

EPISODE 220

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:09] 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 the right journalists? Head to our website at onepitch.co to learn more.

Our guest on today's episode of Coffee with a Journalist is Stephanie Palazzolo. Stephanie is an AI reporter at The Information covering AI startups, VCs, tech giants in research. She also writes AI Agenda, The Information's daily newsletter on AI. During the episode, Stephanie walks us through her background in tech investment making, the sources of story she's currently most interested in, and her favorite resources in reading for staying up-to-date on artificial intelligence.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:51] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. What we try to do on our little show here is demystify the world of PR and working with journalists, reporters, editors, writers, all the comms and media people out there that we need to all be in good working condition and good relationships with because we all need each other.

With us today is a reporter from The Information, an outlet that I like to read every day. Great if you're in the tech world. She's here to talk about AI, pitching, all the things. Welcome, Stephanie.

[00:01:28] SP: Yes. Thank you so much. Really happy to be here.

[00:01:30] BB: Yes. First of all, Stephanie, I do ask this pretty much of everyone. For those who may not be as familiar, what does The Information's coverage include?

[00:01:41] **SP:** Yes. As you kind of mentioned earlier, we are a tech and finance and business-focused outlet, so write a lot about VC and startups, Silicon Valley, big tech, but also cover the world of finance and media as well. So lots of fun, fun stuff there.

[00:01:59] **BB:** Oh, for sure. Specifically for your coverage beats, Stephanie, how would you describe it?

[00:02:05] **SP:** Yes. I'm the AI reporter here. That basically means that –

[00:02:08] **BB:** A little busy then, just a little bit.

[00:02:11] **SP:** Yes. Just like AI is a super underground thing, so nobody really knows about it but –

[00:02:15] **BB:** No, no one does. You're the ones making it. How about that?

[00:02:20] **SP:** Yes. But basically here, I write our AI Agenda, which is our daily newsletter on AI, and then kind of just cover the industry more broadly. It's pretty broad-ranging, everything from VC and AI startups to big Tech, to cloud and chips research and policy. It definitely gets a touch on a lot of areas which I really love.

[00:02:42] **BB:** Now, usually, I don't be asking this stuff, but do you have a take on how you feel AI is going? Or is that too hot for me to ask?

[00:02:52] **SP:** No, no. I mean, I don't know. I think it's kind of interesting because pre-journalism, I used to work as like a tech investment banker. I think so much of my job was working with companies that were going public, writing their S1, which really included marketing these companies, making them sound amazing. Coming into journalism, I was actually very optimistic and excited about tech, which I still am.

[00:03:15] **BB:** Yes, good.

[00:03:16] SP: Yes. But I feel like now I've almost got a little bit of skepticism or gotten a little bit [inaudible 00:03:21]. I think AI is amazing. I think the tech is really, really cool, and there's lots of amazing use cases out there. But I think people do kind of overestimate what it can do in the short run. We have a lot further to go than what people might think.

[00:03:36] BB: I feel the same. Okay. Let's talk about your inbox. How is it in there?

[00:03:41] SP: It's pretty crazy.

[00:03:42] BB: I'd imagine. I'd imagine. What's in there?

[00:03:45] SP: Oh, man. I mean, in terms of pitches, I feel like I get probably 40 to 50 pitches a day. Yes. Just everything around –

[00:03:55] BB: Not as bad as I thought, honestly. I thought you would be the hottest ticket in every tech world everything right now but you know.

[00:04:01] SP: Yes. I don't know. I mean, I could definitely be underestimating it. But maybe a lot of it just goes to my spam or something. But, yes, I don't know. I feel like there's just so many ways you can come at it from in terms of sometimes we have investors reaching out or startups or just like tech or people from Washington. It's quite a wide range of different types of pitches.

[00:04:23] BB: For pitches you like versus you don't like, what would you delineate those differences as?

[00:04:30] SP: Yes, totally. I mean, so I actually feel like I'm pretty good at going through all the pitches in my inbox. I sit down and dedicate 20, 30 minutes in the morning and then will go through in the afternoon around 5 or 6pm. Yes. That's like –

[00:04:44] BB: You got some time blocking done. Okay, good.

[00:04:47] SP: Yes. But because I'm going through every single pitch, I do appreciate it when they're short and to the point, especially ones where the main idea is in the subject line.

[00:04:58] BB: Right in the front in the subject line.

[00:05:00] SP: Yes. For instance, OpenAI released GPT-4o.

[00:05:03] BB: Yes, the chatty one, the casual conversation one with all the things.

