

**EPISODE 194**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:10] 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 start your free 14-day trial. Our guest on today's episode of Coffee With a Journalist is Ian Kumamoto who is a contributor for HuffPost. As a contributing writer, Ian writes for the voices section about the lives and identities of queer and trans people. He's also a writer for Into Magazine where he writes a monthly column about queer wellness called Into It / Not Into It.

During the episode, Ian discusses the importance of planning stories at the beginning of each week and month. Why he loves receiving event invites. The importance of playing the long game and building a relationship and more. Let's Dive in.

[INTERVIEW]

**[0:01:04] BB:** Welcome, everyone. My name is Beck Bamberger. And this is Coffee With a Journalist. And we learn a lot of things here from real-life journalists about their inboxes, and what they like about publicists and what they maybe don't like about publicists, to be frank. But that's why we're here to make sure we're all making better relationships with our publicists and journalist friends.

With us today is a contributing writer from HuffPost. He also writes for a handful of other media outlets. We'll get into it. We have Ian Kumamoto. Ian, I'm going to keep rolling with this because I'm going to keep butchering this. But Ian Kumamoto is with us today.

**[0:01:38] IK:** Yes.

**[0:01:39] BB:** There we go. We got it. We got it. Ian, thank you for being here. Just to let everybody else know, yes, we mentioned HuffPost. But you have other outlets such as VICE, Chaos+Comrades, Mic. Do you want to tell us a little bit more about other outlets you write for?

**[0:01:54] IK:** Yeah. Sure. I focus a lot on identity specifically. For HuffPost, I specifically write for their voices section. Across different media platforms like VICE, THEM, Into. Sometimes, once in a while, CNN. I always focus everything I write on identity. Even if I'm writing about topics that are about a restaurant or about harder-hitting news, it's always often has like an identity angle to it. That's what I like to focus on. And that's what my passion is and what I write about.

**[0:02:26] BB:** And I would say your scope to what you just mentioned is wide. You have a piece here on Mariah Carey that you just did. But then you have a fentanyl crisis investigative type of piece. It is wide-ranging. But yes, in the lens of queer, trans people and anything that has to do with identity, which is very encompassing.

Yeah. How is your inbox?

**[0:02:47] IK:** Oh, it's really embarrassing.

**[0:02:49] BB:** Okay. Okay. Tell us more.

**[0:02:52] IK:** Right now, I literally – and this is also my fault. But looking at my inbox, I have 39,000.

**[0:02:58] BB:** No. Oh, God. You're a let-it-roll person. Wow. That's okay. There's many of those people. It's okay.

**[0:03:06] IK:** Yeah. It's probably something I should get checked out. But I would say like per day I probably get around between 20 and 30 PR emails. And I definitely mostly just open the ones that just like pop out at me when I look at the subject line. That's probably why I have a lot of unread emails.

**[0:03:26] BB:** Okay. And so, it sounds like you just let it roll? You're good. Just let it roll?

**[0:03:32] IK:** Yup. Just chaos.

**[0:03:35] BB:** Yeah, chaos. Chaos. Okay. Okay. Is there a point in which you search then the chaos for something where you're like, "Oh." Like, "God, one of our –" I don't know. Anything like that?

**[0:03:48] IK:** Yes. Usually at the beginning of the week or towards the beginning of the month when I'm really starting to pitch things to my editors, that's when I really go back and try to scan through things that maybe I missed. And that's sort of when I sparse things out. Maybe archive some things or like put things in certain folders. But I would say at the top of the week or beginning of the month that's usually when I'll pay a little bit more attention to PR pitches. Because I'm usually more open to all sorts of stories during those times.

**[0:04:20] BB:** Okay. And for you to go and look at many of those emails that come to you and go, "Oh, I definitely want to not only open this, but I'll respond to it." What are some of the elements that catch your eye?

**[0:04:33] IK:** Yes.

**[0:04:34] BB:** Let's get into that.

**[0:04:36] IK:** Aha. Something that really, really works for me and makes me have more of a sense of urgency is when there's like a big all caps invite in the subject line. Because I'm someone who loves to go to events. Loves to just like get out of my house and just go to different things that are going on.

For me, I get so stuck in the house and in an office of just staring at a computer all day. If I see that there's like an event associated with whatever is happening, I'm more inclined to just like click on it, first of all, because I want to see where it is and what time. And also, because love just like leaving my house.

