

EPISODE 234

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:09] 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 journalist? Head to our website @onepitch.co to learn more.

Our guest on today's episode of Coffee with the Journalists is Nicole Schuman, Managing Editor at PR News. During the episode, Nicole shares her take on responding to emails, gives examples of pitches that landed, and highlights the importance of building relationships along with the best ways to connect with her.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:39] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalists, a little show we do to better educate ourselves as publicists about what reporters want, what freelancers want, editors, and today in fact we do have an editor on. She is the Managing Editor of PR News. Nicole Schuman is here. Welcome Nicole.

[0:01:01] NS: Thank you so much for having me.

[0:01:03] BB: Yes. You know what, I just forgot to even mention who the heck I am, but everyone I think knows at this dang point, because I've been doing this a long time. I'm Beck Bamberger. I've been doing this show, I don't know, 200 plus episodes now. So, here we are. Nicole, what I think is so fun with you is you're a little bit in the Venn diagram of reporting about the PR space, but still being a reporter, who gets pitches in the inbox. May I call out your fantastic LinkedIn picture, which has in the background. Good morning (Media Contact), so I got to kick out of that, because that's all the fun, and a big no-no.

[0:01:40] NS: You don't know how long it took me to crap that, so I could get it into the LinkedIn photo.

[0:01:44] BB: Everyone, please. Go to her LinkedIn page. You must see that. It is divine. Okay, Nicole, first off, and I usually ask this of all people, but just to make sure everyone's on the same page, PR News, how would you describe the coverage? It's all about PR, but tell us more.

[0:02:00] NS: Well, as you know, there's many different communications, trade, publications. There's PR week. There's PR daily. Adage has some PR coverage, marketing brew, all those sorts of places, the drum. So, what we try to do is in addition to – we differentiate ourselves and the fact that I think what I would call what we do is more service journalism. Not only do we bring you ideas and things, examples of campaigns and stuff that's going on through a PR roundup every week, which is on Thursdays, but we also, we take what's going on. We look at what people are talking about. We try to provide our audience with takeaways that they can actually use in their daily workspace and with their teams.

I'll get pitches about, oh, so this is happening in the news. I want to write about it. I want to give my opinion, and I say, that's fine, but it would also be great if you could provide what can we learn from this, so to speak. Things have been changing so much in the past years. I mean, things are always changing communications, but in terms of technology and this and that. We try to provide a well-rounded variety of topics that we think are important to the audience at the moment.

[0:03:16] BB: To elaborate, the audience, would you say, of course, as publicists, in-house, at agency, but would that even include CMOs. Let's say at Fortune 500s or the everyday digital marketer, because it is wide range of coverage.

[0:03:29] NS: Yeah. We're recognizing the fact that PR is PR and communicators have specific skill sets, but also increasingly PR is running underneath, or with marketing departments, or vice versa. PR is running more marketing campaigns and those sorts of things. We're seeing

CMOs who started out in PR and communications become CMOs and become elevated to the C-suite. So, there is something of a mix there, I would say, when you're looking at the coverage.

[0:04:00] BB: Because yes, even in topics, there's branding and marketing to all the way to reputation, SEO, work-life, also important, so yes, excellent, Nicole. Okay. Your inbox, how does it look? I've figured. I've figured.

[0:04:17] NS: I believe in admitting your weaknesses as well as your strengths. I would be the first one to say that, I mean, I think everyone has a hard time keeping up with the level of emails that they get, right?

[0:04:28] BB: It is insane sometimes.

[0:04:30] NS: Yeah.

[0:04:30] BB: It really is remarkable.

[0:04:32] NS: I mean, from my personal email to my work email, it's busy, busy, busy every day. I'm getting pitches, I'm getting – I subscribe myself to a lot of newsletters, so I can keep up on things, just internal comms. I mean, it's like – I feel bad, because I can't – I don't hit everything every day like I just can't.

[0:04:51] BB: Who can? No one on this dang show, let alone a journalist. No, it's impossible.

[0:04:56] NS: No. It's so much. I do my best.

[0:04:59] BB: Yeah. I think that's the key thing. You do your best, because in a way, I think for publicists, myself included, to not respond to an email from someone is like heinous, like did I die on the street? Like, I could not. But for you, the volume is untenable. You must not respond.

