

EPISODE 211

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, brought to you by the team at OnePitch. Are you looking for a more efficient way to find and pitch to the right journalists? Head to our website at onepitch.co to learn more.

Our guests on today's episode is Coffee with a Journalist is Tim Crino. Tim is a Senior Editor at a Inc. where his coverage focus is on cybersecurity and data privacy. He also oversees Inc.'s book reviews, collaborates on strategies for Inc. video and edits Inc. Insider which is a print section that curates expert advice from entrepreneurship's brightest. During the episode, Tim discusses how PR folks can get into his emails good PR folder and what that is, how he votes angles and news to cover, as well as how he stays organized and on top of his stories.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:01:01] BB: Welcome, everyone, this is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. What we do on our little podcast here is bring real live reporters, editors, freelancers, writers, all the wonderful friends of journalism to tell us what they cannot stand about publicists basically, but also how we can be better connections with our journalist friends. Because while they may not be our friends, we need to work together, and that is the goal of our little show here. With us today, speaking of perhaps friends we can make is Tim Crino, like Reno. He just told me. He's the Senior Editor of Inc. Magazine. Welcome, Tim. Thank you.

[0:01:38] TC: Thank you for having me.

[0:01:39] BB: Yes. Tim, you've been in Inc. for a while. This is good to know and see.

[0:01:45] TC: For millennial, I think particularly surprising. But I'm coming up on my seven-year anniversary.

[0:01:50] BB: I see that. Real quick, for those maybe is not familiar, I do this now more often. What would you say encompasses the scope for Inc.'s content?

[0:02:01] TC: It's actually pretty simple. We cover entrepreneurship and main street. So, basically, any business that – our audience, ideally, is really any business, business leader, entrepreneur, or aspiring entrepreneur. And we have a particular focus on businesses and entrepreneurs that are based in United States are privately held. So, public companies, we don't necessarily speak to them, but we might speak about them –

[0:02:31] BB: Yes. Mention here and there.

[0:02:33] TC: Yes. I mean, obviously, Google was a startup once, Facebook was a startup once, and there's lessons that they have that we can plumb. But I guess the TLDR, if I could sum it up so thankfully, is Inc.'s job is to inspire, educate and entertain the entrepreneurs in the United States.

[0:02:53] BB: In the United States. That's wide. But yes, focus. I like that.

[0:02:58] TC: Well, the global community of entrepreneurship is exciting. But we are a small nimble team, so we can't cover everything.

[0:03:04] BB: There you go, which is why you should get the right pitches to your inbox, Tim. Before we get into your inbox, though, for you now, specifically, and this is always something I think to mention or look into with editors, you are writing pieces, but of course you dispatch pieces to be written by your team. So, how do you think about the content that you want to do?

For instance, while I'm looking at your author page, you have a piece on giving feedback. You have something on like Navy SEALs, psychological things. You like data privacy, though, as well. How would you describe what your content area is?

[0:03:41] TC: Like the things that I write about?

[0:03:42] BB: Yes, you as the editor. Yes. Versus, "Oh, I send this to one of my freelancers."

[0:03:48] TC: Yes, it's two things really. One is this something that would be fastest, easiest, and most efficient for me as an editor to just write this. Is it something that the brand needs or that it's just sort of like, I guess, a company objective that I happen to be the person who can get it done fastest and easiest. Then, the other thing is, I have a few preferred areas of interest that I like to cover when I have time for a really well-thought-out, well-reported enterprise story. Those tend to be the ones that are about something like a topic area that I feel passionate about.

[0:04:29] BB: We can choose a little bit.

[0:04:29] TC: We can choose a little bit. But broadly like cybersecurity and data privacy is where a lot of my expertise lies. I dabble in healthcare. I dabble in climate tech, city lab stuff, things that interests me. But as an editor, I don't really have like a super tight focus in terms of writing.

[0:04:49] BB: That's so nice.

[0:04:50] TC: Yes. I kind of gets to do either what I want or what I need to do, which is good.

[0:04:54] BB: Hey, that's a good place to be though, in any workplace. I want or what I need to do. Yes. So, then your inbox, tell us how crowded it is in there with pitches.

[0:05:05] TC: I mean, it's a lot.

[0:05:08] BB: Yes. Because you also have probably freelancer pitches too. You don't just have publicist. Well, you tell us, what's in there?

