

EPISODE 198

[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 Telisha Bryan from Crain's New York. As Managing Editor, Telisha oversees the editing of articles for Crain's print publication, website and various newsletters. She's been with Crain's New York since 2017 where she started as a Copy Desk Chief.

During the episode, Telisha talks about scanning through all the pitches she receives. Why subject lines should explain who you're pitching? When you should use bullets versus paragraphs in pitches? And more. Let's dive in.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:04] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. And we're here on this show to chat about how we can be better friends with our people in media. Because publicists are often not considered the friends of media. And we like to, otherwise, establish that and show that we can have better relationships with our wonderful media.

With us today is Telisha Bryan, who's Crain's New York's Managing Editor. All things about New York. And if you've ever looked at Crain's, you're going to learn a lot about New York and it's going to be a lot of fun. With that, Telisha, welcome. And thank you for being here.

[00:01:38] TB: Thank you for having me. I'm looking forward to this conversation.

[00:01:43] BB: I know. You were mentioning, you don't do this too often, right?

[00:01:45] TB: No. I don't actually. But I do have definite thoughts about how publicists and journalists can work together better.

[00:01:54] BB: I cannot wait. Let's start then, Telisha. Okay. First thing. Well, it sounds like you've got a hot list. You want to tell us your hot list of how we can work better with you? but even actually, before that, maybe it's good to just have everyone understand, what does Crain's New York cover for those not familiar?

[00:02:12] TB: Yes. Crain's New York Business covers all businesses that are headquartered in the five boroughs of New York City. Sometimes we go out to the suburbs of New York City, and parts of New Jersey and parts of Connecticut. But we really try to focus on how people make money in New York City.

And also, we look at the policies in place behind, say, you wanted to start a restaurant. We'd let you know what the mayor is doing that will affect your endeavors in that space. We try to keep our audience informed on basically how they're going to be able to make a living here and just what their peers are doing. Who's making big moves in real estate, politics, healthcare, finance, tech? All the different areas that New Yorkers – where we make our money.

[00:03:00] BB: Where we make our money. Perfect. Okay. And that's quite the advanced and intricate topic. No doubt. Given all the coverage that you do. Okay. Now back to what you were alluding to before, Telisha, on all your tips and tricks or thoughts as it relates to publicists. Do tell. Let's just start.

[00:03:18] TB: Well, I do want to say that I very briefly early in my career tried to go into PR. And it was much more difficult than I thought it would be. And very quickly went back to journalism.

[00:03:30] BB: Oh, okay. Thanks for that shout-out.

[00:03:32] TB: The main thing that I would say that I see in my inbox and especially today right before we all leave for the holiday break, I got so many emails today and most of them did not

actually even apply to me or to Crain's. And that would be my biggest tip, is those blind pitches where you send it out to every publication, it shows.

If you know that your client really wants to be in the New York Times, then you should probably take some time and spin that pitch forward and send it only to the Times. And then if they say they also want to be in Crain's New York Business, then you're going to have to make a pitch that speaks specifically to my publication as well. Because we cover different things. Very different editors. Things that will instantly hit my eye won't hit the eye of someone at The Financial Times, or Forbes, or Fortune.

Taking that extra effort and knowing who you're pitching. Maybe looking them up quickly on LinkedIn or looking through what they focus on. Every website says which editors cover what. Which reporters likely report to them. And just taking that extra time is going to make sure that you get a response back. But the ones that just come through that clearly could have been sent to anyone are very quickly deleted. Sometimes just from the subject line.

[00:04:59] BB: How do you tell a subject line is immediately deletable? When it's just generally vague and just out there?

[00:05:05] TB: Yeah. If it says something that I know would be a long shot for Crain's New York Business to cover, then I won't even open it. If it just seems like why did this come to me? I probably won't spend time. Because, I mean, there are a lot of publicists, a lot of PR representatives in the city. And you're all sending emails to a very small pool.

We have gotten very good at weeding out the ones that are worth our time in a newsroom setting and which ones aren't. It's not so much about making the subject line sexy but it's about making it specific. Even if something said Crain's New York Business needs to know about this restaurateur, that would speak to me more than new chef making waves downtown. Because I know that some thought was put into getting it into our publication as opposed to just whoever clicks on it.

[00:06:02] BB: Mm-hmm. Do you have a system to manage your inbox?

[00:06:08] TB: I actually take my inbox very seriously. And I will at least scan everything that I get unless I know it's just not for me. But I'll read through at least the first sentence of everything.

