

**EPISODE 175**

[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.

Today's guest on the podcast is Rebecca Ruiz, a Senior Reporter at Mashable. At a high level, Rebecca covers mental health, digital culture, and technology. Her specific areas of interest include suicide prevention, screen use and mental health, parenting, youth well-being, and meditation and mindfulness. During the episode, Rebecca talks about the change in coverage of mental health over the last 10-plus years, how direct subject lines are most effective, the various ways she keeps tabs on sources and ideas, and more. Let's hear from Rebecca now.

[INTERVIEW]

**[00:01:16] BB:** Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, and I'm here with another fabulous journalist who's always helping us understand how to better work with journalist friends and our media reporters because we can all do better storytelling together as journalists and publicists. So today with us, very exciting, Senior Reporter from Mashable, Rebecca Ruiz.

I am very excited to talk to you, Rebecca, one, because you're also a Rebecca but, two, because your beat is fabulous, and I can't wait to get into it. Welcome and thank you for being here.

**[00:01:53] RR:** Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to have this chat.

**[00:01:56] BB:** Yes, yes, yes. Okay. Real quick, I do ask everybody, how would you describe what Mashable covers?

**[00:02:03] RR:** Great question. I think like all outlets over the years, we've had evolutions in our coverage areas, but some core areas remain the same. So we focus primarily on digital culture in terms of tech, entertainment, science, social good, which is the team that I'm on, and culture. So we look often and most frequently at what's happening in the world through the way people are experiencing it online.

**[00:02:34] BB:** Okay. Now, specifically, your beat, which is kind of a smorgasbord of things, how would you cover or describe everything you encompass? I know, of course, from your author page, mental health, digital culture, and technology. But do you want to get a little bit more specific?

**[00:02:51] RR:** Sure. So I've covered mental health for a decade-plus, and I've covered it from lots of different angles and perspectives, service, features, analysis. I think my job at Mashable when I cover mental health, and I do cover some other topics, but that's my main beat is to really look at the way people are experiencing their well-being and their emotional health in the context, again, of what's happening in digital culture or online.

But for me, that can be very expansive. So I've written, for example, about how long COVID survivors are coping with some suicidal feelings, for example, by connecting with other people online who are experiencing the same thing. I've written sort of more utility pieces around how to deal with feeling lousy online and cognitive distortions. How we can cope with those. I've looked at people using ketamine on TikTok and showing their experiences with treating depression through that and what to know about what's really happening behind the scenes for them, versus what's shown on TikTok.

It really – there's a gamut, and I'm interested in people's well-being and their mental health and how that unfolds for them in many different ways in their lives.

**[00:04:09] BB:** Rebecca, since you've been covering mental health for 10-plus years, would you say the industry, if we are to say the industry, has improved or gotten worse or what?

**[00:04:21] RR:** That's a great question, and I feel like over the last 10 years, there's been a lot of education for journalists to better understand how to cover mental health in ways that aren't

stigmatizing and really help people understand their mental health in the context of their very different and unique life experiences. I think in the past, maybe there were sort of blanket portraits drawn about mental health conditions or people who experience mental illness that sometimes weren't helpful and sometimes weren't empowering and sometimes didn't center the voices of people who actually live with mental illness.

I do – I am optimistic about that coverage continuing to improve and evolve and really reflect not only research advancements, but also the unique ways that people with lived experience are expressing themselves, including on social media.

**[00:05:17] BB:** Fascinating. What a time to be writing about mental health, for sure. Speaking of mental health, how's your inbox?

**[00:05:25] RR:** That's great. I love that. I try to be an inbox-zero person.

**[00:05:30] BB:** Oh, you're in that camp. Yes.

**[00:05:31] RR:** As I am not as a virtue but more for my own mental health. I am one of those folks who doesn't necessarily do well with clutter, including digital clutter. Although I have written a piece on how to – why we should really only be using one tab at a time. I am failing spectacularly at that right now. This is all to say I take it with a grain of salt, and I try to be kind to myself when I'm not at inbox zero. But I do find that it really helps me manage pitches, and it helps me manage where I'm at in terms of my reporting process. It's actually decent. I'm at like three emails right now.

