

**EPISODE 230**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:08] 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 journalist? 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 Claire Stern Milch, Digital Director at ELLE.com. During the episode, Claire discusses why she appreciates in-person pitch meetings, subject lines that piqued her interest, tips for follow-up etiquette, and more.

[INTERVIEW]

**[0:00:41] BB:** Welcome everyone, this is Coffee with a Journalist, a little podcast show that covers talking with reporters, editors, directors, digital directors of magazines and publications and all the things. We, the publicist, can know better how to work with the media, because it's so important and is the major function of our job, frankly. So, here we are. I'm Beck Bamberger. I'm a publicist myself. That's why I started this whole thing. With us today is the Digital Director of ELLE.com, which we'll get into what digital directing even means, Claire Stern Milch, by the way, recently added the Milch, congrats Claire, and welcome.

**[0:01:24] CSM:** Thank you so much, Beck. It's great to be here. I'm excited to dig in.

**[0:01:28] BB:** We're excited. First, first, we have a two-prong thing. First about the outlet for those, maybe not as familiar with ELLE. I usually have pretty much everybody talk about what's, what their outlet is, so go right ahead. Tell us a bit. What is ELLE cover?

**[0:01:44] CSM:** Of course. Well, for those who aren't familiar, ELLE is the world's largest fashion magazine and media brand. We're known for, of course, our innovative fashion content,

as well as our cutting-edge features. It offers a nice mix of high fashion and personal style, as well as very sharp reporting and rich visuals. All the good stuff.

**[0:02:11] BB:** All the good stuff. Okay. For you, Claire, in this role, Digital Director, what would you say that encompasses?

**[0:02:19] CSM:** Yeah. As you said, digital directing. It requires a lot. Definitely keep busy. So, yes, I'm currently the Digital Director of ELLE, where I oversee all content and strategy across our site and social media channels. That encompasses everything from the Instagram grid to planning out the story cadence for the week to overseeing our newsletter output. I've been here for about three years, starting as the deputy editor.

**[0:02:55] BB:** So then getting to your inbox, perhaps. Are there pitches in there?

**[0:03:01] CSM:** There are a lot of pitches in there.

**[0:03:03] BB:** Oh, okay. Why is a good question, but why do you think?

**[0:03:06] CSM:** Well, I would say –

**[0:03:07] BB:** It doesn't make sense, actually. Yes.

**[0:03:09] CSM:** It definitely makes sense. Again, I'm overseeing all the content here. Of course, that includes a wonderful team of editors who field pitches for their respective verticals and their respective beats. We have our senior culture editor fielding a lot of our entertainment stories, a beauty director overseeing beauty, and our features editor helming a lot of our features and special projects. That said, we all field pitches, and then we'll come together and discuss them, but the one signing off on everything. I have my hand in a lot of –

**[0:03:50] BB:** Oh, yeah. Wait second, just to clarify. Everything, everything, Claire?

**[0:03:56] CSM:** Everything.

**[0:03:56] BB:** That's a lot. Geez, Louise. Okay. Hence, you get a lot of pitches. What do you do with all the pitches, because that must be a lot?

**[0:04:03] CSM:** I have my own intricate filing system.

**[0:04:06] BB:** Tell us. We'd like to hear.

**[0:04:08] CSM:** But I think, quite frankly, we move pretty quickly on the digital side over here. So, in my opinion, a good story is a good story as long as it's unique. I mean, every day is a mix of fielding pitches from PR reps, freelance pitches from our regular roster of contributors or new names and other assignments from our many, many pitch meetings. Those are my personal favorites, but I think an idea can really come from anywhere. Of course, it can come into the inbox, but I always tell the girls on my team to just be out in the world.

I think being a journalist in general, it's very difficult to work in a vacuum. You need to be out there. You need to be curious. You need to be talking to people. I think an idea can just as easily come from drinks with your friends on –

**[0:05:09] BB:** Oh, yeah. Yes, yes, it can. It spurs something else, and then you're curious, and then you're like, “Hey, Claire, what if we did this?” You go, “Oh, that is a story. Let's do it.” I hear that more and more that it's, you got to be out living life in order to get the ideas of the stories.

**[0:05:24] CSM:** Yeah. I think in a post pandemic world. It's not certain. I'm always keen to meet with people, even if I don't think at the moment. I have something specific in mind just because I really never know where their conversation might lead. It might fall into something we're already planning. It might spark the drum of an idea for something coming up. I'm always very pro having those conversations regardless.

**[0:05:56] BB:** Is there a way at all, I like to preface that, that a publicist can make your life easier? We'll get into subject lines in just a second, but I wanted to throw that one out.

**[0:06:07] CSM:** Sure. I think I would say to put everything in an email, I would definitely make my life easier, but I think it seems inherently obvious, but if you're offering something up the best you can to try to not make that person keep asking for more information, just supplying all the information up front. It doesn't necessitate follow ups in that way. So, say it's a new launch or a new opening just to offer the embargoed press release and the visuals and basically the date, all the information up front, so you're not having to repeatedly follow up and ask for the pieces of the puzzle.

