

EPISODE 219

[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 of Coffee with a Journalist is Iris Goldsztajn, morning editor at Marie Claire. During the episode, Iris discusses her role in celebrity news and women's lifestyle coverage, the intricacies of managing a high volume of pitches, her preferences for specific types of pitches, and the nuances of working independently in a demanding field.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:42] BB: Welcome everyone, this is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. On our little show here, we'd like to demystify the world of public relations, and more specifically, how we work with media because we all need each other and we want to make the world a better place with our relationships together and our work lives that are together with us today, all the way from London. So excited.

We already heard the traffic sounds in the background. I'm in New York. She is in London. We have the morning editor of Marie Claire, fellow Bruin. Go UCLA. Iris Goldsztajn is here with us and welcome, welcome. Iris, hello.

[0:01:21] IG: Thank you so much. Hi.

[0:01:23] BB: So much to get into. First, and I like to ask this of several people who just maybe aren't as familiar or whatnot. Well, how would you describe the coverage of Marie Claire these days? Because it's changed.

[0:01:38] IG: Yes. Well, I specifically cover celebrity news, so that's really what I'm doing over there. So, very fast-paced.

[0:01:47] BB: I bet.

[0:01:48] IG: Today's news, I'm doing full stories in three hours.

[0:01:55] BB: I think you win.

[0:01:56] IG: Thank you.

[0:01:57] BB: Wow. In your bio here, you also, besides the celeb stuff, which, comings and goings, but you're interested in, it says, "Debunking diet culture and destigmatizing mental health struggles." Could you expand on that a little bit?

[0:02:11] IG: Sure. I never really wanted to pigeonhole myself with my work, so I'm a bit of a generalist within women's lifestyle magazines. Those two things are things that have affected me strongly in my life. There are things that I've wanted to explore and bring conversations that aren't necessarily being had to more people.

[0:02:32] BB: Important topics, and I'm sure you have lots to cover right now with the Ozempic craze and everything. So, we're going to get into a little bit of that. But, real quick, how is your inbox, especially with you turning that many stories up in an hour or two?

[0:02:47] IG: It's a bit terrifying.

[0:02:49] BB: Terrifying. I think that's a new word gained on this show, too. Okay, terrifying, and how so? Volume? Content?

[0:02:57] IG: Yes. I get hundreds of PR pitches a day and I do open most of them, which I think isn't necessarily advisable, and I'm not sure why I'm still doing it. But I'm always like, I might miss something.

[0:03:12] BB: Okay. You have the like, "Oh, I might miss something if I don't look at it." But do you feel that that serves you well?

[0:03:20] IG: No. I need a new system. Definitely.

[0:03:24] BB: Okay. We need a new system. I have to tell you, a lot of people on the show would like the new system, frankly. But no one knows what that system is. So here we are in the inbox. Okay. Given that you're opening everything email, is the subject line that important or do you have preference over certain subject lines you see where you're like, "Oh, well, that one I need to open before any others?"

[0:03:45] IG: Yes. I mean, there's some subject lines and some specific publicists where I know this is just not going to be a fit for me. It's not something I cover. Well, which I shouldn't really be getting those in the first place. But I do. So, those ones I would delete, then there's a lot of ones within beauty, I would just open it and just see, "Oh, is there something that I want to use here?" If not, sort of click out of it.

[0:04:06] BB: Got you. Okay. Speaking of systems, do you have a system to corral all these emails? Or you amass to leader and you try to get to inbox zero or what?

[0:04:15] IG: Yes. I'm scheduling reminders. If I open an email, and I'm like, "You know what, I might want to respond to this," and I don't have capacity that day. I'll just be like, "Oh, remind me tomorrow," which is quite good for like peace of mind right now. But then the next day, you're like, "Oh, I have 12 reminders and I don't want to deal with them today, either."

