

**EPISODE 240**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:08] ANNOUNCER:** Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with the Journalists 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](https://OnePitch.co) to learn more.

Our guest on today's episode of Coffee with the Journalists is Alex Sherman, Media Reporter at CNBC. Alex discusses his new sports focus newsletter launched in September and his new podcast for everyone to tune into this month. Alex also takes us deep into his inbox to show a behind the scenes look at his pitch process, sharing what works and what doesn't when PR professionals reach out to him.

[INTERVIEW]

**[0:00:45] BB:** Welcome, everybody. This is Coffee with the Journalists. I'm Beck Bamberger, a publicist, a long-term publicist, making friends with media all over the place, because we need to know, of course, how to work with our media friends, whether they be reporters, journalists, producers, freelancers, editors, and so forth. It helps make the world go round in our publicist life as we know. With us today, looking all sharp with his official headphones. Look at this. Look at this, Alex, who's also launching a podcast. We're doing all the things now. It's Alex Sherman. He's the Media Reporter over at CNBC. We're so happy to have you here, Alex. Welcome.

**[0:01:23] AS:** Thank you. Happy to be here.

**[0:01:25] BB:** Excellent. You were saying you already got a lot of examples of pitches and we're going to get into those. We're going to get into those. Could you go define, because I do ask this for people to do, just the coverage beat now of CNBC and then specifically more into your sector, because CNBC is a massive outlet.

**[0:01:42] AS:** Yeah. Both are important points to know for any publicist that's pitching any CNBC reporter or producer. Look, CNBC is more than just what you see on TV. We also have a

website and a robust digital operation that's producing stories on all sorts of different topics every day, similar to the Wall Street Journal or Bloomberg or any other of the high-level business outlets that are out there. Those are the same services, I think, by and large that we consider our competitors in terms of breaking news or writing features.

Obviously, a difference with CNBC is that we do bend to video a little more. It's part of my job. I would say 20% of my job or so is often working on longer form digital videos and there are a handful of reporters that are doing that. I've made a number of those over the years that are on my beat and my beat has been media and entertainment until very recently where I've added sports as part of it.

**[0:02:43] BB:** Just throw that in. Throw it in.

**[0:02:45] AS:** It was always part of it, you know what I mean? A lot of my time was being spent on the NBA media rights. So, I came at that from a media angle, but of course, it's also the main revenue driver for the NBA. TV rights are the main revenue drivers for all sports week. It made sense to move that way.

**[0:03:02] BB:** Then you just got the NFL with being able to have private equity-owned stuff and there's been a lot of stir-up about that. Basically, a very fascinating beat, I'm sure, never boring.

**[0:03:12] AS:** Yeah. I looked at between those three buckets, media entertainment and sports. There's always something pretty big going on and particularly sports media right now, which is why I think one of the reasons why CNBC has decided to launch a CNBC sport vertical with the publication of our NFL evaluations. We hired a person named Michael Ozanian who's been doing these evaluations for all professional league sports teams for decades, I believe. Now, he's part of the CNBC roster. There's a lot of energy behind sports media right now, even with other arms of media, sort of wallowing through layoffs at bad time.

**[0:03:49] BB:** I would like to get into this. This is not usually the topic we like dive into, but since you're mentioning it, why in your opinion is there such energy around sports and dollars, basically, dollars galore?

**[0:04:01] BB:** Because the world of television has moved in that direction. I think that's really the main driver, which is if you look at traditional pay TV, live sports is almost the one thing keeping that ecosystem alive.

**[0:04:13] BB:** I know. The Olympics were a banner too for NBC.

**[0:04:16] AS:** Yeah, for sure. The Olympics were huge for NBC. I mean, that's why NBC is paying billions of dollars per year to broadcast the Olympics. If you look at football, it's the same thing, billions of dollars per year to broadcast football. 93 or 94 of the top 100 watched TV shows last year were NFL football games. It is where the oxygen has gone in terms of advertising dollars, in terms of rights, money. That has supported the sports ecosystem as a lane of growth, unlike a lot of these other different lanes associated with TV media, which have gone the other direction.

**[0:04:58] BB:** Yeah. Ah, fascinating. I mean, I guess that's your one way to beat if you can from the streaming platforms is like capturing live events, like sports and everything, and how good can you get that, so what an exciting time, Alex, to be in the space. I love it. You shared a couple pitches, which we're going to get into, but first, let's get into your inbox. How is it? How do you manage it?