**[0:06:53] BB:** I've heard this so many times. Oh, well send me the link with the photos. Okay, wait a second. Could you spell out the names of the LinkedIn with the people I'm quoting? Okay. It's like why, why are we spending so much time?

**[0:07:04] CSM:** Yeah. I think it's better to just get all that information up front, so then you can move on to discuss how –

**[0:07:11] BB:** Yeah.

**[0:07:12] CSM:** To partner on the story rather than wasting time in the minutiae of lost details there. It would be helpful, I think, to both sides.

**[0:07:21] BB:** Are there sources, by the way, that you're consistently looking for, for example, celebrity stylists that only dress them for maternity wear?

**[0:07:31] CSM:** That's very specific.

**[0:07:32] BB:** I just was like, hey, that sounds like an ELLE thing, right?

**[0:07:35] CSM:** For sure. I love celebrity stylists, certainly.

[MESSAGE]

**[0:07:42] 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 CONTINUED]

**[0:08:05] CSM:** I think just what's most important for us is having a good amount of sources and a diverse mix of sources. So, both incorporating enough people to substantiate the story and solidify that, say, this is a trend worth speaking to or a feature worth telling, but then also ensuring that those voices come from a wide spectrum of backgrounds, both in occupation, ethnically, in terms of their age and all that.

**[0:08:44] BB:** Speaking of, so that people are super clear, you mentioned your girls and they're sending out the demo for ELLE. Now, I can take a bit of that and sometimes we do get into the specifics when we have someone who's like, "I'm running for Morningstar or Bloomberg." It's like, okay. So, to get a little bit more into that, what's a demographic you define as the perfect ELLE audience reader?

**[0:09:05] CSM:** I think it can range.

**[0:09:06] BB:** Yes.

**[0:09:07] CSM:** I mean, our median age is actually in the mid-40s, but again, of course, it depends what channel we're talking, the print book versus the website versus our TikTok

audience who is a lot younger, about 10 to 20 years younger than that. It depends – the platform we're looking at and we have all of them.

**[0:09:32] BB:** By the way, the median age, according to the website is 44.4, very specific, very specific. Yup.

**[0:09:38] CSM:** Very specific, yup.

**[0:09:39] BB:** I like it. Okay.

**[0:09:40] CSM:** Roll in on the data.

**[0:09:42] BB:** Yup. We got to know the data. Okay. You mentioned a little bit about, okay, sources, how that can be helpful. You also did some prep, because you had another friend who was on this show. Perhaps you have some subject lines that you'd like to share with us, redacted, of course, as much as possible if they're horrible, but could you share any with us?

**[0:10:03] CSM:** Yeah. I'm happy to share some slightly edited subject lines.

**[0:10:07] BB:** Keep it simple –

**[0:10:09] CSM:** Keep my interest, for sure. One was an exclusive on Kate Moss and Anita Pallenberg's original fashion sketches.

**[0:10:20] BB:** Okay.

**[0:10:20] CSM:** Again, just an amazing super and film actress and artist. The exclusivity there, of course, always commands attention. We went for that pitch from one of our regular contributors. Another one was an ELLE Escapes opportunity. ELLE Escapes for those who don't know is a travel column at ELLE that I actually started when I joined the team a few years

ago. It was just after COVID restrictions started lifting, people were getting the itch to travel again. A lot of us at ELLE felt that. In so many ways travel was becoming the new luxury.

**[0:11:06] BB:** Yes.

**[0:11:07] CSM:** Our reader who loves to shop and read about culture and politics is also certainly getting on airplanes and seeing the world. So, we started this editor approved digest of all the things to see and do and where to stay. Again, that pitch alluded to one of our successful franchises. I opened that up to see what it was. Last one was an opportunity to interview an artist at Wallapalooza, which is the music festival in Chicago.

**[0:11:45] BB:** Oh, yeah.

**[0:11:48] CSM:** Open that as well, because we're planning all sorts of coverage for the late summer and fall.

**[0:11:56] BB:** It's a little busy over there. I sense. This is good. I have a quick question list, Claire, that I'd love to walk you through to see what your answers are. Are you ready?

**[0:12:07] CSM:** I'm ready. Is it rapid fire?

**[0:12:09] BB:** It's rapid fire. It's rapid fire. Here we go. Video or phone interview?

**[0:12:14] CSM:** Video.

**[0:12:15] BB:** Oh, why? That's an unusual –

**[0:12:17] CSM:** I would say the closer to IRL, the better, especially if it's an interview.

**[0:12:24] BB:** Okay. Okay. Bullet points or paragraphs?

**[0:12:27] CSM:** Bullets. They're easier to read.

**[0:12:29] BB:** Yes. Short or long pitches. I assume it's short.

**[0:12:33] CSM:** Short for sure, as long as all of the information is being included. I think, as long as you get the who, what, when, where, why, how, and there. The shorter, the better.

