

EPISODE 191

[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 pitch the right journalists? Head to our website at onepitch.co to sign up for a free account today.

Our guest today on Coffee with a Journalist is Hannah Orenstein from Bustle. As the deputy editor, Hannah leads coverage on a wide range of subjects, including dating, relationships, sex, fitness, mental health, self-care, food, home, travel, viral culture, technology, astrology, and lots more. During the episode, Hannah explains why she never deletes emails, what it's like fielding pitches from writers, her recommendation for outlining your pitch, and more. Let's dive in.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:06] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. We built OnePitch because we want publicists to have better relationships with journalists, and we can all get along in our fantasy world, as we've created so. We're here again for another edition of fabulous chats with journalists.

Today with us particularly is the Deputy Editor of Lifestyle and Wellness. Oh, we can talk about so much today, but we won't be here for hours, I hope, of Bustle. Hannah Orenstein is with us here. Actually, Hannah, you're in New York with me. I mean, not next to me, but we're both on the same island.

[00:01:44] HO: On the same island, yes. Thank you so much for having me.

[00:01:47] BB: Yes. We're excited to get into it. Okay, Hannah. Now, when we've had editors on, we like to get into how editors' inboxes are, as opposed to sometimes reporters or journalists because it is different at times. How would you describe, first, your inbox?

[00:02:05] HO: Bottomless, endless, overwhelming.

[00:02:08] BB: Okay. These are common phrases. Yes. Then how do you organize it?

[00:02:13] HO: So it's a tricky balance, right? Because every once in a while, there is an email that is a gem, and I'm so glad that it got me. Even if it's from like a publicist that I haven't worked with already or somebody that I don't know, it's great to always have that gem. But just practically speaking, I get several emails per minute. So it's just a flood. So I do have a folder for pitches from writers, from freelancers that I have worked with. I check that regularly and try to keep that clear. But the rest of my inbox, to be totally honest, is just like a bottomless pit. So I do —

[00:02:48] BB: Wow, wow. Yes.

[00:02:49] HO: For somebody to follow up, if I haven't gotten back to them like within a reasonable time frame, if it's truly relevant because I get a lot of people who follow up for quite frankly products or people or whatever that just don't fit Bustle's demo, whatsoever. So that's just my one note to publicists.

[00:03:08] BB: Good tidbit there. Now, as editor, though, are you getting pitches from freelancers and just writers as well in that whole bottomless pit you're talking about?

[00:03:17] HO: Yes. I get both.

[00:03:18] BB: Yes. Okay. So organizationally, you mentioned you kind of have the folder for, all right, pitches I want to follow up with. Do you do some mass deleting and cleansing, how wellness appropriate? I don't know. How do you manage the pit if there is any management?

[00:03:34] HO: I actually never delete anything, and the reason why, even if something — a writer isn't pitching the right story at the right time or a publicist. We don't have a place for their clients at the current moment. I always keep it on file because couple months down the road, years down the road, sometimes the perfect opportunity comes up. I think about it, and I'm able to search my inbox and find that person and get back to them. So I keep everything.

[00:03:58] **BB:** You just mentioned years.

[00:04:00] **HO:** Yes.

[00:04:00] **BB:** What's the oldest pitch you responded to?

[00:04:03] **HO:** Oh, my God. Probably like two years.

[00:04:05] **BB:** Oh, wow. Did the publicist respond?

[00:04:08] **HO:** Yes, yes. [inaudible 00:04:09] they've moved on, or the company is no longer in existence or whatever. But, no, I mean, so I spent many years as the Dating Editor at Elite Daily.

[00:04:18] **BB:** You were. Yes. We could talk about that for a long time. I'm sure. Wow.

[00:04:22] **HO:** Yes. I was covering dating and relationships and sex. So we would get pitched a lot of experts like therapists, sex therapists, couples therapists, psychologists, dating coaches, matchmakers, and so on. So I remembered once that somebody who had the perfect credentials was in my inbox, and I just needed to search and find who they were.

[00:04:40] **BB:** God. Now, what about – okay, we have to talk about this. We have to talk about this because it's not every day we have someone on here who is a multi-time writer, author of a lot of fabulous, looks like romance novels, of course. What could you tell us about this?