[00:05:07] SP: Yes, yes. The very flirty and fun one, as all the videos on Twitter are showing. But for instance, I had somebody say – there's one subject line where it said, “Silicon Valley source on OpenAI’s GPT-4o announcement.” That's just very general. I have no idea who the source is. I don't know what their take is. Versus I had another one that said, “OpenAI disappoints ahead of anticipated search announcement.” That one was interesting. I was like, “Oh, okay. This person has a take. It's something different that I hadn't really heard before.”

It also showed that they had been following the news because basically – originally, there were rumors going around that OpenAI was going to release a search engine on Monday, but it didn't end up doing that. So it showed that this person had been following the rumors and the gossip, close enough to [inaudible 00:05:52] expected and that they didn't end up doing that.

[00:05:58] BB: Stephanie, 50% of your time just occupied by OpenAI or you actually have bandwidth for anything else?

[00:06:04] SP: Yes. No. OpenAI takes up very much of my time. Honestly, probably more than I wanted to, just because there are so many other interesting things that I wish I could spend more time on. But, I mean, OpenAI is the most important startup or potentially even just straight-up company in AI right now. But, yes, it's a lot of time.

[00:06:25] BB: Okay. Then do you have a method to sorting, filing; a method to the madness for the 200-plus pitches you get, let's say, a week?

[00:06:36] SP: Yes.

[00:06:36] BB: What do you do?

[00:06:37] SP: I mean, I basically just go through them whenever I get to work, whenever I leave work. I feel like I basically have some separate folders, so I have one folder that's maybe for pitches that aren't as interesting to me. Then for the other ones, I'll just reply to them basically as soon as I read them. So I don't really have a folder that's a respond to these later type things. I just have to do it then or else I'm going totally forget about it. But, yes, that's the method to the madness [inaudible 00:07:03].

[00:07:03] BB: Okay.

[BREAK]

[00:07:07] 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 RESUMED]

[00:07:30] BB: Is there a pitch that you recently have received where you're like, "Yes, thank you. That is what I like to see."? Any such?

[00:07:38] SP: Yes. I mean, I recently got a pitch that was in response to a recent story that I wrote. I wrote a story yesterday about this AI startup that isn't doing very well, and it's basically looking to sell itself because it's running out of cash. Then I got an email this morning that it was somebody working in PR, and they were saying, "Oh, I really love the story you wrote yesterday. It reminds me of this other startup that's also looking to sell itself but for this other reason."

I don't know. I think that one really stood out to me because it's clear that they read my work. They know what I'm interested in and what I'm following. Then it's also very relevant to what I work on. They're not trying to just shove in a source that doesn't really have to do with AI or [inaudible 00:08:15]. It's just definitely fits very cleanly with the kind of themes that I'm after.

[00:08:23] BB: Okay. Is there maybe an opposite type of pitch? Now, you don't have to say names as you're being very gracious, but anything where you're like, "Please, no. I can't do anything with this." Clearly ones that are off-topic. Someone's sending you a pitch to talk about some pair of shoes or something, obviously not going to work. But any others that you're like, "Almost but just no."

[00:08:45] SP: Yes. I mean, this is just more of a style type thing, but I feel like it is where it's just super long. There's paragraphs and paragraphs.

[00:08:54] BB: Oh, jeez.

[00:08:55] SP: I would also say pitches where it's kind of just like they basically just send over a quote that I can pop into a story. I mean, I feel like it is nice to know that these people are aware of the news, but I very rarely just use quotes that people send over in pitches.

[00:09:09] BB: Yes. Tell us why. Because it's so cut and paste. It's so boring. Or what would you say?

[00:09:15] SP: Yes. I mean, I feel like they're always very general, which I think is [inaudible 00:09:19] because they're probably sending out to lots of journalists. But, yes, it's kind of like it'll say something without really saying anything, if that makes sense. Usually, because so much of my work is around my newsletter, which the whole point is to have an opinion, these quotes usually don't really have an opinion or a specific take. It's more just like, "Oh, this is an interesting space," or saying something very broad in general. It doesn't really fit in with the type of writing that I do.

[00:09:47] BB: Okay. So no, "AI is going to change the world," quote.

[00:09:50] SP: Yes, yes.

[00:09:52] BB: God, yes. I feel for you, Stephanie. I feel for you, Stephanie. Okay. This is such a field that is changing by the hour. How are you staying up-to-date with all the iterations? Are

there newsletters you're loving? Is there some kind of crazy academic source you're using? Are you just talking to people? What are you doing?

[00:10:12] SP: Yes, yes. I mean, I think a big part of it is just having to write the daily newsletter, which means I have to be texting and calling people every day.

