

**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](http://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]

**[00:00:40] BB:** Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. 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.

With us today, coming all the way from Jersey, is Elisabeth Sherman. She is the Associate Editor at Parents.com. 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. First off, perhaps, I know it's fresh in the job that you just got to Parents.com from Associate Editor. Congrats. How would you describe, though, for everyone who's, of course, listening what Parents.com covers?

**[00:01:44] ES:** Everything that we do in parents is very science and research-backed. We're not going to be that site for the parenting hot take. We do news coverage. You will see responses to

big parenting news events, but it's going to be backed by maybe a new study that came out. Maybe we're going to get a doctor to weigh in. Everything that we do is very expert-backed.

Absolutely, there's a place for kind of that personal essay about parenting. Lots of parenting sites out there do that, but we do that a little bit less. 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-backed material.

**[00:02:45] BB:** Which is great. Don't we all need that? Yes. By the way, are you a parent?

**[00:02:51] ES:** I am. I have –

**[00:02:52] BB:** I can hear the kids in the background. I was like, “I hear somebody.” Okay.

**[00:02:56] ES:** Yes. I have a two-and-a-half-year-old, and she's in the living room right now watching cars, so you may hear her.

**[00:03:00] BB:** Love it. That's – love it. Love it. Okay. 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?

**[00:03:12] ES:** I would say my inbox is pretty wild at all times.

**[00:03:16] BB:** Really? Oh.

**[00:03:18] ES:** It is. Yes.

**[00:03:19] BB:** God, you didn't even have a day where you're like, “Oh, one email.”

**[00:03:23] ES:** No, no.

**[00:03:24] BB:** Wow. Okay. By the way, how? How did people already find you?

**[00:03:27] ES:** What happened was I was freelancing as a commerce writer. 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 yes. I mean, I'm pretty public about my contact info, and I sort of like to be transparent. Yes, it just kind of started right back up again. Yes.

**[00:03:55] 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. Oh, I don't think we've had this before necessarily. 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, I heard you got the new job. Congrats, and here's my pitch."? Or business like usual, no one even cares.

**[00:04:23] 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."

**[00:04:45] BB:** Okay. Business as – 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?

**[00:05:01] ES:** Yes. That's such a great question. I think my strategy for a long time was just folders in my email that would be publicists I want to work with. I would actively filter folks that I thought down the line I might want a reply, too. 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.

If a publicist pitched me a story on a product that I really wanted to try or learn more about, I would save that until it became appropriate. So I would sort of 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 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.

**[00:06:08] BB:** Oh, okay. You can – now, I don't hear that too often, like a once-a-week cleanse.

**[00:06:13] ES:** A cleanse. Yes, a cleanse. Yes.

**[00:06:13] BB:** Like end-of-week cleanse. Let's give it. There is nothing better, by the way, of like it's Friday and there's zero emails. Oh, my God. It's so joyful. It sounds perverse but yes. Okay. We also use don't have on here – Elisabeth, we'll get back to the inbox in a second. But an instructor, an adjunct instructor, what are you teaching at Columbia?

**[00:06:37] ES:** It was a long time ago. I went to Columbia to get my MFA in creative non-fiction. After I graduated, I taught an undergrad. It's like an intro class. It's like a requirement for –

**[00:06:51] BB:** One of the 101s.

**[00:06:52] ES:** Yes. Like a 101 intro essay writing class. I taught that class, but it was like a decade ago now. It was 2014 I taught that class.

**[00:07:01] BB:** Oh, okay. Well, we have wrong information here because it says still present on your website or your LinkedIn. That's why we asked. Okay.

**[00:07:08] ES:** Oh, I'm so sorry.

**[00:07:10] 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. What for you is like, “Oh, I need to open that email. Look at how good that subject line is.”?

**[00:07:25] ES:** Yes. I really like a short – if I have to open the email to get the full subject line, I think that probably will stop me. If it's just exactly who you represent and what it is that you're asking of me, I really appreciate that. I got one earlier this week that it was just the brand that the publicist represented was in the subject line. It was like –

**[00:07:56] BB:** [inaudible 00:07:56].

**[00:07:57] ES:** It literally just said from X brand in the subject line. I opened it immediately, and I wanted to learn more about the brand. But, also, it was just easy for me to digest that piece of information in the course of a busy day. 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 – and I was like, “Oh, this person knows how to get to the point, too.” So that was pretty [inaudible 00:08:27].

