

EPISODE 233

[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 Mikhaila Friel, Senior Reporter at Business Insider. During the episode, Mikhaila discusses her shifting roles at Business Insider, what pitches she's open to, her tips on researching who you're pitching, and the story approval process.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:40] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, and we put this show together because we need to understand how to work with our reporter, journalist, editor, freelance friends. As publicists, we need to know what the heck we are doing in making these relationships better, so we can make our lives better, frankly, which is our goal. I'm a freaking, I don't know, longtime publicist, made OnePitch because of this need to better connect with journalists, and also and the Founder of BAM.

Today with us to talk about what she prefers, what she cannot stand, etc. all the way from across the pond in the UK is Senior Reporter from Business Insider, Mikhaila Friel. She is here with us live. Hi, Mikhaila.

[00:01:29] MF: Thank you so much for having me. I'm glad to be here.

[00:01:32] BB: We're so excited to have you. Mikhaila, for those who are maybe not as familiar with Business Insider, which used to be called Insider but it switched back, how would you cover the coverage that Business Insider now entails? Then you could speak a bit, of course, to yours, which is vast.

[00:01:52] MF: Yes, sure. Business Insider is a global publication which started as a tech blog in 2007. Now, today, it has a huge reach. It publishes in multiple languages. The coverage has expanded massively, so it's everything from business news, entertainment, lifestyle coverage. As you said, it used to be called Insider, so we flip-flop with the name a little bit. It was Business Insider, switched to Insider, and now just recently we're back to Business Insiders. I know it's a bit confusing for people but –

[00:02:29] BB: Yes. By the way, do you have any insight into that of sorts like why, what, huh?

[00:02:35] MF: Yes. I believe that the company just wanted to go back to its original roots. Insider reflected the broad shift to doing more than just tech and business. It really became a huge company that had so many reporters doing so many different beats. Now, I think they just want the brand to show their roots, what they stand for. It's a little bit easier. People tend to recognize Business Insider more than Insider. Or maybe some people think that it's two different companies. I think this was a really easy choice for them.

Of course, it still can be confusing because for me personally I don't cover really too much business or tech. I'm based out of the London office, but I'm actually from Glasgow, Scotland, if any listeners –

[00:03:27] BB: Yes. We can hear the accent.

[00:03:29] MF: Can't tell by my accent. Yes.

[00:03:30] BB: We love it.

[00:03:31] MF: Yes. I can give you a little rundown of what I cover if that would –

[00:03:34] BB: Please do. We know it's lifestyle. We know it includes a lot of travel and such. But, yes, tell us in your own words.

[00:03:41] MF: Yes. I do a little bit of everything these days. I started at the company in 2019, and I was initially hired as a royals reporter. I was the first person to solely cover royals.

[00:03:55] BB: I love that, royals.

[00:03:57] MF: Yes. I kind of I built our royals coverage from the ground up. I really led the liaisons with Buckingham Palace, Kensington Palace. I interviewed royals from around the world. It was so much fun. I got to go to events with William and Kate and the queen. It was a whirlwind. Then in 2021, I was promoted to Senior Lifestyle Reporter, so my coverage became a bit broader and expanded to travel, as you mentioned real estate, more general topics.

Then earlier this year, to confuse you more, I was moved to the news team. I'm still doing lifestyle, but now I'm doing a lot more general news, politics, foreign affairs, cultural and generational trends. It really is a filled bag. I'm doing a bit of everything now.

[00:04:50] BB: Wow. Well, that's quite the time. I mean, you've also done The White Lotus five-star hotel in Sicily where the last season was filmed. You've been on The Drew Barrymore Show. You've had quite a lot of stuff because you went on a second date in a graveyard. Mikhaila, my God.

[00:05:08] MF: Yes. I love this story. Yes. It's –

[00:05:11] BB: Oh, yes. It's such a cool story. Highly recommend, everybody. It's in her bio if you get to it, so yes. Okay. Mikhaila, let's talk about now your inbox. How is it and what is in there?

[00:05:23] MF: Yes. My inbox is pretty busy, but I have to admit a lot of the pitches are not for me. A lot of the PRs really don't understand my coverage, and I don't blame them because it is such a mixed bag. But, yes, a lot of what I'm receiving is just stuff that would be a straight no. Just looking at even just the subject line, it's just, yes, there's a lot of stuff that wouldn't be relevant to me or even to the company.