[0:05:14] TC: Yes. It's a lot of publicists. I don't think there's a lot of freelancers in the traditional sense that are pitching me. I don't really see that very often. I run our book review desk. Our little spin on it, though, is we ask authors to not review their own books, but to tell us a little bit about how they think – like why entrepreneurs should read their books and what bits might be relevant to that, to entrepreneurs.

So, I get honestly a lot of pitches about books. But otherwise, it's mostly publicists. I don't really get freelancers saying, "Hey, I'm a freelancer. I've worked at these places. Hire me for this." I do get a lot of people, I guess they're people, they might be bots, but they're demanding –

[0:06:03] BB: Who knows these days?

[0:06:05] TC: It's like backlink requests, or they'll be like, "I need you to post this content on your site." It's a lot of spam, I guess, is what I would call it.

[0:06:14] BB: You're the first person I think has told us this on, those SEO link-building people shenanigans.

[0:06:21] TC: I have this theory.

[0:06:23] BB: Tell us.

[0:06:24] TC: Six, seven year – or five or six years ago, when I started out, I was the assistant managing editor. So, my email is somewhere on the site, and I can't find where it is anymore. But it's somewhere on like, some media kit or some public, like, I'm basically listed as the public point of contact. I get a lot of spam, unfortunately.

[0:06:44] BB: Geez. Now, what do you do to maintain your sanity with your inbox? Or maybe there is none. I don't know.

[0:06:54] TC: Yes. First of all, there is none. I just completely ignore it. No, I'm kidding. I was going to say, that's bold. I love it. For the most part, I actually do just ignore it. During the day, a lot of the actual work that happens during the day for us happens in Slack. Once a week, once every two weeks, I'll go through and do like a full cleanout, and what that looks like is, I guess, I should start from the top.

[0:07:22] BB: Yes, tell us.

[0:07:23] TC: Basically, I have some automatic filter setup, where internal emails go to an internal folder. So, the managing editors is emailing like, I got to pay attention to that first. Internal goes there. Then, there's a folder called good PR.

[0:07:41] BB: Nice, okay.

[0:07:44] TC: Basically, it's any publicists with whom I have an ongoing relationship or who has been helpful or who has clients that are particularly interesting. So, they all go and – it's not a high bar, frankly. If we worked together and it wasn't awful, you're probably going to go on good PR.

[0:08:05] BB: Oh, okay. Nice. So, you want to get in that folder, everybody.

[0:08:09] TC: Yes. You want to get in that folder. Then, the broader inbox is like, that's where a lot of the pitches from people I don't know end up. Once a week, sometimes once a month, depending on season we're in, in terms of busyness, I'll go through and just speed read through the whole thing.

[0:08:32] BB: Just see what's in there. Take a spin.

[0:08:34] TC: Yes. If there's something that catches my eye, I'll read through it, and if I can make a decision quickly about it, I'll send it along and assign it right from there, so reporters will get a lot of like 11pm emails from me because like that's –

[0:08:50] BB: That's when you got time.

[0:08:50] TC: – when I'm going to do it.

[0:08:52] BB: When you have time. I understand.

[0:08:54] TC: So, once I've kind of skimmed through and looked for anything relevant or useful, or there'll be some things that are reports or companies that I want to keep an eye on. Let's say there's a climate tech company, I'll put them in my green growth folder, or if there's a healthcare,

tech that's come out, that looks interesting. I'll put that in the health science folder. So really, it's like a periodic cleanouts and skimming.

[0:09:23] BB: Okay. So, it doesn't sound like you subscribe to this inbox zero camp.

[0:09:29] TC: No, I don't. I actually keep everything unless it's like –

[0:09:33] BB: Me too. I'm like, you never know.

[0:09:39] TC: Yes. So many times, we've been in a meeting and we're like, "Hey, we could really use a story on this topic or this industry. Does anyone have anything good?" I'll go and I'll search some keywords in my inbox, and I'll come up with some stuff. I keep it all.

[0:09:52] BB: Lots of reporters, lots of journalists do exactly that. Your inbox is your own personal Google to find those folks. Now, speaking of finding those folks, are there any particular sources you're constantly needing, Tim? Where you're like, I wish I had more of those people at the ready. Clearly not authors, I imagine.