[00:04:55] **HO:** Oh. Well, thank you. Yes.

[00:04:56] **BB:** Yes. *Meant to Be Mine*, I have read this. I have read this. Yes.

[00:05:00] **HO:** Thank you.

[00:05:01] **BB:** Yes. Tell us more.

[00:05:03] HO: Yes. So I always wanted to work in magazines, but I had a little detour before I got here, and I wound up working as a matchmaker for a dating service when I was 21.

[00:05:11] BB: Oh, how fun.

[00:05:12] HO: I was terrible.

[00:05:14] BB: Oh.

[00:05:17] HO: I was –

[00:05:17] BB: Wait, wait. How are you terrible? Because you didn't get matches? What happened?

[00:05:21] HO: My clients were in their 30s and 40s, and they all really wanted to get married. They had their lives **[inaudible 00:05:26]**, money to spend in a matchmaker. I was college kid flailing around on Tinder, and I had absolutely no idea how to help them. They knew it, too. So it just wasn't a great match, me and the job. But I left that, and I had some wild experiences and met some really fascinating people. So that inspired my first novel, *Playing with Matches*. Ever since then, I've been writing romcoms.

[00:05:48] BB: How fun. Okay. How does the inspiration hit you for a book that you want to do? Is it lived experience? Is it you're just on the subway? You think, "You know what I should do?" Like give us the vibes.

[00:05:59] HO: Often, the career comes first. I am just interested in different careers, and matchmaking certainly is its own world. So since then, every book, I've tried to dive into a different professional world. So my second book, I was exploring the world of Instagram influencers and gymnasts. So my third book explores the life of elite gymnasts. Fourth, it's not about this, but the character is a fashion stylist, just because I thought it'd be interesting to see that world.

But there's also a political campaign in the background. So I got to learn a lot about politics well. But that book is – it's meant to be mine, what you read, which is about a woman who knows the exact day that she's going to meet the love of her life. Thanks to a prophecy from her very eccentric fabulous grandmother. So that was really inspired by my relationship with my own grandparents. They weren't psychic but just to have that special relationship with a grandparent as an adult was what –

[00:06:52] BB: Wow. Oh, I am loving this. We have not had a editor or any reporter, frankly, anyone in media who's also a romance novel writer. So, my goodness, you get the trophy for this. This is great. Okay, back to the inbox. Now, I know you came with a couple of pitches that you want to share. Do you have some that you absolutely love that you would like to offer or paraphrase?

[00:07:16] HO: Yes. I mean, I brought a couple. I would say – should I just go through them?

[00:07:21] BB: Yes, yes. We love the real examples.

[00:07:23] HO: Okay, great. So I have four examples.

[00:07:26] BB: Four. Look how prepared you are. Yay. Go ahead.

[00:07:29] HO: Thank you. First, all caps, it says, "PITCH:," and then in regular text, "The sanctity of the morning debrief, TM." That intrigued me because I wanted to know what that was.

[00:07:41] BB: Yes. Well, me too. Now, I want to know.

[00:07:43] HO: Yes. I opened it and I really appreciated how the writer started the email. She introduced herself. She said where she lives, where she's written before, her website. She says, "We've connected in the past, but sending you my website if you want a deep dive." I appreciated that because, to be frank, I don't recall where we connected in the first place. But it's nice that she's established that we do have this connection, and she's also given me sort of like a sneaky out because I get to look at her portfolio and refresh my memory.

[00:08:10] **BB**: Yes, very good. Excellent job, publicist. Okay.

[00:08:13] **HO**: This is from a freelance writer, actually.

[00:08:14] **BB**: Yes. Okay. That one freelance. Yes.

[00:08:16] **HO**: Yes.

[00:08:17] **BB**: We're all pitching something. So, yes, ma'am.

[00:08:19] **HO**: Yes. These are all from freelance writers, but I think there's a lot in here –

[00:08:21] **BB**: Oh, okay. We can all learn.

[00:08:24] **HO**: Well. So the head, she spells out exactly what she wants the headline to be, which is the subject, the sanctity of the morning debrief. Then she actually explains what it is, which is that moment, especially when you're in college or your early 20s, where you connect with all of your friends the morning after a big party, and you talk about all the drama and gossip that's gone on. You're at a diner, and there's omelets and coffee and drama and gossip and like the stories. Like, "Oh my God. Can you believe that so-and-so did what?"

