

EPISODE 221

[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 Elisabeth Sherman, associate editor at Parents.com. During the episode, Elisabeth walks us through what she recommends PR pros do before pitching her, the nuances of pitching a product versus expert commentary, how she keeps her inbox organized in her new role, and more.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:39] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, and we do this little fun show because we all publicists are trying to know how to better work with our media and journalist friends. Maybe sometimes not friends, let's call them colleagues. But how we can make our working relationship better is what we want to do. And with us today, coming all the way from Jersey, is Elisabeth Sherman. She is the associate editor at Parents.com.

[00:01:08] BB: I bet you have a lot of parental knowledge to infuse in us. Elisabeth, so excited to have you here. Hi.

[00:01:16] ES: Thank you. Hi. Thank you so much for having me.

[00:01:19] BB: Yes. Exciting. Now, you were previously freelancing and you've also been an adjunct instructor at Columbia. No big deal. You've done a couple of things. So first off, perhaps I know it's fresh in the job that you just got to Parents.com from. Associate editor. Congrats.

[00:01:37] BB: How would you describe, though, for everyone who's of course, listening, what Parents.com covers?

[00:01:44] ES: Absolutely. There's a place for, you know, kind of that personal essay about parenting. Lots of parenting sites out there do that, but we do that a little bit less. So we're kind of going to give you a lot of information answering questions that you might google in the space of your pregnancy. What medications can you take while pregnant?

What are things that are safe for toddlers to eat? Kind of that more informative type of thing. Obviously, we do, if you go on the site, we do a lot of fun stuff, like I said, responses to news and things like that. But it is going to be more of that kind of research and expert back to material, which is great.

[00:02:22] BB: Don't we all need that? Yes. By the way, are you a parent?

[00:02:26] ES: I am.

[00:02:27] BB: I can hear the kids in the background. I was like, I hear somebody. Okay.

[00:02:31] ES: Yes. I have a two and a half year old and you. She's in the living room right now watching Cars, so you may hear her.

[00:02:37] BB: Love it, love it. Okay, so you just got there, Elisabeth, so I'm sure, or at least I'm going to hope your inbox is not too busy. But how is it?

[00:02:47] ES: I would say my inbox is pretty wild at all times. It is.

[00:02:55] BB: God, you didn't even have a day where you're like, oh, one email?

[00:02:58] ES: No.

[00:02:59] BB: Wow. Okay. By the way, how, how did people already find you?

[00:03:02] ES: What happened was I was freelancing as a commerce writer, and so when I started at Parents, pretty much everyone who had been pitching me when I was a freelancer just started pitching me immediately for this new position. There wasn't really any lag time there.

And so, yeah, I mean, I'm pretty public about my contact info, and I sort of like to be transparent. So, yeah, it just kind of started right back up again. Yeah.

[00:03:30] BB: Wow. Okay. So because of your history freelancing, you already were getting those pitches. Now people are like, oh, holy cow, she's full time somewhere. Hi. Hi. Okay, so. Oh, I don't think we've had this before, necessarily.

[00:03:43] BB: So when you're a hot take, you just got there. What are the pitches of the people who have previously been pitching you as a freelancer now? Like, is there any difference of like, hey, heard you got the new job. Congrats. And here's my pitch. Or business like usual. No one even cares.

[00:03:59] ES: I think it's definitely a mix. I think when I did start, and I had waited a little bit to say anything on social, I did get a few very kind and polite people reaching out and saying, hey, I saw that you started this new position. Are you ever open to grabbing coffee? Sort of that kind of thing. But then a lot of people were just back in my inbox, like, hey, business as usual, you know?

[00:04:21] BB: Okay, business as usual. They have not missed a beat. They are doing that. Okay, so then do you have, I'm sure as a freelancer you had to have such a system, but maybe it's changed. So let's get into it. How do you organize then, the pitches?

[00:04:37] ES: Yeah, that's such a great question. I think my strategy for a long time was just folders in my email that would be like, publicists I want to work with, and I would actively filter folks that I thought down the line I might want to reply to. That didn't necessarily mean they were going to get a reply the day that they emailed me or even the week that they emailed me, but they were going to be there if an appropriate story came up. I would also, if a publicist, pitch me a story, on a product that I really wanted to try or learn more about, I would save that until it became appropriate. And so I would sort of, like, search for certain brand names in my inbox and see who popped up that way and save those kind of in a separate folder for publicists who represented certain brands that I wanted to maybe explore more. But I'm not necessarily amazing at organization. I would say, like, once a week, I'll sit down and take an hour and just go through my inbox and dedicate some time to that, to clearing it out and responding to what I want to respond to.