[00:06:21] BB: Ooh. Wow. You open every email.

[00:06:25] TB: Yes. I'm very particular about it. And I try to be very quick about it. But it's also because I like to highlight – one thing that I've taken upon for myself at the publication is to highlight specific entrepreneurs, especially those of color. And I like to – even if your pitches about look at this beauty brand. I might scan it just to see if there's an interesting character behind the beauty brand who I might want to profile.

I don't want to put myself behind the eight ball and not look at things. And I'm always looking for new ideas. Every day is big news day. I want to make sure that I'm well-informed. I don't just like – unless, like I said, I can tell from a subject line that it's just not for me at all, I try to look through everything that I get. Because PR people are really giving me ideas for free. There's no reason to just turn them down.

[00:07:19] BB: Okay. Great insight on you read at least every sentence. That's good for people to know.

Okay. You're clearly in New York City, Telisha. Is there a way you like to make relationships with publicists? Or are you like, "No. I just want to know you in my inbox. And that's good enough for me."

[00:07:34] TB: For me, we're so busy, and it is a small newsroom. Meeting for some of these coffees and lunches just isn't the best use of anyone's time. And I do know that there are specific requirements that some companies have. I need you to take out five or 10 journalists a month or something like that. But for me specifically, I don't need that. I just need good pitches. If I do end up coming to the event because it does apply to me, I'll meet you there. But coming in to listen to you talk about every client that you have, it's not the best use of my time.

[00:08:12] BB: Exactly. Is there any invite that you would ever want, Telisha? Like, "Hey, a coffee." "A drink." Or are you like, "No. I don't need to do that."

[00:08:20] TB: If you send me someone who I'm very interested in, like you're telling me about the background of a client or a company and I write back and I'm like sure, and we set up so that I will meet that client or the head of that company. If the PR person is there, we should meet there. But needing to meet just to be friends or to make contacts – because I know you're going to email me again.

[00:08:43] BB: Yeah. What's the point?

[00:08:46] TB: Yeah. I think it's worthwhile to have some of those relationships. But it does during the course of a workday get kind of unwieldy. I don't take as many of them as – I'm more interested in meeting the client than the PR person.

[00:09:02] BB: Meet the client. Meet the client. What about subject lines? You were saying, "Oh, I kind of can spot one a mile away when it's just a general one. Are there any elements of subject lines you particularly look for or that are the ones you're like, "Yes. I definitely want to read that."

[00:09:16] TB: Yes. I work with the real estate team. And if I were to get one that said for your commercial real estate coverage and the colon and then something that they're doing, that would be better for me than just like, "So and so is doing big things in the residential market." And it's like, "Okay. Well, that's great. So is everyone."

[00:09:39] BB: Yep. Okay. Something that like specifies the section.

[00:09:43] TB: Yeah. I work on a section called Gotham Gigs, which is a lot of our people profiles. When people put in the subject line "for Gotham gigs", just know – showing some knowledge that I cover that or that I edit that and that I'm looking for that is important.

Showing something – just a subject line that makes it clear that the person reads the publication or at least knows of it and is going to give – when you open the email is going to give you a

reason why that specific client should appear in that specific publication is the best way for it I feel like.

Anything that's too vague or too self-promotional, it doesn't really land well. Because people are opening these things quickly, quickly, quickly, quickly. You really want to show in the subject line that you at least understand who you're pitching.

[00:10:34] BB: Mm-hmm. Very key. What about exclusives or embargos? How do you feel about either?

[00:10:39] TB: Well, we love exclusives. And we love embargos. But we don't love vague exclusives and vague embargos. Ones that are like, "Oh, Becca is doing something really big on Friday. And if you sign this NDA, we'll tell you about it." I'm always like, "I'll find out on Friday. Thank you." Because I don't want to be in any position where I'm signing something or agreeing to something and I don't even know if I'm going to want to cover it. You have to give a little bit of information about what it is. You can't be so exclusive that people don't care about what you're about to tell them. Put a little bait on the hook and then you'll get the fish that you want.

But I've seen a lot of them that are just like we might be signing a new client on Friday. And if you agree to the embargo, then we'll let you know the news." And it's like, "Well, I don't know if it's news. So, no. Thank you." I always say no thank you to those.

[00:11:37] BB: Ah. You do say the "no, thank you." Okay.

[00:11:40] TB: Yeah. but journalists want to be first. Exclusive embargo, we're happy with those. We just need to know what we're agreeing to. And that it's a true and actual exclusive or embargo. And that you haven't given the same exact one to multiple publications to see who's going to bite and then you end up with a story that matches exactly your competitor's story.

