

EPISODE 235

[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 Pilar Guzman, Editorial Director at Oprah Daily. During the episode, Pilar discusses why she favors subject lines that read like a headline, the evolution of pitch language, and how you can best showcase assets and sources in your pitch.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:41] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, a publicist myself. We made this little show, which has now been going on for a long time, to help other publicists know how best to work with media, journalists, reporters, freelancers, editors, etcetera. Today, speaking of editors, we have quite the editor on. I'm very excited. Pilar Guzman is here. She's the Editorial Director of Oprah Daily. Welcome, Pilar.

[00:01:09] PG: Thanks for having me.

[00:01:11] BB: We're so, so, so excited. We're so excited. Thanks for being here. We have much to discuss. But we don't have five and a half hours, so we will just get into it. For those who – and I ask this for everybody now. I don't care if it's a Wall Street Journal, whatever. How would you describe the coverage arena of Oprah Daily today? It's changed.

[00:01:29] PG: Yes. It's definitely evolved. Some things have stayed true. We are forever wedded to women's health and living one's best life in that complete picture. Really, it's about wholeness, the pursuit of wholeness. I think wellness is a word certainly that is part of our brand. But I think that we've evolved to this new place of health and wellness as a kind of

expansion of living one's best life. Wholeness is returning to a state of wholeness and a state of integrity and purpose.

[00:02:03] BB: Wholeness. Yes. I'm liking all of this. Excellent. For your role then, Pilar, because we've had all types of editors on here, what would you say your role as editorial director encompasses? Because lots of publicists think, "Well, should I pitch you? Do I need to pitch your staff only? Is it valuable to even pitch you?" Anytime there's editorial or director or even producer for shows and stuff, it can be a little confusing. So what would you say?

[00:02:31] PG: Sure. I think all editors on the team, including me, are fair game for pitches. I think we're –

[00:02:37] BB: Fair game.

[00:02:38] PG: I call myself player coach.

[00:02:41] BB: Oh, I like it. Okay. Player coach, tell us more.

[00:02:44] PG: I think it's – all editors these days, no matter where you are in the organization, I think you really need to have your ear to the ground at all times and hearing the pitches and understanding what's going on in the culture. Part of that is being on the receiving end of writers' pitches, publicists' pitches. It helps us take the temperature of the culture.

[00:03:05] BB: To hear what's going on across the board. Are people pitching you in your inbox? Or where are you getting pitches?

[00:03:12] PG: Mostly in my inbox I would say, unless you're going to – I just came back from a travel conference. You receive those pitches in person as well. Sometimes, they take on slightly different form in person. But I think a well-placed written pitch can be very effective.

[00:03:30] BB: Okay. Tell us about then your inbox and what's going on in there.

[00:03:35] PG: I think like most people, we are inundated. You get pretty good at – first of all, there's just instant name recognition. There are people whose pitches rise to the top and others who you feel like you've just been blanketed to the giant distribution. I think the more specific the pitch, the more you think somebody understands the brand, the more likely one will be to open that pitch.

[00:04:00] BB: Okay. Could you get a little bit more into the subject lines and how important those are?

[00:04:07] PG: I think a good subject line should read like a good headline of a story. I think a good publicist is generally a pretty good journalist.

[00:04:17] BB: A pretty good – okay. So you want to see a subject line written like the headline.

[00:04:22] PG: To some degree, yes. It's like we're all competing for eyeballs, and I don't know that it's that different. I think that maybe there's a little bit more directness that a journalist expects of a publicist pitch. But in some ways, I think our industry is going there. I think cleverness is not really rewarded when it comes to clickability.

[00:04:41] BB: Okay. Pilar, what do you love to see more in a subject line or in the body of a pitch? You already said is it written like the headline. Could you expand further or give us any other insights? The opposite, too, by the way, of like, “I don't want to see this ever. That's all.”

[00:04:56] PG: Yes. No. I think it's a really good question, and I think it's kind of an evolving thing. I mean, I will tell you a little piece of history. I remember when I was redesigning. I think it was the front of the book at Condé Nast Traveler. It was at the moment when tackier headlines online were starting to crop up.

I remember changing the type spec of the headline because I'm like I've probably written every two-word headline under the sun in my 150 years in media, and it needed to expand with the culture. There is that sort of like a tackier headline was catching people's attention because you glaze over. It's sort of you cycle through trends like any other trends, like fashion trends. There are word trends that then stop being interesting or stop catching your eye.

I think the same is true for a pitch. I think that they evolve pitch languages like all other language, what stops you in your tracks. I don't know if that answers your question, but I do feel like something like that.

