

**EPISODE 165**

[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](https://onepitch.co) to learn more.

Our guest today on Coffee with a Journalist is Pheobe Bain, a senior reporter at Ad Age. Pheobe covers influencer marketing and DTC brands. She joined Ad Age from Morning Brew, where she helped found the Marketing Brew vertical. During the episode, Pheobe talks about familiarizing herself with her newish role at Ad Age, crafty subject lines that catch her attention, meeting up in person with sources, and more. Let's hear from Pheobe now.

[INTERVIEW]

**[00:01:00] BB:** Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. I'm here in New York, and I've been having all these New York reporters with me. This is so fun. Pheobe Bain is with us today. She's a senior reporter at Ad Age. Pheobe, thank you for being here and hello on this beautiful day, by the way, in New York.

**[00:01:20] PB:** Thank you so much for having me. Glad to be here.

**[00:01:22] BB:** Yes. Okay, Pheobe, I like to start with just, in case people aren't as familiar, how would you describe what Ad Age encompasses and covers?

**[00:01:33] PB:** So Ad Age is, I believe, the oldest marketing and advertising publication in the United States. Basically, we cover all news marketing and advertising. So analyzing Super Bowl ads and chronicling that kind of journey, I like to say, is our Super Bowl. But we also cover TV advertising news, direct-to-consumer advertising news, influencer marketing news, basically all nooks and crannies of the industry, as well as keeping tabs on the agencies that kind of all make it happen.

**[00:02:04] BB:** Specifically for you being a senior reporter that you are, explain your coverage beat because it's looking like it varies to some extent, but I'd love to get it straight from you.

**[00:02:15] PB:** It does. Yes. So primarily right now, at least, I'm focusing on the direct-to-consumer industry and kind of having that coverage for Ad Age and developing that beat for them, getting more articles up on the site about direct-to-consumer brands or DTC brands, which for anybody who doesn't know, it's basically just like think of Glossier and Casper and Warby Parker, all those types of brands.

So, yes, covering the marketing and advertising strategies behind those, the agencies behind those, the industry's evolution. Also cover influencer marketing because a lot of direct-to-consumer brands are pretty keen on using influencers or content creators and their marketing strategy. So it sort of ends up being a good fit. My previous beat at my previous publication was all influencers so that **[inaudible 00:03:01]** naturally.

Then I dabble in covering other parts of the industry sort of as needed as well like health and wellness. Again, a good fit with the influencer, direct-to-consumer type beat. Then randomly telecom, I jump in and do some telecom **[inaudible 00:03:16]** as well.

**[00:03:16] BB:** Yes. I was looking at some of your piece. I'm like, "Oh, okay. Telecom too. Okay, great."

**[00:03:22] PB:** Yes, yes. I mean, they're major advertisers. There's a lot of money in that industry, so –

**[00:03:26] BB:** There you go.

**[00:03:28] PB:** Ad Age wants somebody to sort of keep tabs on it. When Horizon –

**[00:03:32] BB:** Makes sense.

**[00:03:33] PB:** So they're running a Super Bowl ad. Somebody to point out and say, "Okay, Phoebe. That's you, telecom."

**[00:03:37] BB:** That's you.

**[00:03:38] PB:** **[inaudible 00:03:38]** Direct-to-consumer and influencer currently like the primary things that I'm focused on.

**[00:03:43] BB:** Excellent. Oh, that is fun. How's your inbox?

**[00:03:47] PB:** Well, I took a sick day yesterday because I had – I'm developing a slight cold. So currently, my inbox is insane. I have this little project that I'm working on for Ad Age right now, and I really was just so excited to dive into it at the beginning of the day. But it took me until like 1pm to get through my inbox, just because I missed a singular day yesterday. So, yes, it definitely – it gets clogged if you aren't managing it every second of every day.

