

**EPISODE 200**

[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 a more efficient way to find and pitch the right journalists? Head to our website at [onepitch.co](http://onepitch.co) to learn more.

Our guest today on today's episode of Coffee with a Journalist is Sam Blum from Inc. Magazine. As a senior writer, Sam's coverage meets at the intersection of technology and culture with a focus on founders and venture capital. During the episode, Sam talks about the relationships he's built with PR professionals, the right kinds of information he needs from sources. He answers a handful of questions from our audience and more. Let's dive in.

[INTERVIEW]

**[00:01:01] BB:** Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist, our little podcast where we talk to actual journalists, reporters, editors, freelancers, et cetera to learn how they can better work with us publicist people out there. I'm Beck Bamberger, and this is episode 200. Sam, my God. Thanks for being here, Sam. We have with us today Sam Blum. He's a Senior Writer at Inc. Magazine. Thank you, Sam, for being here.

**[00:01:29] SB:** Yes, no problem and congratulations on your 200th episode milestone.

**[00:01:33] BB:** Thank you. Thank you. It's been some time we've been here. So speaking of, for everybody who is listening, stay tuned because we're going to be experimenting with also bringing on another publicist to see how that kind of goes. Anyway, I'm letting the cat out of the bag before we have the actual bag. I will deter. I will not go into that for right now.

Sam, I'm particularly happy to have you here because we have some audience asks for you specifically. Holler to the people, yes, who wrote in their questions. First off, Sam, for those who may not be as familiar, I do like to clarify it with folks, how would you describe Inc.'s coverage?

**[00:02:13 SB:** I mean, how would I describe it? It's a magazine about American entrepreneurship and American business and particularly small to medium-sized businesses, but also the big ones, the household names. It's definitely like pro-business, pro-entrepreneurship. I understand that's a large gamut, but I honestly think the best way to familiarize yourself with a publication is to just read it and find writers that you like and things that you look forward to reading at a given website or magazine.

**[00:02:54 BB:** Yes. Okay, good. So American entrepreneurship and celebrating the entrepreneur's path, journey, et cetera, adventure, downhill, ski slope, whatever you want to call it. Sam, for your inbox, how does it look?

**[00:03:08] SB:** Like an absolute minefield. It is –

**[00:03:12] BB:** Okay, honest answer. That's good.

**[00:03:14] SB:** I can't manage my inbox. I basically just don't. I do look at email, but I do not bother responding to 95% of the emails I get. Yes. It's untenable. It's completely – it's a total mess.

**[00:03:29] BB:** Okay. I love that you're just owning that completely. Many people do on this show I have to say no one's usually shy about it, but you – so if 95% is not helpful for you, how do you then get to the 5%?

**[00:03:44] SB:** I develop decent relationships with some publicists.

**[00:03:47] BB:** Yes. Okay.

**[00:03:49] SB:** It depends on the kinds of things they can offer, obviously, and the clients they represent. These are people who, I think, understand what I cover and what I'm interested in. I think I have shared journalistic interests with the publicist. It's not kind of a – it's not forged off some sort of random shot-in-the-dark kind of pitch, I think. I think it's a little bit more. I don't know. More of a we understand what I'm trying to cover and how they can help me get there.

**[00:04:23] BB:** You said decent relationships. I feel like you're being coy. What is a decent relationship with a publicist would you describe?

**[00:04:30] SB:** I'm definitely not being coy. We're just – I'm not trying to withhold from you at all. I don't know. We've –

**[00:04:40] BB:** Decent meaning like, “I see your email. I'll respond.” You know.

**[00:04:44] SB:** Yes. I mean, I think they offer me good information and cool sources and smart people. Here's the thing. I am not – my eyes don't light up when I see like, “Oh, CEO interview.” It's like, “Wow, you have a CEO that you're representing, amazing.” I'm being sarcastic. I could not care less about someone being a CEO. It's more about like their expertise and the way they're able to contextualize news events and provide meaningful information that isn't just about their company and its growth and how great they are.