[00:10:17] BB: You have to be. Yes.

[00:10:18] SP: But I think there are so many really great resources out there. I think in terms of just newsletters and sites that I keep up with, I really love Import AI. It's this pretty research-focused AI newsletter by one of the founders of Anthropic. Another one is supervised by Matthew Lynley. He goes a lot into data and data science. He obviously knows his stuff, too. I think other than that, I feel like I usually just check out the typical sites; New York Times, Wall Street Journal, TechCrunch.

I also really love reading more culture pieces about AI. The Wire does a bunch. Yes, those pieces where it's like, "How are kids using AI," or telling me the story of this man with an AI girlfriend. I think those are all [inaudible 00:11:06].

[00:11:06] BB: Oh, God. I know. I just finished Annie Bot, which is a fictional account. I don't know if you saw that, and it's not too illuminating necessarily. But, yes, it's this very human bot, and she basically breaks away because it didn't go well.

[00:11:24] SP: Wow. Well, hopefully, that will not happen here.

[00:11:27] BB: I know. I'm going off the thing, but we love books here. So there you go. Okay. Stephanie, for those folks you'd like to make a relationship with, is there a way to go about that, whether it's a – I mean, obviously, we're publicists here, so with publicists, with anybody, anything. You tell us.

[00:11:43] SP: Yes. I mean, I think email is probably just the best way. I do not respond. I'm very bad at checking my Twitter DMs or my LinkedIn DMs. I do get a little bit scared whenever people call me on my phone.

[00:11:55] BB: Where are they finding your number?

[00:11:57] SP: I don't know. I mean, I feel like it's pretty easy.

[00:11:58] BB: [inaudible 00:11:58].

[00:11:59] SP: Yes. I feel like it's pretty easy to find my number. But, yes, I think email is usually the best way.

[00:12:06] BB: Okay, okay. This is good to know. So email you. Okay. Sources, whom are you looking for if anyone?

[00:12:13] SP: Yes. Very, very broad range of people. I think the ones that are expected are, obviously, investors investing in AI, AI founders. I think maybe some sources that I don't hear from as much that I would love to hear from more are researchers, academics, or professors and people at different universities or in labs. I think that would be really great. I think also one area that we love to talk about here at The Information is how are actual businesses putting AI into production because it's very easy to be like, "Oh, look at how cool this is. This is going to change the world."

But there are a lot of problems that come up whenever you actually try to use AI in your basement. Yes we'd love talking to people. If we could talk to people at Morgan Stanley and Walmart and big healthcare companies and insurance companies that are very – yes, I feel like it's a lot slower to get new tech up and running in some of these industries. So it would be great to talk to more people working at these big companies on how this works in practice.

[00:13:15] BB: Okay. If you're representing big companies, Stephanie is open. Okay. Okay. That's great. What about – some people have asked for this question to be presented more often on this podcast, so I'm going to toss it to you, Stephanie. What about your typical week cadence? If you have one, do you do, for examples, "Hey, I do interviews in my mornings. On Wednesdays, I am just writing. Thursdays, I clear out the inbox."? I don't know. Is there any cadence at all?

[00:13:44] SP: Yes. I think normally I will write my newsletter in the mornings before maybe 2pm Eastern. Then I spend my afternoons doing calls.

[00:13:54] BB: Afternoons for calls. Yes.

[00:13:56] SP: Yes. Then Thursdays basically is my off from the newsletter. That's like back-to-back calls. I like to schedule all my interviews and stuff for then. But, yes, other than that, I'm pretty flexible.

[00:14:07] BB: Okay. We like flexible, Stephanie. We like that. Okay. Another question someone was just asking in, I'm going to read this here. This question is do you occasionally post reminders on your social media channels about the specific topics you cover in an effort to reduce the number of relevant pitches you receive? Now, I've seen some of your posts, but what would you say? Because some journalists do that. 'Oh. Hey, everybody. Reminder, I'm looking for doctors to help with my health tech beat.' But is that a technique you're using at all?

[00:14:37] SP: Yes. I haven't really done that. I think it's more just because AI is so crazy.

[00:14:42] BB: Yes. You're like, "Forget that. I can't. I can't." Then one other question before we get into my quick-fire questions is what's the approval process like for your stories. Since you're a reporter, we assume you got an editor and, of course, the newsroom. Is there kind of a pitch process you have to go through?