[00:05:58] BB: It helps. But stops you in your tracks, I think that's something to hang on. Does it or not?

[00:06:03] PG: Yes. But as far as – sorry. To go back to what should it look like, it's sort of like you do want things to get to the point right away. You forgive a long-winded something if the first couple of sentences feel one. They are pitched specifically for you, and your brand and that the person who's pitching really understands who they're pitching to, and they've done their research, and they've put whatever their point of view is in the context of said subject.

If we are talking about menopause, for example, which is something, or longevity or weight, we want to know that whoever is pitching is up to speed on the subject matter, has done their homework, and knows what's been covered by us and other brands.

[00:06:47] BB: Yes. That is so often missed. Publicists, they send you a pitch and you're like, “Well, I just did that topic five days ago.”

[00:06:54] PG: Or everybody else did. You know what I mean?

[00:06:57] BB: I think that's the other thing, too, and there's nothing [inaudible 00:06:59]. There's nothing fresh, no.

[00:07:01] PG: Exactly.

[00:07:02] BB: Exactly. Speaking of experts, people who really, really know their field, we like to talk about this on every person we're talking to. Sources and any particulars that you're like, “Yes, I do want X all the time.” I don't know.

[00:07:15] PG: I mean, I think I'm always happy when the pitch addresses some fresh take. Then the expert, I have some sense of what that expert's point of distinction is. Yes, original sources. People who are on the front lines often our go-to, and maybe this is not always correct, but somebody who's publishing a book who has some area – who has an expertise on a subject matter and has some fresh take. Therefore, there's a reason to go to them. But they also have to be compelling, not just because they have a book.

I think having – if it's a video something, they've got to be camera-ready. If they're incredibly good at synthesizing a subject matter, that's also valuable.

[BREAK]

[00:07:59] 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]

[00:08:21] BB: Okay. We were discussing – oh, the experts. Just because you got a book, it doesn't mean you're an expert.

[00:08:28] PG: Or it doesn't mean – first of all, we all know how many terrible books get published and –

[00:08:33] BB: God.

[00:08:34] PG: Even if one is an expert in whatever subject, it doesn't mean that they should be writing a book. But in any case, assuming that we are intrigued by the subject matter and the expert, I think one has to make a decision because we're not just writing articles. We're also doing video and social around people like are they camera-ready if this is something that goes on camera. Of course, we play in all the different spaces, so it doesn't – not everybody has to be good at everything.

I think a pitch that speaks to or showcases the strength of the expert, that should come up pretty high up. If somebody did a TEDx talk or a TED talk, have a 30-second clip of that.

[00:09:18] BB: Yes.

[00:09:19] PG: Don't make me go to the Dropbox at the bottom of the page and load another page because, usually, I'm on my phone, that sort of thing. Or give a little snippet of an image if it's sort of a visually driven something, whether it's a product or a hotel opening or something. If it's visual, make it easy and don't make me sit through an ad.

[00:09:40] BB: Oh, boy. No. That is one of our questions on our little rapid fire, which we're going to get to in a second, which is do you want a Dropbox zip file or whatever. Personally, I don't want to click to anything else myself. It sounds like you want to see everything contained in the email ideally like the visuals there.

[00:09:57] PG: Yes, exactly. If it links to more images, more video, whatever it is, that's fine but as long as I get a little taste. I don't even mind a long-winded email as long as it sets things up succinctly at the top, and there are some bullets. I'm okay with the combo. I know that goes down to it the next question.

[00:10:15] BB: That's okay. Well, we will get there. Is there a way, Pilar, for relationship building to happen with you? Or are you like, "You know what? Just send me good pitches, and I'll see you in email."?

[00:10:26] PG: Sure. I mean, I think I've gotten so quick just sifting through my inbox at the publicists who I think do really thoughtful pitches that – so just even starting there, I will respond often, and I'll say, "I want to hear more. Can you send me more video or more whatever?" So then the relationship starts. I won't necessarily say I'm looking for this, this, and this. Pitch me only these things. I think a good publicist will be able to see that based on their knowledge of our site and our social. I think that it becomes sort of self-selecting. It's sort of like the people who pitch well will get a response. Or the people who pitch well have an understanding of what our brand is.

[00:11:11] BB: Then they keep pitching you good stuff. I'm sure that helps further the relationship, right?

[00:11:15] PG: Exactly, right.

[00:11:15] BB: Yes. Excellent. Pilar, here we go with our rapid-fire questions. First one is video or phone interview?

[00:11:23] PG: Phone interview, usually, although I don't mind video.

