

EPISODE 176

[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 guest on today's episode of Coffee with a Journalist is Sarah Burke, Editor-in-Chief of Them. She joined Them in 2021 after serving as editor and special projects editor at Vice. During the episode, Sarah talks about the target audience and focus of stories for them readers. Who to pitch from the publication? Hint; section editors. How to craft compelling subject lines for her and her team? And more. Let's hear from Sarah now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:00] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. We are on episode 161 now with Coffee with a Journalists. Thanks, team, for adding that at the top of the show. Now I know like, "How many of these have we done now?"

We have a fabulous guest today. I'm very excited. Because I'm not as familiar with this outlet. So we're going to learn a lot. We have the Editor-in-Chief of Them, Sarah Burke, with us today.

Sarah, thank you for being here.

[00:01:27] SB: Thank you for having me.

[00:01:28] BB: Yes. And thank you for doing this even though you're a little under the weather and you're doing all the things. But you're still here. Thank you.

[00:01:35] SB: I'm sorry about my raspy, nasally voice.

[00:01:38] BB: You're good. You're good. First off, and I ask this of, now, everyone. I don't care if you're from The New York Times. What does Them encompass? And specifically, how does your coverage or reporting fit into that?

[00:01:51] SB: Sure. Them is a platform for LGBTQ+ people from Condé Nest. And our coverage spans a really pretty wide range of topics. We cover news, politics, culture, entertainment. We also have a section called answer and advice, which is all lifestyle guides centered towards LGBTQ+ people.

[00:02:13] BB: Would you say, Sarah, if you are not in the LGBTQIA community, would it still be relevant or maybe is not as much? Or how would you advise on that?

[00:02:24] SB: Yeah. Absolutely. We have a lot of allies who read the site. And I do think, increasingly, queer culture is mainstream culture. It's really indistinguishable at this point. What distinguishes us is that, when we report the news, we are thinking of LGBTQ+ readers first and foremost. That is our kind of target audience in terms of assuming what people know, that kind of thing. But really, everyone I think could find the content useful, for sure.

[00:02:56] BB: Excellent. Okay. Sarah, how is your inbox?

[00:03:01] SB: Well, it's pride.

[00:03:04] BB: A little hectic right now. Although, we're at the end of pride.

[00:03:07] SB: My inbox tends to be a little chaotic and pride is when it really goes overboard.

[00:03:14] BB: I'm sure. By the way, how do you feel about that? Are you like, "Yes. This is our month." Are you like, "Ugh. Well, it's just this month." I could see both sides of that.

[00:03:25] SB: I think a lot of LGBTQ+ people and especially people who work in queer media or queer creative industries feel pretty ambivalent about it. Pride is a really, really fun and exciting time to celebrate. And it is genuinely a really fun month, right? But also, as someone

who works in the industry, it does get tiring. And at Them, we definitely celebrate pride 365 and we try to encourage everyone to do the same.

[00:03:53] BB: Gotcha. So during this month, it's a little busy in your box. But how is it maybe the rest of the year? In terms of pitches specifically. Because that's what we really want to know about.

[00:04:04] SB: I would say it's generally pretty busy. I am the Editor-in-Chief at the site. So I commission less directly, right? A lot of times, if I'm getting pitches that I like, I'll forward them to my section editors.

[00:04:19] BB: Okay. Yes.

[00:04:20] SB: And I kind of encourage publicists to reach out directly to section editors a lot of the time as well.

[00:04:26] BB: Okay. So this is what we've heard consistently with editors. You're kind of a central command unit where you're able to say, "Oh. Okay. Let me put it to that writer. Let me put it to this beat writer." So in other words, are you a good person to pitch, Sarah, for publicists?

[00:04:43] SB: It can kind of depend on the topic. In general, I prefer for publicists to reach out directly to section editors. And then if my section editor is interested in that topic, they'll flag it to me. For certain LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations, such as Glad, for instance, I like to be on all of their news blasts. But I also love for my section editors to be on their lists as well. So I don't have to be the one kind of forwarding. But I can just assume, "Hey, okay. We both got this. What do we think about covering?" That kind of thing.