Someone who – I don't know. I usually look at emails from university publicists who are like, “I have all these professors who can talk about these issues.” It's like, “Okay, that's helpful.” When someone has like – God, I don't know. I mean, when someone understands what I've been writing about, I think it's more helpful. Obviously, there are so many journalists out there to be reading and to be following. So I don't blame anyone for not knowing my work in particular.

I think it definitely helps to familiarize yourself with the reporter you're pitching, right? What are they writing about, and what does it seem – are there any themes in their work that you can kind of decipher, and do you have any sources along those lines, and perhaps keeping things brief. I'm not necessarily all that interested in reading a founder's bio in the body of an email. I'm not going to do that. I think, hey, if you're going to be writing about this, this person can definitely talk about it, that sort of thing. I appreciate the brevity, and I appreciate the directness. You know what I mean? I think that's valuable in this kind of relationship.

**[00:06:36] BB:** I think that leads us to an audience ask that we have here from **[inaudible 00:06:39]** Burnwell. I hope I got that right. She is asking or he is asking, “What have your favorite founder stories been and why?”

**[00:06:50] SB:** I mean, Sam Bankman-Fried, right? I mean –

**[00:06:55] BB:** That just writes itself.

**[00:06:57] SB:** Yes. I mean, I'm not – my favorite founder stories look – we cover founders but I'm not enamored with the founder story or whatever. I mean, I think some people have interesting backgrounds and have done cool things founding companies. But, yes, I'm trying to think what my favorite founder story is and if I actually have one.

**[00:07:22] BB:** Do you have one? Yes. Or are there elements perhaps of a story where you're like, "Okay. If you want to pitch me CEO or a founder, here are some of the things I'm looking for."?

**[00:07:33] SB:** Yes. I mean, here's the thing. I don't want to be pitched founders necessarily. I want to be pitched knowledge and expertise. Look, I don't care about someone's business. I'm not – I work at a magazine that writes about people's businesses and their success, of course. That's part of what we do. I care far more about how someone's knowledge and experience can better inform a story I'm writing and our readership. It's not some hero's journey to selling your **[inaudible 00:08:12]**.

**[00:08:13] BB:** Yes. "I started this."

**[00:08:14] SB:** Making a big exit. That's not necessarily what I'm what interested in.

**[00:08:18] BB:** Yes. No how I got to my big multi-million dollar exit. More so, what could you provide? What lens, what knowledge drop here that adds to something you're trying to convey to your audience perhaps?

**[00:08:30] SB:** Yes. Look, I know it's hard. I actually worked as a publicist for a little bit, too, before I was a reporter.

**[00:08:35] BB:** You did? Oh, wait. Where was that on your bio sheet, Sam? Wait, let me look here. Freelance writer. Now, hold on.

[00:08:41] **SB**: You probably –

[00:08:42] **BB**: That is not on your – I don't see it on your thing here, Sam, on the prep sheet. No.

[00:08:47] **SB**: Yes.

[00:08:47] **BB**: You must have buried that somewhere.

[00:08:49] **SB**: Yes. I don't recall doing a prep sheet. Maybe I did. I don't know.

[00:08:54] **BB**: No. It's on my – no, no. You didn't do a prep sheet. It's our prep sheet over here, so I have all your LinkedIn stuff and your background and things.

[00:09:00] **SB**: Okay. I'd be happy to –

[00:09:01] **BB**: So it is missing on this side. I'm just letting you know.

[00:09:04] **SB**: Yes. I'd be happy to fill you in.

[00:09:07] **BB**: Okay, tell us. How was your voyage into beyond? Yes.

[00:09:10] **SB**: It was in 2013. I worked at an Oxford University press as a publicity assistant.

[00:09:16] **BB**: Oh. What did you learn from that experience?

[00:09:19] **SB**: I think I learned how to pitch in a way that was more beneficial to my career as a freelance writer down the line. That being said, I think I understand the hustle that you guys are involved in. But so often I'm just getting blasted with stuff that really just shows to me that whoever is pitching me has no idea what I've been working on.