**[0:05:19] AS:** It's overwhelming for sure. I would imagine every – by the way, I love this topic in general. It's one that I talk about with colleagues on the side and certainly other communications people, because I would imagine every reporter deals with this differently, but –

**[0:05:34] BB:** That's what we talk about on here. Yes.

**[0:05:35] AS:** Yeah. I feel like I'm bombarded by pitches. Almost all of them I'm ignoring. Most of them irrelevant to what I'm covering. So, if there's something in the lead of the pitch or the subject line that happens to be something that I'm thinking about or covering or something that I'm always thinking about, then I'll read the pitch and it may or may not be something I'm interested in. But most of the pitches are not all that relevant. They seem to be half hazardedly cherry picked from previous reporting I've done.

**[0:06:10] BB:** Wait. What do you mean cherry – how do you mean?

**[0:06:12] AS:** Yeah. One of my pet peeves with pitches is when comms people will say they'll do their pitch and then they'll say like, the fact, this was – I'm going to read you something, because it was in one of the recent examples I got as something that bothered me, okay, but I'm going to pull it up right now. Let's see here. Okay.

**[0:06:33] BB:** Thank you for dishing it, by the way, Alex. This is what we like on the show. Go ahead.

**[0:06:37] AS:** The pitch was about AI technology and how – so it was, it says, here's the beginning. “Hi, Alex. We're past the midway mark of 2024 and the media landscape.” Okay, I cover media, fine, is right for disruption, but which trends will drive activity across the sector throughout the rest of the year? Then it goes into trends and they're all more or less about AI, data integration, privacy, VR advertising opportunities. AI enhanced creativity and efficiency.

I don't really cover any of that stuff. However, five months ago, I did write a couple of stories, because I went to Davos with CNBC about AI. So, if you were very lazy about trying to figure out what I covered, you may assume that I do cover AI, because I have written about it, but that doesn't mean that I care about it on a day-to-day basis. We have a whole team at CNBC that covers tech and AI. I'm just not part of it. Anyways, after all of this, there's a sentence here, which is, “Alex, given your previous coverage with a link to my own story of media predictions.”

**[0:07:42] BB:** In case you forgot.

**[0:07:43] AS:** Right. “Given your previous coverage of media predictions.” Link to my story. “I'd be more than happy to connect you with blah, blah, blah, blah on the emerging trends.” A couple of things there, which is, right, one, you don't need a link to my own story. I'm aware of what I cover and what I don't.

**[0:07:59] BB:** I remember.

**[0:08:00] AS:** Two, I don't cover media predictions. That doesn't even make sense. Nobody covers media predictions. Once a year, I write a story, every year where I talk to a bunch of media executives.

**[0:08:14] BB:** Once a year.

**[0:08:14] AS:** Anonymously. Then I aggregate 10 or 12 or 15 of their predictions for the previous year, but this is once a year, I do it at the same time, every year at the end of the year. Not only does it not make sense, but it's something I'm doing once a year. Also, it doesn't relate to what anything you just said. Like the predictions thing I did doesn't have anything to do with this random person in my mind.

I've never met this person. I don't know what they do to talk about these fairly random trends in my mind. It's not random of this person, because it's what they do on a day-to-day basis, but to me it is. There's nothing about that pitch that is good in my mind. Now, let me go to a pitch that is good as a flipping example to that. Here's one I got from someone I believe on your team, actually.

**[0:09:06] BB:** In the past. Yup.

**[0:09:07] AS:** I got it this past week, which was – the name of the company, A Digital Wealth Management Platform is closely following the NFL's decision to allow private equity to invest in the teams. Head of private investments, a woman's name is available to discuss the topic. She can share insights on the decision. Its implications for investors and any ripple effects if it may have on college sports. End of pitch. What was that, two, sentences? Here's the thing, which is that I happened to be working on a story about NFL team evaluations that is going to go along with this big launch of the CNBC sport vertical. I was literally writing the portion of that story about how private equity may affect the evaluations.

**[0:09:50] BB:** I mean, that's just no great.

**[0:09:53] AS:** I get this pitch and I'm thinking to myself, as I'm writing it. You know, I need a voice for this. I need an expert here.

**[0:09:59] BB:** Ta-da. That's just wonderful, serendipitous timing, like that's amazing. Yeah.

**[0:10:04] AS:** Wonderful, serendipitous timing. But that's almost always how these pitches work. It's almost – it doesn't necessarily happen the moment, like that one, but for me, it usually is a situation of I'm writing a story, I realize I need a voice, let me check my inbox to see if I've gotten any recent pitches about this specific topic. So, that's the order of operations of how the pitches work for me. It is very rare that you are going to pitch me a story flat out. I'm going to be like, “Oh, that's a good story.”