[00:05:44] BB: Oh, okay. So you can. Now. I don't hear that too often. Like, a once a week cleanse.

[00:05:48] ES: A cleanse.

[00:05:51] BB: Let's get it. There is nothing better, by the way, of, like, it's Friday and they're zeroing emails. Oh, my God. It's so joyful. It sounds perverse, but yeah. Okay. We also usually don't have on here. Elisabeth, we'll get back to the inbox in a second.

[00:06:08] BB: But an instructor, an adjunct instructor. What are you teaching at Columbia?

[00:06:12] ES: It was a long time ago. I went to Columbia to get my MFA in creative nonfiction, and after I graduated, I taught an undergrad. It's like an intro class. It's like a requirement for one of the 101s. Yeah, like a 101 intro essay writing class. So I taught that class, but it was, like, a decade ago now. It was 2014. I taught that class.

[00:06:37] BB: Oh, okay. Well, we have wrong information here because it says it is still present on your website or your LinkedIn. So that's why we asked. Okay.

[00:06:44] ES: Oh, I'm so sorry.

[00:06:45] BB: No problem. But I like to see media people being teachers and all that good stuff, so. Okay. Okay. Well, we'll update that. Sounds good. All right, back to the inbox. Subject lines.

[00:06:55] BB: What, for you, is like, oh, I need to open that email. Look at how good that subject line is.

[00:07:00] ES: Yeah. So I really like short. If I have to open the email to get the full subject line, I think that probably will stop me. So if it's just, like, exactly who you represent and, like, what it is that you're asking of me, I really appreciate that. I got one, like, earlier this week that it was just the brand that the publicist represented was in the subject line. It was like, it literally just said from X brand in the subject line. And I opened it immediately, and I wanted to learn more

about the brand, but also, it was just, like, easy for me to digest that piece of information in, like, the course of a busy day.

[00:07:48] ES: It was like, oh, she's reaching out from X brand. It's a parenting brand. Super relevant to me, one I've bought in the past for my own daughter. I could see it right away and it just was like. And I was like, oh, this person knows how to get to the point too. So that was pretty okay.

[00:08:30] ES: So I like that a lot. Short and sweet is really good. I also would say, like, if it says something about, like, samples available in the headline.

[00:08:44] BB: Oh, in the subject line?

[00:08:45] ES: Yeah, sorry. Yeah, in the subject line, that can go kind of either way for me. Sometimes I feel like I don't necessarily need a sample of something to write about, but I do like that it's like for a lot of the time, like we need to try something before we write about it. So I appreciate just kind of like the upfrontness about that in that case, because it's less guesswork, I guess I would say. But that's really if you're doing product focused stories, like if you're pitching expert, for instance, like even having interviews available. And the title making that clear. Yeah, like the title of the book, the person's book, if they are writing a book in the subject line too. So that can be really helpful because then I know kind of like that this person has a new book coming out and that's why it would be timely or relevant.

[00:09:34] BB: Okay, what about sources you mentioned earlier? Hey, we're always looking for scientific backed information and resources for those folks. Is there a hot list you got right now that we could help you with?

[00:09:45] ES: Yeah. So we do have a big list of experts that we use to kind of provide insight for our articles. And that is a list that's been at our publication for a long time. That doesn't mean that I am constantly reaching out to people to kind of back up stories or just add a little bit of expert insight. So, you know, if you feel like you have like an OB or like a mental health expert that specializes in family care or children, if you're a doula, if you're a lactation consultant, if you have any kind of expert in breastfeeding or perinatal care, I'm always open to hearing from people like that because I want to expand the list, especially for the sake of diversity and just

getting new voices. You know, if you're someone who, like, for instance, if you're a mental health expert who treats queer families, for instance, you know, that's something that I'm always open to hearing about because I think we want to try to have as many experiences and perspectives at our disposal. So, you know, always open to that. To those kinds of experts.