[00:05:19] BB: Oh. And how do you feel about pitching multiple people at them? For example – and I know some outlets are very particular about this, where it's like, "Wait a second. You already pitched one reporter. You don't need to pitch three other reporters. And the editor. And the deputy editor. And the –" because you all are talking.

[00:05:37] SB: Right.

[00:05:37] BB: Do you have a thought on that?

[00:05:39] SB: I mean, I would prefer to just loop us all into one pitch. It's not a huge pet peeve of mine or anything. I'm not like mad about it. But I just think it feels more efficient and transparent if we're just all in the same chain.

[00:05:52] BB: Yes. Okay. So pitch in bulk if you got the right relationships. Oh, speaking of relationships, so I always like to ask, for people who don't know you or maybe haven't met you at an event or something like that, how do they go about building a relationship with you? If at all? Some people are like, "I don't want a relationship. It's cool."

[00:06:12] SB: I do sometimes get Coffee with publicists. I tend to not have a huge amount of time to do that kind of thing. But it does feel like a genuine kind of nice request when asked, you know? I do like when people take the time to actually understand what our topic areas of coverage are as opposed to just kind of pitching blindly.

And so, to me, like sitting down and actually understanding our different columns, our different needs as far as pitches, feels genuinely helpful. So I try to do that. Although, again, my schedule is a little bit packed.

But other than that, a nice introductory email, I do try to always meet people at events. That kind of thing. I haven't so far done just like an introductory call with a publicist or an agency. Virtual coffee? Yeah. I mean, depending on how much we would likely actually work together, I could potentially be open to something like that if I had time.

[00:07:13] BB: Okay. So sounds like you're open to a coffee but limited bandwidth, which is everyone. Would you say, Sarah, too in that, let's say, intro email, someone's like, "Oh, I'm going to be rolling through Brooklyn. I'm going to be in New York," or whatever. "Hey, Sarah, would love to meet you to talk about bullet point, bullet point. Like to give you a little primer on things that could be of interest."

[00:07:35] SB: Yes. Absolutely. That's a huge help. And especially, if already that primer shows, "Hey, I've really looked at the site and said I'm really interested in the answers and advice section and wondering how we can work together with our medical experts on your healthcare resource guides." That kind of thing. I'm much more likely to respond to something specific like that.

[00:07:56] BB: Yes. Okay. Good to know.

[BREAK]

[00:08:00] 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 and create your own custom media list in five minutes or less.

Now back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:08:24] BB: Do you have some way you manage the craze of your inbox, Sarah? Are you a let it fly person or are you a ruthless inbox zero?

[00:08:32] SB: I, at one point, was inbox zero.

[00:08:35] BB: I feel everyone was at one point, Sarah, back in the day. There were a few that still remain. There are a few that remain.

[00:08:42] SB: Yeah. I think times have been tough. But I'm always chasing that zero. Always trying to get back to that play. But I usually try to go through my inbox every morning and evening. Because the middle of the day tends to get a little bit crazy. I'll kind of go through – and I will read most releases unless they're just very clearly not meant for the site off the bat from the subject line. Then I will sometimes just archive things without opening them.

[00:09:19] BB: Oh, okay. Oh, you don't want to get to the archive. Got it. You're not a master leader though, it's sounds like?

[00:09:25] SB: No. No. No. I do go through things daily.

[00:09:28] BB: You go back. Okay. This is good. Do subject lines matter to you?

[00:09:32] SB: They do. I mean, I'm not going to judge you necessarily on your subject line as a person. But I will – if it's way off, that's what's going to get me to just kind of not really pay attention to it.

I think one, showing, again, that you actually read the site. That you are familiar with the kinds of coverage that we do. And two, if you're able to hook me almost with an example headline or something like that, or an expert that really falls within our coverage areas, that's really going to help.

[00:10:06] BB: Okay. You're kind of talking about like, okay, when I'm seeing the subject line and it is clear you don't know what the heck is going on here with their outlet. What is an example of, "Oh, you clearly do?" Do you have even an example to share? It's totally fine if you don't. But what in that quick subject line indicates expertise of this is an outlet I clearly know?

