

**EPISODE 236**

[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 Maxwell Millington, Entertainment Reporter at Axios. During the episode, Max explains his role at Axios, how he prioritizes emails based on their importance of streaming, entertainment, and sports, and his tips for PR pose to best determine what news to pitch and what sources to provide.

[INTERVIEW]

**[0:00:44] BB:** Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, a publicist myself, storyteller, all the 19 jobs we do. Anyway, we're here because we love to understand how to better work with reporters, journalists, editors, freelancers, all the people that make the media world go round, because we have to as publicists, so that's the point of this show, to better understand how to make great journalism happen via working with our great journalists' people.

Today with us, quite exciting if you're into the entertainment beat. Not an area I know too well, Max, but you know, you'll inform me. Is Max Millington, he's the entertainment reporter over at Axios. We are so happy to have you here, Max. Howdy?

**[0:01:28] MM:** Hey, Beck. How are you? Happy to be here.

**[0:01:29] BB:** We're so good. You said you had a smooth day today, so I'm taking that as a win.

**[0:01:34] MM:** Yeah. Let's do it.

**[0:01:35] BB:** Let's do it. Yes. Perfect. Okay, Max, to kick us off, I do like to ask this of every person. How would you just drive the coverage for Axios? It has evolved over time, tell us.

**[0:01:49] MM:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, our job as Axios reporters is primarily to get readers smarter, faster, which is, you know, I'm sure a term that you've heard if you've read Axios, *Smart Brevity*.

**[0:02:00] BB:** Oh, yes.

**[0:02:01] MM:** Our whole thing is just about getting readers the information as efficiently and as clean as possible, but Axios coverage is spread far and wide between local news and we like to say hyper local, tag business, politics, and obviously entertainment and sports as well. We're all a good place.

**[0:02:21] BB:** It's quite a wide range, yes. Multiple sections. As we were just talking about this, Max, like entertainment, but you also do a lot of sports. It depends on the day. It depends on the things, although both are, I would say, intersect to some degree, more and more these days.

**[0:02:37] MM:** Yeah –

**[0:02:37] BB:** Such as what we saw with the Olympics, right?

**[0:02:39] MM:** Yes. The Olympics. My first thought when you said that was like the Super Bowl. Everyone was talking about Travis Kelce and Taylor Swift.

**[0:02:48] BB:** Oh, yes.

**[0:02:49] MM:** That was the ultimate intersection of entertainment in sports.

**[0:02:54] BB:** Yeah. Yes, it was. What an exciting world that we live in with all that sports now is the entertainment. Anyway, that's a whole other podcast, I'm sure. How is your inbox, Max?

**[0:03:06] MM:** My inbox is it fluctuates. Today, wasn't a terrible day. I feel like there's some occasions where it gets pretty crazy, but I'm happy to report that it's not too bad as of right now.

**[0:03:20] BB:** No, that's good. Do you have a way in which you manage that to make it not so crazy?

**[0:03:26] MM:** I checked my emails throughout the day. Pretty much try to get my unread emails to the single digits. It's not always zero, but you know –

**[0:03:37] BB:** Single digits. Oh, that's good. That's good.

**[0:03:39] MM:** Yeah. I do my best. I live in Los Angeles. I'm on the West Coast, so I feel like it's a little bit easier to check in like the early emails from folks that might be on the East Coast, make sure I check in with them, and then I can pace it out throughout the day and go from there.

**[0:03:57] BB:** Do you use filing system or do you do a mass deleting? How do we get to this single digit's level?

**[0:04:03] MM:** Yeah. I look through everything. I have a pretty good idea of what I need to focus on and what emails could, I can just bookmark and move on or delete right away. I also sometimes, I do this little trick, this is just how my brain works, instead of like making a bunch of folders, what I'll do is if I read an email and I know I need to pay attention to it or I need to come back to later, I'll actually just go ahead and press mark as unread, so that way I can make sure I come back to it later and in addition to bookmarking to make sure that I see it.

**[0:04:38] BB:** Oh, you have a double system, a failed system. Oh, I have not heard that before on here. Okay. Then you did say you know what you're looking for. Do you just via subject line and alone know like, okay, that's just clearly not for me?

**[0:04:52] MM:** Yeah. I've got to know what's a prioritize. For my role, a lot of the things that I do involve TV and movies on streaming and being of course, sports, so just taking the streaming example, if I get a release from a Netflix, or a Peacock, or Hulu and they're – you know, letting

me know about a new show that's coming out, I know to sort of, like prioritize that in my inbox and make sure, you know, is it like a show that everyone's talking about that I need to let local reporters know about right away, or I need to write something about right away, or is it just like something I can come back to and write about later. Another good example is like concert announcements. We do, if it's a Taylor Swift is going on tour, like that's sort of like, okay, put everything down, read that.