[0:10:14] TC: Yes. That's a good question. It kind of depends on what project I'm working on at any given time. For many years, I ran our front of books section in print. For those who don't know, front of book is like, New York Magazine has the *Intelligencer* and Inc.'s version of that is *Insider*. But there were certain rubrics or recurring columns, I always needed, like mentorship stories, for example. So, it's more based on topic that I'm always looking for, rather than industry. Because for industry, I think we just like take a different tack when we report that out. If I assign a story about marketing, and it's about a specific kind of marketing, I'm going to tell my reporter to like, talk to your marketing contacts, look through the trades, look through the databases we have access to, and put out a quoted request. Used to be HARO, but now it's –

[0:11:03] BB: Oh, God. Whatever they now change it. No one has mentioned that my name on this podcast that I can recall. I'm sure people will tell me if I'm wrong, but opinion on HARO. Do you find it ever a value? Are you ever on there?

[0:11:17] TC: It is one of those things that I caught myself lucky to be able to outsource to reporters now, because they do – the way HARO worked, is it really would kind of flood your inbox a bit.

[0:11:28] BB: Yes.

[0:11:30] TC: Which is help – let me tell you, when you're down the wire and you need a source –

[0:11:35] BB: Yes. It's going to get you.

[0:11:37] TC: It's great. It's great to see. But then at scale, if you're doing that for every story, it's tough.

[0:11:42] BB: Oh, you'd be dying, I imagine.

[0:11:44] TC: As a service, I think it's a great idea, and I think Quoted's take on it is probably like just a user interface.

[0:11:51] BB: Time will tell what decision we'll do with HARO, is they're now changing it or whatever. Anyway, we're not here to talk about PR software tools, because that's a whole other spiral of things, Tim. But for you, how do you decide on a story? As in, we're going to run with that, or I'm going to sign that, I imagine, just being as the editor, senior editor, have the ultimate decision on that. Is there a way in which you consider how a story is basically greenlit?

[0:12:20] TC: Yes. There's a series of metrics.

[0:12:23] BB: Okay. Tell us.

[0:12:24] TC: Yes. Basically, I would call them a series of filters. So, two big filters, number one is the subject, let's say it's a business. Are they based in the United States? And are they privately held? So, that's if we're just, if someone's like, "Hey, I want to do a profile on this business. Let me just run through that first, actually, because that's like one of the big things."

US-based, privately held. Then, are there what we call success metrics that are present in the pitch? What is the story? Why should we be talking about this story or this business now? And why should Inc. be saying something about it? And what should we be saying about it?

That's the biggest thing is like, is this story actually, for us? Is this business actually relevant to our readership? Then, from there, those are kind of like pie in the sky. Then, from there, if we're like, they passed that test, and we drill down into business company, is there any other news about them? Are there other ways to verify that they are who they say they are? How much funding do they have? Because we're business magazine.

[0:13:34] BB: Yes, exactly.

[0:13:36] TC: Do they have notable investors? Did Tim Cook invest? That's worth paying attention to, because he is somebody who's charged with running the most valuable company in the world. So, there's something there. Then, do they have revenue? Do they have profits? How big is their business? A lot of that really gets into a lot of pitches, and, frankly, just need to be reported out. I think the biggest problem with the pitches if you haven't already talked to the publicist, at least, but preferably the subject, and just kind of done all the reporting already, because otherwise, there's so many things that, for us, that can basically spike a story.

If we find out down the line that like yes, it's a great story, but it turns out we're missing the business metrics that make this company worth talking about. It's not that unsuccessful companies aren't worth talking about and like plumbing for insights. But that's just a different story. So, we need to know that from the outset.

[MESSAGE]

[0:14:43] ANNOUNCER: Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch.

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Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:15:07] BB: Then, to help given the publicists who are thinking, “Well, how do I pitch that?” Do you like a pitch that includes that upfront? Like, “Oh, hey, Tim, by the way, I can provide you with revenues, profits, growth, blah, blah. Do you want to hear that up front?”

[0:15:21] TC: Yes. In fact, not only do I want to hear it up front, just write in the pitch.

[0:15:27] BB: Put it in there.

[0:15:28] TC: Because at the end of the day, and I think more publicists need to realize this in the business world, we're going to find it out most of the time, no matter what. You're just making us work harder for it. So, if you can be honest with that upfront, we can spend more time developing the actual story.

[0:15:43] BB: There you go.