The most watch Netflix shows across the country by state, it's like, dude, maybe I would have like written that when I was a blogger at Thrillist eight years ago. Now, that's not what I'm doing. So if you're bitching me at Inc., look what I've been a writing at Inc. I think that's really the key, and it's kind of staying up to date on what people are doing. The news moves fast, so I understand that it's difficult. But just take a look at what people are covering on a regular basis. I would recommend tailoring your pitches according to that.

**[00:10:17] BB:** Is that, would you say, the five percent that gets you to respond –

**[00:10:22] SB:** Sure. I'd say that's definitely –

**[00:10:25] BB:** How you break through.

**[00:10:26] SB:** Yes. I'd say so.

**[00:10:28] BB:** Okay. Sam, you are in Brooklyn according to your LinkedIn. Is this true?

**[00:10:33] SB:** Yes, this is true.

**[00:10:35] BB:** Okay. Do you ever want to meet publicists, talk to them in real life, have a relationship with them? Or how would you describe it?

**[00:10:43] SB:** If the publicist is gatekeeping some kind of crucial groundbreaking story, then totally but not –

**[00:10:52] BB:** Groundbreaking emphasis on.

**[00:10:54] SB:** Sure, yes. I mean, something that's going to be, I don't know, beneficial to an actual interesting story. I'm sorry if I'm coming across as kind of –

**[00:11:03] BB:** That is okay. That's why we're here, Sam. That's why we're here, to distill the myths and personas of all of our fabulous reporter friends.

**[00:11:11] SB:** Yes. I mean, I don't know. I don't really like to meet up for coffee with PR people too much. It's – I don't know. I have so much crap going on any given day that it's difficult to squeeze that in I feel like. Sometimes, it happens. Never say never.

**[00:11:29] BB:** Okay, never say never. So maybe, maybe if you're swinging through Brooklyn and it happens to be ridiculously convenient on maybe a certain day.

[BREAK]

**[00:11:38] 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 RESUMED]

**[00:12:01] BB:** Okay. For the ones you mentioned earlier, you were like, “Oh, the decent relationships,” how did any of those get started? Was it just purely like, “Oh, you clearly know what I write about. So, yes, I'm going to answer your email.”?

**[00:12:13] SB:** Yes, I think so. Right.

**[00:12:15] BB:** Okay. Tell us more.

**[00:12:18] SB:** I think keeping things brief and kind of direct is really valuable, right? Time's limited. I really appreciate airing on the side of being direct and not really being cute about anything. That's not to say I don't –

**[00:12:37] BB:** Not cute.

**[00:12:39] SB:** Love all things cute. But for the sake of time and –

**[00:12:45] BB:** Yes. Cute's not – was cutting over there for you. Yes.

**[00:12:49] SB:** Yes. Cute's not cutting it with you publicists.

**[00:12:52] BB:** Okay, forget the cute.

**[00:12:54] SB:** Yes. Being direct and kind of be like, "Hey, I have some useful data. I have some PhD who wants to talk to you about AI. I have a finance professor who just wrote a book about this." That kind of thing would be valuable. Or, "I have someone who started this company that is an insurgent in a new area that's making waves and has some interesting things to say about whatever topic." Yes. Like I said, it's about pitching –

**[00:13:26] BB:** Knowledge.

**[00:13:27] SB:** Right. It's about sharing the knowledge.

**[00:13:30] BB:** Let's just say you get someone, "Oh, wow. It's a double PhD person with AI degrees up the wazoo, doing something in quantum physics." How do you keep track of that source? Do you have some filing system? Clearly, it's not your inbox I'm going to say. But how do you keep that person in the back pocket, if you do?

**[00:13:49] SB:** I say their number, and I don't know. I mean, don't really –

**[00:13:51] BB:** Okay Well, you say their number. Oh, you're like punching their cell phone.

**[00:13:55] SB:** I mean, I prefer to do phoners, for sure.

**[00:13:57] BB:** Okay, okay. Phoners, great. Good to know.

**[00:14:02] SB:** Yes.

**[00:14:02] BB:** That leads me to, Sam, a fun little quick question session here. We have so those rapid-fire questions. Let us know the answers to these. The first one you already answered, video or phone interview. It sounds like you want phone.



