

EPISODE 239

[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 journalists? Head to our website at onepitch.co to learn more. Our guest on today's episode of Coffee with a Journalist is Alan Neuhauser, Climate Deals Reporter at Axios Pro. In this episode, Alan discusses his preferences for pitches, his approach to networking at conferences, and the importance of building relationships with publicists who manage multiple climate-related clients.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:42] BB: Welcome everyone, this is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, I'm a publicist and we're here on this show today because we talk about how to get better relationships with journalists, reporters, editors, freelancers, all the people that make the media world go round, frankly, and we need each other. We're here to demystify how we might better work together. With us today, on video too, this is new format for us, I have to get all prepared, Alan, is Alan Neuhauser. He's the Climate Deals Reporter at Axios Pro. Quite prolific in your background, Alan. You're a doctor of law, JD, you've been at Wall Street Journal, you've been at Washington Post. Actually, not Wall Street Journal. Wait. Yes, yes, at Washington Post.

[0:01:29] AN: I've published freelance stories there, but I wasn't in the newsroom.

[0:01:32] BB: Yes, and the New York Times and various other things. So, we are here with you today. Thanks for being here.

[0:01:37] AN: Yeah, thank you for having me.

[0:01:38] BB: My, it must not be a boring time in climate for you to be reporting on that, so congrats on that. Let's first, though, demystify if need be what Axios specifically, Pro, entails and covers, and then we can get a little bit more into your stuff.

[0:01:53] AN: Sure. So, we follow the deals landscape. We've got a few different verticals, retail, media, FinTech, HealthTech, and then us at climate. Our load store really used to be the go-to source for what the heck is happening in each of those industries, day in and day out. Our guiding principle is respect, respect to our readers' time. Everyone is busy out there, especially in this B2B space, right? As we want to arm our readers with the information they need and that they need now, and they need to do it as quickly as possible. That's what we're trying to do every day.

[0:02:25] BB: I love that. Respect. That's our guiding principle. How refreshing. How refreshing. Yes, and for those, maybe not as familiar, Axios is known for a bullet pointed, quick, it's breezy, it's quick, but a deeply researched, deeply – it's not junkie, little random thoughts. No, it's not meant to be that way. Alan, then on the climate side of things, what are you looking for pitch-wise and then we'll talk about your inbox?

[0:02:50] AN: It's not dissimilar from anything else that you would expect, right? This stuff, and this is going to be probably painfully intangible, but –

[0:02:57] BB: That's okay. We're here.

[0:02:58] AN: - stuff that's salient, really understanding what our readers want. You know that in PR, right? For us, our readers, our venture capital investors, private equity investors, what are the deals that they need to know about? Our entry point is typically fundraising announcements. So-and-so startup has raised X amount of money in a series, whatever. But it'd be any business type story along those lines. Those are what's been most successful as far as pitching to myself and my colleague, Katie.

[0:03:29] BB: Okay. Good. Katie to know. Oh, maybe she could be on here, too.

[0:03:32] AN: Yeah. Oh, she'd be great.

[0:03:34] BB: Alan, do you have a way in which you manage your inbox, or tell us how that goes?

[0:03:40] AN: I have given up on inbox zero a very long time ago. Thank God, that the search function is as strong as it is. I do have a filter for emails that say embargo, and embargoed.

[0:03:52] BB: Oh. Mm.

[0:03:54] AN: Those do go to a specific folder that I look for.

[0:03:56] BB: Oh, that's a good tip for people to know. Do you have one for exclusive?

[0:03:59] AN: I should.

[0:04:01] BB: Or maybe those that had happened. Yeah. Have that. Why not?

[0:04:04] AN: Yeah. I'll make that after this, actually. It's good.

[0:04:06] BB: Okay. There we go. Hot tip. Okay. You've given up on inbox zero. You do have a filter. Do you have any other means to control the slog?

[0:04:16] AN: Yeah. As far as the emails coming in?

[0:04:17] BB: Exactly.

[0:04:18] AN: No.

[0:04:19] BB: No. Okay.

[0:04:20] AN: I mean, internal emails are easy to filter from the access addresses, but not – otherwise, it's just staying on top of it as much as I can, day in and day out.

[0:04:28] BB: Then, are you looking at your inbox pretty frequently, like every couple hours, every hour, every moment? I don't know.

[0:04:35] AN: It's just up, because the thing about it, right, is the access stories, because they're short, right? The maximum word count that I try to abide by is 250, if not shorter, right? Yeah. I'm keeping an eye on my inbox, because I'm not spending – most days I'm not head down in a story all day. That makes it easier to check in on what's incoming.