[00:11:26] BB: Okay. Bullet points or paragraphs in pitches? You talked about it earlier.

[00:11:30] PG: Yes. I think it depends on the topic, number one. If it's something that's really data-driven, bullets can be helpful. But always you want a setup. You want something that puts it in context, whatever the topic is.

[00:11:42] BB: Images attached or Dropbox zip file? We copy that, too. You want to see it all right up front.

[00:11:47] PG: I think you want to at least get a sampling within the body of the email, and then you can link to Dropbox if there are more.

[00:11:53] BB: One follow-up or multiple? Because we already covered emails are the way to pitch you.

[00:11:57] PG: For me, it's a maximum of two.

[00:11:59] BB: Two and done. Direct or creative subject lines? Now, you talked about a headline. But would you like to elaborate?

[00:12:05] PG: I would say a direct subject line doesn't have to be dull.

[00:12:09] BB: Yes, so true.

[00:12:11] PG: I think sometimes people can be too clever by half. I'd rather – if I had to put a gun to my head, I'd take direct over clever because most people aren't that clever.

[00:12:20] BB: Yes. This is so true. Press release or media kit in a pitch/

[00:12:24] PG: I think it sort of depends, but press release generally. Media kits tend to need to be downloaded.

[00:12:30] BB: Yes. Based on the East Coast, is there a time that you prefer to read pitches, or you're like, "It's all the time."?

[00:12:35] PG: It doesn't really matter. It's just when I get to them. But I get up very early, so I usually – I clear my inbox early in the morning or end of day. It's just – I think that's pretty common for most people.

[00:12:47] BB: Got you. Then we already talked about sources. Is there, Pilar, anything you want to note for publicists where you're like, "Hey, publicist. When I see X, I love it."? Hard question? Yes.

[00:13:02] PG: No, no. I think it's a really good question, I think, for me, the greatest pleasure I get from a good pitch is when I know that somebody is familiar not only with the subject matter but also with our brand and our particular lens on something, and they pitch within that context. I realize that's not super soundbitey, but it is really true. It's about doing your homework more than anything.

[00:13:26] BB: Yes. Do you know the outlet? Do you show you know the outlet?

[00:13:29] PG: There are so many people who cover – we are technically women's service, and so many titles fall under that umbrella. We sit uniquely, I think, at the intersection of women's health, psychology, and spirituality. I think it makes – we are always threading kind of an

interesting and unique needle of rigorous journalism and storytelling. I think that's the secret sauce is those two things, both incredibly hard-nosed and also poetic.

I think that it makes us a little bit unique in the sense that we straddle both. So we get pitches from all sorts of writers that are first-person essays, and that's great, and the hard nose. It's sort of like we encompass those things. I think if people understand that within a context, then they pitch accordingly. Not to say that everything has to tick both boxes at the same time always, but we do tend to straddle those realms.

[00:14:32] BB: I do love, Pilar, and I've never heard it said. This is what we were talking about earlier where you're like, "Oh, it must be all the same stuff." No. It's always different where you're saying rigorous journalism but with the storytelling that's compelling. Both are very hard and when you got to do both.

[00:14:46] PG: Yes. I think I get plenty of wonderful pitches from publicists that do do that, that do take those things into consideration.

[00:14:55] BB: Yes. All right. Well, everybody, we need to send poetic storytelling, keeping in mind robust journalism and the integrity of such because that is what Pilar wants to see. Pilar, is there anything we can highlight, celebrate, emphasize that's going on for you or Oprah Daily? Tell us. Tell us.

[00:15:17] PG: Yes. We have just proudly launched our new Oprah Daily Insider's community platform, which is actually something that we have been wanting to do for time immemorial. It's not just allowing our users and readers to comment but actually to engage with one another. It is an incredibly robust platform that allows for people to gather, in real-time respond to topics that are not just on the site but ones that they are generating from within the community. Not just talk to editors but to each other because I think all of our community members are mini Oprahs in their own right.

[00:15:57] BB: Oh, I love that. They're mini Oprahs in their own right. Yes, they are.

[00:16:02] PG: Yes, indeed. We're thrilled about that, and that comes with membership, too, with oprahdaily.com.

[00:16:08] BB: Got it. Oh, I love it. I love it. Pilar Guzman, thank you so much for being on today. This was totally a delight. She is, everybody, a reminder, Editorial Director Oprah Daily. Make sure you read the outlet before you pitch. Once again, chief repeating officer, there you go.

[00:16:25] PG: Thanks so much, Beck.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:16:27] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode with Pilar Guzman, Editorial Director at Oprah Daily. 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]