[00:10:56] ES: Yeah.

[00:10:56] BB: And further on that, just with sources, is it ever from a publicist pitch that you want to hear of, hey, I have so and so source who could a, b and c on this topic want to get on a call for just 15 minutes? Like, do you want to immediately talk to that person just to kind of get a little background or you only want to pull on that when you're like, oh, no, no, no. I have a very specific ask.

[00:11:19] ES: I think it would be the latter. Like, if I had a really specific ask, if it was like, I have a story about x thing, and then, absolutely, let's connect.

[00:11:28] BB: Yeah, there you go. Okay, that's good. To clarify. How can people make a relationship with you, Elisabeth?

[00:11:35] ES: I think, you know, again, if you're someone who is reaching out about a story, like you have an expert or you have a product that you think would be a fit for what we do, and you're open to kind of like, maybe it not being something immediate, maybe being like, I would love to keep this person in mind for a story coming up, or I would really like to try this product, but it might not be a fit. Right now, I work on different stories. Literally, like every single day I'm reading a new story. And so I don't know when the relevant information will come up, but it will.

[00:12:14] BB: It could. Yeah.

[00:12:15] ES: And so I feel like if you're kind of open to that, kind of like, you know, I work on the evergreen side. I don't do anything timely. So if you're someone who's kind of like, so if you're someone who's, like, promoting, and there is completely a place for this, but if you have a timely story or a news hook for your story, I'm probably not going to be, like, the person to work with. If you are kind of someone who represents a source or an expert who is just always

around to give a comment and who can kind of turn a comment around quickly, that's, like, gonna be great for me. Um, yeah, so, yeah, I think that's a really good starting point.

[00:12:53] BB: Good. Then we might answer our own question here.

[00:13:01] ES: But then exclusives embargoes probably don't pertain to me. We definitely cover them at Parents, but I just don't handle them. Yeah.

[00:13:06] BB: Yes. Do you ever pass along? Do you ever, like, hey, okay, yeah, tell us a little bit more about that, because I want more and more people perhaps to know about that of, oh, within the realm of the newsroom, you know, there's discussions being had about your pitch and where it's going and so on and so forth. So it can get to the right person if you don't have the original right person. But go ahead, tell us.

[00:13:29] ES: Yeah, completely. So I was just thinking about this today. We ran, like, a story, like a movie trailer, exclusive, something like that. I'm not handling it.

[00:13:39] BB: Yep, that.

[00:13:40] ES: But if you were to, like, not know who to pitch, and you're like, oh, we have this kids movie. You know, Disney plus is gonna start streaming this kids movie, and it ends up in my inbox. I know the editor to forward that to, and I can always just say, like, hey, I got this pitch, and, yeah, but maybe you would want to check this out, and then it would be in their hands. But it's not like we're all in communication with each other. So, you know, if something does end up with me, I totally can forward it along. That being said, like, it's not like a free for all. Like, I'm not just gonna, like, field everybody's pitches.

[00:14:22] BB: But if it does, like, imagine that.

[00:14:24] ES: Yeah, but if it does end up in my inbox, like, we are always talking to each other every day and absolutely can forward things along as they.

[00:14:32] BB: Come on, you just don't have all the time in the world to be traffic control. There's that. There's that. In fact, that's another question I like to ask for editors. Are you getting a lot of freelancer pitches, or have you already had that even though you were just in that seat?

[00:14:47] ES: Yeah, yeah. I haven't opened up my inbox to freelance pitches yet, but that is not, like, a permanent state of affairs. And so excited to work with freelancers. It was, like, one of the most enticing aspects of this job for me. And that will 1000% be happening sometime in the future. I just don't know when yet, but it will be happening down the line. And, like, like I said, I work on evergreen, so I would be, like, accepting them on a rolling basis and maybe even putting out pitch calls at certain points depending on what comes up. But, yeah, I think I'm just still getting situated at the moment.

[00:15:25] BB: Well, okay. Noted for all the freelancers who are out there, then. Okay. Is there anything folks can do to make your life a bit easier Elisabeth?

[00:15:34] ES: Yeah, I mean, I would say, I know that everyone probably says this, but I just think it's so worth reiterating if you could just, as a publicist, just, like, look at my clips on my website or just go into Parents.com and just literally look at the homepage. Like, I'm not asking for 30 minutes to an hour of research. I'm not. I'm just saying, if you could just take a glance.