[0:04:57] BB: Got you. Okay. You check in. Now, with all the emails you do get, I'm assuming, do you open everyone? Do you slide through? No. Okay. No, no. That's no. Okay, great. You delete, or what?

[0:05:09] AN: Yeah, because I don't love the Outlook desktop client. I just use the online – we use Gmail for our access email. I just use the online portal.

[0:05:19] BB: Okay, great.

[0:05:20] AN: Which is maybe painfully analog. But it means, I don't need to open everyone to go through it. There's not that sidebar setup. No, most emails I'm not opening, because the vast majority are not relevant.

[0:05:34] BB: Yeah. Okay. Can you immediately tell from the subject line?

[0:05:37] AN: Pretty much. Yeah.

[0:05:38] BB: Yeah. Okay. What's a good subject line for you, for a pitch, for a pitch?

[0:05:44] AN: There's the obvious answer, right? Which is, if it's an embargo, or it's an exclusive, just putting that right in the subject line.

[0:05:51] BB: Yup. Put it right there.

[0:05:52] AN: Things that are short, not too complicated, it helps that climate deals is pretty niche, to an end respect. I mean, climate is getting bigger and bigger, right? The places that we're touching are ever expanding. What we're following again is this, where the money's going, where the investment is happening. I can tell pretty quickly from a subject line, is this about

some random peer of a land management announcement that I'm – that yes, personally I care about, but professionally, I don't need to open? Or is this is this TPG announcing something, some private equity firm? Actually, putting the company name in the subject line, especially if it's recognizable, definitely helps.

[0:06:31] BB: Company name, funding amount as well. You want to see that in there too, or no, you don't really care?

[0:06:36] AN: I mean, if it's a bananas number, that always helps.

[0:06:38] BB: What's bananas now, by the way? 200 million, 500 million?

[0:06:42] AN: Nine figures these days, let alone 10 or 11.

[0:06:45] BB: All right. Okay. Approval process. I'm curious about this, especially with Axios and how short it is. We haven't talked about this lately on this show. What is that like for you? Do you have to go pitch your boss, your editors and say, "I want to do these seven stories tomorrow"? Or how does it go?

[0:07:03] AN: First of all, if I had to do seven stories for tomorrow, I'd have a heart attack.

[0:07:05] BB: Yeah. Okay. I thought so. Just throwing it out there. I didn't want to downplay your rigor, Alan.

[0:07:11] AN: I appreciate the confidence, but nonetheless. We used to use Trello. We've gone to a platform called Notion, that's much more – I love Trello. I miss Trello. Oh, but it's similar.

[0:07:20] BB: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[0:07:21] AN: We'll update that, and then we'll have a check-in call at some point in the afternoon. My colleague, Katie Fehrenbacher, and our editor, Mike Flaherty. That's an opportunity to touch base and say, this is what we're working on. It's not so much pitching our editor, because he trusts us, right? We're supposed to be the subject matter experts.

Occasionally, especially if it's a funky – if it's a company with a teeny, tiny, fundraising amount, right, 500k, but it's a compelling technology. That would be a question of, do we write about this? Do we care about this? Is there something more valuable? Mike is commonly deferring to our judgment and be like, “Hey, you tell me. What do you think your readers care about?”

[0:08:02] BB: Okay. That's nice. That's just an informing, updated meeting. Like, I'm going to be looking at this, writing that, and that type of thing. That is refreshing.

[0:08:12] AN: Yeah. He'll occasionally veto something, right? He'll say, “Eh.”

[0:08:16] BB: That was my next question, I was thinking like, is there ever a like, nope? No, you're not doing that. No. Okay.

[0:08:20] AN: Oh, yeah. Totally. Yeah. This either, I don't know if this works, or this got covered already, or we did this before, or it needs more time.

[0:08:28] BB: Ooh. Let's talk about that a little bit. It doesn't come up here too often. It was already covered. This is a whole fricking thing with publicists. Exclusives, that's a whole other conversation. For you, and where would you get the X when it's like, it's been covered? It's been covered by one outlet. It's been covered at all. I saw it on someone's LinkedIn profile or, yeah, someone already wrote about it 10 times. That should be an obvious one. What's the already covered definition?

[0:08:55] AN: It's definitely no one answer, but it comes back to, again, this principle of respecting our readers' time. The news that I write, it pops into your inbox, it is imposing on our readers, on our subscribers to open it. It said, “Please, pay attention to this.” Can we add value to it? Commonly, if there's some blockbuster mega deal involving BlackRock or something, so does someone else, well, the Wall Street Journal, we'll have that story or something.