**[00:06:06] BB:** Wow. Congratulations, Rebecca. It's so interesting on here where the wide of the inbox, the width of let it ride to 337 unread emails to 3 is shocking to me. It's always cool to hear. So are you like every single day, you get it to zero, every single week? How does this exactly work?

**[00:06:31] RR:** So I try to get it to zero every day. That is really a Sisyphian task because once I get it to zero, there's 10 more emails that come in, and so –

**[00:06:40] BB:** Doesn't that kill you, by the way?

**[00:06:41] RR:** It does.

**[00:06:42] BB:** When you're like, "I just touched zero, okay. Now, how did this happen? I get so mad." It's so funny. Yes.

**[00:06:48] RR:** Well, it just takes a lot of brain power to first get to zero, and then to realize that 10 more emails have come in, and to have to cognitively like go through each email and figure out which one is most important. Of course, that, for me, flags towards the middle and end of the day like it probably does for a lot of people, where I just sort of give up, and my system is – I leave things unread if they're really important for me to get back to so that I know that those three emails aren't necessarily things that I haven't opened. They're just things that I need to get back to today that I want to make sure I do that, so.

**[00:07:23] BB:** Oh. Now, with that zero, which is truly magical for your profession for sure, which I'm also in that camp, by the way, but I live in a totally different world, do you file? Do you just mass delete? What do you do?

**[00:07:38] RR:** So I do have a habit of mass reading or mass deleting. I try to be very judicious about this because I do not, and this has happened to me a couple of times where I've accidentally deleted something that I needed. I usually figure it out before it's too late. But at the same time, if I see that a pitch is really off base for what I do, and the person hasn't like read and looked at my author page to see what I cover, I kind of go through a couple of times my inbox. I will just check all of those emails and then delete them if they're really off base.

Then the ones that are related but not compelling to me and I know that probably I'm not going to do anything with them, I will mass read those. It's not that many every day, but at least they're still in my inbox. Then the ones that I feel like are really important, I go through it and read them carefully.

**[00:08:33] BB:** Okay. For you, is the subject line at all a matter?

**[00:08:39] RR:** Yes, it does. I think headline writing is hard, and I imagine that subject line writing for a PR professional is equally hard. I find to the point and direct to be most effective. Obviously, a few keywords that I'm interested in are helpful, whether that's mental health or the names of prominent social media companies and in relationship to people's mental health and well-being or new research findings. All of those things kind of grab my attention, as do experts who I might know about, offering availability for those folks.

There is this funny thing that I've noticed just seems to be a trend lately where people put your name in the subject line as if they're like –

**[00:09:29] BB:** Yes, yes. Like how do you feel about that? I think this is a interesting tactic. I don't know.

**[00:09:34] RR:** I am sympathetic. First of all, let me just say that because I know they know they're competing with like 50 other emails in my inbox. So if I see my own name in the subject line, I certainly – it like definitely draws my attention sort of probably like a reptilian brain response like you know. But at the same time, I've sort of grown. I'm used to it. It's not working. The novelty of it's not working anymore, and I actually feel like it's a waste of space, ultimately, because that's – I know you're talking to me. I mean, I don't need to hear my name or see my name in the subject line. That's my own little observation that might be helpful to some of your listeners.

**[00:10:13] BB:** Very interesting. Very interesting because, yes, some find it like, “Oh, then I know it's for me.” But some like don't because it's in my inbox. So, of course, like what – you know.

[BREAK]

**[00:10:27] ANNOUNCER:** Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to learn about the unique ways OnePitch helps brands engage with the right journalists? Head to [onepitch.co](https://onepitch.co) and create your own custom media list in five minutes or less. Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

**[00:10:50] BB:** Okay. Then for you, Rebecca, is there a certain pitch that really works for you? If you had to boil it down to what are the three components of a pitch, what would those be?