**[0:05:15] BB:** Got it. Oh, this is so good to know. He wants to be invited.

**[0:05:19] IK:** I love to be invited. I love to go places. I would say if something has an invite, to me it feels more urgent. Because, obviously, invites for events, it's not just going to be like whenever I decide to read it. Because whatever the event is might already have –

**[0:05:33] BB:** Yeah, might already pass. Yeah, exactly. There's built-in urgency.

**[0:05:37] IK:** Yeah. There's built-in urgency. I would say that is like every time I see invite in all caps, I always click on those emails.

**[0:05:45] BB:** Mm-hmm. Okay. That's a good little insight. We like that. What about the structure of the actual pitches? Is there anything that allures you where you're like, "Hmm. I really like how that's worded."

**[0:05:55] IK:** Yeah. I think definitely because I can definitely tell when someone has read my stuff because they'll always try to work in an identity angle to it. For example, if it's something that – if there's like a new store that's opening or whatever and they don't mention that the owner is like queer, or POC, or like a woman, or just things that has an identity that is marginalized and they're just like, "Oh, new store opening." To me, that kind of also like tells me that like they just kind of are reaching out to like all the writers they can.

Versus like if someone says, for example, there was a recent like tequila brand that reached out to me and they open in the email of just saying how this tequila has been in this family for generations and just how important it is for them to keep local tequila producers, especially with a lot of American and other people from other countries kind of coming into Mexico and producing tequila. Just how that really resonates – that kind of stuff really resonates with me and it makes me understand that, okay, this person actually knows what would be interesting to me based on what I've written. And so, to me that is always – leading with that always – I feel like my time is being used well and I'm more inclined to like want to respond even if. I can't do a story at that moment I'm more inclined to be like thank you. I definitely keep this in mind.

**[0:07:24] BB:** Yeah. You paid attention. You know what I'm up to. And one thing with you is you're consistent across all your outlets.

**[0:07:32] IK:** I try to be. Yeah.

**[0:07:33] BB:** Yeah. It has to be in theme of identity. That's nice. Versus a freelancer who's wide-ranging. Because then you're like, "Well, does it fit for that or this? Or whatever it is." Yeah. Okay. What about exclusives or embargos for you? Do you ever get exclusives or embargo pitches? And what do you do with those?

**[0:07:49] IK:** Yeah. I used to do actually write some stuff about immigration and just environmental justice stuff for VICE. I would get embargoed stuff. But it was more so on the politics side. Sometimes I do get it for like products. And usually, I don't mind them. I totally understand that there's a certain time that people want things released. Yeah, I actually don't mind getting those emails at all.

**[0:08:15] BB:** Okay. What do you then do with those?

**[0:08:19] IK:** Usually, if it's something that is really could be interesting for audience, I'll just talk about it with my editor and then decide from there if it's something that we want to write about. But yeah, I usually bookmark those if it's something that's interesting or seems like something I want to write about. But I always have to run it through editors first.

**[0:08:40] BB:** Always. Always with that. By the way, how much time does that normally take you? And I ask that particularly. Because if you're just pitching a regular reporter, they talk to their editor maybe in the day or whatever the pitch meeting is. For you, it's maybe a bit removed. You got to go to your various editors and so forth. What would you say?

**[0:08:58] IK:** Yeah. Because I have a contract with HuffPost and I have a really good relationship with my editor there, usually I'll pitch things to her first. And that's pretty easy. Because I can email her at any time of day. Maybe she could take a couple hours to respond. But usually, it is towards the beginning of the month that I usually try to send most of my pitches. Because then we have like a workflow throughout the month of like what articles are due when.

But usually, if it's something urgent or it's something like really timely that would be a really good fit, I just email her. If it's not a fit for HuffPost and I'm really passionate about the story, I'll start

pitching it to other editors. And usually, that could take like two to three days for them to get back. I would say like I go through that process of HuffPost is always like the first place I pitch a story I really want to do and then I go from there.

**[0:09:54] BB:** Mm-hmm. Okay. Good to know for people, I think, that are doing the pitching of the story.

[BREAK]

**[0:10:00] 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](https://onepitch.co) and create your own custom media list in five minutes or less. Now back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

**[0:10:23] BB:** Okay. Do you have any pet peeves from publicists? And shall we talk about them?

**[0:10:29] IK:** I have a couple. And I think one of them was more like maybe less about them being in PR and more about like a respect thing. But there was a person who invited or who sent an invite. Because I love my invites.