**[00:04:16] BB:** Oh, boy. Do you unclog it in some certain way? Or do you just – are you a mass deleter?

**[00:04:23] PB:** Not anymore because Ad Age uses Outlook. I previously was a Gmail gal myself. So I feel like with Gmail, whenever every other company **[inaudible 00:04:35]**, I think I used Gmail. But it was easy to in those newsrooms go through and mass delete. But Outlook, I don't know. I haven't figured out the check-all-unread-box methodology yet. So I have just been opening every single email, and I think that I just started at Ad Age in December. So I think it's also worthwhile to open every single email, right? But I'm 100% familiar with the people coming into this particular inbox. But, yes, I'm not a mass deleter. I'm a mass open, skim a couple lines, and then delete. But no longer just checking the boxes and deleting them like my old ways.

**[00:05:09] BB:** Okay. Okay. Do you ever cycle back then on any piece? I know it's only been since December. But what would you say?

**[00:05:16] PB:** Cycle back on?

**[00:05:17] BB:** Just something where you're like, "Well, yes. I opened it." But four months later, you're like, "Wait a second. Let me reply to that now."

**[00:05:24] PB:** Yes. So I used to be – again, in my previous role, I founded Marketing Brew for Morning Brew. That was what I did previously. I was, I think, employee number 30 or something like that for Morning Brew. They hired me to get their marketing and advertising newsletter started, which I did. But back in the day, it was just me on this entire three-times-a-week newsletter publication, and so I have to be a little bit more organized.

**[00:05:48] BB:** Oh, yes.

**[00:05:49] PB:** Right, like that thing. If I was sick there, like the newsletter wouldn't go out, right? So I used to have these folders in my email inbox. They are where I have like data or potential Marketing Brew story or campaigns. I would organize the majority of my emails into these folders. So that say that I needed data about streaming or OTT like television, and I had it in my data folder.

If I was looking for a stat about that or needed some sort of data to reference in a story, I could look back and be like, "Well, maybe I got a pitch about that a while ago," and then type in like **[inaudible 00:06:24]** or Hulu or something like that in that folder. Then I would know. Here, I've not gotten that organized yet. It's a bigger job. There's been a lot to do and –

**[00:06:34] BB:** I love the idea of it. So many people have told me like, "Oh, I have my folders in my folder." I'm like, "But the upkeep on the folders."

**[00:06:42] PB:** Yes, yes. The upkeep, the upkeep.

**[00:06:44] BB:** How?

**[00:06:45] PB:** That was – I mean, I was at a startup then **[inaudible 00:06:47]** a very old newsroom. I had kind of more – I was sort of dictating what I was doing with my time back then a lot more because I was creating a newsletter that didn't exist yet. That was in the early days of Morning Brew when things were less structured.

Now, I'm in a newsroom that has an output and flow. I'm mostly really just focused on reporting and writing these days, rather than building sort of an organizational structure that I really felt like was needed for Marketing Brew when, again, I was building a franchise that I **[inaudible 00:07:15]** to grow.

But, yes, I think when I had the time to do that kind of thing, it was great. Maybe one day in the future I will, once I got a little bit more in the swing of things at Ad Age, like I said. I still feel new, even though I started in December. But it was helpful when I did it. I guess, sometimes – let me see. So I covered South by Southwest for Ad Age. They flew me down there, which was great. We cover all things marketing and advertising going down to the festival. So I did create a folder for literally all South by Southwest for Ad Age. I created the folder for all of the Super Bowl stuff that I was working on. So these days, it's for bigger projects that are sort of directly in front of me, whereas back then it was like a just-in-case type of folder.

**[00:07:56] BB:** Got it. Okay. Things evolve, of course, as you need to adjust on the workload, Phoebe. So I totally get it. Okay. Is there a type of pitch that you love to receive, like in its format or in its delivery, like the subject line being extra juicy? I don't know.

**[00:08:15] PB:** Typically, this is kind of a weird one. But I do think that it will make somebody open it and read it a little bit closer. I wouldn't necessarily say I have a large social media presence. I think I use social media like every other millennial woman out there.

**[00:08:27] BB:** Yes, yes.

**[00:08:28] PB:** I have an Instagram that I post on once a month. Maybe I'll do a story every other day. I have a Twitter, obviously. We're journalists, we're big on Twitter. Although TBD on my blue check, I think today is the day that those are finally going away. But anyways, I have like some degree of social media output, right?