[00:14:15] **SB:** Yes.

[00:14:16] **BB:** Perfect. Bullet points or paragraphs in pitches?

[00:14:20] **SB:** I don't know. I don't care, I guess.

[00:14:23] **BB:** Okay. That's great. Why do you not care? Because if it's direct, you're good with that?

[00:14:28] **SB:** Yes, yes, for sure.

[00:14:31] **BB:** Okay, okay, okay. Then that's easy enough. Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[00:14:38] **SB:** I mean, if I'm not expecting images, I probably don't want them in either format.

[00:14:47] **BB:** In any format. Okay, noted. Email or DM?

[00:14:50] **SB:** Oh, email.

[00:14:52] **BB:** Does it – people would DM you, though, on random crap.

[00:14:55] **SB:** Some people might but not on random crap. If I ever get an Instagram pitch, I'm blocking whoever sends it immediately.

[00:15:02] **BB:** Oh, good to know. One follow-up or multiple?

[00:15:07] **SB:** I mean, my heart goes out to the publicists who will seemingly have conversations with themselves in my inbox and write eight emails following up about something. I'm like, "What are you doing? You look insane."

[00:15:22] **BB:** Yes, I agree. Yes.

**[00:15:24] SB:** Like I said, I can sympathize with what you all do. But I would say one follow-up is probably enough.

**[00:15:33] BB:** One and done. That sounds about right. I agree. Okay. Direct or creative subject lines? I know you harped on this, but let's be even more clear.

**[00:15:42] SB:** I mean, look, if you can –

**[00:15:44] BB:** Not cute. We got that covered.

**[00:15:45] SB:** Throw something creative in there. Whatever that means, go for it.

**[00:15:52] BB:** Okay. Press release or media kit?

**[00:15:55] SB:** No preference.

**[00:15:57] BB:** No preference. Time you usually read pitches?

**[00:16:00] SB:** Zero seconds. No, I'm kidding.

**[00:16:05] BB:** Time of the day. Like, “Hey, in the morning I like to look at it and then at the evening. At three o'clock, I do that.” No?

**[00:16:10] SB:** No. Dude, my inbox is absolutely insane. I get 10 or more emails an hour, and I don't have time to look at most PR pitches. I'd say that I read news mainly in the morning, and that might make it a higher likelihood that I will see your pitch. But I can't really guarantee that. There's no time throughout the day when I'm allotting time to read PR stuff.

**[00:16:44] BB:** Okay. This is good to know. Speaking of, and normally I don't dig into this, but curious because you prompted it, what's your news digest? How do you get up to speed on what's going on in the world?

[00:16:56] **SB:** Well, I used to look at Twitter before it became what it is now.

[00:16:59] **BB:** Oh, God. Yes, the dumpster it is.

[00:17:01] **SB:** Yes. I mean, I don't know. I've always been kind of weird, though, in the sense that I just go to home pages. I'll check out The Guardian and the New York Times and Bloomberg and all the mainstream sites and WIRED I read a lot. Yes. I don't really listen to podcasts. Maybe I'm –

[00:17:21] **BB:** Okay, not a pod person. Got it.

[00:17:23] **SB:** An outlier like that. I don't know. Yes, but mainstream sites. I mean, I'm a big fan of GQ's long-form magazine.

[00:17:34] **BB:** Oh, they do a great job.

[00:17:36] **SB:** Rolling Stone, that kind of stuff, so yes.

[00:17:40] **BB:** Let me ask, if you had to read just for fun, what would you read?

[00:17:43] **SB:** A book or anything?

[00:17:46] **BB:** Yes.

[00:17:47] **SB:** Currently reading *Blood in the Machine* by Brian Merchant, which is about [inaudible 00:17:51].

[00:17:51] **BB:** Yes.

[00:17:52] **SB:** I just finished *The Fund* by Rob Copeland, which was cool.

[00:17:58] **BB:** How is that? I haven't read that.

**[00:18:00] SB:** It was great. When I read something like that, I tend to just be amazed at the undertaking that it entails to write something like that and if I could ever pull something like that off. I'm just like, "Geez. Jesus, how did you do this?"