[00:05:51] BB: How do you know, by the way? You're like, "It's totally not relevant."

[00:05:55] MF: Yes. There are a couple of ways. I think people might be confused because while I'm a British journalist, Business Insider is not a British publication. Our main audience, of course, we have readers from around the world, but we cater to an American audience. If I have a pitch that is something particular to a UK news story or a UK company, I'm not able to go ahead with it, unless I can see an angle that our US readers would love. That's a really big thing.

[00:06:32] BB: Okay. Good to know. Do you have a system, though, in your inbox in which you manage the slog of pitches you receive, many of which you're saying are just not a fit?

[00:06:44] MF: Yes. I think I heard another reporter you spoke to say they just used the star function.

[00:06:49] BB: Yes. Some do. Yes.

[00:06:51] MF: Yes. That's a big thing for me. Even if it's a pitch that maybe at that time it's not right, but maybe there's an expert or a little nugget in there that I could see myself going back to later, I'll just star it or use the search function, and I'll be able to find that pitch a later date.

[00:07:11] BB: Okay. You use stars. Do you then come – how far back do you go with the stars, like eight weeks? Do you go back to the star? Because people want to know like, “Well, how do I get to be starred, but then do you ever come back to me?”

[00:07:24] MF: Yes. I mean, probably a couple of months. It's not an ideal system, but I just get so many messages each day. Now that I'm on a news team, it's a lot more fast-paced, so I don't actually have as much time to be replying to emails as I would have done in my previous role.

[00:07:44] BB: Do you then see a subject line and go, “Oh, yes. I must open.” No? That's okay if it's no.

[BREAK]

[00:07:57] 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]

[00:08:20] MF: Yes. These days, honestly, it's more not so the case. Sometimes, I mean, what I find that really grabs my attention is if someone refers to a story that I've written recently. They've shown that they've done their research. They look at my coverage area. Maybe they'll put the headline in their subject line, and they'll just keep it short and concise and say, "Oh, I know you've covered this. I'm actually working on something similar. Would you like to chat about it?" That's really good. That's keeping it straight to the point and showing that they know what kind of stories that I'm looking for.

[00:08:59] BB: Are there any other aspects of what publicists do that you go, "Oh, yes. More of that please."?

[00:09:04] MF: Well –

[00:09:05] BB: Tell us. Tell us.

[00:09:06] MF: There's something I wish that I could accept which would be when I was doing a lot of travel reporting, I got offered a lot of complimentary trips like hotel stays and things like that. But I actually wasn't allowed to accept those because we have a policy at Business Insider where we can't accept those things. We either would pay for it ourselves, or we would negotiate a press rate. Personally, when I would see those offers in my inbox, I would be delighted.

[00:09:36] BB: And be like, "Oh, my gosh." Yes. I imagine – give us a little profile more of the publicist who should be pitching you. Is it lifestyle people? Is it consumer brand people? I mean, it is kind of a unique spot you sit in.

[00:09:51] MF: As I mentioned, my beat has shifted. I'm still doing lifestyle coverage. If there's anybody that has travel clients, royals, real estate, I definitely still welcome that. But I am also now expanding my coverage to do a lot of US politics. If you are an author or an academic or podcast host, I'd love to hear from you. I'm also really enjoying writing about generational and cultural trends, so I definitely welcome if there are any PRs that are representing experts who can speak on, for instance, Gen Z's place in the workplace and employment is a big one or how Gen Z are influencing travel. That's really interesting.

[00:10:42] BB: God, what a what a time to be a Gen Z. It feels like everyone – it feels like it's all those things. Yes, yes, yes. Okay. Thank you for explaining that. Source-wise, is there anyone? You're kind of alluding to it with what you were just asking for kind of story or pitch-wise. But is there a certain person or expert you wish to hear from?

[00:11:03] MF: I would say there's no one in particular, but I love pitching things that are a little bit different. I love hearing from people with unique stories and worldviews. Even if you don't think that if you're not a particular expert in any of the things I've mentioned, if you have a story to tell and you think that Business Insider or myself would be the best person to tell that story, we do a lot of personal essays, as told to. I'm always interested to hear about if it's something that really wows me or shocks or inspires me. That's always great. I know that's quite broad, but it's just yes.

