

EPISODE 188**[INTRODUCTION]**

[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist brought to you by OnePitch. Are you looking for an easier way to reach the right journalists? Head to onepitch.co to sign up for a free account today.

Our guest on the podcast this week is Alexis Morillo from Bustle. As the lifestyle editor, Alexis oversees coverage on food, travel, home, holidays, tech, viral trends, and astrology. She also reports on one-off viral trends as they pop up on TikTok, seasonal moments and gift guides, and bigger picture features about how the latest Internet obsessions came to be.

During the episode, Alexis talks about her and her team's unique approach to covering trending stories, her openness to having a phone discussion with a potential source or story idea, two examples of subject lines that resulted in coverage, and more. Let's dive in.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:12] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, and with us today, another New Yorker. I love our New York journalists. We're getting so many these days, especially when it's coming up for fall. I love fall in New York City. I cannot wait. With us is Alexis Morillo. She is the lifestyle editor at Bustle, one of my favorite outlets. Alexis, welcome with all your fabulousness as we've seen.

[00:01:39] AM: Thanks for having me.

[00:01:41] BB: Yes. Alexis, for those who are maybe not as familiar with Bustle, though, they should be, how would you describe what Bustle covers?

[00:01:49] AM: I'd say that Bustle's main demographic is definitely a Millennial. But I like to say a Gen Z-informed Millennial. They want to know what's trending. They want to know what's happening on the very niche corners of the Internet, on TikTok. But they might be a little bit

embarrassed to text their Gen Z sibling or their Gen Z niece and nephew. So that's why they come to us to inform them what's going on, what's trending, how not to be basic, and just across the board.

[00:02:20] BB: Also as editor, how does the coverage you do differ perhaps from reporters, if at all?

[00:02:29] AM: I'd say that just in general, we're always looking to do trend spotting as much as possible. We want to make sure that our coverage isn't regurgitating information that every outlet is doing as well. So if there is something that's taking off online, we want to unpack the why and really dig in to the trend, rather than just talking about what it is. So I think that that's something that I focus a lot on with my coverage, just sort of deep dives into these random corners of the web.

[00:03:03] BB: Yes. Such as why the internet loves watching celebrities eat chicken.

[00:03:08] AM: Yes, exactly. It's a thing.

[00:03:10] BB: It is, and it's okay. So first off, how did you say, "You know what? I got to do the story."?

[00:03:17] AM: Something that I think is just really great about Bustle is that a lot of it is throwing things at the wall and seeing what sticks. I would say our editorial team across the board is really excited about those somewhat chaotic pitches. We like to sort of –

[00:03:33] BB: Chaotic pitches. Tell us more.

[00:03:36] AM: I think that our litmus test is truly what are we talking about in our group chats. What are we talking about with our friends when we go to happy hour? Not just what are we talking about in the office. We know that all of us are sort of on the same side of the Internet. What questions are our parents asking us?

Just because we know those are questions that we can answer or questions that we have. Other people likely have them too. Hopefully, we can kind of help facilitate those conversations of people figuring out what the heck is going on, especially if they're seeing a bunch of their favorite celebrities eat chicken wings on camera over and over again. Then maybe it's something that we can help them dive into a little bit more.

[00:04:19] BB: Yes, very good point. I never thought of that as like what are the questions your parents are asking. Could that be a source of a story idea? Huh.

[00:04:29] AM: Yes. I think –

[00:04:30] BB: That makes sense, though.

[00:04:31] AM: Yes. I mean, everyone is on their different sides of the Internet or using their phones in different ways. So it's always fun to kind of see what other people see.

[00:04:41] BB: Yes. Okay. How about your inbox? Is it crazy in there?

[00:04:45] AM: Yes. It has been the holiday season since July. So it's definitely been crazy for the second half of the year. I do take pride in my organization with my inbox I will say.

[00:04:57] BB: Tell us more. Very few people say that.

[00:05:00] AM: I know.

[00:05:01] BB: Very few. Let's emphasize very.

[00:05:03] AM: Yes. I mean, I know that it's a two-way street. As much as it's helpful to get the feedback, like I know that it has to happen in real time. If I ever get an invitation to a PR event, I try to let them know that I can't make it.

[00:05:21] BB: That's nice.

[00:05:23] AM: If it's something that maybe we wouldn't cover, doesn't really fall under what Bustle is looking for, I'll try to give that feedback as well because it helps me as much as it helps them, because then I'm not getting the pitches that could maybe be taking over my inbox a little bit too much. So, yes, I do think that like the responsiveness is definitely something that I pride myself on. Obviously, sometimes, it gets a little bit crazy up in there. But I do try my best.

