

EPISODE 168

[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.

On the podcast today, we're joined by Kate Irwin. She is a gaming lead reporter for Decrypt, where she writes about the latest news and features in technology and big tech, cryptocurrency news, entertainment, and culture. Kate also creates video content for the Decrypt website and social media pages. During the episode, Kate talks about Decrypt's audience and how the team likes to break down stories, the story she looks for behind video games and their makers, the reason why full transparency is important to her and her readers, and lots more. Let's hear from Kate now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:10] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. Hopefully, you're here to listen to some journalists talk about PR and what they like, what they don't like, and all the good stuff going on in the world of media today. What a world it is. I'm Beck Bamberger. I'm here every week with you all. Thanks for listening.

Today, we have, oh, gaming. Oh, this is going to be good. Kate Irwin, she's the gaming lead reporter over at Decrypt. We're going to get all into it. But, first, Kate, welcome and hello.

[00:01:41] KI: Hello. Thank you for having me. Excited to be here.

[00:01:44] BB: Yes, yes. First off, Kate, for those maybe not as familiar, how would you describe Decrypt?

[00:01:50] KI: Yes. So Decrypt is a small crypto news site that is growing. Yes, we cover all things crypto news, but we've recently branched out into video game coverage, looking into Web3 games, which basically means any video game that either has NFTs and some element of the game or maybe uses some kind of crypto token at some point in the game.

[00:02:15] BB: Oh, so how would you compare this to maybe the others in the landscape of crypto? Because there's quite a few number of sites out there. Is there more of a niche you specifically have for it? I'm talking Decrypt overall. I don't want to say any competitors. You know what I'm saying? I just want to paint the picture a little bit more for people.

[00:02:32] KI: Yes. So I think from what I understand, we are kind of a mix of I would call crypto natives, which means people that own crypto. They already know a lot of the technical stuff. They've been trading for a while. They are looking for a place to get dedicated crypto news from well-sourced reporters and journalists and that have been working in the space for a while.

But I think also some of our audience ends up sort of being a little bit coming in from the pop culture side when we cover different celebrities getting involved in crypto, and it pulls in a much broader audience. But I would say that, generally, our audience is mostly people that are at least a little bit crypto-curious, anywhere from like a little bit crypto-curious to a hardcore like crypto degen that is trading constantly.

[00:03:23] BB: Yes. By the way, how many people are out there would you ascertain are like the traders every day? I don't know if you all have like a number that you know. Is there anything out there that you're like, "Yes, there's 7.3 million people **[inaudible 00:03:35]** every day."? I don't know.

[00:03:35] KI: Oh, man. That's a great question. I know there are like millions of people that own crypto around the world. We are mostly focused on a US-based audience. However, we do have readers from around the world. But not sure on exact stats on like how many hardcore traders there are.

[00:03:52] BB: Yes. I'd be curious to know globally what the numbers are. Anyway, let's now talk more about your coverage beat, Kate, and what people may need to know in terms of

pitching you. So overall, since it is of, course, gaming lead, what would you say does your coverage encompass? Only gaming? I know you write about a lot, so tell us.

[00:04:15] KI: Yes. So I started at Decrypt as a general crypto assignment reporter, and I basically covered a little bit of everything. But over time, my areas of interest really rose to the top, and I started covering more of the music, entertainment meets crypto kind of content, where it's like comic books meet crypto, music meets crypto, movies meet crypto and then, of course, video games.

The video game space has just become a massive space for crypto, and that's why I've really honed in on it. I mean, I'm a lifelong gamer as well myself. I often will be playing like a video game every day and have my own PC build. So I'm very much familiar with PC gaming culture specifically, as well as like console games and indie games and like the traditional gaming space. That's sort of my background and also covering a little bit of esports.

Moving into this position, I'm covering Web3 gaming, which all of us, I think, sort of collectively are wondering what does that mean. What is Web3 gaming? Should we call it something else? Should we just call it video games that use crypto, video games that use digital collectibles or whatnot?