[00:12:05] BB: Has that happened to you more than once?

[00:12:08] TB: It has happened a time or two. But you get smarter as you go along. The end result sadly is that you stop agreeing to so many of them.

[00:12:16] BB: Yeah.

[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 and create your own custom media list in five minutes or less. Now back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:12:43] BB: You earlier mentioned, Telisha, that you had other thoughts and other tips and things. Do you have another one you'd like to share with us just for publicists?

[00:12:43] TB: Yes. In the past two or three years, I would say, a lot of my emails from publicists start with, "When can I introduce you to Telisha Bryan?" And that first sentence is always that question. When can I introduce you to whoever, whoever?

[00:13:09] BB: What? As a pitch? As a pitch, that's the first line?

[00:13:13] TB: It's a lot of them. A lot of them start like that. I don't know if it's like a school that is teaching that. Grab them by asking a question. But I always think never. I don't know who that person is. Like I said, I try to read the first sentence. And if that's your first sentence, I have an answer. Not now. Then I delete it. But that drives me absolutely nuts. I cannot stand it.

I get a lot of them especially for the people profile columns that I edit. It's always like, "When can I introduce you to this jewelry maker who's doing big things downtown?" It's like don't ask me a question. Can you just tell me who – just tell me who the person is and then I'll tell you if I want to meet them or not. It just seems like such a weird way to start a conversation with someone you've never spoken to before with a question. That is so direct.

[00:14:06] BB: Yeah. Okay. You got another one? That was good. I never heard that one before.

[00:14:12] TB: I will get a lot of them that are very much formulaic where it's just a plug and play of the name that will say –

[00:14:19] BB: I - Telisha?

[00:14:22] TB: Yeah, it'll say that. But a lot of them will say we really want to make sure we have a good relationship. And then with and the name – there's another publication's name in there that they forgot to take out. You have to scan what you're sending out.

I know that everyone is doing a lot of them. Everyone's trying to take advantage of technology to make their jobs easier. But it is such a turnoff to read something that's like we really want to make sure that our OpEd ends up in W Magazine. And it's like this is not W Magazine. So, send it to W Magazine.

And I will often reply just because, like I said, I did that very brief stint in PR. I know how hard it is. And I do try to reply to most of my emails anyway. I'd say I reply to maybe 65% of them. I will call that out and I'll just say, "Listen, I think you sent this to the wrong place. I don't know if you meant to send it to us. If you want to try again."

And usually, they're apologetic or they seem embarrassed. And I'm always like, "Don't worry. It's not that big of a deal. Just make sure you're reading through things." I try to give tips. But it's just not the best look. You can take advantage of these technological advances, but you have to make sure that you're doing a clean job. Not just a quick job.

[00:15:38] BB: Okay. Telisha, I have a little run of questions to ask you. Quick-fire. And you could tell me your preferences and we'll take it from here. How about that?

[00:15:49] TB: Okay. Sounds good.

[00:15:50] BB: Perfect. Video or phone interview?

[00:15:53] TB: If I were doing an interview, I think I'd want to do video so that I could see the person's mannerisms. You can read more into body language than someone just speaking.

[00:16:04] BB: Mm-hmm. So true. Bullet points or paragraphs in a pitch?

[00:16:08] TB: Well, I personally read paragraphs if I'm interested. But I think for a lot of my colleagues, I'll just speak on behalf of our entire newsroom. Bullet points are better. Get to the point quickly.

[00:16:20] BB: Okay. But don't start with that dang question.

[00:16:22] TB: No. When can I introduce you to –

[00:16:25] BB: Well, it kind of answers the next question. But short or long pitches?

[00:16:30] TB: It depends on the pitch. If you know that this is really a good fit, be as long-winded as possible. Because then I have as much information to take to a reporter to assign a story as possible. And I know exactly what I'm getting. But if it's just like a vague "this thing opened and you might be interested", you can keep that short.

[00:16:50] BB: Okay. Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[00:16:53] TB: Neither. In newsrooms everywhere, we're just under attack from phishing and all kinds of viruses. I do not click anything in an email unless I've had multiple conversations with the publicists and I know that they're a real person and I trust them. But I don't open any attachments. And I click on no links.

[00:17:13] BB: Okay. No links. One follow-up or multiple?

[00:17:18] TB: I would say none.

[00:17:19] BB: Okay. None.