For us, the question becomes, okay, is there insight that we can add that makes it useful, so that arms are readers with interesting and compelling insight? Or maybe one of our colleagues wrote a story that we can add a thought bubble to. That's I think, the versions of that takes. If the answer is no, then there are better ways for us to spend our time.

[0:09:40] BB: Simple enough. Simple enough. I like that. Okay. How about relationship building with publicists, Alan? Do you want to ever meet publicists in person ever? Mm. What would you say? You're in Boston area too, just for people to know.

[0:09:56] AN: Yeah. A lot of it is location dependent, right? I'm down outside Providence. The short answer is yes. Publicists are who I'm talking with most day in and day out, maybe investors, but probably, frankly, publicists. Yeah, I do want to know the person that I'm working with, especially if they specialize in this area. I'd say, especially with remote work and now not being in a city like DC, or New York, or Boston, those meetings most often tend to occur at conferences, which have almost become the time that's set aside to just meet with people.

[0:10:27] BB: Yeah, that's a good point. Speaking of, and you know what? No one has really commented on that, or said that. That's where now we meet. When you go to a conference, and by the way, we'd love to know which ones you're going to. We'll get to that in a second. Are you then interested in having those set up meetings? Do you want to have the coffee meetings before the big talk, or something like that? Or are you just like, I'll just see on the floor wandering around?

[0:10:48] AN: I think it's really dependent. It depends. It's tough, right? Because these conferences are often so wall to wall.

[0:10:53] BB: Yeah. They don't give much time. Yes.

[0:10:55] AN: No, but a 15-minute, a 30-minute coffee, especially if it's near where other stuff is happening. If I don't have to walk two blocks to the coffee shop, if it's near there, then that helps. Also, too, is it a publicist who specializes in climate with a lot of venture capital clients, or a lot of startup clients? Then yes, absolutely. Totally makes sense to me.

[0:11:18] BB: If you got one, meh.

[0:11:19] AN: Yeah, exactly, exactly.

[0:11:20] BB: Yeah. You're looking for density of clients. That's a good point for people to realize and see. Okay. Good to know.

[MESSAGE]

[0:11:29] 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 CONTINUED]

[0:11:53] BB: Now, what conferences are your must-do's?

[0:11:55] AN: All right. My conference calendar keeps growing, right?

[0:11:59] BB: Okay. Yes, of course.

[0:12:01] AN: I think the musts are Climate Week, New York, which is coming up.

[0:12:05] BB: Yeah. I'll see you there, sir. Okay. I'll hit you up. Yeah. Look at that.

[0:12:08] AN: Yeah. Send me the stuff you're going to, because I would actually be interested in seeing. That's helping, too. It's helpful to compare notes of who's going where.

[0:12:15] BB: Yeah. Exactly. Exactly. Cool.

[0:12:17] AN: That's the other thing, too, is like, Climate Week is super dispersed. It's a hot mess.

[0:12:21] BB: It's all over the place.

[0:12:23] AN: CERAWeek, which is another must-go, is in one, albeit, giant convention center in Houston. That makes it easier to meet in a lot of cases.

[0:12:31] BB: Yeah, I know. They have all these tech weeks in LA and SF and again, New York and you're like, okay, but have you seen LA? We're spending 45 minutes, getting 3 miles. No. It's very hard. Yes. Okay. Okay. Any others that you love?

[0:12:46] AN: RE+ is good, but enormous. I actually went to one called Blueprint that would happen to be at the same time as RE+ last year. It was focused on sustainability and real estate and construction. That had a lot of investors, and again, for me, right? That counts. That was great.

[0:13:02] BB: Yeah, for you. That's what you want. Yeah.

[0:13:03] AN: I actually spent most of my time on that floor, instead of the RE+ floor. Then my colleague, Katie, she's based in the Bay Area, so she goes to San Francisco Climate Week. She goes to GreenBiz VERGE. I think that's probably a high quote, another good one. Then you hit the ones that are local too, MIT Energy Conference. Would I travel for that? Probably not, but going to it for the day nearby, it's perfect.

[0:13:24] BB: Mm-hmm. Okay. This is good. Good to know. What about sources for you, Alan? Obviously, VCs who are cutting these checks and making these deals, but are you ever looking for, you know what? I need that PhD who's got the chemical engineering background in X, because I want them on speed dial when I have a material science question.

[0:13:42] AN: Occasionally. Less than it used to be. One example is, Offshore Wind right now has been having a devil of a time, right?

[0:13:48] BB: Yeah.

[0:13:49] AN: The turbines keep breaking. They've been getting hammered on earnings. This is going back a little bit, actually, I'm not sure how current that is. I know, the last year it was ugly. It was a question of why are these turbines breaking over and over again? That was a really great opportunity to talk to the people who are studying how these things get built, who build the computer simulations, who designed the layouts. That was a level of expertise at investors. Even if they had, it's what some engineer tells them, so to get it straight from the source was valuable.