[00:11:43] BB: Wows or shocks or inspires me. Yes. Oh, I like that. I would love an email where I'm like, "Oh, that wows me. Yes." I like that. Timing-wise for you in starring your inbox and so forth, is there a time that you're looking for pitches? Or could you walk us through a little bit of the cadence of your day?

[00:12:02] MF: Yes. It really depends on each day because now that I'm on the news team, I'm doing a lot more faster-paced, faster turnaround type of stories. I usually don't get to look to my inbox until the afternoon time. Some days, I'm doing so much that maybe I don't even have the chance. I've got so many pictures and so many emails to respond to, so it very much – if I'm having a quiet day, that will be my email time.

[00:12:36] BB: Okay. It totally depends, not necessarily a timing that you want to see a pitch. Okay. This is good. We haven't talked about this too much on other shows, but I want to start bringing this into the fold. Publicists, of course, understand, although I think we painfully understand sometimes how long it takes to get an actual story done. There have been months, for example, that people at BAM have waited for something to materialize. Why? Because of scheduling, because of interviews, because it's not a breaking thing but it's an important thing. It's eventually happening. Could you tell us a little bit about maybe the story approval process?

[00:13:15] MF: Yes. How I get stories approved from my editors, the process is quite simple. I'll give them a working headline, a little summary of the story that I'm hoping to write. Then I will include a couple of experts that I'd love to interview. Or if I don't have the experts, I'll just say that that will come later. Usually, it's pretty – if it's a straightforward news story or a short feature, so anything between 500 and 700 words, that could be approved quite quickly on the day that I pitch it.

But if it's a bigger feature and there's more conversations to be had, especially if it's something that maybe wasn't my original idea but a PR has come to me, then that's something that would take a little bit more time and just few more conversations and just trying to figure out what the right angle would be. Maybe I have an idea, but my editor has something else in their mind. We go back and forth for a little while just discussing that.

[00:14:24] BB: Okay. Thank you for explaining that. Any relationship building that could be helpful for you? Do you want to know publicists better, for example, Mikhaila, beyond what hits your inbox? Or you might say, “No, I just want to hear you in my inbox. I don't care. I don't want to do anything.”

[00:14:42] MF: Yes. I'd love to know publicists better. I have a couple of go-tos who I speak to regularly. But I would love – to me, it's a lot easier if somebody were to reach out and say. Even if it wasn't for a particular story but just say, “This is who I'm representing. This is why I think it's good for your coverage and your company's brand. Let's have a virtual call and connect.” Sometimes, from those calls, that's when you find the best nuggets. It's not necessarily something that can all be conveyed in an email, especially if they don't know what it is that I want necessarily, what it is I'm looking at for my next story.

Then just from me chatting and being able to ask them questions, that would help a huge deal. It's always nice to make new contacts in this industry because I work remotely. I don't know about you, but I can find it.

[00:15:37] BB: Oh, me too.

[00:15:38] MF: Yes. It can be a bit isolating, so it's nice to have an excuse to have a little call with someone and meet someone new and just have that FaceTime.

[00:15:48] BB: Okay. She likes to be in person if you can. Okay. I like it. We covered kind of the story approval time, Mikhaila. We covered the relationship-building sources a little bit. I have this rapid-fire question series if you want to play. Are you ready?

[00:16:06] MF: Sure.

[00:16:06] BB: Let's do it. Video or phone interview?

[00:16:10] MF: Video.

[00:16:10] BB: Oh. This one always surprises me. Why video?

[00:16:14] MF: Well, as long as I'm having a good hair day, I love video just for that face-to-face connection.

[00:16:21] BB: Yes. Then you could see so much more. Bullet points or paragraphs in a pitch?

[00:16:26] MF: Bullet points.

[00:16:28] BB: Short or long pitches? I assume short.

[00:16:30] MF: Yes, short.

[00:16:32] **BB:** How short, by the way?

[00:16:33] **MF:** One that I just got recently.

[00:16:35] **BB:** Yes. Oh, tell us an example. Yes.