Because you can't. You can't get to everything. Especially if it's something really off-topic. Do you get bad pitches?

[0:05:24] NS: Oh, my God. Yes, absolutely.

[0:05:26] BB: Tell us more because the irony of this is high. It's a PR publication getting hit up by publicists.

[0:05:32] NS: Well, I will say probably the three worst things you can do if you're pitching: Number one, is get my name wrong. I mean, I understand we're humans. These things happen, but hence, where my header on LinkedIn came from. I'm not just Nicole. I'm a media contact, so that obviously went in the trash. The second thing I would say is if you get the name of my publication wrong. Now, I understand, I usually give people one pass, but –

[0:05:59] BB: Wait, wait, wait. It's a pretty basic PR News. What are they –

[0:06:03] NS: Yeah.

[0:06:03] BB: Saying?

[0:06:04] NS: I get PR Daily, and actually I'm connected with the editor over there, Alison, who's wonderful. She actually posted something similar about this the other day, and I said, “Oh, yeah. I've gotten some pitches for PR Daily the past couple of weeks.” She said, “Send them over.” I said, “Okay.”

[0:06:20] BB: Oh, that's so funny. To be clear, there's PR News, there's PR Daily, and there's PR Week, and a few of them, so like, yeah, yeah, there's a lot going on in our space.

[0:06:28] NS: The names are similar, but as I was saying like we all differentiate ourselves in the terms of the way we cover the industry. We don't cover mergers and acquisitions. I can't tell you how many pitches I get about mergers and acquisitions or personnel, which honestly, I'm

happy I'm getting them, but I don't report on them, but I like to know who is in different positions, because I might use them for sourcing.

I might use them for an event. I don't mind getting those, like I'm not saying don't ever send me that, because I do read them, but I mean, you should know the difference between PR Week and PR News and what we do. I know sometimes people are just busy and doing 10 million things at once. I get it. I've made mistakes as well, but it's a pretty big one when you do that.

[0:07:14] BB: Oh, yeah. Okay. The inbox is hectic. There's a lot of bad pitches in there. It doesn't sound like you have a mechanism or sorting tool that you use. Do you just let them ride or you an inbox zero-person and somehow you chop a whale? What do you do?

[0:07:30] NS: Oh, God. No, I don't think I'm ever going to get to inbox zero. I've just given up on that.

[0:07:36] BB: I feel like most people have that, by the way. It's like aspirationally the first thing you want to do in the first week, you're out of place. Then you're like, "Oh, crap. There's 600 emails."

[0:07:44] NS: Yeah. I'm the type of person where I really need things in front of my face or I forget about them and that goes not just for work, but I have sticky notes around quite a bit and on my desktop. If I look in my closet and I don't have something hung up somewhere, I'm never going to wear it.

[0:08:01] BB: Yes.

[0:08:02] NS: It's a certain bottle of wine that I have put somewhere I'm going to forget that I have it. That's just the way my mind works. But what I do try to do is, I try to, like yesterday, I went through my previous week of email to make sure that I was kept on all of my contributed

writing pitches, people that wanted to write for us and I updated my documents with all of those. I do have folders for –

[0:08:25] BB: Okay. You've got a system.

[0:08:27] NS: A little on.

[0:08:28] BB: – ish, yes.

[0:08:31] NS: I probably should look more into some sorting mechanism for email, but –

[0:08:36] BB: No one's figured out, no one.

[0:08:37] NS: But it's, like I said, if I put something in a folder, I'm usually more likely to forget about it, then if it's right in front of me. That's why I do the way I do. I do, as far as you said like in response, I try to respond to everyone whether or not I'm going to use them.

[0:08:51] BB: Really?

[0:08:52] NS: It's really hard though. Just to be like, hey, we don't write about this or thank you, but I'm not interested or thank you. I could maybe use this person in the future. I mean, it's pretty rare, well, it's not rare, but I mean, on a daily basis where you're accepting tons of pitches from people, just because we have a small team, if I had a team of like 10 reporters, then yeah, we'd be writing about all kinds of stuff. But we have to make some things priority over others. A lot of that has to do with just what the audience is interested in at that moment and the story that's being told, obviously. But lots of ideas.

[0:09:26] BB: lots of ideas. Okay. Do subject lines matter then to you?

[0:09:30] NS: Yup.