So I left that because, number one, it's a great concept for Bustle. She talks about how this practice changes throughout your 20s. Friendship is something **[inaudible 00:08:59]**. What's special about this is that the way that she describes the concept is so lyrically written. It's almost poetic. So I got a taste of her writing, and I got a sense of, oh, like I can put together some really beautiful sentences. So I thought that was just perfectly done, and I commissioned the piece. This, honestly, doesn't happen that often. But the headline on the site is almost identical to what she pitched it with.

[00:09:23] **BB**: Oh, that's great. By the way, do you recommend that as a pitch strategy? Pitch the actual headline, whether you're a freelance writer or a publicist.

[00:09:33] **HO**: A hundred percent.

[00:09:34] BB: A hundred percent. That's good.

[00:09:35] HO: Yes. Because just two things. Number one, it makes it really easy for me to understand what you're talking about, and it gives me sort of like a shortcut of like, okay, do you understand sort of like what headlines look like on our site and what a story should look like. But, also, it helps ensure that publicists or the writer are on the same page about how this is going to be framed or what we really want to highlight with this.

[00:09:59] BB: Then you know what else? It's the efficiency of I don't need to tell you in a dang sentence. I know what you write about. I like that you're writing it. No, no, no. You can clearly see that because I'm writing the headline that showcases my knowledge.

[00:10:09] HO: Yes. I will always go above and beyond with the writers that I work with. I mean, I hope. I always try to. But I want them to also be committed to giving exactly what I need for a story. So they've already had that thoughtful moment of like, okay, let's sit down and find a great headline. That's just another sign to me that there's somebody who's probably going to be easy to work with.

[00:10:30] BB: Yes. Oh, a sign of how you – oh, that's also sneaky tidbit there.

[BREAK]

[00:10:37] 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]

[00:11:00] BB: Okay. So, Hannah, you also have a pitch from a publicist you'd like to share, a positive one.

[00:11:06] HO: Yes.

[00:11:07] BB: Let's hear it.

[00:11:07] HO: So one of the subjects I cover often are dating apps, and I do have existing relationships with the publicists at a lot of these apps, just from working together over the years. But one story sort of came about in an interesting way, and it's not what the publicist necessarily pitched. But it sparked the idea for the story, and then I was able to circle back to the press release and, ultimately, use the information in the press release and credit Hinge. It was Hinge, the dating app.

So they sent me a study that they had done about their users and about changing attitudes around vulnerability and mental health and just being really open and honest with people on dates from the start, which can be challenging for a lot of people. But they concluded that daters said that vulnerability is one of the hottest traits a person can have.

[00:11:55] BB: Yes.

[00:11:57] HO: I thought that was really cool.

[00:11:58] BB: That is.

[00:11:59] HO: A couple weeks later, I was having a conversation with some co-workers, and it sparked this idea, and we just had this image of a headline that was it's hot when men go to therapy.

[00:12:10] BB: Yes. There you go.

[00:12:12] HO: This was before all the Jonah Hill stuff, but we just thought know mental health is something we should all be taking care of, and men often don't. So what I do is **[inaudible 00:12:24]**.

[00:12:25] BB: Is this the same article that's titled here, Is Therapy Actually Helping Your Boyfriend? Or that's a different piece?

[00:12:30] HO: That's a different piece.

[00:12:31] BB: That's a different piece, but therapy's the topic. Okay. I like it.

[00:12:34] HO: Yes, something we do like to cover, just a note for anybody listening. But I found a writer for the piece, and she was able to include the data from Hinge. That's really what sparked the story, and I wouldn't have necessarily assigned that story or published that story without the Hinge data because I needed something concrete to pin it to. It can't just be a couple editors in a room saying like, "Oh, that is hot." There needs to be this world of concrete data.

[00:13:01] BB: Oh. Now, I want to double-click on that because so often, publicist here, we're like, "Oh, we got this data report. We have it from our client," or whatever. But if you don't contextualize it, it's kind of like who cares. Like how does it fit into the world? So from a pitch perspective, in your opinion, is it like, "Hey, here's this data that is really interesting that my company gathered," for instance. "By the way, here is some qualitative stories or murmurings or something else to tie it to." Do you want to see that in a pitch?