**[0:05:44] BB:** I love it. Put everything down.

**[0:05:48] MM:** Yeah. That kind of – I'll put everything down, like –

**[0:05:52] BB:** That's right. That's right.

**[0:05:55] MM:** We got to get the news out about that right away. That's how it works.

**[0:05:59] BB:** Ah, I love it. Oh, God, this is always bad. I just googled her just to like see and there's like 900 art. She's a media thing herself. My God. Look at this one. Page six saying he won't propose unless you have an ironclad prenup. Well, that's because they're both billionaires. But anyway. Oh, my gosh. okay. Now, this is not common for a lot of people we have here on this show, but for you, where like you got to watch a show, you got to watch a movie, you need to sit, watch a game. How do you manage the volume of that content you must consume?

**[0:06:37] MM:** The great thing about working at Axios is that I don't have to worry about writing anything that's too much like in the weeds and in detail and a lot of content –

**[0:06:46] BB:** That's true. That's not the sound of Axios. Yeah.

**[0:06:49] MM:** A lot of times for the streaming guide, for example there's a couple of I do two or three shows that are like the standouts, and then the rest of them, I can write about based on the description of given to me by the press team or the press notes or whatever. For the shows that are on top of my streaming guide, I can – if it's a TV show, I can watch a couple of episodes to get the sense of what it's about and the tone and everything like that, or if it's a movie, you know, movies you can watch in a couple hours and then write about it. Thankfully I don't have to

watch everything. I don't have to watch all of a certain show to be able to write about it. It's a little enough to get the gist of it and I can put something on paper.

**[0:07:38] BB:** Okay. Good. Maybe it's beneficial then that the outlet itself Axios is shorter. In depth, you're not writing a 4,000-film review, so like I said, that is helpful. Okay. How can publicists make your life easier, Max?

**[0:07:53] MM:** Yeah. I would say the number one thing is just to really understand what it is that I as a journalist cover. I think there's instances, so for example, one of the interesting parts of my job right now is I write what's called the weekender for two cities, Axios Chicago and Axios Denver. I write about what events are coming up on the weekend. It's like six items. A lot of the events are large scale, hundreds of people, concerts, festivals, sporting events, really big events. Sometimes bar crawls. It depends on the weekend.

If for example, that's something that you're pitching me for like an event that is 50 people are going to be able to come to or something that's like, "Hey, this restaurant is doing a drink special on Wednesday." Like that's not really on the same like level as I normally have the weekender, which is a concert or a Bear's game or a Cub's, whatever. Just paying close attention to if you're pitching for like a weekly series, paying close attention to the things that are in this series to make sure that whatever you're pitching fits in with that, or if you're just pitching me on like something that you think might be relevant, but you haven't really done –

**[0:09:22] BB:** You haven't done a work.

**[0:09:24] MM:** If it is like that, I would say just really getting an understanding of what the journalists or it might be what I do like would help a lot. It would save us both a lot of time.

**[0:09:32] BB:** It would save everybody the time. Please, everybody. Please. Okay. What about sources for you? I would think it wouldn't be as valuable for you, Max, but I like to always ask that, because sometimes we're repping PhD of this, doctor of philosophy that, celebrity stylists, so-and-so, sports agents, so-and-so, like are there sources that you look for or like to have on a short list?

[MESSAGE]

**[0:10:01] 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]

**[0:10:24] MM:** Yeah. I think we are always looking for sources, because my role is a little bit unique to where I, a lot of the work or the work that I prioritize is for our local markets. We have 30 cities that have local newsletters. I'm getting sports and entertainment stories for those markets. Sometimes it's great to have inside sources on something a team is doing in Atlanta, or Denver, or Chicago or if one area that we're really trying to do more in is in music.

Music sources, somebody that can talk about the behind the scenes of a tour, or music publicist and people that can, you know – people that can hey, so-and-so is doing interviews or whatever, like I think one big thing we love at Axios is data stories. One thing that we were working on too is getting more data driven sources, whether that be in music, or in television, or in sports. That way we can tell more data stories in those entertainment and sports spaces.