[00:16:38] **MF:** It was actually just before this call, like an hour ago. I wrote a story last week about Gen Z and Millennial brides that have tattoo regret. This PR just said, "Tattoo regret, new data. I saw your story, and this is who I represent, and this is why it's relevant." I won't go into it, but the pitch was two sentences, and that's ideal. It just allows me to see, okay, is that what I want to look into more? If so, I will reply and we will forge a relationship pretty easy.

[00:17:14] **BB:** Okay. This is good. Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[00:17:19] **MF:** It really depends. I don't mind images being attached. I think maybe it will make the pitch stand out a little bit if it needs.

[00:17:25] **BB:** Okay. Email only or any DMs for pitches?

[00:17:31] **MF:** Oh, just email please.

[00:17:33] **BB:** Yes. This is like 98%. I hope everyone understands this. Publicists, please no DMs anywhere. I think we've had like one or two people say yes. Very, very rare. Okay. One follow-up or multiple?

[00:17:45] **MF:** I don't mind multiple. Sometimes, I have so many emails that I might just miss it. It's good to just keep following up, and I don't mind that all.

[00:17:53] **BB:** Yes, good. Direct or creative subject lines? We talked a little bit about it.

[00:17:58] **MF:** Yes. I think direct.

[00:17:59] BB: Direct, direct. By the way, do you want to see, because most people say direct and now I want to get a little bit more specific in that, do you want to see your name in the subject line? Do you want to see exclusive spelled out? Do you want to see the name of the person, let's say celebrity, or the hotel or something? How direct-specific are you looking for? Of course, it's limited because you can't spell out a 20-word subject line.

[00:18:26] MF: Yes. I mean, there's been a few instances where they've used my name in the subject, and that has really grabbed my attention. Overall, I think what you said about if it's a celebrity or something really specific, it's good to just get straight to the point. Or as I mentioned, if it's referencing a story of mine and they're pitching me because they've read my work and they know that it's relevant, then if you put the story in the subject line, even just a little portion of the headline, that will grab my attention because I've seen that they have read my work. I instantly feel a bit more of a connection to them because I know that they understand what I write.

[00:19:07] BB: Which is just how many seconds does it take just to do that extra little work. That's nice. By the way, do people misspell your name?

[00:19:14] MF: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But I don't mind because my name is really confusing. It's not the standard.

[00:19:21] BB: That is very generous of you, but that is one of the biggest pet peeves, and you're like, "That's not how my name is." Or worst off, blank. Hi, blank. You're like, "Oh, God." That's the worst. Okay. Press release or media kit?

[00:19:36] MF: Media kit I think.

[00:19:38] BB: We already covered time that you read pitches, so we're good there. We already covered sources. Is there anything else, Mikhaila, that would just make your life easier from publicists?

[00:19:49] MF: I think that I have really mentioned the main points. But, yes, I just can't emphasize enough how important it is to know who you're pitching to because I get so many things that aren't relevant. I get people pitching me tech stories. Of course, BI is a tech

publication, but I do not cover tech. Or if I do it, it will be very, very rarely. Just do your research. Know who you're writing to. It's really – yes, it's the biggest thing for me is for some reason now I have the most random pitches in my inbox, and I don't know how this happened. Yes. It can be frustrating to get to the good ones when you've got so many things that are not relevant.

[00:20:40] BB: Just be mindful, everybody, publicists. Read the work, of course, with Mikhaila. Although her beat is wide, I think it's very clear what she's into. Mikhaila, thank you. I want to end with just is there anything we can do to tout, promote, celebrate you? Is there anything coming up that we should be looking for, for example, that you're going to be publishing?

[00:21:03] MF: Oh, thank you so much for asking. That's kind. Right now, I don't know if I have anything in the works that I'm looking to promote. But regularly I will post my stories on X, or I sometimes do appearances on BBC News and different podcasts like this. I just appreciate anyone that has a chance to watch or listen. It's always great to know that people have tuned in and that they care about what I have to say, so yes.

[00:21:35] BB: Well, we're here for it, Mikhaila. Thank you so much for being on today. Mikhaila Friel is the Senior Reporter at Business Insider based in the UK, covering quite a broad range within the news but mostly lifestyle sectors, including potentially the hotels of The White Lotus show, so stay tuned. See if you can see her covering the next one. Mikhaila, appreciate you so much.

[00:21:59] MF: Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:22:02] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode with Mikhaila Friel, Senior Reporter at Business Insider. 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]