[00:13:34] HO: If there's any data, absolutely.

[00:13:37] BB: Okay. Yes.

[00:13:38] HO: I will say I would so much rather be pitched data than a person. I understand **[inaudible 00:13:42]** pitch people as experts, as sources. But truthfully, it's not always the most helpful thing for me. So what I would do is lead with the data or lead with whatever the concrete thing you have is and then say, "If you'd like somebody to speak to this topic, so-and-so is available for it, there are a couple subjects this person can cover." Yes. It frames the story in a different way, and I think it makes it more likely that what you pitch is going to end up on the site because **[inaudible 00:14:13]** an editor rather than thinking like a publicist.

[00:14:16] **BB**: Very good. Oh, Hannah. I love your preparation for this lovely pod we're doing with your actual pitches. We're learning more you wanted to share.

[00:14:24] **HO**: Yes. I mean, I can just shout out a couple really quick things from various –

[00:14:27] **BB**: Please.

[00:14:28] **HO**: These are all from –

[00:14:29] **BB**: I love this.

[00:14:30] **HO**: That ultimately wound up being stories that I commissioned.

[00:14:33] **BB**: Okay. Tell us. Tell us.

[00:14:34] **HO**: Another one, same strategy as the last one or the other one, pitch in all caps, “ENTER THE LAVISH WORLD OF TUTOR COSPLAY ON TIKTOK.” These are people who do these really elaborate costumes like **[inaudible 00:14:45]**. It's so weird and so niche. It's so cool.

[00:14:50] **BB**: Yes, it is.

[00:14:53] **HO**: What I loved about the pitch, number one, the head is really fun, like it's **[inaudible 00:14:56]**. There's a lot of like color **[inaudible 00:14:58]**. I'm instantly intrigued. World, I think, is always a great word to use because like that shows that there's a community. It's a subculture. Like all those are great things for a site like Bustle. The pitch itself is written almost like the first couple paragraphs of the story. So it has a ton of information and has links. She mentions which people specifically she wants to interview, the timeliness of it. She gives it a timely hook and explains why the story is relevant now. Then she also gives just a hint of her own analysis about why, like what this means for our culture today.

I mean, that contains everything. I know everything that I need to know about the story in just a couple very short paragraphs. So I really liked that.

[00:15:41] BB: Great job all these publicists, doing the good pitches out there.

[00:15:44] HO: But this is another freelance writer, I will say.

[00:15:46] BB: Oh, that's another freelance writer. Okay. But the freelancers, you're killing it, too.

[00:15:50] HO: But two strategies that I think publicists can borrow to other pitches. One, the person wrote the name of another website and said, "Reconnect/travel pitches." I said, "Oh, reconnect. Okay, I'm going to open this because it's from somebody I know." Again, to be honest, like I have no idea who this person is. But I opened it because they made me think that I knew who they were. I don't think you should lie. I think you should only use this if we truly did meet. Then you can say, "Oh, we met at such and such event in September," or whatever.

But the pitch that she had was ultimately great, so that – actually, let me rephrase. It was not the right pitch, but she said, "What are you looking for?" Then I gave her a couple guidelines, and then she followed up with something that was really great.

[00:16:32] BB: Oh, there you go. Way to turn that around. You know what I've also – just as an aside, I so appreciate this at live events, and I'm sure this happens for you, Hannah, like all the time. When someone comes up to you, and you're having this moment, I don't know if this happens to you, where you're going like, "I don't know who this person." But this person knows you, like they're approaching you. But just the gesture of, "Oh, Hannah. Hey, it's Andrea from Chief." It's like, "Oh, my gosh."

This friend of mine, old friend of mine, did exactly that to me in a hotel lobby. I was like, "Thank you for telling me the context and your name." Now, we don't have this awkward moment of like, "Oh, but I forgot your name for –" Oh, it was just so good, so way to go, freelancers, if you put that. Put your one line in or publicists. "Hey, we met at a dinner two years ago pre-COVID," whatever. Oh, so good.

[00:17:19] HO: Yes. Even if it's two years ago, go for it.

[00:17:21] BB: Yes. Go for it. Get the context. Yes. We've all – yes. Okay, Hannah. I know we've been chatting for a while. How do you feel about exclusives or embargos?