[0:15:43] TC: And gaining insight and context into those numbers.

[0:15:46] BB: This is why I always recommend in pitches, what are the assets you have available? Hey, Tim, I have headshots of people here, boom, revenue numbers here. Below, three customers, you can speak to, this, this, and this name, just like plating the story, basically. So, you know as the writer or reporter or editor like, “Oh, cool, like this is already baked for me.”

[0:16:06] TC: Yes. Tell me what's on the menu so I can pick it.

[0:16:08] BB: Exactly. Tell me what's on the menu. Yes, Tim. Okay, Tim, do you have a pitch by chance that you're like, “Oh, that's one I really wanted to respond to?” As an example, you want to look at your inbox right now. Maybe like, none, but –

[0:16:26] TC: Do you want to me to look for – or in the general?

[0:16:28] BB: Yes. Let's look in the good folder. What's in there? We want to know, like, subject lines. By the way, how are subject lines for you? Is that a big key indicator for you?

[0:16:40] TC: So, subject lines, I think, it's kind of hard for me to say like, this is what you should and shouldn't do for subject line. Because the way I and the way everyone views subject lines is different across every device and every program. So, the subject line on my phone might show in completion, and I might be able to read the whole thing. But on the desktop, email client, it doesn't actually show much. So, what I'm really looking at there is the preview.

I'm actually just really just kind of reading the first couple lines of the message. I think subject line is like, tell me – give me like a few keywords. If there's someone specific that's going to grab my eye, like if you're representing – sorry, to keep going back to Apple, but it's easiest. You've got new jobs, tell me what exactly what you want three words. Interview Steve Jobs, right?

[0:17:36] BB: Yes. That will get you.

[0:17:39] TC: Yes. Just use the subject line. Just grab it. Pretend it's a tweet. But not a full tweet. Just grab my attention and get me to open it. Then, the first line should be a TLDR. Who you are, what you want, why you want it, and why us. Then, go into what you have to offer and the details.

[0:17:58] BB: Give me the menu. Okay. Do you have an example not naming names of a bad pitch? Not those link-building ones. But yes.

[0:18:07] TC: Yes. Anytime you're kind of like demanding or naggy, if you keep saying following up again, it's like okay, yes, you and 700 other people. At scale, when you think about it, you spam my Inbox by doing a mail merge, and everyone else in your industry, in theory has probably also done that. So, think about how many things I have to look at, and is it really worth raising the stakes like that? Is it really going to work in your favor to like introduce tension into it? Or maybe you need to say it differently so that you're grabbing my attention.

Think about it like, on my end, if an article doesn't do well, not that traffic's the only thing I pay attention to. That's a whole other conversation. I think that's a silly thing to do. But if I look at an article and it performed really badly, am I going to say, well, people draw article up again and with like, adding on another line and being like, "Hey, world, just want to make sure you saw this, because I think it's important." Or am I going to think about how to present it differently so that people actually engage with it.

[0:19:12] BB: Mm-hmm.

[0:19:13] TC: So, someone sent me, I won't say who, but someone sent me a pitch that said BEAM x DOLE Super Greens. I'm like, "Okay. That makes me pay attention because that's two big companies." Even if I can't use them, I'm paying attention because I know you're representing people who are paying you a lot of money. The only thing is I'm thinking like a business editor. So, I'm not just thinking about it. I'm also thinking like, like they trust you to represent them, so you're someone I want to pay attention to. Because they have their pick of publicist, because they've got a big budget. Obviously, it's not that simple, but if you can –

[0:19:48] BB: You hope. It's a good sign. It's a good indicator that you got someone who's a top player.

[0:19:53] TC: It's drawing me in.

[0:19:55] BB: Now, for our rapid-fire questions, Tim. Here we go. Video or phone interview?

[0:20:01] TC: Video.

[0:20:01] BB: Bullet points or paragraphs?

[0:20:03] TC: Bullet points.

[0:20:04] BB: I bet I know the answer to this, but short or long pitches?

[0:20:07] TC: Short.

[0:20:08] **BB:** How short? You said bullet points. So, like three?

[0:20:10] **TC:** Three bullet points or a paragraph.

[0:20:10] **BB:** One follow-up or multiple? Not with tone, I'm sure.