[0:04:34] BB: I know. I experimented with that trick too, but then it's like depressing. Then emails come back and you're like, "Oh, it's not solved. Here it's now just more buried. Not fun." Okay, so you're piloting that. Tell us what are the emails you love to get and more specifically, the pitches you love to get, as specific as you can get. Because we don't want to hear just like, "Oh, if it's about" – I'm sure like It's about something juicy with celebrity, obviously. But tell us more.

[0:05:03] IG: Yes. Well, that is one category that I love to get. Celebrity interview opportunities are definitely a big one for me. I love doing those. I love reading them and I love speaking to these people that we hear so much about and kind of seeing who the person is. So, that's a

really big one. I love when people introduce an expert they're representing, because I use a lot of medical experts, dermatologist, dieticians, that kind of thing. Usually, I won't respond, but I'll just star them for when I'm writing something that is a good fit. I also really like when people send me like new beauty product releases that kind of thing. Just seeing if something might be a fit for something I'm working on and then also getting samples is a nice little perk.

[0:05:47] BB: Oh, okay. So, you like some samples. This is good for people to hear. By the way, do you get inundated with too many of them? Because I've heard people saying like, "Oh my God, please do not. I cannot handle these things to my house."

[0:06:01] IG: Yes. But beauty is an amazing area and I'm kind of like, "This is very expensive stuff that I might not be able to afford on a journalist earning." So, I'm quite happy about it.

[0:06:14] BB: There you go. Okay, noted. I'm a little curious about the perfect kind of celeb pitch, because I would imagine some of the representation doesn't want to tell you certain things. But then maybe they want to tell you positive things like you have Hailey Bieber, who's having her cute little baby bumps and everything. We like that. But there's some stuff that's maybe not as positive. So, how does that look? Pitches from the actual publicist representing celebs?

[0:06:44] IG: I've never done an interview where I'm like grilling someone or trying to get some data out of someone. Obviously, if someone's just been in like a huge controversy, and they're like pitch to me, I'm not going to pursue that. I don't really have an interest in like creating greater controversy. So usually, it's is actually quite straightforward. I mean, you'll get the odds, publicists saying, "Please don't bring up this one topic or whatever." But usually, with the kinds of interviews I do, it's quite friendly.

[0:07:10] BB: I want to be clear for everyone who's wondering like, "Oh, is she getting like dirt?" No. No. It's like Prince Harry arriving to St. Paul's Cathedral. Sandra Bullock wants to work with Keanu Reeves again, before I die movie. It's positive type of stuff, which I think is refreshing, actually.

[0:07:27] IG: Yes. I mean, most of that stuff is not I'm not getting any publicists pictures to inform that. The thing where publicists will come in for a news story would be if someone's wearing a specific product, or like reference to a specific product, or sometimes I get, Spotify pictures about something someone said on a podcast, that kind of thing. Or people will request that I changed something in an article. Can I actually say something on that?

[0:07:55] BB: Oh, please. Yes, corrections corner.

[0:07:59] IG: Obviously, I have no obligation to add your brand and afterwards. I do it sometimes as a courtesy.

[0:08:05] BB: That's generous.

[0:08:07] IG: But yes, proactive is good. So, if you're seeing a celebrity wearing your brand one day, and you haven't pitched it, and then I'm writing the story, and I didn't know. I mean, I would prefer if the pitch had been sent the day before, if that makes sense.

[0:08:22] BB: Yes. Okay. So, it sounds like you will accept with some grace, some follow-up emails with slight modifications when appropriate.

[0:08:31] IG: Yes. If someone's wearing a brand, like that can be really helpful for us with affiliate marketing and all that stuff.

[0:08:37] BB: Yes. Okay. Everybody needs to note that. We also heard you like samples. So, how can people build relationships with you where they go, "Okay, you're going to open my email." Is it for example, "Tea time in London?" Or you're like, "I never want to see you. Just please send me an email. That's good."

[0:08:54] IG: No, I love meeting publicists.

[0:08:56] BB: Oh, we have a fan. Okay.