[00:17:31] HO: I like them. Yes.

[00:17:32] BB: You like them. You like them both.

[00:17:34] HO: Yes.

[00:17:35] BB: You want them.

[00:17:36] HO: I do. I have been – there was one time where I was talking to a publicist for a certain celebrity, and she said, “Celebrity has some personal news that they want to reveal on social media soon, but we would love to partner with a site to tell the story first in a really beautiful way sort of long-form.” It was a great story. It was unique. It was interesting. It was something that I'd never seen before. The celebrity was perfect, and I was really excited. But they were doing the same thing to tons of different publications at the same time. Ultimately, they want somebody else, instead of us.

I understand. Of course, you have to do that. You have to do what's best for your client. But if you're going to say exclusive, at least give whatever brand you're pitching some opportunity to actually get the exclusive deal.

[00:18:18] BB: Do you have any rules you'd like to impart about exclusives for publicists, just because everyone has, I think, some different ideas of what a real exclusive is?

[00:18:29] HO: I mean, we want to be the first. I don't –

[00:18:31] BB: And the only.

[00:18:32] HO: Yes. I mean, and the only. But, I mean, I honestly don't care so much who comes after us, as long as ours is better and ours is first.

[00:18:40] BB: There you go. Then we're good. Note to publicist, note to publicist. Okay, Hannah. I have a quick-fire list of questions for you to quickly give your answers on, and we can take it from here. First, video or phone interview?

[00:18:54] HO: Phone.

[00:18:55] BB: Old school phone. Is there a reason for that?

[00:18:59] HO: I really like the opportunity to just like have my questions in front of me and be taking notes and to be – I can make a weird face, and I just get to do my own thing, and there isn't that of sort of like awkward eye contact with somebody that you don't know.

[00:19:11] BB: Yes. Bullet points or paragraphs in pitches?

[00:19:15] HO: Bullet points for data, paragraphs for anything more substantial than that.

[00:19:20] BB: Long or short pitches/how would you define either?

[00:19:24] HO: I want three short paragraphs.

[00:19:26] BB: Three. Oh, you are precise. Okay. Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[00:19:33] HO: I think either is fine. Images attached is maybe a little bit easier, but I think either is fine.

[00:19:38] BB: Okay. Twitter/X DM or email?

[00:19:41] HO: Oh, always the email. Any platform do not DM me. I don't want to hear it. That's –

[00:19:45] BB: I guess, yes. Yes. You should collectively decide on that, please.

[00:19:49] HO: Yes. It's going to get lost. I'm not going to see it. If I do see it, it's like a Sunday night. I'm not going to remember this on Monday morning.

[00:19:55] BB: That's right.

[00:19:56] HO: So it's going to get lost, and it's annoying, to be frank.

[00:19:59] BB: Okay. We're not doing that. Press release or media kit?

[00:20:02] HO: Either.

[00:20:02] BB: Creative or direct subject lines?

[00:20:05] HO: Creative.

[00:20:06] BB: One follow-up or multiple? You alluded to this before because your inbox is shenanigans but –

[00:20:12] HO: Just one follow-up.

[00:20:13] BB: One.

[00:20:14] HO: And I'm going to say like be really judicious with your follow-ups. If you really don't think you're the strongest possible fit, like don't follow up because we passed for a reason. We wish we could get back to every single person, but we can't.

[00:20:25] BB: Okay. What time, if there is one, that you usually read pitches?

[00:20:31] HO: Usually morning like 9:00 to 10:00 or 5:00 to 6:00. Like sort of the middle of the day, it's hard to keep on top of everything because I'm editing, but morning and end of day.

[00:20:40] BB: Okay. Any last words, shout-outs, things we can do to support you, Hannah, besides buy all your books?

[00:20:48] HO: Thank you. No, that's it. Please, buy my books.

[00:20:51] BB: And click the site and check it out.

[00:20:53] HO: Yes. And go to Bustle. We're doing a lot of fun stuff right now and some about therapy and other topics we discussed today. So, yes, thank you so much for having me.

[00:21:01] BB: Thank you, Hannah. Excellent fun time.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:21:05] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, featuring Hannah Orenstein 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]