The order of operations here is I've come up with the story or my editors and I've come up with the story. I've already chosen that. Then I need someone who is an expert in this particular area and how am I going to find this expert? Well, that's where the pitch is coming. It's either somebody I know or it's somebody like in this one, this is a really niche thing. Private equity investment in NFL teams, like that isn't someone that I run with in circles all the time. It is perfect for a pitch. It's someone like, “Well, who is an expert on this?” So, that's where email pitches can really help.

**[0:11:17] BB:** I love it.

[MESSAGE]

**[0:11:20] 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](https://onepitch.co) and create your own custom media list in five minutes or less. Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

**[0:11:43] BB:** You had said earlier, and I love these examples, by the way, that you ignore most of them. Do you just mass delete? Do you ever file them? Do you ever go back? People want to know how they get in your inbox and stay there.

**[0:11:54] AS:** Yeah. I don't mass delete any of them, but the NBC Universal email system auto deletes everything that's more than three months old.

**[0:12:01] BB:** Yes. I've heard this from a couple of other big outlets. It's just gone. It's just gone.

**[0:12:05] AS:** Yeah. It's just gone. I would have heart palpitations.

**[0:12:08] AS:** Yeah. It often is irritating. Let me tell you that. It forces me to really me to really like be on my toes about communication that I want to keep.

**[0:12:16] BB:** Oh, shoot.

**[0:12:16] AS:** Yeah.

**[0:12:17] BB:** Can you imagine that? God, that's refreshing though in some way. It's just like it's always cleaned every 90 days, like –

**[0:12:24] AS:** Totally. Also, it does forcibly make pitches that are in my inbox somewhat real time. If you go back a couple months, like that may be a little bit too late, but like more or less, which is helpful for me, because what it means is that the person being pitched to me probably still works at that same company, probably still does the same thing. I'm at least not wasting my time on that end, like chasing somebody that's like, oh, actually they left a year ago and they don't do this anymore.

**[0:12:52] BB:** Just to clarify too, for people who are like, what the hell that you get deleted. This is, I think the same is at Bloomberg where it's just – because there's just so much data you all have. There's just so much. There's so much like there's some bill being paid that is like, listen, we cannot have – make a gig of whites for every damn reporter for the next five years back. No, no.

**[0:13:11] AS:** It's an email server issue. That's right.

**[0:13:12] BB:** It's a server issue. Yeah. AWS is like, "Oh, can't handle, can't handle." Anyway. Okay, Alex, you're based in New York City, correct?

**[0:13:21] AS:** Yeah. But New Jersey, technically, but I'm in New York at least once a week. Our office is in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, right over the GW bridge.

**[0:13:28] BB:** Yes. Are there relationships you wish to build with publicists ever in person or otherwise? Yeah. Tell us.

**[0:13:36] AS:** Yes. Certainly, if you're the corporate comms person at a major company that I'm covering like I always want to know that person, because they are the gatekeeper to me in order to make introductions to other people that work at that company. But I have relationships with plenty of external comms people that represent interesting people who can help me. They obviously, all of them have a portfolio of different clients. Some of them will be of interest to me and otherwise won't, but it's very helpful to know those people, because not only can they help me set up the introductions to certain people, but also, they can act as a proxy for that person if I can't get on the phone with them.

I can always try their comms person and either they can get that person on the phone for me or they can perhaps get information directly from that person if that person is tied up. Then I use that person as a backdoor chain hole into getting direct information. I absolutely want to have relationships with communications people. I do have relationships with many communications people. That's really helpful. It's helpful for me to know who their clients are so that I know who to go to. It's also helpful, because we're now establishing a relationship where they have a very firm sense of what I am interested in and what I cover and to go back to your earlier question about CNBC, like what am I interested in?

It's the highest profile themes and figures in the world of media entertainment and sports. We are not a trade publication. The stuff we do doesn't tend to be all that niche. It's big companies, big figures and the biggest story is that those people are thinking about and working in. Those



are the people who I'm talking to and interviewing on a day-to-day basis. That is the world that I run in and live in.