[00:05:52] BB: Okay. That's so generous and rare. I love it. Now, breaking down, though, the ratios of pitches, let's say, in your inbox. Is it mostly publicists? Is it mostly like freelancers? Because you're an editor, and I think one thing we try to do on this show is to demystify what the editor's inbox looks like and what they got to deal with in terms of story allocation and getting back to this freelancer, assigning, literally editing, all those things. How would you describe it?

[00:06:23] AM: I'd say that the pitches from freelancers are definitely way less common than the pitches of story ideas from publicists. I will say that I know how we work at Bustle is we have one lifestyle pitches email. Anything that goes to that inbox goes to everyone on the lifestyle team. So it wouldn't necessarily just be up to me to sift through those, respond back to freelancers, give them feedback on their pitches. We have those emails go out to several members of our editorial team. So that definitely helps when it comes to going through all the pitches from freelancers.

But then, of course, there are the pitches from publicists to get through. But those, I would say, probably 85%, if not more, of my inbox is likely from publicists.

[00:07:15] BB: Oh, wow, wow, wow. Okay. So you had previously said, Alexis, that you are very proud of your inbox management. Perhaps you need to lead like a course on this or whatnot. Do you save all those pitches and then like refer back to them and like use your inbox as your own Google file? Or what do you do to keep those 85% of pitches organized?

[00:07:38] AM: Right. So in the morning is, obviously, when I'm first logging on, going through anything that came in overnight. I will always star something if it's something that maybe I know I can't make it. Maybe I know that it's an event that just is not necessarily up our alley. So I always star those. I kind of keep, I guess, just in my head what I know is highest priority when it

comes to responding. I do try and clear everything that I pin before the weekend. I think it just like helps me clear my conscience and actually be able to log off.

But, yes, I'd say that I do that first kind of sweep through in the morning, going through it. Then it's, obviously, a lot more manageable throughout the day when it comes to like what to respond to. But a lot of times, I do things like the subject line helps me kind of be able to filter things out. Obviously, there are publicists that I already have relationships with. But, yes, like you said, it truly does kind of feel like my own like search engine sometimes.

I always like tell publicists that whenever I'm looking for a source, the first place I'm going to look is my inbox, whether it's an astrologist or a registered dietitian or a relationship expert. The first place I will look is likely my inbox before I try and do any outreach outside of that.

[BREAK]

[00:09:05] 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 RESUMED]

[00:09:30] BB: Okay. Now, you mentioned relationships. How do you like a relationship to be built with you, if at all?

[00:09:37] AM: I think that's definitely such a personal decision for people.

[00:09:41] BB: It is. That's why we ask.

[00:09:43] AM: Yes. I was at Delish before, where I covered all food. So I think I had kind of a pretty big list of publicists that worked for some like big like food and beverage brands. We kind of have like maintained those relationships since they followed me to Bustle. I've followed them for when whatever moves that they've made in their career.

So I do think that an initial reach out, a 15-minute phone call, truly never bugs me. Sometimes, it's just easy to talk through like, "Hey, maybe this like won't be a fit. Or if it is, this is sort of like how we can work that out." I'm always with like a 10-minute, 15-minute Zoom call. I do think sometimes it's just easy to talk things out.

[00:10:29] BB: Yes.

[00:10:30] AM: Admittedly, I do think, and perhaps it's a bit of a pet peeve, but I won't answer Instagram DMs. I have it in my Instagram bio. Please don't pitch me in my DM.

[00:10:42] BB: Yes, yes.

[00:10:43] AM: Still, people do it. I don't like a Twitter DM either.

[00:10:46] BB: This is one of our questions, so yes, yes.

[00:10:48] AM: Yes. I think email is best. I will also sometimes respond to LinkedIn. I'm admittedly not as good at answering those. But I think a 15-minute phone call, reach out to kind of get the baseline and get the relationship started is something that I'm definitely open to.

[00:11:05] BB: Wow, wow, wow, wow. Look at you. Okay. This is so generous, Alexis. That's how I'm feeling about this. Real quick too with LinkedIn, there's so much freaking spam, I feel, on LinkedIn. Do you find that as well? I must get like 12 pings now a day, and it's always some sales bot robot thing, oh, following up. I'm like, "What is this thing?"

[00:11:27] AM: Yes. Or LinkedIn is like telling you to take a course, and I'm like –

[00:11:31] BB: Another course.

[00:11:32] AM: Yes, exactly.