[00:16:03] BB: Yeah, literally.

[00:16:04] ES: Because I get. I get tech pitches, I get gift guide pitches, and I get so many food pitches, which I understand because I worked.

[00:16:13] BB: You did? Yes. Previously.

[00:16:15] ES: I totally get that, but I just don't do it anymore. And so that would be pretty obvious if you just, like, even looked at my Twitter bio. Like, I just don't cover that stuff anymore. And so I really, really emphasize that to people. I don't, like, ever want to make a publicist work. I don't want to ever dismiss it, because I have worked with the most incredible publicists who've made stories better and facilitated stories. But if those stories land in my inbox, like, I just delete them, and I always feel bad about that, you know, just to make sure that those people are utilizing their time in the best way. I'm just not, like, the person to send those stories to.

[00:16:57] BB: Noted. Thank you for telling us that. Okay, I have a quick fire list of questions, Elisabeth, that I'm ready to give you, if you're ready.

[00:17:07] ES: Absolutely.

[00:17:07] BB: Let's do it. Video or phone interview?

[00:17:11] ES: Oh, phone. Every time.

[00:17:13] BB: Yes. Where is the art of the freaking phone? I cannot tell you how, like, relieving it is just to have, like, the voice? Oh, it's so good. I'm with you on that. I'm with you. Okay. Bullet points or paragraphs in a pitch?

[00:17:26] ES: Oh, my goodness. I'm going to go with bullet points, but I will say I don't see that very often. Most people give paragraphs. If more people want to send me pitches with bullet points, I would love that.

[00:17:38] BB: Yes. Bullet points are coming back. Okay, then I imagine short or long pitches. Short.

[00:17:43] ES: Short, yeah.

[00:17:44] BB: Email or a dm of any sort.

[00:17:46] ES: I'm going to go with email. So everything is centralized. But I do get pitched on instagram and I don't hate it.

[00:17:53] BB: Ooh. Oh, really? Okay. That's the unique answer. Okay. Okay. Noted. Direct or creative subject lines?

[00:18:02] ES: Direct.

[00:18:03] BB: Okay. Press release or media kits?

[00:18:05] ES: Oh, I would say, if you're an expert and you have, like, a wide range of interests and expertise, like, if you're a pediatrician or a lactation consultant. Great. Because then I can get a sense of, like, all your publications and, you know, what books you've written and where you've spoken before. So even though that kind of goes against what I just said about short and sweet, if you're an expert, a media kit is, like, totally fine with me. Otherwise, press release.

[00:18:33] BB: If it's a product, anytime that you specifically read pitches.

[00:18:37] ES: All day. I'm doing it all day.

[00:18:39] BB: All day. All time. And we already cover sources. Is there anyone else that's just valuable to you right now? A lot of times people on here are like, you got the names, you got the MD person, you got the fancy person, but just like anybody else.

[00:18:54] ES: That's a good question. I would say, like, any kind of, like, I did say doula. You know, like a doula doesn't, like, require a medical degree if you're a therapist and you're not, like, that straight MD that I'm always interested in talking to mental health experts because I think they can apply to so many different stories. So, yeah, I think in that realm, I'm very interested.

[00:19:19] BB: Okay, noted. Elisabeth, is there anything lastly that we can celebrate? Highlight.

[00:19:27] ES: Let's see.

[00:19:28] BB: Yes. God, isn't that so sad? In a way? It's hardly even, we're filming this or taping this at the end of May, and it's like, oh, you're already doing the back to school. What happened this summer? What happened?

[00:19:42] ES: I know. And I saw someone even say they're looking for pitches for the new year.

[00:19:48] BB: Oh, no, no. Yes.

[00:19:53] ES: I was, like, working ahead. Respect. But that's crazy.

[00:19:57] BB: Respect.

[00:19:57] ES: Yeah.

[00:19:58] BB: But also disgrace. Elisabeth, thank you so much for being on today on our lovely little podcast. Elisabeth Sherman, associate editor, Parents.com. thank you so much.

[00:20:09] ES: Thank you so much. Beck, thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:20:12] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode featuring Elisabeth Sherman, associate editor at Parents.com. 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.

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