[0:09:32] BB: Maybe you have an example or two, no pressure, but if you do, we'd love an example.

[0:09:36] NS: Yes. We actually just published a piece yesterday. That's gone gangbusters today about the Kamala Harris campaign. It came from a contributing writer and about the subject lines that they're using for their press releases and for their emails.

[0:09:52] BB: I see it right here. The Harris campaign subject lines slay it all. I mean, look at this. The campaign over there, freaking good, freaking good.

[0:10:01] NS: Yeah. No matter what side you're on, if you're a communicator, obviously subject lines and headlines are important to getting the attention of people. Looking at that was really interesting. For me, I like – subject lines are a skill.

[0:10:14] BB: Very true. It's like writing a good headline.

[0:10:16] NS: Yeah. They can't be super long, but if they're too short and they leave things out, then someone might not pay attention to that. I do have examples of some that have worked and some that haven't if you're interested, but –

[0:10:29] BB: Please. Can you give us maybe some that have worked, maybe one that work?

[MESSAGE]

[0:10:35] ANNOUNCER: Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch.

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Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:10:58] NS: This one's an interesting story. I originally got this pitch in this probably earlier spring. I want to say maybe April, April or March, and it's from a fantastic writer. The pitch line was, "Why PR practitioners must recognize and understand misogynoir?"

[0:11:15] BB: That was all in the subject line?

[0:11:17] NS: Yes. Which sounds long, but also, I was like, "Oh, that's like, that would be a good headline for a story." Then I went and I read the pitch and I said, "This is a really interesting topic." but it just doesn't fit anything right now that we're working on, or that we want to promote, or any of the topics that people are talking about. I told the writer, I said, "Hang on, I like this, I just have to find the right time for it."

[0:11:43] BB: Good.

[0:11:45] NS: Rewind here a couple of weeks. Kamala Harris is announced that she's entering the presidential race. If you haven't learned about misogynoir, which this actually taught me a lot about it, this piece.

[0:11:56] BB: Misogynoir – yeah, I need to read up on this.

[0:12:00] NS: You know, misogyny towards black women and all that.

[0:12:03] BB: That's an intersectionality there.

[0:12:05] NS: Yeah. One of the things that we like to do at PR News is we like to educate people on these topics, so be aware of them, and their daily work, and work that's coming up, work that'll be coming around, different messaging and things. I remembered it. I went back to the author and I said, "You know, this piece is perfect for right now. I know it's been a couple of

months, but we're going to run it." I kept that. I have a chart, I have a spreadsheet with all of my contributed pieces that are coming in and a lot of times I'll get contributed pieces from people and they will literally, like every two days ask me, when is this publishing, when is publishing, when is publishing. I'm just like, you can't do that, like you don't –

[0:12:48] BB: No.

[0:12:49] NS: You just can't do it. Number one, it's annoying. Number two –

[0:12:53] BB: For me a second.

[0:12:55] NS: There's like a method to our madness here on the editorial side.

[0:12:59] BB: Yeah. You don't just hit the button, whatever. Yeah, no.

[0:13:01] NS: No, no. We have standards and we have calendars and things like that. But the writer, the author was super patient and it ended up being a wonderful piece and ended up being really relevant for the time. Another –

[0:13:14] BB: Oh, yeah. Give us another example.

[0:13:15] NS: Yeah. Another example I had gotten a couple of weeks ago, subject line was really simple. It just said, "CrowdStrike follow-up." I was like, "Oh." Because we're in the midst of CrowdStrike, right now.

[0:13:27] BB: Yes. Okay. You already were hooked by the main name.

[0:13:29] NS: Yes.

[0:13:30] BB: But then also follow-up. Now, I'm like following-up about what?

[0:13:34] NS: Yeah, exactly. It was timely. It was to the point, of course, I'm reviewing it. The pitch included an already drafted piece, which was really helpful, but also the fact that it was also already an established relationship with someone who had written for us before. I knew they were a good writer. I knew I could depend on them. It's all right there. I don't have to wait for it. Of course, I'm running this piece, because it's timely and it's something that this coverage that I think people would be interested in. That was like the perfect pitch relationship exchange that we had going on there.

[0:14:08] BB: I love it. Now, you are mentioning relationship. How do people, if at all, publicists make relationships with you? You're in DC, for example, not everyone, maybe, but you know, if you're in town. Okay. Do you want to go out to coffee? Do you want to have the drink? Do you want – what do you want to do?