[00:10:28] SB: Sure. I mean, I think in terms of talent, for instance, we have a column called One of Them where we just like highlight cool people within our community. And if you're able to identify, "Hey, this is a potential person for a One of Them spotlight," something like that, then I'm going immediately know, "Okay. This person is actually familiar with our columns. And so this might actually be a good fit." Beyond obviously just subject lines that have topics that kind of fall within our areas of interest, of course.

[00:11:01] BB: Now, being an Editor-in-Chief. And reporters, of course, have their own feelings on this. But exclusives embargoes? Do you have a preference?

[00:11:10] SB: I'm totally open to either. We don't kind of tend to hinge our coverage a lot on either of those things. What really matters to us is if our readers are going to care about it.

[00:11:23] **BB:** And then that decides everything. Okay. So no real exclusives or embargoes unless ridiculously fitting, I would say. Okay. This is good.

[00:11:32] **SB:** Yeah. Not against it. But just not really what we're chasing all the time.

[00:11:36] **BB:** Yeah. Got it. Sarah, I have some rapid-fire questions to go through with you. Are you ready?

[00:11:42] **SB:** Yes.

[00:11:43] **BB:** Okay. Phone, video or in-person interview?

[00:11:47] **SB:** Oh, in-person.

[00:11:49] **BB:** In-person. And why is that?

[00:11:52] **SB:** I just love meeting people in-person. I used to work at an Alt Weekly and I did almost all of my interviews in-person. Again, it's not always possible particularly because of scheduling. But I prefer face-to-face.

[00:12:05] **BB:** Okay. Face-to-face. That's good. With the limited time. So make it good. Okay. Bullet points or paragraphs?

[00:12:12] **SB:** Bullet points.

[00:12:13] **BB:** And why is that?

[00:12:14] **SB:** Easier to digest quickly.

[00:12:16] **BB:** Yes. Exactly. What types of sources do you look for? And how do you want them pitched to you if you had to say?

[00:12:24] SB: In terms of via PR, mainly we're pitched kind of medical experts, researchers, experts in the field, that kind of thing. I like them pitched to me mainly in terms of what they can offer as far as a story.

[00:12:42] BB: Or a point of view maybe that's compelling?

[00:12:45] SB: Of course. Exactly. I care about credentials and I care about who they are. Of course, I care about them as a person. But in terms of the subject line, what I'm most interested in is what is the data or what is the story or the op-ed that we're going to create with this person?

[00:13:03] BB: Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[00:13:05] SB: Images attached.

[00:13:06] BB: Oh, and why is that?

[00:13:07] SB: The less that I have to click through or download in order to see, it's helpful.

[00:13:13] BB: Yes. I cannot stand – I do a little contributing dorky stuff. But like, "Oh, here's the link to the thing." But you have to sign up. And what's your – let me get the text message code to like get – and I'm like, "I am done with this. There's too many barriers to get a damn photo."

[00:13:30] SB: Yes. And my downloads folder is actually more wild, I would say, than my inbox.

[00:13:35] BB: Oh, yes I bet it is. Indeed. Ah. Look at that. Okay. Sarah, is there anything you want to promote, mention, highlight, champion? Obviously, your work. But what else?

[00:13:49] SB: Sure. Well, I mean, at Them we just came out earlier this month with our Now Awards Package, which is one of our biggest editorial temples of the year. And it just champions LGBTQ+ changemakers across 12 categories. People who are really influencing and innovating within their industries. So you can read that on the site this month or all year round. Pride 365.

[00:14:14] BB: All year round. It is 364. Oh, I love it, Sarah. Thank you for being on today, Sarah. Happy Pride 365, of course, or four. And hope you get better and feel a little bit better.

[00:14:27] SB: Thank you so much for having me and my froggy voice today.

[00:14:30] BB: You're good. You killed it. Thanks, Sarah. Appreciate you.

[00:14:34] SB: Thank you.

[OUTRO]

[00:14:36] BB: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist. Featuring Sarah Burke at Them. 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]