**[00:08:28] BB:** Okay.

[BREAK]

**[00:08:31] 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]

**[00:08:55] ES:** I like that a lot. Short and sweet is really good. I also would say if it says something about samples available in the headline.

**[00:09:08] BB:** Oh, in the subject line. Yes.

**[00:09:10] ES:** Sorry. Yes, 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 it. But I do like that it's – for a lot of the time, we need to try something before we write about it. So I appreciate just 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. If you're pitching expert, for instance, even having interviews available and the title –

**[00:09:43] BB:** Making that clear.

**[00:09:44] ES:** Yes. Like the title of the person's book if they are writing a book in the subject line, too. That can be really helpful because then I know that this person has a new book coming out, and that's why it would be timely or relevant.

**[00:09:58] 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?

**[00:10:09] ES:** Yes. We do have a big list of experts that we use to 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 back up stories or just add a little bit of expert insight. If you feel like you have an OB or 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.

If you're someone who – for instance, if you're a mental health expert who treats queer families, for instance, 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 always open to those kinds of experts. Yes.

**[00:11:21] BB:** 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?” 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.”

**[00:11:44] ES:** I think it would be the latter. If I had a really specific ask, if it was like I have a story about X thing, and then absolutely. Let's connect. Yes.

**[00:11:53] BB:** There you go. Okay. That's good to clarify. How can people make a relationship with you, Elisabeth?

**[00:12:00] ES:** I think, again, if you're someone who is reaching out about a story – 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 maybe it not being something immediate. Maybe it 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, every single day, I'm reading a new story. So I don't know when the relevant thing is going to come up. But it –

**[00:12:37] BB:** It will. It could. Yes.

**[00:12:41] ES:** I feel like if you're open to that. I work on the evergreen side. I don't do anything timely. So if you're someone who's kind of like –

**[00:12:48] BB:** Oh, there you go.

**[00:12:49] ES:** If you're someone who's 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 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 turn a comment around quickly, that's going to be great for me. Yes. I think that's a really good starting point.

**[00:13:17] BB:** Good. Then we might answer our own question here. But then exclusives, embargos probably don't pertain.

**[00:13:25] ES:** For me, we definitely –

**[00:13:26] BB:** For you. Yes.

**[00:13:26] ES:** Cover them at Parents, but I just don't handle them. Yes.

**[00:13:30] BB:** Yes. Do you ever pass along? Do you ever like, "Hey. Okay, yes."? 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, there's discussions being had about your pitch and where it's going and so on and so forth. It can get to the right person if you don't have the original right person. But go ahead. Tell us.

**[00:13:53] ES:** Yes, completely. I was just thinking about this today. We ran a story, like a movie trailer exclusive, something like that. I'm not handling that.

**[00:14:03] BB:** That's not your jam. Yes.

**[00:14:05] ES:** But if you were to – not know who to pitch and you're like, "Oh, we have this kids' movie. Disney+ is going to start streaming this kids' movie," and it ends up in my inbox, I know the editor to forward that to. I can always just say like, "Hey, I got this pitch and –"

**[00:14:24] BB:** Yes. For me, as you know. Yes.

**[00:14:25] ES:** Yes. But maybe you would want to check this out. Then it would be in their hands. But it's not – we're all in communication with each other. So if something does end up with me, I totally can forward it along. That being said, it's not a free for all. I'm not just going to field everybody's pitches. But if it does –

**[00:14:46] BB:** Yes, of course, because imagine that. Yes.

**[00:14:49] ES:** Yes. But if it does end up in my inbox, we are always talking to each other every day and absolutely can forward things along as they come in.

**[00:14:57] BB:** You just don't have all the time in the world to be traffic control, though. 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?

**[00:15:11] ES:** Yes, yes. I haven't opened up my inbox to freelance pitches yet, but that is not a permanent state of affairs and so excited to work with freelancers. It was one of the most enticing aspects of this job for me, and that will 1,000% be happening sometime in the future. I just don't know when yet, but it will be happening down the line. Like I said, I work on evergreen, so I would be accepting them on a rolling basis and maybe even putting out pitch calls at certain points, depending on what comes up. But, yes, I think I'm just still getting situated at the moment.

**[00:15:49] 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?

**[00:15:58] ES:** Yes. I mean, I would say I know that everyone probably says this, but I just think it's so worth reiterating. If you could as a publicist just look at my clips on my website or just go into Parents.com and just literally look at the homepage. I'm not asking for 30 minutes to an hour of research. I'm not. I'm just saying if you could just look.