[0:14:24] NS: Yeah. I know. That's usually how it happens. I mean, I was in New York for 10 years before we moved last year, which I love it. I miss New York. I did –

[0:14:33] BB: Yes, because it's a mess. But DC, that's a powerful city. I don't like it.

[0:14:35] NS: It's been really interesting seeing the differences in the PR industry here and in New York. I mean, it's very different vibes, but I mean, tons of people that work really hard for a lot of very important causes and those sorts of things. CEO of PRSA was here last week. I'd been wanting to sit down with Linda for a while and just have a chat. I saw her at one of our events previous. She said, we come down a lot. So, we just made a date and it was just an informal chat. Sat down for an hour. We've met in the city and that was good in DC, setting at New York City.

If I go to New York, I, and I've had people – I have people reach out on email that say, “Hey, I'd love to meet you sometime, blah, blah.” I keep those emails and I keep them like in a folder. Then so when I go somewhere, I'll follow up with those people. I'll say, “Hey, I'm going to be in this area. You're here. You want to meet up, blah, blah, blah.” A lot of times, I mean, I like meeting people in person, because it gives you a lot more insight into who they are. We don't

usually always chat about business or work, like we just get to know each other as people, which I've – that I think is really important.

As far as like phone calls and stuff during the day, I don't really – I don't have time for that. Unfortunately, I'd actually rather meet someone in person, which I know takes more time, but I feel like I get more from the experience. I've connected with a lot of folks on LinkedIn. We've developed relationships that way. For an example, Natalie, I can't remember her last name right now, but she actually just left Giphy. She was the chief – officer over there. We became connected through LinkedIn.

Then we did, they worked with me on several articles. I had someone from her team do a live event. We've had – but we had known each other for four years, virtually. We had never connected. She came to one of our in-person awards events recently, the top women awards. I got to meet her there in person for the first time. It was like meeting an old friend, because we'd been commenting on each other's posts or working on things through email or this and that, over and over. That was really sweet. It was just nice.

[0:16:49] BB: That's rad.

[0:16:50] NS: Yeah. It was cool. Also, a lot of things like that. The other way to get on my good side is if I do use you as a source for a story and I know not everybody can do this, because of different regulations and things like that, but getting back to me, like super quickly.

[0:17:07] BB: Oh, yes.

[0:17:07] NS: Yes, I can do this. No, I can't do this. Here is what you asked for that always establishes a really good relationship.

[0:17:14] BB: Yes. Be reliable. Get it through. Yes. I'm writing a book that's for founders in the venture space. It's like a pure handbook. One of the things I just wrote this chapter, so it's on the top of my mind is just like speed wins. You have to – if you're sitting down pitches yourself

as a founder or your team is whoever it is doing it, you cannot wait 12 hours to respond to an interview request. Maybe if it's months in advance, it's a long theme story, but for the most part, no, you're not doing that, in the hour, in the hour, in the minutes, ideally.

[0:17:45] NS: So many journalism teams have been shrunk down over the past couple of years. So, while you love having the time to write these big, like enterprise feature-riffic stories.

[0:17:57] BB: That 2001 to pieces.

[0:17:59] NS: Yeah. A lot of what we're doing is responding to what is going on in the moment. If you do want your leadership and included in something like that, then you really have to have something established ahead of time, like oh, we have this question that came in, like we need doctor so and so to answer this within like two hours. Maybe some people do have that in place. Maybe some people don't. I know if I need someone in a financial aspect, I already know that's going to take a couple days or healthcare sometimes, because of the nature of regulatory illness and that. I get it. The worst is if someone tells me that they can do it.

[0:18:41] BB: Oh, and then they don't.

[0:18:43] NS: I get to the end of the day and they're like, "Oh, we can't do this" or I don't hear from them. That ruins a relationship.

[0:18:51] BB: Yeah. That's done. You know what, I'm glad you mentioned that, like usually we talk on this show of, how do you make the relationship? But we haven't spent a lot of time on it. How do you end it? How do you end it? Okay, that's the one way to end it. Are there any other ways to end it? Then we got to wrap up, Nicole, but go ahead. Any other and it's done.