**[00:11:01] RR:** So I think a real awareness of what I cover which seems obvious but because I've been doing this for a long time, and I've worked at different outlets, and I've covered different topics. For example, I used to work at Forbes like 15 years ago. I used to do work there that was different than what I do here. There are some overlaps and similarities. I did cover some aspects of mental health back then, but some people I find will sort of see that. Maybe they don't – they may have found my work and not realized that it's 15 years old **[inaudible 00:11:35]** prominent. Again, I try to have some empathy there. But if I –

**[00:11:39] BB:** You're very gracious, very.

**[00:11:40] RR:** Well, I mean, I understand that most people are working hard at their jobs and trying to get it right, and so –

**[00:11:44] BB:** Yes, they're trying.

**[00:11:46] RR:** Yes, right. But I will say that if I get a pitch that's just really not in tune with what I've been covering lately. Someone who demonstrates that they've been reading my work and knows like even if I've just covered something that I probably won't revisit for a while, at least that demonstrates to me that they're paying attention. They're really trying to target me and my publication, rather than blasting to everybody that they think might be open to it. That's actually really important to me.

Then I think I'm often looking for a research or an expert. So a pitch that can be really effective is offering me an expert that's in line with the things that you've seen I'm covering. I often tell people in those situations like, "I don't have any plans to cover this right now, or I just did that." But I'm keeping this person on my radar. One thing I do is I have a running list of ideas that I may not be pursuing at the moment, and this includes things like research studies and includes experts, where I will copy and paste from a pitch or a research study and put it into a document

that I go back to quite frequently. That's one way of organizing my experts and pitches along those lines.

Someone who pitches that kind of information, they may not end up with a story, but they might end up in that document. That's literally how I keep people on my radar.

**[00:13:10] BB:** Okay. Okay. But in an email where people are like, “Oh, here's my expert,” blah, blah, blah, what is in the context of that email? You want to see their credentials. You want to see three bullet points on what they could speak to. You want to see what? Because those intro talk to my expert pitch is a particular type of pitch that remains mysterious.

**[00:13:32] RR:** It is a particular type of pitch. It is mysterious. I can understand that, yes. That's sort of what makes one successful versus the other. I am looking for those things that you mentioned, so bullet points and then expertise. I think the pitch that's really hard is – at least for me, and it may not be for other reporters in this space. But for me, it's the pitches that come from folks representing a private company or their expert isn't necessarily an academic researcher or a well-known researcher, just someone with the CEO of this company. That's not a bad thing. It's just –

**[00:14:04] BB:** Yes. Yes, not bad. It's just not good.

**[00:14:07] RR:** It's not – if that CEO has a background as a PhD or a PsyD, for example, and has done clinical – what used to be a clinical therapist. Like those are details that actually are really helpful to me and set that person apart from just the CEO who runs a company that's sort of tangential to the beat that I cover.

I will also say, actually, that pitches, and this goes back to your – kind of what are the top three things. The third thing I would add would be pitches that reflect someone's expertise on the trends that are happening right now. I cannot stay up to date on every like TikTok trend.

**[00:14:44] BB:** No. Yes.

**[00:14:45] RR:** You know what I mean? I don't – sometimes, there's like the trauma talk trend. There's stuff that's happening in these spaces that I just cannot be up to date on in the same way that if it's not your job, you might be and since like – in terms of using it all day long. I had to be writing and things like that.

Someone who has expertise in paying attention to a special niche in these areas on online trends, like that's compelling to me as well. I think that just goes back to an effective pitch. So don't just tell me that this person's a CEO of this company without kind of adding something about their expertise on something unique, whether it's their academic or clinical background or whether it's they're paying special attention to this particular trend, and did you know about it.

**[00:15:33] BB:** Great intel on that front. Okay, Rebecca, if someone doesn't know you, how would they go about making or forming a relationship?

