BB**: On short end. Okay.

[0:13:43] **KL**: Or end of medium.

[0:13:44] **BB**: Got you. Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[0:13:49] **KL**: Dropbox file, I would say because then they'll be usable. Big enough to actually be usable for a story.

[0:13:59] **BB**: Yes. Okay. Pitches in the morning or at night?

[0:14:04] **KL**: Morning.

[0:14:04] **BB**: Email or Twitter DM?

[0:14:05] **KL**: Email.

[0:14:05] **BB**: One follow-up or multiple?

[0:14:08] **KL**: One.

[0:14:09] **BB**: One and done. Direct or creative subject lines?

[0:14:13] KL: Direct.

[0:14:14] BB: Press release or media kits?

[0:14:17] KL: Probably press release, honestly.

[0:14:20] BB: Kathryn, do you have anything you want to promote, brag about, tout, et cetera? We'll take anything because we're here to support you.

[0:14:28] KL: Oh, sure. Our sustainability digital package is coming out in about two weeks. We're all kind of heads down on that right now and pretty excited for what that's going to look like.

[0:14:41] BB: Oh. What would you describe the package including? Because the package can mean many things to different outlets. Yes, go ahead.

[0:14:46] KL: Yes. It's going to have – there's a list of sustainability honorees of the six folks that we feel like our must follows in this area for our community. Each of those folks will have a mini profile. Then there'll be a slate of feature stories, a couple of bigger ones, and then, I think four-ish, like medium-length ones that tackle different issues within this space. Then we'll have a video story, which our video team is currently putting together on circular fashion. And there'll be a related podcast episode on – yes, that's probably an ad.

[0:15:27] BB: That's a long list. Fantastic. Fantastic. Okay. Well, everyone, be checking out that package. Kathryn live from Austin, Texas. Love it. Thank you for being on today.

[0:15:41] KL: Thank you so much for having me. This was fun.

[0:15:44] BB: This was super fun. I always enjoy them, and best wishes on getting that inbox back to zero.

[0:15:49] KL: Thank you so much.

[0:15:49] BB: Pretty much on the regular. Star, star student.

[0:15:53] KL: Thanks.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:15:55] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist. Featuring Kathryn Lundstorm at Adweek. For more exclusive insights about the journalists on this podcast, subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter at onepitch.co/podcast. We'll see you next week with even more insights about the journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.

[END]