**[0:11:36] BB:** This is good to know. Do you get pitched sources, you're like, “No, no.” Hard no.

**[0:11:43] MM:** Sometimes. As that is much as where it's like insane, like why it's just happening to me, but every once in a while, there's like stuff that's a little bit off the cuff. I'm like, how do we get here? I think – sometimes it's –

**[0:11:58] BB:** How did we get here?

**[0:12:00] MM:** Sometimes it's not like –

**[0:12:02] BB:** How did we.

**[0:12:03] MM:** Sometimes it's not completely their fault. Sometimes there have been, like a publicist might reference an article I did, like a one-off, like for example, one time I collaborated with Axios Twin Cities about a video game coming out that was featuring an athlete that's a big star in that market. For that one occasion, I wrote about the game, but that goes back to what I was saying earlier, really knowing what I covered, because that one situation doesn't mean that, okay, now pitch me a bunch of like video game stories, because that's not really what I covered. That was just a unique situation. Those are the times where sometimes I get like things that I'm like, "Oh, no. This isn't in my covered area at all." But like I said, thankfully those occasions are not often.

**[0:12:48] BB:** That's very good. Do you have any pitch examples, Max, that you have handy that you're like, "Yes, I love this pitch?"

**[0:12:56] MM:** Yeah. So, one cool part of my job is that a lot of times, especially being in Los Angeles, like I'll get invited to certain events and go be in the entertainment sports realm. One great pitch that I got recently was about Olivia Rodrigo's pop-up here in LA. It was very to the point, the subject line, like awesome, like Olivia Rodrigo GUTS Pop-Up at so-and-so in LA. They told me what it was, where it was, and it even had the dates in the subject line, like perfect. I read the email, of course, but like if I didn't read anything else, I would have known like what exactly was happening.

It was really clear and easy to respond to those are always great, or a lot of times I'll get interview op with so-and-so. Okay, great, like I can read that in the subject line. It's very clear right away. I know, okay, I need to learn more about what the situation is and what the interviews they're trying to get across. Those are two really good examples that I recently got.

**[0:14:01] BB:** I like that. You mentioned you're in LA. Great. Tinseltown. Do you like, Max to meet for a coffee, a cocktail? Anything? Is there any in-person relationship building that you seek to look at?

**[0:14:12] MM:** Yeah. I love in-person.

**[0:14:14] BB:** Me too.

**[0:14:15] MM:** Yeah. I'm an in-person guy. I will say that LA is people don't like to drive too much, because the traffic is terrible.

**[0:14:25] BB:** Oh, it's horrible. Yeah.

**[0:14:26] MM:** It's a very big place. I will say, like just be flexible in terms of like what parts of town we meet. I'm always having an in-person.

**[0:14:39] BB:** Okay. This is good to know. What's your preference though? You like a coffee, a lunch. What do you like? A walk? I don't know.

**[0:14:45] MM:** Yeah. I would say like coffee, is great. Happy hour. I'm always game for. Lunches are great too. Kill two birds in one stone. I'll be above. I'm down for whatever.

**[0:14:55] BB:** Okay. Flexible, flexible, Max would like it. Do you want to get a little bit into before we go to our, like quick-fire questions into the story approval process? Because for many publicists perhaps, even at the editor level, it's a bit murky. It's like, well, how does a pitch get the okay to then become the story? We all have a boss somewhere. Someone has to say, yes, this is a go. No, don't do that or whatnot. Is there a way in which you pitch the stories you wish to do or how does that look?

**[0:15:28] MM:** Yes. For a lot of things, I – thankfully, I worked on a really great team. A lot of things, I'm at the point now where my editor trusts me to do a lot of things. I don't have to get everything I write about approved, but for a pitch to get approved, to go back to that point, a lot of times for me, specifically, I look for stories that touch as many of our local markets as possible, because at the end of the day like I said earlier, that's my job is to provide entertainment and sports stories for our 30 local markets.

If there's something that touches even three out of the 30, that's a good place to be able to you know, okay, I can go ahead and write about this. Depending on what it is. If it's really right in the middle of my coverage area that's something I can just write and no approval really needed, but if it's something that's a little bit more obscure, a little bit outside, so like for example the video game thing. If it's like something like that, it's like, "Okay, I might have to check with my editor to see if this is okay." But really at the core for myself, it all goes back to a story that's relevant in as many of our 30 cities as possible.