**[00:15:44] RR:** So it's interesting. I don't have that much time for a chat. You know what I mean?

**[00:15:54] BB:** It's okay to say like, "Uh, yes. No, we're good."

**[00:15:57] RR:** I have really great relationships with some folks who have just – we built a nice rapport together over a period of time. Usually –

**[00:16:06] BB:** Yes. Do you email?

**[00:16:08] RR:** We email. But what I like to do versus the like coffee chat or the virtual meeting or the "desk side," which is really –

**[00:16:15] BB:** Virtual meeting.

**[00:16:17] RR:** Become kind of not a thing anymore, those desk sides.

**[00:16:19] BB:** Yes, exactly. Yes.



**[00:16:20] RR:** Yes. Is to say like someone pitches me, and I said, “This is really interesting. Do you have 10 minutes to chat about it?” We get on the phone, and it's 10 or 15 minutes. I explain to them what I want or what I need, and they come back to me. Actually, for me, it's those more like let's not set up a time on the calendar. Let me just talk to you on the phone. Let's have a 15-minute call. We can work out some details to see if something will make sense here.” That's I feel like how you start to build a rapport. I mean, for me, at least.

**[00:16:49] BB:** Efficient, efficient. I like that. Yes. Let me tell you this juicy thing. Let's go.

**[00:16:55] RR:** Yes, exactly.

**[00:16:56] BB:** Okay. Good. Okay. Rebecca, we have this little quick-fire section. So let me go through my questions, and you tell me what you think. Sound good?

**[00:17:04] RR:** Yes.

**[00:17:05] BB:** Okay. First off, video, phone, or in-person interview? Why or why not?

**[00:17:10] RR:** Phone.

**[00:17:12] BB:** **[inaudible00:17:12]**. Yes, yes.

**[00:17:13] RR:** Yes. I find it difficult. I will do video meetings in certain cases, but I type at the same time that I'm recording. So it means I have to keep eye contact with the camera, even though I'm not watching the camera. I find that to be like a big thing. It's a lot of mental gymnastics. So unless it's an off-the-record or on-background conversation, we're just chatting, I really prefer phone.

**[00:17:36] BB:** Okay. I'm telling you, phone's coming back. It's having a revolution. It's amazing.

**[00:17:40] RR:** I think so.

**[00:17:41] BB:** Okay. Bullet points or paragraphs in a pitch?

**[00:17:44] RR:** Bullet points.

**[00:17:45] BB:** Yes. Then images attached or Dropbox zip file?

**[00:17:50] RR:** I prefer Dropbox link. It just is easier for me. I don't like to download a ton of things onto my computer, partly because then I have to organize it, which I don't like doing.

**[00:18:02] BB:** Got it. Okay. You're one of the rare ones in the Dropbox camp. But, hey, this is why we ask. Okay. Rebecca, is there anything you want to promote, emphasize, celebrate, champion, et cetera?

**[00:18:18] RR:** That's a great question, and I don't have a book or a podcast or anything like that. I would just – I'm really proud of the mental health reporting that I do. I'm proud of the work that our Social Good team does at Mashable. I'm proud of the work that all my colleagues do. I think in general, just would like to celebrate some of the really great journalists working in mental health right now. I think the more that we can engage with their work and continue to drive audiences to the stories around mental health, I think it's a good thing because we need more coverage along those lines.

**[00:18:53] BB:** It is. It is. We indeed do. Rebecca, thank you so much for being on here today. This has been fantastic. How fun and how important.

**[00:19:03] RR:** I loved it. Thank you.

**[00:19:04] BB:** Thank you. Thank you for doing the work, going and evolving this topic, I think, which is ever more important and essential for our collective well-being.

**[00:19:14] RR:** Indeed.

**[00:19:16] BB:** Indeed. Thanks, Rebecca. Have a good one and happy summer, by the way.

**[00:19:21] RR:** Yes, and to you.

**[00:19:23] BB:** Thank you. Thank you.

**[00:19:25] RR:** Okay. Take care.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[00:19:28] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, featuring Rebecca Ruiz at Mashable. 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]