[0:14:18] BB: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Okay. Good. Any others?

[0:14:22] AN: That's the one that comes most recently. I mean, it comes up, I'd say, once a quarter, that there's that story where that subject matter expert would be useful, but it's not more than that.

[0:14:31] BB: Yeah. So, very rare. Okay. Okay. Got it. Would more the VCs who are making 10 deals over two years or something more viable? Okay.

[0:14:40] AN: VCs, analysts. Yeah. Private equity. Anyone in that that finance market research and analyst space.

[0:14:48] BB: Okay. Oh, an analyst. Good to know. Good to know. Okay. We covered relationship building with publicists. Got to have the density. Got to have the LPs, or the VCs on here. We talked about pitching. Is there anything, Alan, that drives you crazy with publicists?

[0:15:05] AN: No. Only one, maybe one and a half thing comes to mind, right? The subject line, Your Story is Awful. I have gotten that.

[0:15:13] BB: Oh, no. I've never heard that. Just subject line, your story, as in any story you've written in the last whatever.

[0:15:18] AN: Well, yeah. That can be, it's like, there's a bomb in the box, right? You don't know, is this going to be someone complaining about the story that I just published?

[0:15:28] BB: Yeah. Oh, oh. Good point.

[0:15:31] AN: Or is this someone saying, “Thank you. I enjoyed reading it. Great working with you,” whatever. It is a total coin flip every time, but it is always an immediate surge of anxiety when that pops into of, “Did I just get something wrong in this piece?”

[0:15:47] BB: Yeah. Oh, oh. The heart palpitations you must have that. Does that happen a lot, by the way, people emailing you being like, “Listen, sir, I did not enjoy that”?

[0:15:55] AN: Yeah. Look, you would rather know, right?

[0:15:58] BB: Yeah. Yes, I get. But what are they saying? I didn't like your third bullet point?

[0:16:03] AN: Let me make something up here. Going back to the Offshore Wind example. This is not the case, but off the top of my head, making this up. The way you described the way wind farms are laid out, affecting how blades wobble, or whatever actually was not accurate. That's a benign version of that.

[0:16:21] BB: That's okay. Okay.

[0:16:22] AN: Either way, whether it's something a mistake I made, or something that someone just disagrees with, I'd rather know, because then I can A, fix it and B, make sure to remember it for the next time.

[0:16:31] BB: Yes. Good to know. By the way, do you share those little comments amongst your colleagues? “Hey, guys. Look what I just got today.”

[0:16:39] AN: No. The only example was, this is going back some years, someone accidentally sent me their vampire – it was a comment about the story, but then they had hit paste by accident. It was vampire-inspired fan fiction that was very, very spicy.

[0:16:58] BB: No. No. Wait, was it like, your article, Alan, vampire post?

[0:17:04] AN: Yes.

[0:17:05] BB: Oh, no.

[0:17:09] AN: It was, I might have shared that not widely, but with a couple of people who are sitting next to me.

[0:17:14] BB: But selectively.

[0:17:15] AN: Yeah.

[0:17:15] BB: Oh, that's good. This is why, man, email lives forever. Be careful.

[0:17:20] AN: Be careful. Yeah.

[0:17:23] BB: Oh, okay. Any way for publicists to make your life easier, Alan, besides just short, good pitches?

[0:17:28] AN: No. I mean, it's all the stuff we know, right? It's hard, because everyone's busy. It's hard being a publicist. It's hard doing client service. It's hard trying to figure out whatever your reporter wants, and there's a million of us, right? Figuring out what someone at this publication month versus that is a challenge, so I appreciate that. Short and sweet. I guess, that's expected coming from Axios, but, truly. The other thing is data. Data punches above its weight.

[0:17:56] BB: Okay. Now, what type of data? Because I've seen pitches where you're like, "Oh, yeah. Look at this. Oh, we reviewed this data." It's national. It's from the Fed. It's very simple to see this. It's not exclusive data in any way, shape or form. Do elaborate.

[0:18:09] AN: Yeah. If it's not BS, right? We've all seen those Valentine's Day versions of, if you do this, so and so, that kind of thing. Or market research reports, which are not great. If it's counterintuitive, it's great. Obviously, if it needs to be reliable. I got a pitch. Recently from someone citing the pounds of, I keep going back to Offshore Wind, 6,000 pounds or whatever,

or 6,000 tons of Offshore Wind blades get recycled every X many years. I forget what it was exactly. That's interesting. If there's a way to get an annual figure for that, that shows an increase in that recycling.