[00:11:33] BB: Another. I'm like, "I don't –" Yes. We don't need to know about AI machinery and manufacturing. Thank you. Oh, okay. Alexis, that's good. Thank you for telling us about the DM preference too and, no, do not do that. But 15-minute calls, you love it. Great. Do you ever, though, go like to your favorite coffee shop in New York or like drinks or anything? You mentioned you respond to events like event intros or invites.

[00:11:57] AM: Yes. It definitely depends on the week. I will say like Q4 is obviously –

[00:12:02] BB: Busy.

[00:12:03] AM: Yes, always very busy. So I think right now, that's definitely slowing down for me. In the summer, I would pop out for a coffee here and there to talk to someone who we already had a bit of a correspondence via email. So I sort of knew that it would be mutually beneficial to chat out how we could help each other. So, yes, that's definitely something that I'm open to as well.

[00:12:25] BB: Okay, very good. You mentioned you had some homework that you brought for us, and you had some pitches you liked and didn't like perhaps. We're going to redact the information, but go ahead. Share, share, share.

[00:12:37] AM: This was just an example of a maintained relationship. Someone recently emailed me. The subject line was, "Hi, Alexis. New role at," insert company. "Let's catch up." So that's someone that I knew they had left their previous job. I had spoken with them about like who are these clients. So it was just a good example of, I think, like reconnecting. I think, otherwise, with a new website at website.com, it might **[inaudible 00:13:03]**. Another example from several months ago, but I do think it is hard when something's trending at the moment, catching the right time. I –

[00:13:14] BB: Yes. It's very difficult.

[00:13:16] AM: That on the publicist's side, it's hard of knowing do we hop on it. Do we wait? But this was related to a raw carrot salad that was going viral on TikTok.

[00:13:25] BB: Oh, God, that thing. Yes.

[00:13:27] AM: Yes. People were preaching the benefits. So I got the subject line on #rawcarrotsaladtalk, TK company's chief medical officer on what you need to know. I thought that was really great framing.

[00:13:41] BB: Yes.

[00:13:42] AM: It was trending. We were looking to write it up, but we also wanted to have a professional give their input. That was, obviously, way easier than googling someone who could speak to something so specific. That actually was from a brand that was unrelated to carrots, unrelated to TikTok, so I thought that was just a really great way in for something that –

[00:14:04] BB: Yes. A little avant-garde too.

[00:14:08] AM: Yes, exactly. Then another fun example was, "You're invited. XOXO, the brand, live the Gossip Girl fantasy with." Then they kind of explained their pitch.

[00:14:22] BB: Yes, I'd like to live the Gossip Girl. Yes, go ahead. Tell me more.

[00:14:24] AM: Yes, exactly. So just from that, I wanted to click on it. Whether they did their research or not, they did a good job because our entertainment team, our fashion team has covered Gossip Girl from like a nostalgia angle. So it's definitely something that was on brand for us. I do think I mentioned before, but knowing that we are getting pitches from someone who has looked at Bustle and knows what we cover.

Of course, BDG has great brands under the parenting portfolios and the tech portfolios. But knowing that we are getting pitches that the publicists know are for the Bustle reader is definitely important. So I thought that was just a great example because we've covered Gossip Girl. Recently, we had a TikTok go viral about it. So I was like the timing could not be more perfect for that.

[00:15:15] BB: Perfect timing. Oh, we do have an audience ask from Maggie Davis from MD Public Relations, and she's asking you specifically, Alexis. What kind of holiday gift guide pitches would stand out to you and why? We're recording this in September, by the way, everybody. I mentioned that the fall is happening, so that should be a big clue. But go ahead.

[00:15:37] AM: This is related to this, and then I will definitely answer that directly. But you think that and I'm sure it can be confusing because I know when you look up journalists, you get just whatever has their name on it that's been updated the most recently. But I have gotten holiday gift guide pitches that were from my previous job because that's everything updated for SEO purposes. I have gotten asked for updates on things that I no longer have access to. So I do think that taking a look at that is very important because sometimes, unfortunately, I can't help updating some of the things that publicists want me to.

But I do think that like if someone has a bunch of clients, I prefer having all of it in one email. Like I said, I use that kind of as my Google search. So this guide in the subject line and then maybe inside the body of that, there's experience gifts, as well as hosting gifts, as well as wellness and beauty gifts. I can kind of use that as my guide, rather than having five different emails of all the different categories from the same person. I think that's very helpful with gift guides.

I also think it's nice and, obviously, this isn't always doable, but if there's something that has a buzzy celebrity component, such-and-such celebrity has used this, that's a great caption to use in a gift guide. So I think something like that.