**[0:15:24] BB:** Got it. Okay. Note to everybody. No AI pitches. I'm sure. No. No. We don't need that.

**[0:15:30] AS:** You don't need that. Not for me.

**[0:15:31] BB:** Yeah. You're touching on it a little bit more, but I want to further go into this on sources. Yes, PR people, you could be helpful if you're touching these realms and such the biggest of the biggest and that's where you play. But are ever like is there a rolodex of the sources you want to hear? So, for example, people say, yes, if you have a PhD in molecular biology from Cambridge, yeah that's who I need to talk to, because I'm writing science for time, whatever. Do you have like a source book that you're looking to fill?

**[0:15:57] AS:** Not really. It's more ad hoc than that.

**[0:16:00] BB:** Got it. Okay.

**[0:16:02] AS:** It's very much a case-by-case basis. I think if I were a more organized person that may be beneficial to me, but I'm not. So, it's very much like one story to the next for me. Then I'm figuring out like who I need to talk to real time every time. I'm doing it. I'm figuring it out. Then I'm on to the next thing.

**[0:16:23] BB:** Damn. Speaking of then, the day in the life of, are you reading pitches constantly? Are you reading your inbox constantly or how does this function for you?

**[0:16:33] AS:** Yeah. I'm vaguely aware of the pitches. I'm definitely not reading them like, well. That's why in the example I gave you from your colleague, it was like two sentences, like great, good. I'm not going to read a pitch that's like forever long.

**[0:16:49] BB:** Well, you did have some samples in there too. They were like paragraphs, paragraphs.

**[0:16:54] AS:** Yes. I was just sort of like my eyes plays over at that point. It is all – I will say, like a lot of comms people take a strategy where they throw something at the top, that personal to me to get my –

**[0:17:07] BB:** How are you doing, Alex? I hope your dog is good or whatever. Yeah.

**[0:17:10] AS:** Yeah. A lot of it is like, I've heard public about being in San Francisco 49ers fans. So, like I get that a lot, sort of like, go niners thing or whatever. That's nice. I get that does catch my attention. I'll probably read at least read on to the next paragraph at that point, but I still may not read like paragraph nine at that point, if it's not something that I'm interested in. But look, again, by and large, while I am aware of these things, because they are coming from my inbox and I need to like be sifting through my inbox for important stuff and not important stuff. I do see them. I'm not really reading them unless I'm focused on doing a story where I need it, because again, this goes back to the order of operations thing. I'm not getting story ideas from pitches by and large. I already have the story idea.

**[0:17:57] BB:** Okay. Yeah. This is good to know.

**[0:17:58] AS:** Then I'm using the pitch to help me fill in the blank for something I don't need. So again, other reporters may do this differently, but that's how I do it.

**[0:18:07] BB:** They do. Some are like, "Oh, I haven't thought of that." But others are much more like you, like packaging the whole piece and that person could fill in and be a perfect resource quote, etc. to fill it out. Let's go Alex, if we can to our rapid-fire session and let me know your answers here. Are you ready?

**[0:18:24] AS:** I'm ready.

**[0:18:25] BB:** Video or phone interview?

**[0:18:27] AS:** You kind of hit me with a hard one in a rapid fire. Okay. If this is a person that I would like to have a long-term relationship with, then video. If it's a person where it's like, I'm on

deadline. I need to sign I'm working on a story. So, like again, your colleagues pitching me, phone. I don't need video. Phone or even email for that matter, like yeah, I think that's what I did with this one. I don't even remember if I spoke to your colleague on the phone. I just said, "Yes, this is good. When – meet the person on the phone, I need to turn this around quickly. Yeah, a long-term relationship video. Short-term story, deadline, whatever phone or email.

**[0:19:03] BB:** Oh, God. I just did the very millennial thing. Did you see that? By the way, okay, I did this. This is like, you know phone where it's like –

**[0:19:09] AS:** Yes, right. I do it too.

**[0:19:12] BB:** Yeah. Oh, God. Okay. I just caught myself on that. Okay. Bullet points or paragraphs in a pitch? Unless it's two sentences, maybe.

**[0:19:19] AS:** Correct. Right. So, bullet points or short paragraphs. I would say either one of those is fine.

**[0:19:23] BB:** Short paragraphs. That answers our next thing. Short or long pitches? Short as we've covered. How about images attached or a Dropbox zip file? I don't see that's really relevant for you, but you tell us.

**[0:19:33] AS:** Yeah. I can't imagine that that would be relevant. No, I would say in generally that doesn't make much sense. Yeah.

**[0:19:39] BB:** You don't need those things. Okay. What about an email or a DM to somewhere, X or Instagram or anywhere else you can LinkedIn, whatever? Do you ever want that or is it all inbox?