Occasionally, PR people will slide into my inbox with like my dog's name in the subject line, like something – say that it's like a birthday cake company. My dog's name is Guava. They would say like, “Guava’s birthday?” Or something because I post about my dog on social media a lot

and really just getting to know the person that you're emailing. I'm sure it might not be the most efficient thing for a PR person to do.

But if somebody had a pitch, they really, really wanted me to make sure that I kept a close eye on, including personal details about my life is kind of a surefire way to get me to open. Again, like I really think it's just a brain or psychological thing. Immediately when you see something like that, you're like, "How do you know my dog," right? So you're going to pay a little bit more attention? Yes. I don't know. It's interesting. Again, I think that's just psychological tactic, but I'm not invaluable to it.

**[00:09:34] BB:** Okay. So if the dog name is dropped, extra attention.

**[00:09:37] PB:** If the dog name is dropped.

**[00:09:37] BB:** Extra bonus. Okay.

**[00:09:40] PB:** Yes, exactly. But then, honestly, I feel like the best kind of pitches that I get typically happen. Occasionally, I'll go to lunch with a PR person or a comms person. Or get drinks with someone or get a coffee with someone, and they'll just sort of ask me like, "Hey, how do I make this useful for you? What are you looking for? We'll talk about exactly what maybe it is, what I'm hoping to cover." Then after that, they typically start sending stuff that's really irrelevant to me.

But I do think that making an in-person connection helps. On the calm side, I guess, it helps them have an easier memory. I would think of the stuff that I'm actually interested in being pitched and covering. Then I'm also like, "Oh, that's Alex," or, "That's Sam," whatever. I know a face to the name in my inbox now. So it makes it easier.

Again, you can do Zoom meetings for this kind of stuff, of course. But I think it takes many years to develop that great of a relationship with a journalist and a PR person over. Takes many years to do online, whereas that might take one or two lunches or one or two coffees to do in real life, right? It depends where you live, obviously. But, I mean, I don't know.

I remember when I was relocating back to New York in December 2020. I left during the pandemic and was coming back kind of when the real estate market was better. My parents were like, “Why are you going back?” My dad at least was, “Why are you going back?” I was like, “Because it's so much easier —”

**[00:11:01] BB:** You're a New Yorker.

**[00:11:04] PB:** Totally, yes. But it's easier to develop these kinds of relationships for work that are beneficial here than it is in like, a small little town in Virginia.

**[00:11:13] BB:** And the agency space too, where New York remains an agency beachhead, right? That totally, yes. It's not like you're like, “Well, I do oil and gas. I don't live in Canada, but you know, or Texas.” I think it is relevant to that too.

**[00:11:28] PB:** Exactly, exactly. So I don't know. I feel like everyone, obviously, makes choices that are a fit for their lifestyle. But I think, yes, I could be making the same salary in North Dakota and probably not living in a studio apartment. But creating relationships with my sources here feels worth it to me.

**[00:11:46] BB:** Okay.

[BREAK]

**[00:11:49] 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](https://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]

**[00:12:13] BB:** For those, you're alluding to it already, Phoebe, wanting to make a relationship with you, maybe they don't live in New York. But maybe they're going to come in town or

something, and they're not going to try to dangle or get your attention with your dog's name. Is there a way to build that relationship with you? Or is it going to take three lunches and an afternoon tea? I don't know.

**[00:12:34] PB:** I've had meetings with people, right? Whether it's a comms person, an executive, or just a comms person, or just an executive, where we do a happy hour or we do a coffee, and we just immediately hit it off and click. That doesn't have to happen 10 times within the year. That just had to happen once, and then those are sort of in the back of my mind when maybe I need a source at a specific company or insight on a specific topic, that type of thing. So I just think making the most of the real-life moments that you have with people is kind of all you can do in those situations.

**[00:13:07] BB:** Okay. So see if she can be in-person. By the way, coffee, happy hour, dinner, lunch, what's your specialty?