But that's sort of a peek into like what I'm thinking about in terms of coverage now is pretty much exclusively video games that leverage crypto in some capacity. It can be a really out-of-the-box way. I just think that the game has to be appealing, first and foremost.

[00:04:15] BB: How would you ascertain appealing? What to you, you're like, "Yes, I want to play this."?

[00:05:57] KI: Yes. I think, I mean, everyone has different tastes, right?

[00:06:00] BB: Of course.

[00:06:01] KI: We want to cover a wide range of games. We want to cover and have covered everything from first-person shooters to mobile games to like indie RPGs. So I think there is

room for any genre of game in that regard. I think like gambling stuff for me, personally, is a little tough to sort of shoehorn gambling stuff into gaming. For me, personally, I know it's a debated thing. But I personally don't really see gambling as video gaming. I do think that that dividing line is like very important and I think – so that's sort of like that line.

But in terms of games, like I'm looking for a little bit of lore. I want to know what's the core story here in a nutshell. I also want to know the team behind it and what games they've worked on in the past. I think that's so, so essential because we want to know like what you did before and what you're doing now and why you made the switch. A lot of it is developers switching from traditional video games to games that use crypto. So I'm always curious to see who is making that switch, where they came from, and why, and really exploring those conversations.

[00:07:18] BB: So, Kate, have you had any good pitches lately would you say?

[00:07:22] KI: Yes. I think some of the good pitches. I mean, it might make sense, right? Some of the best pitches come from people that have already worked with me before, and they sort of know what I'm looking for. I think the good pitches are the ones that are very – if they need to be timely, they're timely, right? If your game is announcing something on this day, like tell me a couple days before. Request an embargo. Or tell me like right away first thing when it drops, and I will decide if it makes sense to cover.

Sometimes, what's harder for me is when PR folks try to sort of spin stuff when it's already like two days late. I pick up on that like right away.

[00:08:06] BB: Hell, no. Yes. Ooh, and just to clarify. What do you mean by two days late, like the news is already out, and they're trying to make you –

[00:08:14] KI: Yes.

[00:08:14] BB: Okay. Yes, that's bad.

[00:08:15] KI: Yes. Yes. I've noticed that more and more that sometimes, like we as journalists, obviously, we have to do our own due diligence. But we have to do that even more now, just

because there's a lot of like partnerships that are teased and by a company that we've never heard of before. But the company that they're partnering with is like a big sexy name in gaming, right? We're like, "Okay. Well, this could be great because of the big name involved."

But this brand that we've never heard of is less interesting to us. So we have to independently reach out to the big brand and get confirmation of the partnership because multiple times, it does sometimes happen, where we don't have direct correspondence there, and it's not verified that the big brand is actually involved.

[00:09:04] BB: Oh, no. It's not actually involved for real?

[00:09:08] KI: Yes. I think that might have happened uh once or twice. I mean, basically, we just have to always verify, and that's like our policy now because some of these smaller companies, everyone loves to throw the word partnership around, which is another word that I personally find frustrating from PR folks. It's like what does the word partnership mean. Who gave who money? That's what I want to know. Who gave who money and why? That's what I want to know because we don't want to use – I don't want to use the word partnership in my story. I'm just writing your press release for you.

[00:09:39] BB: No. That's very vague. Oh, I'm so glad you called that out. No one has on this entire show before I don't think as pointedly as you have. Yes, where's the money flowing? Where is it going?

[00:09:52] KI: Yes. I think companies should be more transparent about that. I wish there was more transparency. I feel like our readers want to know that. They want to know to what extent is a game developer jumping on board with this blockchain network, just because they got given like \$10 million, right?

[00:10:09] BB: Yes. I wonder if it's like a legal thing that they maybe don't disclose as much or so. I don't know. The point is I think, Kate, that you're making is tell you exactly what the partnership means if that's the case.