[00:17:05] BB: Oh, yes. Good point. Drop those celebrity names. Yes.

[00:17:09] AM: Yes, exactly. Name drop.

[00:17:11] BB: Yes. Drop that. Excellent. Okay. That's a great answer. Thank you for asking that, Maggie, from MD Public Relations. We love our audience asks. Alexis, just to round us out for here, we have our little rapid-fire questions. We'd love to hear your hot takes. Are you ready?

[00:17:29] AM: Okay.

[00:17:30] **BB:** Video or phone interview?

[00:17:32] **AM:** Video.

[00:17:33] **BB:** Bullet points or paragraphs?

[00:17:35] **AM:** Bullets.

[00:17:37] **BB:** Okay. Short or long pitches?

[00:17:39] **AM:** Short. Just the who, what, where in short.

[00:17:42] **BB:** The who, what, where. Perfect. Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[00:17:48] **AM:** I like a Dropbox zip file and lifestyle images. I don't just want a vector image. I want someone holding it or drinking it or using it.

[00:17:56] **BB:** There you go, in use with it, interacting. Yes. You already did cover this, but email or Twitter DM? Email, right?

[00:18:05] **AM:** Yes.

[00:18:05] **BB:** Email for life. Great.

[00:18:06] **AM:** Absolutely.

[00:18:07] **BB:** One follow-up or multiple?

[00:18:10] **AM:** One.

[00:18:11] **BB:** One and done. Direct or creative subject lines?

[00:18:15] **AM:** Can I say creatively direct?

[00:18:18] **BB:** Yes. Expand on that, though. What does that mean?

[00:18:22] **AM:** I still want like the who, what, where in the subject line. But I think if you get a little creative with it, it definitely will stand out.

[00:18:31] **BB:** Okay. Press release or media kit?

[00:18:34] **AM:** Media kit.

[00:18:36] **BB:** What time are you normally reading pitches? You touched on it

[00:18:39] **AM:** I would say I spend at least the first 30 minutes of my day going through all of the emails I get overnight. So if you –

[00:18:49] **BB:** Overnight. Interesting.

[00:18:51] **AM:** Yes, I know.

[00:18:52] **BB:** Fascinating.

[00:18:53] **AM:** So I'd say 9am and 3pm are probably my big inbox sweeps.

[00:18:59] **BB:** Okay. Oh, you have a time frame. This is why your inbox, you need to lead the course, Alexis. Okay. Then lastly, sources you love.

[00:19:08] **AM:** What exactly do you mean by that?

[00:19:10] **BB:** Like you're like, "Yes, I love dietitians. Yes, nurses in emerging markets." I don't know.

[00:19:16] **AM:** Yes. Okay. I love a registered dietitian.

[00:19:19] **BB:** Okay.

[00:19:20] **AM:** I love an astrologist, a manifestation coach.

[00:19:23] **BB:** Oh, a manifestation coach.

[00:19:27] **AM:** Yes.

[00:19:27] **BB:** Is that the new title for life coaches? We just now upgraded it to manifestation coach.

[00:19:32] **AM:** Honestly, maybe it is and maybe I need to write that story.

[00:19:37] **BB:** Yes. Because life coach, that's boring, right? Boring.

[00:19:42] **AM:** Yes.

[00:19:43] **BB:** I love it. Okay. Alexis, is there anything you want to promote, highlight, tout, anything?

[00:19:50] **AM:** I would just say I have a lot of fun stories coming down the pipeline. We are [inaudible 00:19:55] about what's happening on TikTok and why. I probably have the answer to it. I am always open to an email reach out. Never Twitter. Never Instagram.

[00:20:07] **BB:** Never.

[00:20:08] **AM:** But you can find all of my work at alexismorillo.com for anything coming up. You can always follow my work on the Bustle website as well.

[00:20:19] **BB:** That's right. Alexis, thank you so much for doing this and being here today. This was so fun, and I love that you're an inbox champion.

[00:20:30] AM: Thank you so much.

[00:20:30] BB: My God.

[00:20:32] AM: I need to put that in my LinkedIn now.

[00:20:34] BB: You should. You should. Like hit me up for workshops on inbox management, fellow reporter. I got you. I got you. Oh, I love it. Thank you so much, Alexis. Happy fall in New York. I love it.

[00:20:47] AM: I hope you'll be able to enjoy the weather soon.

[00:20:49] BB: Oh, I will. I'm coming back. You know it. I'll hit you up. There you go but only via email. There you go. There you go.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:20:58] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, featuring Alexis Morillo from Bustle. 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]