[00:15:00] SP: Yes. I think so for more traditional stories, there usually has to be some element of a scoop or an exclusive in it, some detail that's not really publicly known. I think for the newsletter, it's a lot more flexible, and I have a lot more control over it. In terms of, I think, what we could use help from outside sources on, we do obviously cover exclusive funding rounds. Then I also write a lot of trend pieces and educational pieces. Usually, for those, we love to talk to startups that are involved in some interesting trend in AI. For instance, recently, there's been a lot of music that's generated with AI. So I talked to –

[00:15:37] BB: Yes, there has been.

[00:15:39] **SP:** Five different, yes, music generation AI startups for that sort of piece. I think luckily for me, those pieces are mostly under my control. My editor does let me have kind of free rein with the newsletter, which is really nice. Yes, that's very, very nice to know.

[00:15:55] **BB:** Okay. Stephanie, we have a little quick-fire portion of our podcast here. Are you ready for the answers?

[00:16:03] **SP:** Yes.

[00:16:04] **BB:** Let's do it. Phone or video interviews?

[00:16:09] **SP:** Video.

[00:16:09] **BB:** Video. I haven't heard that answer in a while.

[00:16:12] **SP:** I know.

[00:16:12] **BB:** Bullet point or paragraphs in pitches?

[00:16:15] **SP:** Bullet points.

[00:16:16] **BB:** Okay. Short or long pitches? I assume short then if you want some bullets.

[00:16:21] **SP:** Yes, short. I feel like two to three paragraphs usually.

[00:16:23] **BB:** Yes, tops. How about images attached or a Dropbox zip file?

[00:16:29] **SP:** Images because I'm very bad –

[00:16:31] **BB:** Attached?

[00:16:32] **SP:** Yes, images attached. I'm very bad.

[00:16:34] BB: I know. I don't like to click another thing to click another thing. No. Email or any DMs? You already mentioned this but just to be clear.

[00:16:42] SP: Yes, email. Email is best.

[00:16:43] BB: Yes. One follow-up or multiple?

[00:16:46] SP: I think two follow-ups is a good amount.

[00:16:48] BB: That's the max. Got it. Direct or creative subject lines? We talked on this a little bit, but do expand.

[00:16:56] SP: I personally think direct is more helpful, but I have gotten some pretty out there creative ones that have caught my eye, so I don't know.

[00:17:04] BB: Caught your eye and been of benefit or just caught your eye that's funny.

[00:17:08] SP: Caught my eye like that's funny. But then I do click on it and read –

[00:17:11] BB: Oh. Well, okay. All right. Press release or media kit?

[00:17:15] SP: Press release.

[00:17:16] BB: Time you read pitches? You were talking a little bit about that. You have your blocks but anything else?

[00:17:20] SP: Yes. Usually 9am. I spend 20, 30 minutes and then 5 or 6pm, whenever I'm leaving for the day.

[00:17:27] BB: Okay. You do good blocking, Stephanie. Most people lately on here have been like, “All the time. All the time.” It's like, “Wow. That's –”

[00:17:35] SP: No, I cannot do that for my sanity's sake.

[00:17:39] BB: Yes. I'm with you. Then we talked about sources that you're looking for, so we covered that. Stephanie, is there anything, lastly, that we can celebrate, tout, highlight y'all are doing, you're doing, anything you got? I mean, there's lots of newsletters. Sign up for your newsletter, of course, but.

[00:17:56] SP: Yes. I would say always looking for feedback and thoughts on the newsletter. I would love to be able to write on topics that people are really interested in. I guess one little shout out is that we are having our first-ever AI Summit in September, and so –

[00:18:11] BB: Look at that. Yes.

[00:18:13] SP: Wait for that.

[00:18:15] BB: Okay. You told us more, September. But, yes, how long, what's going on, all the things.

[00:18:19] SP: Yes. It's going to be based in SF. It's happening on September 5th. Yes. We're going to have Reid Hoffman speaking.

[00:18:27] BB: Oh, hey.

[00:18:28] SP: [inaudible 00:18:28] AI founders and other investors and researchers. Please submit [inaudible 00:18:34]. Yes. If you have any good speakers that you want us to consider.

[00:18:38] BB: Oh, speakers. Okay, call for speakers. Look at that. Oh, good. Stephanie, thank you so much for being on today. This is great. I cannot imagine the speed at which your beat is changing, so I salute you. Thank you for doing the good work out there and keeping us posted on all things AI.

[00:18:58] SP: Yes. Thank you for having me.

[00:19:00] BB: You are welcome, Stephanie. She's a reporter at The Information covering everything in AI. Thanks again, Miss Stephanie. Really appreciate you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:19:08] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, featuring Stephanie Palazzolo, AI reporter at The Information. 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. But until then, start great stories.

[END]