[00:17:22] TB: For me personally, if you say you sent me an email and I was interested in it and I just didn't have time, the mayor was doing something crazy, and I didn't have time to get back to you, I will flag it in a folder and say I'm going to get back to you back later. I don't need you to follow up.

When I have space for that article or when I have a reporter who's ready for that assignment, if it's something I'm interested in, you will definitely hear back from me. It's never going to be the case where I need a pitch where I just don't do anything. If I need a pitch, then I've seen yours and I have it waiting. You should see my inboxes. All those little red Outlook flags. I know exactly who I'm going to talk to. But when someone follows up two or three times, by the second time, I just delete it. Even if I wanted to profile the person, it's I just feel as if it's too much. Because I will get back to you.

[00:18:20] BB: Yes. That's how you think you had a story but then you lost it because too many follow-ups.

[00:18:26] TB: Yeah. Just remember, I mean, I think the important thing is that journalist inboxes are war zones. There's just so much going on. And we're trying to clear them out. But we do see everything because we're in the ideation business. We're looking for stories. It's not going to be a case where you sent something and I just didn't see it. I know what's going on in my inbox.

[00:18:52] BB: It seems like you have a proficient level of control and command on it at a level that not a lot of people do. Cheers to you, Telisha. Look at you. Okay. Direct or creative subject lines? We kind of touched on this.

[00:19:06] TB: I would prefer direct. Because you can be too creative to the point where I don't know and I don't know what you're talking about.

[00:19:13] BB: Time you usually read pitches.

[00:19:15] TB: Oh. I'm a nutcase. I really like to keep on top of my inbox. I pretty much go all day long. I'm like looking for things and putting them into different folders. But I do know that a lot of my colleagues will check their email the first thing when they get online and not again until around lunchtime. And then not again to the end of the day. Not like a full-day thing. I don't think it actually matters. If what you're asking in away is what time should you send a pitch? I think you can send them whenever.

[00:19:49] BB: Okay. Whenever it is. And are there any sources you're particularly looking for right now, Telisha? Or writers? Because you're a managing editor. So, hey.

[00:19:58] TB: Well, we have a nice staff of reporters now. I'm not actually looking for any writers. But I'm always looking for people who are doing unexpected things in the five boroughs who have an interesting story to tell. There are a lot of native New Yorkers especially who you might not have gone to Harvard but you found your way into owning five chain stores or something. And you're making good money. And you're making a good living. And you're doing good things for your community. I love to tell those kinds of stories.

But also, we're also always looking for pitches from sources who have like the inside scoop on things. Maybe behind the scenes, especially in the political arena. Or maybe someone who knows a lot about real estate deals who maybe they don't want to be on the record, but they like to talk to us. We're always interested in knowing about people who are in the know as well. I like to know about people who are making a name for themselves in the city where it's hard to make a name for yourself.

[00:21:03] BB: That's right.

[00:21:04] TB: I like to tell those stories on their behalf. But then, also, I'm willing to listen. If you feel like you have something interesting to say, I'm always happy to listen.

[00:21:14] BB: That's so generous. Telisha, is there any last comment, promotion aspect that we can applaud you for that you just want to tout? We're here to celebrate you.

[00:21:28] TB: Well, that's so nice. I appreciate it. I've been very happy with the trajectory of my career. I'm not going to spend any time promoting anything. But I do want to say during this conversation, a lot of times it can seem as if journalists and publicists are in a combative relationship. And it's not necessarily the case. And it doesn't have to be so.

Journalists are prickly people because we're always on deadline. And it's not a thing where we hate you guys. We need you, guys. It's just that we have to be able to reach out when we're ready. A lot of the following up. A lot of the bugging. You send the email and then the next day you call. Some of that can get you yelled at without it being necessarily mean. But we do know that it's a symbiotic relationship and we want to make sure that it's a good one. Just as much as PR people need us and journalists definitely know we need them back.

[00:22:25] BB: That's right. Telisha Bryan, thank you so much for being on today. And happy holidays. Live from New York.

[00:22:33] TB: Happy holidays to you too. Thank you so much for having me. This was fun.

[00:22:39] BB: Thank you, Telisha. Really appreciate you. Managing Editor of Crain's New York, everyone. If you got something in the five boroughs, this is your gal.

[00:22:48] TB: Send it my way.

[00:22:49] BB: Send it her way. Perfect. Thanks, Telisha.

[00:22:52] TB: Thank you.

[OUTRO]

[00:22:53] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for tuning in to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, featuring Telisha Bryan from Crain's New York. 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.

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