[00:10:21] KI: Yes. I think like big money numbers actually makes a story way more appealing to journalists.

[00:10:25] BB: Way more.

[00:10:26] KI: Because if we hear like, "Wow, this company threw \$50 million at you to make a game, like that is interesting." But if it's sort of a vague partnership, and we don't really know the details of it, and the PR folks are being a little too coy about the specific details of the deal, it's a little frustrating because it doesn't give me much to work with in the story. I'm sort of like, "Okay, these two people are doing something. We don't know what it is yet, though." It's a little tough to sort of flesh that out into something substantial.

[00:10:57] BB: Oh, man. That's cool. Glad we're talking about this. Okay. How is your inbox with pitches?

[00:11:05] KI: It's a mess.

[00:11:06] BB: A mess, okay. Do you have any way that you keep it sane in there? Or what do you do?

[00:11:11] KI: Yes. So when I moved back toward gaming coverage exclusively, I started working on a PC because that's sort of like the way to do any video game play tests. Now, I'm back on like browser. I found the Mac Mail app was really helpful. Obviously, that doesn't exist on Windows. So I'm sort of re-navigating my inbox all over again.

[00:11:36] BB: So wait a second. You were using Windows, but now you're Mac. What?

[00:11:40] KI: Mac then Windows, yes.

[00:11:41] BB: Oh, no. Okay. Wow, a lot of things, a lot of things going on.

[00:11:45] KI: Yes. But it's okay. I mean, I think I've gone really good at reading subject lines.

[BREAK]

[00:11:54] 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]

[00:12:18] BB: Okay. So now, that gets to the next point, which some people are like on the show, "Oh, I read every single email." They literally click every –

[00:12:25] KI: Oh, no. No.

[00:12:25] BB: I don't know how that works. So you're a subject line scanner I'm going to say. In then the subject line, what do you want to see?

[00:12:33] KI: Big names that I recognize.

[00:12:35] BB: Big names.

[00:12:36] KI: Big money.

[00:12:37] BB: Big money, big names, big.

[00:12:39] KI: Yes. I mean, sorry not sorry.

[00:12:42] BB: No. This is where you should bring it. Okay. Is there a subject line that you recently have received that you were like, "Yes, I'm clicking on that."? You don't have to just say who exactly it was but anything where you're like yes, like it said name, amount of money, launching five days from now, something like that.

[00:13:00] KI: Yes, exactly. I mean, a lot of it also right now that I'm really hungry for is like games that I can actually play tests, whether it's pre-alpha, alpha, beta, whatever, fully released, whatever stage of development. If you as a game developer are ready to have someone like me check out your game and like write about it and be honest and sort of be like, "Hey, this game's still in development. Here's the stuff that's cool. Here's the stuff that still could use work, obviously, because it's in beta." If you're ready for a little bit of press in that way, I'm really looking for games to actually play because I'm less interested in like, "Oh, we're announcing that we're making a game." It's like, "Okay, cool. See you in five years."

[00:13:43] BB: Yes. I find this surprising that people would pitch you a game but don't have anything to show you, given that you're the gaming lead.

[00:13:55] KI: Yes. I also – a lot of the exclusives I think could be better. I would like to get more –

[00:14:00] BB: Ooh, let's talk about exclusives. Ooh, ooh. Tell us. Tell us.

[00:14:00] KI: Exclusive offers with actually exclusive footage of your game that you have not published on Twitter a week ago.

[00:14:09] BB: Okay. Oh, gosh. Okay. So tell us and define, Kate, an exclusive to you.

[00:14:16] KI: Yes. To me, it means like you, first of all, have researched decrypt.co, and you know what our website is, and you know what kind of content we produce. You've also checked out decrypt.co/gg, which is the gaming homepage, dedicated Web3 gaming homepage. You understand that like your game probably leverages NFTs or like a crypto token in some way. It's probably – maybe it's optional. Maybe it's not, whatever. The point is that you understand like who you're pitching to, and you know that the value that we can bring because our audience is very specific. The type of content that we publish is very specific and cater to this like niche audience right now, which is crypto gaming.