**[0:19:49] AS:** If it's just a generic pitch, then I would rather be in my inbox. I actually find it a little irritating if it's like DM this, it's sort of like, this is too intimate for this. The DM to me is like I get something urgent. I need to get in contact with you now, otherwise I'd rather stay in the inbox, because then it's just too many different forms of – I had to check my LinkedIn, my Twitter DM, like –

[0:20:14] **BB:** It's too much, too much.

[0:20:15] **AS:** Yup.

[0:20:15] **BB:** By the way, we had someone on here. I'm not going to reveal who is a freelancer. She is like five inboxes, because she writes about – and I'm like, no.

[0:20:23] **AS:** Yeah. don't do that. You can't do that.

[0:20:26] **BB:** Okay. One follow-up or multiple?

[0:20:28] **AS:** Oh, great question.

[0:20:30] **BB:** Especially, because it disappears every 90 days. Go ahead. Yeah.

[0:20:33] **AS:** One follow-up. A hard one follow-up.

[0:20:36] **BB:** One and done.

[0:20:37] **AS:** Multiple follow-ups is another pet peeve of mine. That was one that you genuinely know, like if I have gotten back to you twice, why do you think I would get back to you a third time? This is another thing which I know different reporters do, like please do not take my ignoring your pitch personally. Any of you, like that are listening to this, it is not personal. It just means that I'm not interested in that topic at this time, but I can't respond to all of you telling you that, because it would take my whole day. So, right. I will find you if I need something. Yeah, one follow-up is more than enough.

[0:21:12] **BB:** Noted. Any press release or media kit? Is that ever relevant?

[0:21:16] **AS:** Oh, well, I mean, a press release is often relevant depending on the story, for sure, but usually that's a thing that we would have already had a back-and-forth personal email

about where I would say like, “Hey, is there a release with this?” That usually doesn't come unless it's obvious that I would need a press release. They're often embargoed for persons.

**[0:21:37] BB:** Yes. All right. We covered sources. We covered reading pitches. It's more like a scroll, an ambient scroll for you, Alex. How about last words here? What can we highlight, promote, tout, do for you? You mentioned the podcast coming up. Tell us about that, perhaps.

**[0:21:52] AS:** Yeah. The first thing that will happen will be, there will be a newsletter, sort of an aggregation of CNBC's best of in media and sports coverage of that week. Then probably some links to maybe some outside work. This podcast will come out. We hope in late October, but maybe early November, but in that range. That will be a show 20, 30-minute show like this one, where it will be a video cast with people in the sports business and it will have a little bit of an investor slant to it, I would say.

**[0:22:25] BB:** By the way, is that a dog in the background? What's going on?

**[0:22:28] AS:** I think it's just a chair moving –

**[0:22:30] BB:** Oh, God. Wow.

**[0:22:31] AS:** I didn't even know you'd hear it down here. That's –

**[0:22:33] BB:** No. It's all good. This is why we – we're in a very professional setting here, Alex. Yeah.

**[0:22:38] AS:** Yeah. Right. I'll repeat that answer, because –

**[0:22:41] BB:** No. I love it. No, I love it.

**[0:22:43] AS:** Ambient noise.

**[0:22:44] BB:** Ambient noise. We got a newsletter. We got a podcast coming up.

**[0:22:48] AS:** Yeah. This is all the newsletter and the podcast are all part of this CNBC Sport Vertical. That CNBC is launching. We announced that we were going to be launching it a month or two ago. So now, we're putting energy and resources at the happiness thing and we'll see where it goes from there.

**[0:23:05] BB:** I love it. Alex, thank you for being on today, sharing your home environment with us here, being on video, because we're doing now video and so forth. Everybody, this is Alex Sherman. He's a Media Reporter at CNBC Sports. Yes. Not AI.

**[0:23:21] AS:** Yes. That's the takeaway.

**[0:23:23] BB:** That is the takeaway. Thank you, Alex. congrats on the newsletter and podcast coming up. That's –

**[0:23:27] AS:** Thanks, Beck. Appreciate it.

**[0:23:28] BB:** That's a pretty good thing to do. Good on you.

**[0:23:30] AS:** Happy to do it. Thanks for having me.

**[0:23:31] BB:** Appreciate it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[0:23:34] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode with Alex Sherman, Media Reporter at CNBC. For more exclusive insights about the journalists on this podcast, subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter at [onepitch.co/podcasts](https://onepitch.co/podcasts). We'll see you next week, but until then, start great stories.

[END]