**[00:16:26] BB:** Just take a glance. Take a glance.

**[00:16:27] ES:** Yes. Just literally because I get tech pitches, I get gift guide pitches, and I get so many food pitches, which I understand because I worked –

**[00:16:37] BB:** You did. Yes, previously.

**[00:16:40] ES:** I totally get that, but I just don't do it anymore. So that would be pretty obvious if you just even looked at my Twitter bio. I just don't cover that stuff anymore. I really, really emphasize that to people. I don't 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, I just delete them, and I always feel bad about that. Just to make sure that those people are utilizing their time in the best way. I'm just not the person to send those stories to.

**[00:17:22] 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.

**[00:17:31] ES:** Absolutely.

**[00:17:32] BB:** Let's do it. Video or phone interview?

**[00:17:35] ES:** Oh, phone every time.

**[00:17:38] BB:** Oh, yes.

**[00:17:39] BB:** Where is the art of the freaking phone? Can I not tell you how relieving it is just to have 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?

**[00:17:51] 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.

**[00:18:02] BB:** Yes. Bullet points are coming back. Okay. Then I imagine. Short or long pitches? Short.

**[00:18:07] ES:** Short, yes.

**[00:18:08] BB:** Email or a DM of any sort?

**[00:18:11] 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.

**[00:18:18] BB:** Oh, really? Okay. That's a unique answer. Okay, okay. Noted. Direct or creative subject lines?

**[00:18:26] ES:** Direct.

**[00:18:27] BB:** Okay. Press release or media kits?

**[00:18:30] ES:** Oh. I would say if you're an expert and you have a wide range of interest and expertise, like if you're a pediatrician or a lactation consultant, media kit is great because then I can get a sense of all your publications and what books you've written and where you've spoken before. Even though that kind of goes against what I just said about short and sweet, if you're an expert, a media kit is totally fine with me. Otherwise, press release if it's a product.

**[00:18:59] BB:** Anytime that you specifically read pitches?

**[00:19:01] ES:** All day. I'm doing it all day.

**[00:19:03] BB:** All day, all the time. Okay. We already covered sources. Is there anyone else that's just valuable for 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?

**[00:19:18] ES:** That's a good question. I would say any kind of – I did say doula. A doula doesn't 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. Yes. I think in that realm I'm very interested.

**[00:19:43] BB:** Okay, noted. Elisabeth, is there anything lastly that we can celebrate, highlight?

**[00:19:51] ES:** Let's see.

**[00:19:51] BB:** [inaudible 00:19:51]. Yes. Anything going on.

**[00:19:55] ES:** Yes. I think right now, I am – we had a back-to-school pitch meeting. But if you have back-to-school anything, experts on how to deal with back-to-school stress, experts on the best products for kids for back to school, cut-off would be – also, I didn't mention the cut-off –

**[00:20:16] BB:** Yes. What's the cut-off?

**[00:20:17] ES:** The end of high school, so we don't really do anything past high school.

**[00:20:20] BB:** Yes. You got the big kid section. But, yes, I noticed that. Yes.

**[00:20:25] ES:** Anything with back to school, whether it's a product or an expert who can talk about back to school, I will have some stories to assign that I'm sure will need experts. If you've got a back-to-school thing going or a back-to-school news hook, definitely get in touch.

**[00:20:40] BB:** Okay, back to school. God, isn't that so sad in a way? It's hardly even – we're filming this or taping this on end of May or in the end of May, and it's like, “Oh, you're already doing the back to school. What happened to summer? What happened?”

**[00:20:51] ES:** I know. I know. I know. I saw someone even say they're looking for pitches for the New Year.

**[00:21:00] BB:** Oh, no.

**[00:21:02] ES:** I know.

**[00:21:02] BB:** No.

**[00:21:03] ES:** Yes. I was like, “Working ahead, respect.” But that's crazy.

**[00:21:08] BB:** Respect but also disgrace. Elisabeth, thank you so much for being on today on our lovely little podcast. Elisabeth Sherman, Associate Editor of Parents.com. Thank you so much.

**[00:21:21] ES:** Thank you so much, Beck. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[00:21:24] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, featuring Elisabeth Sherman, Associate Editor of Parents.com. 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. But until then, start great stories.

[END]