I think perhaps some PR folks might sort of be like, "Okay, we're going to give the exclusive for our tiny little crypto games like IGN." It's like, "I'm sorry. IGN doesn't care about your crypto

game.” That's just my – that's just what I understand about the gaming media space. Video games media is very difficult, and there's basically only two or three journalists in crypto games coverage right now, and I'm one of them. So I think it's sort of like if you're developing a Web3 game, yes, of course, you want to go big and broad.

But like you're going to have way more success with someone like us because we actually care. This is our bread and butter. We understand the technology. I understand like way more than like the average person about crypto. I'm going to be able to objectively evaluate like your game and cover it in a way that feels holistic, complete, honest, fair. So I think that's like why someone should pitch me/us an exclusive. I also think like there's a misconception that like if you pitch a huge outlet an exclusive, that it's like better for you. But I don't really think that's true. I also don't think packaging like crappy news as an exclusive will get you traction either. So it does have to be exciting.

[00:16:24] BB: Agreed, agreed. Yes. You need to make it exciting. That is great, and I love that you pitched for your exclusives. So people know. This is good. Cool. Kate, what bothers you about publicists, if anything? I should say that, if anything.

[00:16:43] KI: That's a tough question.

[00:16:44] BB: That's why I say it, if anything.

[00:16:47] KI: I mean, I've been so barraged with like unrelated pitches, so that's frustrating. Just getting bombarded with like mailing list type stuff where it's like they're trying to pitch me about a health insurance story. I'm like, “Hello, who are you?” That happens way more than you would think.

I also find it frustrating when folks don't respond, and they know when their embargo's lifting, and they know that I'm rushing to meet a deadline, and they just like log off. That can be tough.

[00:17:19] BB: Why? Why?

[00:17:21] KI: Yes. I mean, that happens. I don't know. I don't really know why in each like situation. I could only speculate. But that sometimes does happen, like where people will just go AFK for days and days and days. They'll just be offline.

[00:17:35] BB: Even though they pitched you.

[00:17:35] KI: They won't have an auto reply, and they won't like CC anyone else in. They'll just kind of vanish after feeling like they secured the initial story. I find that like really bizarre because it's like we can't – there are certain things that will come up along the way. If I've been writing this story, and suddenly some detail comes up, and it's like, “Oh, man. We kind of really need to know this before we publish.” Sometimes, it's like, okay, well, we just have to hold it. We kind of have to wait. Sometimes, it makes sense to just not publish the story at all. I mean, I think the biggest issue is when embargoes get pushed. I think when embargoes get pushed repeatedly, it's a big problem.

[00:18:18] BB: Oh, no. Oh, no. Repeatedly, this happens?

[00:18:23] KI: Yes. I once had an embargo pushed at least five times on me, and I was about to pull my hair out. Yes.

[00:18:29] BB: No. Wait. What was the reason? Was there a reason?

[00:18:32] KI: It was a while ago. But I think it was about like they weren't ready, something they weren't ready. It was a lot of people on like wildly different time zones than me as well. I think like if you have a big PR team, like try to know roughly where your journalists that you're pitching are based. Then just like assign someone who's on that time zone because, otherwise, it delays stuff by like days. Because if someone's in Asia, like they're – it'll take a day for them to get back to me because of the time zone. Or in Europe even, it can be tough too. So it's tough.

[00:19:08] BB: Be mindful of the time zone.

[00:19:09] KI: Yes.

[00:19:10] BB: Oh, Kate, this is very illuminating. Okay. Relationship building, for those who do not have a relationship with you, how would you say they could build one with you? Could they meet you in person? Where are you based?