[0:08:59] IG: I think it's really important to take that time and sort of ask questions. I agree. Because I get so many pitches from people that just like they're not relevant to me or my work, and I know that this is a common problem, and it's kind of like, "Well, what are you doing? This is a waste of your time. It's a waste of my time."

[0:09:17] BB: Yes. Why do you think that happens, by the way?

[0:09:17] IG: I'm pretty mystified by it, to be honest. I mean, you'd think that someone would want to pitch someone who made sense for the client.

[0:09:27] BB: Yes. But it doesn't make sense. Maybe your client told you to send out all these emails or someone told you to send out 200. Who knows? I am mystified by it as well.

[0:09:40] IG: Yes. I have clients listen to your podcasts because they are often the problem from speaking to publicists.

[0:09:46] BB: Honestly, yes, they are. It's a lack of trust. I think sometimes for whatever reasons, maybe it's not well established or whatever, or you are kind of behind, so now the client doesn't trust you. So, now they're pressuring you to do blah, blah, blah.

[0:10:00] IG: My policy for anything in life is don't hire someone you don't trust, so you start there.

[0:10:06] BB: Really? And figure out how to establish trust early and initially. We do this fun thing. This is a little aside, but just for anyone out there who could find this, something we just call called Designing the Alliance, DTA. What it is, is it's kind of a little written contract. You can put it on Google Docs. That's what we do. But we have it with a lot of our clients and also with each other just as team members, so that people can understand, "Hey, how are we going to be when shit hits the fan with one another? What am I going to bring to this relationship? How do I behave sometimes, when there's potential confrontation, or something not going well? It just like sets that all out in the open so that you can refer back to it. It's so nice, it really is. Anyway, highly recommend.

Okay, I want to get into your role, because when we have folks on here, we have freelancers, we have reporters, we have deputy editors, we had a directing editor yesterday. So, your morning editor. Tell us a little bit about how you're playing maybe traffic control with sending or forwarding, if at all, pitches to your team versus things you will write. It sounds like you do and crank out a lot of your own stuff. But how does that look? Does that take place? Can publicists assume sometimes like, "Oh, she might pass it along to one of her staff writers." Or is that just not happening? You tell us.

[0:11:29] IG: I don't have staff writers, so that's – I do actually get pitches from journalists, sometimes. I'm not a commissioning editor. I don't have a team. I'm working independently.

[0:11:39] BB: Good. Okay. It's all you writing all the things.

[0:11:42] IG: It is, yes.

[0:11:42] BB: Okay. No freelancers coming to you. Well, do you respond to them? Probably, you get too many.

[0:11:48] IG: I respond if the pitch is well done. If the pitch is well done, and they seem to know what they're talking about. I mean, look, it's not very nice of me. I should respond to people who don't know what they're doing. But I just feel like you can Google it.

[0:12:03] BB: Yes. You can Google it. There's so much information online these days. So, why don't you Google it? That's my question or OpenAI it or whatever you – yes, okay.

[MESSAGE]

[0:12:14] 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]

[0:12:37] BB: Is there sources that you were always looking for? You mentioned a little bit earlier with health wellness folks, but what are some titles of people you're really looking for?

[0:12:47] IG: Yes. A bunch, like I said, I like to write a lot of different topics. So, within fashion, I'd be looking for stylists, bridal experts from time to time, some fashion influencers, stylists are a bit better. Within beauty, some influencers, some estheticians, mainly dermatologists.

[0:13:07] BB: Dermatologists, yes. I've been hearing that a lot lately on this show too. People love skin.

[0:13:12] IG: Oh, my God, I love a dermatologist. They're so smart and they always like know how to talk about this subject so well and they're just a dream as sources to be honest, and there are a lot out there.

[0:13:24] BB: There are.

[0:13:25] IG: Then, also sorry, I forgot to say hair care, hair stylists, beauty, makeup artists.

[0:13:31] BB: And scalp experts. What are those folks called? Have you heard of this?