**[00:13:15] PB:** It's good question. I mean, I don't want to say happy hour because then that's exclusionary to people that might not drink. But I've gotten many a mocktail at happy hours, rather than a cocktail with PR folks.

**[00:13:23] BB:** Yes. I have drinks. I go to happy hour. Yes.

**[00:13:27] PB:** Yes, absolutely. I think that's – the thing is if we get a coffee in the morning or if we get a lunch.

**[00:13:32] BB:** And not all people are coffee people, by the way.

**[00:13:34] PB:** Not all people are coffee people.

**[00:13:34] BB:** Some like tea, smoothie, whatever, whatever fits your –

**[00:13:37] PB:** Totally. The thing is coffee is typically happening in the morning. Lunch is typically happening during the day. All I'm thinking about, right, I'm obviously also trying to focus and be in the moment. But I know that I have a story due at 2pm or the next coffee I'm running



to at 10am. I think if you can get me at happy hour outside of Super Bowl season or outside of me, trying to chase down some breaking news or working on a feature story that's coming out right then, that's typically when my work brain is a little bit more shut off. I can be the most focused on the conversation, right?

So I think like if I were a PR person trying to make something like this happen, I would do a happy hour because then, ideally, the journalist isn't still on their workday mindset, right? That, I think, is easier for connection when people are less distracted. But, again, it doesn't have to be alcoholic. I can't tell you how many times I've gone to "happy hours" and asked the bartender for like a club soda with a splash of cranberry and no alcohol in it. But it's fun too to sit and have a cute little drink, even if it's not alcoholic.

**[00:14:38] BB:** Exactly. It's more relaxed. I hear what you're saying. Good. Do you like exclusives?

**[00:14:44] PB:** Yes, but they have to be really relevant to me.

**[00:14:47] BB:** Okay. Such as?

**[00:14:49] PB:** Something I really don't appreciate is like the exclusive roll-over-the-eyes trick that I've had fooled on me before in the sense that like, especially when I was a more junior reporter and newer to this industry, I would get fooled by this more often. But it felt like a lot of times, especially because I was at a publication called Marketing Brew that I started myself, like I didn't have any reputation yet.

So the idea of getting an exclusive was so much more exciting to me then because fewer people were going to be pitching kind of an unheard of publication an exclusive in it's earlier days. But when clearly what's happening is this person has pitched the story to so many different people. Nobody's biting. Nobody's checking it probably for a reason. Then it's pitched to a junior reporter as an exclusive to kind of make it more enticing. I hate that, right?

But if you trust me as a reporter, and you trust my outlet as a journalistic institution, and you know that I cover direct-to-consumer brands, and let's say the exclusive is, I don't know, Warby

Parker's running its first ever influencer marketing campaign or something like that, then that's a perfect story for me. I would absolutely take that exclusive if my editor approved it, right? That helps generate this relationship even more so. But don't pitch me an exclusive about a golf club that is launching. You know what I mean? Like something that's clearly not relevant to me.

**[00:16:07] BB:** Oh, God. Yes, geez. Oh, okay. Where do embargoes then sit? Same-ish? Yes. How do you feel about that?

**[00:16:17] PB:** I mean, I don't know. That's sort of something that I've had different editors with different opinions on, and I typically just go with whatever opinion my editor has at the time, right? My current idea about embargoes is that say that you're pitching something to five journalists, and you're saying to all these journalists, "Okay, the embargo lifts at 8am on Monday, depending on the –" It totally depends what the story is is the bottom line, right? Or what the pitch is.

But I still have it in my head that I'm not breaking this news. I'm not the only one that knows about this. Of course, there's a chance that this could come out earlier because it's in all these other people's inboxes, right? So like, yes, I will stick to an embargo, of course, but –

**[00:16:55] BB:** This got to be good.

**[00:16:55] PB:** It's a small industry. Word gets around, especially in like the marketing and advertising industry. So you can tell when a pitch like that is sent to a million people, right? Or even just one person. I understand why it's done that way. But, yes, it depends.

**[00:17:13] BB:** You can tell.

**[00:17:14] PB:** It depends on what they all say.

**[00:17:15] BB:** There you go. Good answer. Good answer. Phoebe, I have a little quick-fire question list here for you.