**[0:10:42] BB:** Yes. Yes.

**[0:10:43] IK:** Yeah. I got an invite to go to a restaurant and they were like come and try this food or this new dish. And I was really excited about it. And it was actually like the week of my birthday. I took the whole day off and I was like – it was something I was looking forward to because I would have loved to write about them too because it was a Caribbean-owned restaurant. And I went there and I told them the person at the front desk of like okay, I'm here from this email. And he had no clue what I was talking about. And he was like, "Oh, please. Can you wait at the bar?" And I waited at the bar for like 20, 25 minutes and I kept asking like the staff if they knew if there was someone that was expecting writers. And no one knew.

[0:11:27] **BB**: Oh, no.

[0:11:29] **IK**: Honestly, I'm sure like the place looked great.

[0:11:31] **BB**: Well, let me ask you though. Let me ask you. Did you have the publicist's contact information? Their cellphones? Were you able to text them, "Hey, what's going on?" Or were you just totally abandoned?

[0:11:42] **IK**: Yeah, I had their email. I emailed the email address that sent me the invite and then I didn't get a respond from them. But then the next week they invited me to something else and I was like, "This just seems – I don't understand what's going on. But I am not going to anything this person invites me to." And that's just a professionalism thing. I don't think it has anything particularly to do with PR. But it was just one of those things where like people not making sure that people are being taken care of.

[0:12:12] **BB**: Yeah. Well, even more so, when it's you who invited me and you – in this situation, just curious further, because I think there's learnings in here. There was no, "Hey, how did it go, Ian, last night?" Or there wasn't any follow-up. You just suddenly got the next invite. It's like, "Oh, no."

[0:12:30] **IK**: Yeah, exactly. Aha. That's just like a carelessness thing. Yeah. Probably wasn't keeping track. Maybe they don't have a system of keeping track of things.

[0:12:41] **BB**: But not you're problem. Yeah.

[0:12:43] **IK**: Yeah. And then I have another one.

[0:12:45] **BB**: Oh. Okay. Let's keep going.

[0:12:48] **IK**: Just one more that I – and it might be like controversial. And I could see different sides to this. But for me, it's – when someone offers me to send me a product and I wouldn't consider writing about it, I just don't tell them. I don't ask them to send it, right? Because to me

it's like I don't want to waste their time. I wouldn't ask them to send me a product. But there's times when I have genuinely been interested in potentially considering if like to write about a product or a brand and they offer me samples and I say yes. And then before they send it, they ask me, "Oh, just like before we send, could we like know like –"

**[0:13:32] BB:** If you were going to write about it.

**[0:13:32] IK:** Right. Or being kind of stingy with like I might send it, but I might not. Because to me, immediately I'm like, "Well, if I like it and it's a good product, I promise I'll write about it." But I'm also going to like – I also can't tell you right now that I'm 100% going to write about it. And I think to me that like when someone starts like asking me those types of questions I actually like don't even send it. Because now I feel like I'm going to have this like pressure to – I just don't feel like it's an organic relationship.

And for me it should feel the best relationships I have with PR are the ones that feel organic. The ones where I'm like, "Okay, maybe I don't love this product, but another product from this brand I actually really love." And I'm always going to keep it in mind for gift guides. To me, it's kind of like a mutual respect thing of like I'm not going to waste your time. But also, I work for this publication. I don't work for the brand you're working for.

**[0:14:31] BB:** That's right. We have different alliances.

**[0:14:33] IK:** Right. Right. Right. Right. Aha.

**[0:14:35] BB:** Ian, we heard that you like to get invited to things. That's noted. And you are based in Brooklyn. If you're in New York City, we know where to find you. How else can people make relationships with you?

**[0:14:46] IK:** Yeah. I just love meeting people in person.

**[0:14:49] BB:** Me too. In-person's the best.



**[0:14:51] IK:** Yeah. Totally. And also, if someone is like, "Oh, can we hop on a call?" Someone did that a couple weeks ago. And I actually really appreciated it because it was a way for them to like ask what I was interested in. And then I talked to them about their clients. And to me, it just felt less soulless and it felt more like I got your back. You got my back.