[0:13:36] IG: Trichologists.

[0:13:37] BB: Yes, trichologists. I see that this is an up-and-coming field.

[0:13:42] IG: Yes. Which is much needed and it's a great one for haircare stories. I write a lot of commerce within those categories. I also, within health, just lots of different general practitioners, dieticians, depending on what the subject is, just lots of different doctors. So, I tend to if I get a pitch for something that I've written about in the past, I'll just star it and get back to you when I've got something in the works.

[0:14:09] BB: Okay. We got a starring system kind of going. Do you ever take – I haven't been asking this lately, but I want to come back to it to remind myself. Embargoes, exclusives, are those ever of interest to you?

[0:14:20] IG: Only in a context of interviews. Well, no. Some celeb news as well. If it's like embargoed till tomorrow, that's fine. I'll just sort of cover if it's interesting to me. Then, yes, celeb interviews, usually, they'll be working on some project that's embargoed and you just publish the story at that point. So, it doesn't put me off.

[0:14:42] BB: Okay. It doesn't put you off. Okay. That's good to know. How can publicists, if at all, make your life easier?

[0:14:49] IG: Don't ask me to do your work.

[0:14:53] BB: Such as? Let's clarify that one.

[0:14:55] IG: I get the occasional email that's like, "What are you working on? How can we help you?"

[0:15:00] BB: Oh, and it's just like a general blah.

[0:15:03] IG: Why would I tell you that? I don't have five minutes to list what I'm working on and I don't even know who you are and how you can help me. Or if you would help me like, it's such a waste of everyone's time and it's so lazy.

[0:15:15] BB: I'm glad you are calling this one out, because I agree with you. This person does not have the bandwidth, or like the copy-and-paste ability to be like, "You know what, here's 17 things. Can you help?" No. But tell me if you prefer this, because I've seen people do this. "Hey, Susie, here are my three new clients. Here's what's up with them. This angle, this angle." Kind of like a little digest. Are those ever helpful for you? If of course it's in your coverage area?

[0:15:41] IG: Yeah, I'll star something if there's an expert within it, that would be useful to me. I rarely want to be pitched story angles. That's probably something that's more suited to a staff editor. But it's not, again, it's not like going to put me off completely, but I rarely will sort of use your story angles. So, I'd rather just have a contact for the expert.

[0:16:05] BB: Yes. Boom, here's the expert. Take it from here. Got you. Is there anything with pitches that really just grinds your gears, that we just want to put out there? Tell us, Iris.

[0:16:18] IG: I mean, there's a lot of stuff.

[0:16:19] BB: Okay. Let's dish it. I was like, "You got to be specific."

[0:16:22] IG: Yes. Not doing your basic research. I don't write about cars and I don't write about I don't know, weightlifting. I mean, I might write about weightlifting in the future, but I don't at the moment. Just see what I've written about. I mean, there's a lot of different things. Don't say you loved so and so article I wrote. You didn't. You just googled it and put it in – when like a really big block of text, no images. unclear what you're selling me. No links.

[0:16:53] BB: Oh, no links. No links?

[0:16:57] IG: It's common.

[0:16:57] BB: Really? But are there attachments?

[0:17:02] IG: Sometimes, no. I got an email the other day that was a follow-up in a new thread. So, it didn't have the original email in it. "Just following up, will you be free for this event with first name?" I was literally like, "Who is first name? What is this event? I've never heard of you. I've never spoken to you. What's going on?"

[0:17:21] BB: No. Oh, that's bad. I'm sorry. That's bad.

[0:17:26] IG: Well, it's kind of funny and I feel bad. I mean, your job seems really hard and we're always bashing you.

[0:17:31] BB: It is hard. But in a way, it's simple. And with just a little bit of, we'd like to say, I like to say, "Slow is smooth and smooth is fast." Slow it down. Spend two minutes. Look at that reporter. "Oh, you know what? They don't cover autos. Okay, Skip. Not a fit." There's such pressure, I think with, "Oh, my God, I got to get out these 47 pitches. I'll just copy, pray and spray." Just boom, boom, boom. It's like, no.