**[0:12:44] BB:** Images attached or dropbox zip file?

**[0:12:47] CSM:** Attached. I think the less steps, the better. Again, that's assuming the files are small enough that they can be –

**[0:12:54] BB:** Yes. The last interview we just did was like, oh, my God, I can't take attached, because I need to dump my downloads every month. Yeah. It has to be small. Note, everybody. Note, everybody. Okay. Email or a DM?

**[0:13:07] CSM:** Definitely, email.

**[0:13:08] BB:** Yes. No one's answered DM in, I don't know, 70 episodes, so maybe we should even take that one out. Anyway. I tend to go in my DMs, but ultimately, if something's being brought to my attention to DM, I will pivot to an email from there.

**[0:13:24] BB:** Okay. Okay. This is good to know. Follow ups. Any follow ups? Multiple? None.

**[0:13:30] CSM:** I think it depends. I think one 24 hours later, if it's a timely pitch, just in case it was missed. If it's not timely, I would say a week is appropriate for a follow up. Then after that, I would assume it's a pass if you're not getting a response. I like to think I'm pretty good at responding, but not everyone has the time, and that's just sad.

**[0:13:54] BB:** That is a function of the job. Yup. Press release or media kit?



**[0:13:58] CSM:** I think either works. Again, I think the more information, the better, so I guess that would be a media kit, because then you'd have the release as well as imagery and probably everything you'd need.

**[0:14:14] BB:** Is there a time you read pitches, or is it just all the time?

**[0:14:18] CSM:** It is all the time that said journalism professor of mine once advised to never pitch on a Friday afternoon when people are logging off or a Monday morning when they're catching up. I think that's very sound advice.

**[0:14:37] BB:** Okay. Don't do the Friday afternoons. Now Claire, you're in New York City. Do you ever like to meet with publicists ever for anything?

**[0:14:47] CSM:** Yes, of course. I'm usually game to have a quick coffee meeting, get to know somebody. I think, so much of this job is relationship-based, so I'm always happy to meet with people. I do it frequently.

**[0:15:01] BB:** Oh, she does it frequently, everybody. What's the best way for people to perhaps approach that? Is it simple as, hey, I'm going to be in New York, you want to get a coffee? I got client A, B, C, and D, maybe?

**[0:15:13] CSM:** Yeah. I think that sounds pretty solid to me.

**[0:15:18] BB:** There you go. Claire, you're so easy. Oh, no. I hope your inbox doesn't get 300 emails.

**[0:15:23] CSM:** I say, should my schedule allow, I think, most people can make the time to hop on a quick call or grab a quick cup of coffee if they feel the need to, or if they think something can come out of it.

**[0:15:36] BB:** Yeah. Now, speaking of, and since you are in New York City, I'm there like every month, are you like, I got three places I only go?

**[0:15:45] CSM:** I have –

**[0:15:46] BB:** It needs to be this coffee, okay?

**[0:15:47] CSM:** Yeah. I'm pretty open. I live in the West Village, so I would say on Mondays and Fridays, when we work from home, I can usually be found there. I like a place, St. Hardine, near my apartment as a lovely coffee shop. I can defer to Soho House a lot as a place to meet. Then you know the other three days of the week, we're at the ELLE offices at the Hearst Tower, so places around there are great, or we have a great cafeteria. I take a lot of meetings there as well. The streets are very busy, and I usually don't leave.

**[0:16:25] BB:** Yes. Oh, my gosh. A cafeteria. I love it.

**[0:16:29] CSM:** Yup. I know.

**[0:16:31] BB:** What a joy to go to your cafeteria. Oh, that sounds really fun.

**[0:16:34] CSM:** It is great. I will say there's even a sashimi chef –

**[0:16:38] BB:** Oh, my God. Everybody, that's where you need to get to. You need to get invited to the cafeteria.

**[0:16:46] CSM:** It's good. It's good. We love it.

**[0:16:47] BB:** I mean, hey, Claire, is there anything else you'd love to convey, confirm, dispel to publicists here?

**[0:16:56] CSM:** Oh, I would just say, you know, familiarizing yourself with the work we do at ELLE. I'm very proud of all of it. Of course, it's produced by an amazing team. I think we're looking at a very, very busy fall with a ton of amazing coverage for fashion month in particular. I've spoken about ELLE Escapes, and we're always considering new destinations. We're really proud of that franchise. Our biggest tentpole moment of the year is the Women in Hollywood issue.

**[0:17:38] CSM:** I look forward to sharing more.

**[0:17:40] BB:** Okay. Claire, thank you for being here today. Claire Stern, wait a second, Milch, also. She's the Digital Director of ELLE.com. Check her out. Maybe get invited to the cafeteria if you're so lucky.

**[0:17:54] CSM:** Thank you so much, Beck.

**[0:17:57] BB:** Thank you, Claire. I appreciate it.

**[0:17:58] CSM:** All right, have a good one.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[0:18:15] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode with Claire Stern Milch. Digital Director at ELLE.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]