At the end of the day, we just want to create stories that uplift voices and products that we believe in. It's like we could be a team, but sometimes the way sometimes I feel like on both ends we approach each other, it almost feels like sometimes antagonistic or like a route to get each other. But it's really like we just want to create genuinely good stories, which is why when someone is like maybe I'll send you something, but are you sure you're going to write about it? To me, that's already it's not authentic, an authentic relationship.

**[0:15:49] BB:** Also, I feel that that is almost not professional. Because we should know as publicist, you have no obligation. You are going to give your opinion of the experience, the product, the whatever. It's like telling a movie reviewer, "Hey, go to see the movie." But, oh, if you don't like it, don't say anything. If you really thought it – you know what I mean? You have your role. We have our role. Yeah, it just seems –

**[0:16:14] IK:** Yeah. And I would say for the most part, it does end up paying off. Good relationships end up paying off. It might not be immediately. But I have PR people who I really, really like who I've worked with for two, three years. And like I will almost always eventually like pitch me something that I will like. Yeah, I would just say the long game. Sometimes people don't play the long game and they're just – I feel burn bridges sometimes.

**[0:16:39] BB:** Mm-hmm. Okay, Ian, I have a quick rapid-fire question series here. Are you ready?

**[0:16:44] IK:** Yes.

**[0:16:45] BB:** Perfect. Video or phone interview?

**[0:16:48] IK:** Video.

[0:16:49] **BB**: Bullet points or paragraphs?

[0:16:50] **IK**: Paragraphs.

[0:16:52] **BB**: Paragraphs. How many?

[0:16:53] **IK**: Two to three.

[0:16:54] **BB**: Two to three. Okay. Okay. We just covered how long or short. Okay. Images attached or Dropbox ZIP file?

[0:17:00] **IK**: Images.

[0:17:01] **BB**: Attached?

[0:17:02] **IK**: Yeah, attached.

[0:17:03] **BB**: Oh, attached. Email or Twitter/X? Whatever the hell we're calling it. DM?

[0:17:08] **IK**: Email.

[0:17:08] **BB**: Email. Always the winner. Even when you have 36,000 emails or whatever you got going on there. It's all good. One follow-up or many?

[0:17:17] **IK**: If it's timely, many is fine. But if it's not time-sensitive, one.

[0:17:22] **BB**: One. Direct or creative subject lines?

[0:17:24] **IK**: Direct.

[0:17:25] **BB**: Press release or media kit?

[0:17:27] **IK**: Media kit.

[0:17:27] **BB**: Time you prefer to read pitches?

[0:17:30] **IK**: 9 to 11am.

[0:17:33] **BB**: E.T. Got you.

[0:17:34] **IK**: Yes.

[0:17:35] **BB**: Sources you look for?

[0:17:37] **IK**: Sources –

[0:17:38] **BB**: I mean, actually, do you even need sources? Some folks are like, "Oh, yeah. I really like MDs who specialize in human longevity or –"

[0:17:46] **IK**: Oh, got it. Aha. Aha. Yeah, usually, I tend to talk to a lot of – because a lot of my stuff is about wellness, and queer wellness and stuff. Definitely, therapists, psychologists. Just people who are just have studied mental health. Yeah, I always, always need them for articles no matter what.

[0:18:05] **BB**: Mm-hmm. Okay. Last words, Ian? Anything you want to promote? Highlight? Expand upon?

[0:18:12] **IK**: I would just say, yeah, whoever's listening to this, feel free to pitch me. I'm always looking for stories that are identity-related. I love stories that are about people who are surmounting some sort of odds in their industry and really creating something new that – and need a platform. To me, that's really why I do this is because I want to help people who might have been overlooked or are not taken as seriously because of where they come from or their identities and are doing actually amazing things that deserve to be platformed. That's my passion. I'm always looking for those types of stories.

**[0:18:48] BB:** Okay. Thank you, Ian. Thanks for being here today, especially on a cozy New York City wintry day.

**[0:18:56] IK:** Yes, exactly. Yeah, invite me to stuff. That's the –

**[0:19:00] BB:** Invite him. He wants the invites, people. Please. But then if you do invite him, make sure you follow up. Damn. Okay. Ian, thank you so much. Joy to have you on here.

**[0:19:14] IK:** Thank you. Thank you.

[OUTRO]

**[0:19:16] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for tuning in to this week's *Coffee With a Journalist* episode, featuring Ian Kumamoto from HuffPost. 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]