**[00:17:23] PB:** Great. I love it. Let's do it.

[00:17:23] **BB**: So it's just real quick. Yes. Let's play it and see how it goes. Okay. Video or phone interview?

[00:17:29] **PB**: Phone.

[00:17:30] **BB**: Bullet points or paragraphs?

[00:17:32] **PB**: Bullet points.

[00:17:33] **BB**: Short or long pitches?

[00:17:36] **PB**: Short.

[00:17:36] **BB**: How short?

[00:17:38] **PB**: A couple bullet points.

[00:17:40] **BB**: Okay. Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[00:17:44] **PB**: Images attached.

[00:17:45] **BB**: Pitches in the morning or at night?

[00:17:48] **PB**: At night.

[00:17:49] **BB**: At night. Okay. Why, by the way?

[00:17:53] **PB**: You'll have more of a competitive edge in my inbox. **[inaudible 00:17:55]**.

[00:17:57] **BB**: Okay. Oh, this is a good insight.

**[00:17:59] PB:** I'm reading through dozens in the morning, right? Like usually while I'm walking my dog. But at night, if it's the last thing that I'm seeing before I'm signing off, I'll respond and say, "Hey, let's talk about this in the morning," or whatever, right? I just think that there's a better chance of me actually reading it and going back to it at night when the inbox isn't as crowded.

**[00:18:17] BB:** There you go. Okay. Email or Twitter DM?

**[00:18:20] PB:** Twitter.

**[00:18:21] BB:** One follow-up or multiple?

**[00:18:23] PB:** Two.

**[00:18:24] BB:** Direct or creative subject lines?

**[00:18:26] PB:** Creative.

**[00:18:28] BB:** That makes sense for your space. Press release or media kit?

**[00:18:32] PB:** Press release.

**[00:18:34] BB:** Really? Okay. That's an unusual answer. Why? I got to ask why.

**[00:18:38] PB:** Just tell me what's going on. If I need the media kit, I'll ask for it.

**[00:18:42] BB:** Okay. Yes, I did give it to you as an or thing. Okay. Phoebe, do you have anything you want to promote, celebrate, tout, whatever? We're just here to shout you out and support you.

**[00:18:55] PB:** Amazing. Yes. I would love it. If you guys could all go to [adage.com](https://adage.com) and keep an eye out for my direct-to-consumer coverage. It's something that we're working on building at Ad Age, and I'm curious to see what people think of it and get feedback, all that type of thing. On all

social media, Instagram, Twitter, et cetera, I'm @notnotphoebe. So that's N-O-T-N-O-T-P-H-O-E-B-E. Follow me on there to keep updated. But, yes, that's me.

**[00:19:22] BB:** Perfect. But also, how did that one come to be? Was everything else taken because it's a double not?

**[00:19:28] PB:** Yes. I was sitting in a conference room with a couple old co-workers, and I don't remember what my old name was. But they were like, "Phoebe, that's really bad. That's the worst handle. It's not great." I was like, "Okay. How about @notnotphoebe," because I'm not not Phoebe, right? They were like, "Wait, you just thought of that right now. It's infinitely better than whatever, my like phoebain871 or whatever it was before it was. It stuck, and that was like probably five or six years ago.

**[00:19:56] BB:** Excellent. Phoebe, thank you so much. High five to you.

**[00:19:59] PB:** Yes. Thank you so much for having me. This is great.

**[00:20:01] BB:** It's just so fun. I'm glad you're in New York, and you came back because this is where the lifeblood of the world is, in my humble opinion. I'm not a New Yorker, but I'm just a big New York fan, and I like to be here all the time, especially in this exact moment. So high five. I love it.

**[00:20:17] PB:** Amazing. Well, yes, glad you're here. Come visit more often. Again, thank you so much for having me on the show. This has been great.

**[00:20:24] BB:** Thanks, Phoebe.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[00:20:25] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, featuring Phoebe Bain at Ad Age. For more exclusive insights about the journalists on this podcast, subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter at [onepitch.co/podcast](https://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]