[00:19:26] KI: Right now, I'm based in Atlanta, so Atlanta, Georgia. I was in LA for a while but moved to the Hollywood of the South last fall.

[00:19:38] BB: The Hollywood of the South. I love it. Okay. Yes, it is the Hollywood of the South. They do lots of filming there. Okay, great. So back to the question, to build a relationship with you, if they're not worked with you before, what would you advise?

[00:19:53] KI: think I think following me on Twitter. Maybe, right? I don't know.

[00:19:56] BB: Yes. Maybe. Yes.

[00:19:58] KI: I think sometimes that can work. It really depends, though, because there's no guarantee that like a professional connection will result from that. I've had lunches with PR folks, and I don't know. It just – it hasn't really resulted in anything because then the pitches that I get are not great. It sort of feels like – it's like, okay, maybe we need to be a little bit – maybe they need to think a little bit more about the kinds of pitches that I would accept and stuff like that and the access as well.

I mean, I think if you've gone through the hoops of having like lunch or coffee with me, like I would hope at least like that you're able to **[inaudible 00:20:40]** some cool offers for me for some cool interviews. I can't just accept every like mediocre thing that gets thrown my way. So I kind of like wonder. It's like the relationship is built on respect and like timeliness and like understanding like how my job works. But also, it falls on like the pitch as well. At the end of the day, like if it's a killer pitch, we're going to take it.

[00:21:06] BB: We're going to talk. We're going to talk. Okay. It's a killer pitch. We're going to take it. Kate, I have a little rapid-fire section here to go through. So are you ready?

[00:21:16] KI: Yes.

[00:21:17] **BB**: Let's do it. Video or phone interview?

[00:21:20] **KI**: Video.

[00:21:21] **BB**: Bullet points or paragraphs?

[00:21:23] **KI**: Bullet points.

[00:21:25] **BB**: Short or long pitches?

[00:21:27] **KI**: Short.

[00:21:28] **BB**: Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[00:21:32] **KI**: Attached.

[00:21:34] **BB**: Pitches in the morning or at night?

[00:21:36] **KI**: Morning.

[00:21:37] **BB**: Email or Twitter DM?

[00:21:39] **KI**: I guess email because my Twitter DMS are closed.

[00:21:42] **BB**: Oh, there you . Okay. Note to everyone out there.

[00:21:45] **BB**: One follow-up or multiple?

[00:21:48] **KI**: Only one please. Yes

[00:21:50] **BB**: Direct or creative subject lines?

[00:21:54] **KI**: Direct.

[00:21:55a] **BB**: And then press release or media kit?

[00:21:58] **KI**: Both but like press release.

[00:22:00] **BB**: Okay, okay. Press release. Noted. Kate, is there anything that we can promote for you or celebrate?

[00:22:10] **KI**: Well, we can celebrate the launch of Decrypt's GG, which stands for good game, for those of you less familiar with gamer land. Yes. So decrypt.co/gg is our dedicated Web3 gaming homepage. We interview game developers. We interview crypto execs that are working in gaming and in that space. So it's been fun. We're also reviewing and previewing a lot of games.

[00:22:36] **BB**: Oh, fun. Oh, I'm on it right now. Good game, yes. By the way, Kate, for those who maybe don't know, maybe including myself, is that a common thing you say to people like, "Hey, good game."?

[00:22:47] **KI**: Yes. You just say GG. You say GGs, GGs.

[00:22:50] **BB**: Oh, GGs. Okay. Oh, I learned something. Kate, thank you so much for being on today. This was lovely. If you send a killer pitch, she's going to answer. That's what I got out of this, Kate.

[00:23:02] **KI**: Big names, big money. Yes.

[00:23:04] **BB**: Big names, big money. Yes.

[00:23:06] **KI**: Thanks so much for having me.

[00:23:07] **BB**: Thanks, Kate.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:23:09] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, featuring Kate Irwin at Decrypt. 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]