[0:19:08] NS: I mean, I guess just promising a story, like exclusive or whatever to, for example say us, and then you see another like similar topic in a rival publication that your people are quoted in, like that's not cool. If you're giving one journalist a heads up that we want to work with you on this and then it shows up in like another publication, that's not cool, or if you do it,

if you do a contributed piece for us and then we see it somewhere else just edited like so the wording is a little different.

We don't like that either, because we put the rules there ahead of time, like okay, this is exclusive to our publication when we let people know what's going on. It seems like, if people are being a little funny, trying to do that. I get it, like you want your name out there. You want your story out there, but you also have to – there are rules you have to follow, too, for people.

[0:20:06] BB: You do. We should know most of all, we know the rules, but this is why we're here on this podcast. Yes, Nicole. I have a quick couple of fast rapid-fire questions. Are you ready?

[0:20:18] NS: Sure.

[0:20:19] BB: Let's do it. Video or phone interview?

[0:20:21] NS: Video.

[0:20:22] BB: Okay. Bullet points or paragraphs in a pitch?

[0:20:25] NS: Bullet points, please.

[0:20:26] BB: Always. I assume short pitches compared to long.

[0:20:30] NS: Yes.

[0:20:31] BB: Yes. Images attached or a drop box zip file?

[0:20:35] NS: I don't really have an opinion on that either or.

[0:20:38] BB: Email or a DM of sorts for a pitch?

[0:20:41] NS: I prefer email.

[0:20:43] BB: Yes. 99% of people do. I also mentioned this in the book, by the way. Okay, one follow-up or multiple?

[0:20:49] NS: One. Please.

[0:20:52] BB: Yes. Direct or creative subject lines?

[0:20:56] NS: I think direct. I don't want to have to guess what you're talking about.

[0:20:59] BB: I don't want to spend time doing that. Press release or media kit?

[0:21:03] NS: More and more lately, I've been looking for images of what I've been writing about and not able to find them. If I'm getting a media kit with a press release and some art, that would be helpful.

[0:21:16] BB: Okay. Noted. Any time that you read pitches or is it all the time?

[0:21:20] NS: All the time, but probably, I'm probably one of the only people that reads a lot of them on Fridays, but I do it.

[0:21:28] BB: Oh.

[0:21:30] NS: Yeah. I like to plan my week out on Fridays, so I do that. But also, I do a lot on Mondays as well.

[0:21:37] BB: Okay. Lots on Mondays. So, Fridays, Mondays, anytime for Nicole. Okay. Nicole, is there anything we can promote, how to celebrate for you? I know you have some awards coming up.

[0:21:48] NS: Oh, my gosh. We always have awards coming up.

[0:21:50] BB: You always have awards, yes.

[0:21:52] NS: I believe our Platinum Awards are going to be announced very soon. One of the best things I think PR News does is in October. Every year, we have the Platinum Awards Gala. It's in New York City. This is a really great time, a good time to get to know other people in your industry, even if you're not being awarded to support other people in the industry. That's where you get to meet me and other people that work for PR News.

Yeah. It's a great time. It's fun to be in New York and all that stuff. I also have, this is the first year we're doing this. I'm hosting and I think also in October. Yes, and the agenda for this will be coming shortly. A virtual influencer's seminar is going to be a half day virtual seminar with all sorts of experts in the influencer field and how that's affecting PR, because influencers are always changing. That is something that I'm working on over the next couple of months. Yeah, I hope to see you guys there.

[0:22:51] BB: Okay, publicists, you heard it here first, Nicole. Thank you so much for being on today. Nicole Schuman, Managing Editor at PR News. Emphasized PR News, everybody. Okay, not the other ones. We got a lot of news outlets for our – I want to say little industry, but really, it's not little. There's a lot of comms going on in the world. Anyway, thank you again.

[0:23:13] NS: Thank you.

[0:23:13] BB: I hope to see you and see if I roll through. Hey.

[0:23:16] NS: Please, let me know. Let me know when you're here.

[0:23:18] BB: I'll make a note, everybody. I shall make a note.

[0:23:21] NS: Thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:23:24] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee the Journalist episode with the Nicole Schuman, Managing Editor at PR News. For more exclusive insights about the journalist on this podcast, subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter at onepitch.co/odcast. We'll see you next week, but until then, start great stories.

[END]