[0:17:59] IG: I mean, clients are often the problem and the pressure behind that, but I just feel like, why are they hiring someone if they don't trust the work they're doing? And also, just like in their interest, that's going to put people off more than it's going to get them on board. So really, in their interest, they should leave the professionals to do their work. How they see fit.

[0:18:19] BB: I know. I hate to say it, but fire your clients. That sounds scary, though. But fire your clients. If you're in a spot, all the maybe elder publicists who are running the shops, we've done that a number of times, and it can hurt in moments where like, "Oh, that that money is so good." But when you have your values, and those are tight –

[0:18:38] IG: Think about it this way. I mean, if the journalist is getting bad pitches from you, because you have a bad client, then that's hurting your relationship with them and it's hurting all your other clients' chances of getting featured.

[0:18:52] BB: It is. It's a long game view. But sometimes people are not playing the long game or I don't know. Anyway, we don't have enough time on this show to get into it. But I do have a last little part here, a rapid-fire set of questions. So, are you ready?

[0:19:04] IG: Let's do it.

[0:19:04] BB: Iris, let's go. First off, phone or video interview?

[0:19:09] IG: Phone for source, video if it's like an interview with that person, like the article.

[0:19:14] BB: Yes. You want to make sure it's the person. Okay. Bullet points or paragraphs in a pitch?

[0:19:20] **IG:** Short paragraphs.

[0:19:21] **BB:** Short paragraphs. We already covered short or long pitches. So, you want short.

[0:19:25] **IG:** Images attached or a Dropbox zip file?

[0:19:28] **IG:** Attached.

[0:19:28] **BB:** How about email versus any DMs, like on your Instagram or X or whatever we're calling it?

[0:19:34] **IG:** No DMs.

[0:19:35] **BB:** No DMs. None. Zero. Follow-ups?

[0:19:38] **IG:** One.

[0:19:39] **BB:** One. One and done. Okay. Direct or creative subject lines. This trips people up sometimes?

[0:19:45] **IG:** Yes, direct but it's not like horrible if it's creative. Dry is fine. I need to know what the pitch is about.

[0:19:54] **BB:** Yes. Dry is fine. That's my takeaway from this call. Dry is fine.

[0:19:59] **IG:** Gold.

[0:20:01] **BB:** Press release or media kit?

[0:20:03] **IG:** Whatever makes more sense.

[0:20:05] **BB:** Okay. A time that you read pitches by chance. What should we know about that?

[0:20:10] IG: Oh, God. All day.

[0:20:11] BB: All the time. All the time. Hundreds. We heard, you got hundreds. Good God. Okay. And then we already covered sources. So, my last question for you, is there anything we can tout, celebrate, highlight about your work, Marie Claire, anything else? You got something going on?

[0:20:31] IG: Nothing in particular.

[0:20:32] BB: No. Just read her articles and send her good stuff to review, perhaps?

[0:20:38] IG: That'd be great.

[0:20:39] BB: Got you. Yes. We don't get to ask that so often on here. Let's say, "Oh, my celebrity has a new brand. They're going to" – how do they send you things? Is it going to the office? Is it going to your home? What are we doing?

[0:20:53] IG: Yes, my home.

[0:20:54] BB: Your home. Okay. That delivery person's probably busy. I love it. I love it. Thank you so much for being on the show today, Iris. This was just lovely. I just want to tell everybody don't be sending emails with no links. That's another one of my takeaways from here. No links. No, go. That's my takeaway. Iris Goldsztajn for Marie Claire, morning editor. Thank you so much. All the way from London. Have a good rest of the evening over there.

[0:21:21] IG: Thank you. You too.

[0:21:23] BB: You got it. Thanks so much.

[0:21:25] IG: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:21:26] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode featuring Iris Goldsztajn, morning editor at Marie Claire. 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]