**[0:16:53] BB:** Okay. Noted on that front. Shall we get into the quick-fire portion?

**[0:16:57] MM:** I'd love to.

**[0:16:58] BB:** Max, let's do it. Okay. First off. Video or phone interview?

**[0:17:03] MM:** Video.

**[0:17:04] BB:** Video. Now, we're hearing interesting answers for this one. What makes you say video?

**[0:17:09] BB:** Just being able to have a conversation like face-to-face is great and this virtual world. I think seeing a face is always, you know, I like it. It feels so good.

**[0:17:19] BB:** Okay. Okay. I mean, I agree too with that. Bullet points are paragraphs in a pitch?

**[0:17:24] MM:** Bullet points. I haven't got many enough. I get a lot of paragraphs.

**[0:17:29] BB:** Yeah. Yeah.

**[0:17:30] MM:** Send the bullets at me, please.

**[0:17:32] BB:** I assume short versus long pitches?

**[0:17:34] MM:** Yes, short pitches.

**[0:17:35] BB:** Okay. How about images attached or a Dropbox zip file?

**[0:17:39] MM:** That is a great question. I think Dropbox, for me, just because, depending on what it is, like it's easier just to share a link. If it's a Dropbox with other reporters or I can just go and look, but yeah, Dropbox links are cool.

**[0:17:56] BB:** We like a Dropbox. Okay. Then email or a DM of any kind for a pitch?

**[0:18:03] MM:** Email just because it's really easy. It's about, it's right there in my work stuff. DMs are fine, but email just –

**[0:18:13] BB:** Okay. Okay. We like it. Direct or creative subject lines. We talked a little bit about this.

**[0:18:18] MM:** Yeah. Direct.

**[0:18:19] BB:** Direct it. Done. Okay. How about follow-ups? Multiple or?

**[0:18:25] MM:** This is a good question. One follow-up is usually enough. I will say that just depending on the time out of like whatever the news is, like I'm not responding in – I don't mind multiple follow-ups, but usually I can get back after one.

**[0:18:47] BB:** Okay. This is good. Press release or media kit?

**[0:18:51] MM:** Oh, man. What a great question. I think I'm more likely to like look through a media kit. The media kit's great, because it's a one-stop shop, right? But if you got, a lot of times, personally, in it with photos and all the stuff I need. I love a media kit.

**[0:19:08] BB:** Is there a time? We talked about a little bit from you being in LA. A time, though, in which you're looking at pitches. Any time we should know?

**[0:19:15] MM:** No. I look at stuff all day. I would say, I don't normally start my day at around 8 Pacific. I mean, you can email me before that, but if you want like a quicker response, then later in the day is better.

**[0:19:31] BB:** By the way, do you ever feel like you're behind being on the West Coast from your New York peers or East Coast peers?

**[0:19:39] MM:** No, not really. The only time I feel behind is when like some major news comes up before I wake up.

**[0:19:46] BB:** Oh, I know.

**[0:19:47] MM:** But on a day-to-day basis, no, I love being on the West Coast.

**[0:19:54] BB:** Oh, me too. For the life, hell yeah. But sometimes on the news front, you're like, yeah, man. Which is why I love being in New York City. That's my favorite place where I'm like, oh, and I'm an early bird, so I'm like, it's 5:30 AM. No one's up. Not even anyone in New York except the trash people. I'm telling you. I love it when you can have a East Coast vibe. Anyway, Max, is there anything we could do to promote, celebrate, tout, anything else you're all doing?

**[0:20:23] MM:** You know what? I would just say, wherever you're at subscribe, if there's an Axios local newsletter in your city, subscribe to it, that's where you'll see some great work by our entire Axios local team. But also, myself, my colleagues on the hub, Analis Bailey, [inaudible 0:20:42] Barber. We do a lot of entertainment sports and real estate content among the four of us. There's other great stuff on the hub as well. Lifestyle data stuff. Yeah. That's where you're going to see all of our work is. If you live in one of our 30 cities, subscribe to the Axios local in your city. That's where you'll see all of our stuff.

**[0:21:06] BB:** Max, thank you so much for being on today. Spend a little bit of time, especially on the – well, it's not too late of the afternoon in the West Coast, but still, it's the afternoon and we've had a long day. So, let's keep it up with smoothness, as you said.

**[0:21:19] MM:** Absolutely. Thank you so much. I really appreciate this, Beck.

**[0:21:22] BB:** Oh, thank you. It's Max Millington. He is the entertainment reporter, everybody, from Axios. Hit him up in LA, but don't make him drive too far. No.

**[0:21:33] MM:** Thank you.

**[0:21:33] BB:** We cannot.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[0:21:35] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, Maxwell Millington, Entertainment Reporter at Axios. 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]