[0:20:16] **TC:** Yes. This is tough. I think multiple is fine, especially because like, if it is pressing and I'm not getting to it, it's like, you should keep following up. But after the first couple of times, maybe you should try and find my phone number, or try and get a hold of me a different way. You know what I mean?

[0:20:38] **BB:** Yes.

[0:20:38] **TC:** Even on LinkedIn. I look on LinkedIn every once in a while. I check LinkedIn messages. I actually hired a –

[0:20:43] **BB:** Me too, but –

[0:20:44] **TC:** – recently because he messaged me on LinkedIn.

[0:20:49] **BB:** I finally didn't know. It's so freaking spammy, though now. It's so sad.

[0:20:53] **TC:** Yes.

[0:20:54] **BB:** It's a disaster. Because it's, again, back to – can I have my SEO links? I can't tell you how many people think they need – they're going to 12x our revenue because some magical tool, I don't know. It's really shocking. Back to our list. Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[0:21:11] **TC:** This goes back to technical stuff, but probably, I think, a link, like a drive link or a zip file.

[0:21:17] BB: Yes. Perfect. You just mentioned it with LinkedIn, but email or X DM, or formerly known as Twitter? Whatever we're calling it. Actually, any DM. Maybe it's Instagram. People talk about that.

[0:21:30] TC: Yes. I am no longer on X. I am on it. My account exists. I'm boycotting it. So, I'm on Threads and I like it. I would respond to Threads with you.

[0:21:42] BB: Okay. Press Release or media kit?

[0:21:49] TC: Press release.

[0:21:50] BB: Press release. Okay. What time do you normally read pitches if at all?

[0:21:53] TC: Later in the evening, typically.

[0:21:56] BB: Okay. Later evening. Yes, your 11pm emails to your reporters. Okay.

[0:22:00] TC: Yes. After hours.

[0:22:01] BB: After hours. Okay. We already talked about sources. So, Tim, are there any last things you want to celebrate, promote, tout? How can we be your PR people for a second?

[0:22:13] TC: I think there's so many exciting things happening at Inc. right now. We have a new editor in chief that just started last week and I'm super excited to watch his vision unfold and to help that happen. Stay tuned. I wouldn't say we're in stealth mode right now, but we got a lot of things cooking on the horizon.

[0:22:32] BB: Okay. My chess instructor calls it cooking with grease. We're cooking with grease.

[0:22:36] TC: We're cooking with grease.

[0:22:39] BB: Then stay tuned. Tim Crino, thank you for being here today. Senior Editor of Inc. Magazine, everybody.

[0:22:46] TC: Thank you for having me.

[0:22:47] BB: Don't send him a – well, let me think. He'll be respond – getting that good folder. That's all I can say. Get in the good PR folder.

[0:22:56] TC: I think the best way to do that, if I could offer a tip.

[0:23:01] BB: Please.

[0:23:01] TC: You said something earlier about how like, we don't have to be friends. I think it's great when we are friends. I think on my end, I've been a publicist in the past. I've been a journalists for a long time. And I think like having been on both sides of it, this relationship works best when it is a relationship. You're in the middle of two big – you're in the middle of a client and a publication. The best way to navigate that tension is with an ally. So, if you and the journalists are seeing each other is like, on the same team, right? Because like the idea is the story, and like the publicist has to serve their client, of course, but like the idea is to do good work here, right? So, there's no reason not to be friends. Use your expense account. I'm just kidding. But form a relationship. We're people too. We want to be friends.

[0:23:53] BB: We are people. I think that's the biggest thing. We're all people behind these inboxes. Come on.

[0:24:01] TC: I mean, we're looking to fill a story, or we're scrambling last minute, like we call you first because we have a relationship. We can call you and be like, "Hey, who do you know? Or could one of your clients feel this?" That's how a lot of opportunities happen for us is like, we know a publicist who knows someone or knows someone and they make it happen last minute.

[0:24:21] BB: See, look at that. Thanks for all your gems of wisdom, Tim. Appreciate it so much. As I said, yes, we all just want to get in the good folder.

[0:24:31] **TC:** Yes. Get in the good folder.

[0:24:34] **BB:** Thank you. Appreciate you. You're welcome.

[0:24:37] **TC:** All righty, take care.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:24:38] **ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist episode with Tim Crino, Senior Editor at Inc. For more exclusive insights about the journalists on this podcast, subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter at onepitch.co/podcast. We'll see you all next week, but until then, start great stories.

[END]