**[00:18:14] BB:** Oh, my gosh. I feel like that's the new reporter's thing you got to do. The new metal is you got to write a book, at least one.

**[00:18:22] SB:** Yes. I don't know. I mean, I'm pretty content with just logging off and being happy.

**[00:18:29] BB:** You're like, "I'm good. I'm – no. No, I don't need to do that."

**[00:18:32] SB:** I'm like, "I would write a book if the stars align, and I had a good enough idea."

**[00:18:37] BB:** Okay, okay. That sounds good. Sam, is there anything that we can promote, highlight, celebrate about you in your fabulous work?

**[00:18:46] SB:** Yes. Well, you should always be celebrating me in my fabulous work for one.

**[00:18:50] BB:** Yes, yes.

**[00:18:51] SB:** So tell everyone in the industry.

**[00:18:53] BB:** Tell everybody all that.

**[00:18:56] SB:** Yes. Just keep fighting the good fight. I didn't want to come off like a jerk or anything, so apologies if I did. But one word of advice is –

**[00:19:07] BB:** Ooh, please.

**[00:19:07] SB:** Yes. When we do Zooms, so many times I've logged onto a Zoom to interview someone, and the publicist who set it up is there. But then there's four other people, and I'm

like, “Where the hell did you guys come from, and who are you, and who am I talking to? Who is who?” It bombards me.

**[00:19:23] BB:** Yes. It’s weird. It’s weird.

**[00:19:26] SB:** I feel like I'm logging on to intervention or something. I want to know who is who and who I should talk to. I don't think you should do that. If more people are going to be on the call, just tell me who they are ahead of time.

**[00:19:41] BB:** So who are those people?

**[00:19:43] SB:** I don't know.

**[00:19:44] BB:** The comm’s handler, the – they don't say?

**[00:19:47] SB:** No, they do. They do.

**[00:19:48] BB:** They're just there. Oh, okay.

**[00:19:49] SB:** No. It’s usually like the external PR than like the internal PR. Then maybe there's an intern or this call was optional for this person. But they showed up because they just wanted to be on. So I'm just like I hate doing interviews in front of an audience.

**[00:20:02] BB:** They just wanted to be on. Oh, no.

**[00:20:04] SB:** Yes, I know.

**[00:20:06] BB:** Oh, it completely changes the interview and the intimacy of the interview. I don't mean that in a weird way but just more what may come out, what may be said, how it is quoted.

**[00:20:19] SB:** Yes.

**[00:20:21] BB:** By the way, do you find that that's like ticking up? Is this a trend increasing?

[00:20:25] **SB**: No. I don't think it's increasing, just like when it happened.

[00:20:27] **BB**: Okay. You just noticed it. You're like, "Meh."

[00:20:30] **SB**: Yes. I just noticed it, and I'm like, "Why did you do this to me?"

[00:20:36] **BB**: To be clear, too, you just – you mean you log on. You're like, "Oh, crap. There's five other people here. What the hell?"

[00:20:40] **SB**: Yes.

[00:20:40] **BB**: You just come in blind. [inaudible 00:20:42].

[00:20:40] **SB**: Yes. I mean, I think I used to be nicer about it. Now, I'm just like, "Okay, who are you? Why are there four of you?"

[00:20:53] **BB**: Yes. Direct, Sam. I think that's the takeaway point here for everybody.

[00:20:57] **SB**: Yes, sure.

[00:20:58] **BB**: Plus do not be cute people for Sam Blum at Inc., Inc. Magazine, yes. Sam, thanks for being here today.

[00:21:05] **SB**: Of course. Thank you for having me.

[00:21:08] **BB**: Thanks for being on episode 200. Look at that.

[00:21:12] **SB**: Yes. You did it. Yes.

[00:21:13] **SB**: We're doing something here. Stay tuned for more wonderful episodes, everybody. Again, Sam Blum, thanks so much for joining us.

**[00:21:20] SB:** Thanks for having me. Appreciate it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[00:21:22] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, featuring Sam Blum from Inc. Magazine. 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. Until then, start great stories.

[END]