[0:18:45] BB: How do you recycle a damn blade? Have you seen those things? They're huge.

[0:18:49] AN: Yeah. Yeah. Split town. I don't know.

[0:18:54] BB: Fascinating. This is why I love business, because there's someone whose job is that.

[0:18:58] AN: Yeah. That's another way to get a different spin on a story, right? Ford slowing down its EV investment, or changing how it's investing EVs. If someone's got compelling data on mid-sized electric trucks, or something like that, and that offers a way into that story, amazing.

[0:19:13] BB: I'm going to be thinking about, how do you recycle the blades of a wind turbine. Thank you for elaborating on how publicists can be helpful. I do have my little rapid-fire question set.

[0:19:24] AN: Yes.

[0:19:25] BB: Are you ready?

[0:19:26] AN: I hope so.

[0:19:26] BB: Okay. You're ready. Video, or phone interview?

[0:19:30] AN: Oh, that's actually a hard one. It depends. Which I know, is that helpful?

[0:19:33] BB: Yeah. No, it does depend. A lot of people say it depends. Okay. Depends.

[0:19:36] AN: Phone. I'll go phone.

[0:19:38] **BB:** Okay. I'm sure we know it's bullet points versus paragraphs for pitches. Bullet points, yeah?

[0:19:42] **AN:** Bullet points. Yeah.

[0:19:43] **BB:** If you could, bullet points. Okay.

[0:19:44] **AN:** But if the bullet points are paragraphs, then it becomes moved.

[0:19:46] **BB:** Then it's silly. Okay. How about images attached versus a Dropbox zip file? Is that even relevant?

[0:19:53] **AN:** It is not. It's not. The only issue is if the attachment gets flagged by a spam filter.

[0:20:00] **BB:** Yeah. Okay. Email versus a DM somewhere, Twitter, X, LinkedIn?

[0:20:06] **AN:** I do not check my DMs. Email. If it's someone I have a relationship with, then text is fine. Text is great. Yeah.

[0:20:12] **BB:** Do you ever get, by the way, cold called?

[0:20:14] **AN:** Rarely. I still do occasionally.

[0:20:18] **BB:** I missed a very important call myself, because there was a voicemail left and I was like, "Oh, my God. I don't listen to any voicemails." Yeah. I feel you on that. Okay. Follow ups, one or many?

[0:20:29] **AN:** Many. There's no such thing as too many emails.

[0:20:31] **BB:** I've never heard this answer before, Alan. Okay. Many. Okay. Good.

[0:20:36] **AN:** All the emails.

[0:20:36] **BB:** Direct or creative subject lines?

[0:20:38] **AN:** Direct. 100%.

[0:20:40] **BB:** Direct. Press release, or media kit?

[0:20:42] **AN:** Oh, press release. Please.

[0:20:45] **BB:** Mm-hmm. Is there a time you read pitches? You said, it was just scrolling all the time.

[0:20:49] **AN:** Yeah. Our newsletter goes live at 11.30 in the morning. We're in the heat of production from 7.30-8, until 11.30. And that afternoon slot, I'd say. But honestly, it doesn't matter. I'm constantly checking.

[0:21:02] **BB:** Okay. Yeah, you're good.

[0:21:03] **AN:** Send them whenever.

[0:21:04] **BB:** Okay. Send them whenever. Okay. Very good. Then we already talked about sources, so I think we're good there. To wrap us up, Alan, how may we support you, promote you, etc., celebrate you? We always like, to see what's the ask? Get the emails. Okay. Besides your newsletter, what else? If there's anything else.

[0:21:22] **AN:** Oh, like where to find me?

[0:21:23] **BB:** Oh, no, no, no. We know where to find you. We got that part. No, this is just like, hey, do you have something to plug? Are you going to be on stage somewhere? We want to hype you up.

[0:21:32] **AN:** Oh, no. Just keep reading climate deals. Check it out. Subscribe. Recommend it to your clients, your colleagues. If you've got climate, come find me.

[0:21:39] BB: That'll be me with you, Alan. Yes. Yes. Consider it done. Excellent. Well, Alan, thank you for being on here. Thanks for being on video. It's our new little thing. It's fun.

[0:21:49] AN: Yeah, it's been a pleasure.

[0:21:49] BB: Thank you, Alan. Again, Alan Neuhauser, Climate Deals Reporter at Axios Pro. Check out the email. See him live in New York City. There you go. Thanks, Alan.

[0:22:00] AN: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:22:02] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode with Alan Neuhauser, Climate Deals Reporter at Axios Pro. 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]