

**EPISODE 241**

[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](https://onepitch.co) to learn more.

Our guest on today's episode of Coffee with a Journalist is Susannah Snider, Managing Editor of the Money Section at U.S. News. Susannah shares the importance of timing when pitching, her insights on what makes a credible expert source, and how PR approach should align pitches with upcoming editorial calendars.

[EPISODE]

**[0:00:41] BB:** Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist, a podcast we do to help fellow publicists, I am one myself, better understand how to work with reporters, and journalists, and the great editors that make the media world go round, frankly, because we need better relationships to make our work happen and it's essential. So, we're here today with, coming live from Pittsburgh. I'm a big fan. I'm a big fan because I did my MBA there. Susannah Snider, she is the Managing Editor for Money at U.S. News. Money is her beat. We're going to talk all about money. Susannah, thank you for being here. Hi.

**[0:01:17] SS:** Hi, thanks for having me.

**[0:01:19] BB:** Yes, thank you. So, we did talk a little bit about Pittsburgh. So, you are in Pittsburgh. Tell me why you're a fan, just so I know, and just kind of reminisce.

**[0:01:28] SS:** Oh my goodness. What is there not to love about Pittsburgh? The food, the people, the sports. I guess maybe not the weather, but besides –

**[0:01:35] BB:** Not the weather, yes. You know what I used to call it, my American study abroad, because as a Southern California gal, I thought, "Oh, I'm going to the East Coast for my MBA."

No, people were like, "No, that's the Midwest. That is the Midwest." I was corrected adamantly. So, learned that real quick. Susannah, I like to start by asking people in case they aren't as familiar with every outlet we cover, what is USA News now covering? Then, we'll drill into specifically your area.

**[0:02:03] SS:** Sure. U.S. News is a big, vibrant publication. We have all sorts of aspects to it. People might be familiar with our college rankings.

**[0:02:14] BB:** Yes, very popular.

**[0:02:15] SS:** Our news. But where I come from and the vertical that I work on has to do with consumer advice. So, we have lots of consumer advice, ways that readers can learn to make better financial choices, health choices, real estate choices, investing choices. So, that sort of arm the – I am coming to you a consumer advice side of U.S. News. But again, a large publication and some of what I'm going to say today may not apply to every single part of the company and the reporters who work there. So, it's definitely worth going to the website if you're interested in an editor and seeing what they cover and how it works.

**[0:02:50] BB:** Also, bonus, you're a certified financial planner.

**[0:02:54] SS:** I am.

**[0:02:55] BB:** So, that gives you extra credit, I'm sure, in the money space, for sure. It does. It was not the

**[0:02:59] SS:** It does. It was not the easiest thing to achieve, but I did it.

**[0:03:02] BB:** I was going to say it, because you did it in 2019, pre-COVID-ish. That's what I see on my notes.

**[0:03:05] SS:** Yes.

**[0:03:05] BB:** Okay, perfect. So, what spurred that? Because you don't usually see for journalists who go like, "Oh, wait. Let me get the extra certification in the field that I'm in, or the masters, or the Ph.D., or whatever." It's not as common.

**[0:03:19] SS:** Well, there were a few things. I wanted to be more of an expert in my beat to understand it better. But I will say, it was actually one of my favorite sources who encouraged me to do it. So, I had a great relationship with somebody who I went to for quotes and for insights in my reporting.

**[0:03:34] BB:** No way.

**[0:03:34] SS:** He said, "You should really go for this." And yeah, when I got my CFP, I wrote him a note saying, "Thank you for giving me the idea."

**[0:03:40] BB:** I love that. So, a source told you. Look at that. Look at that. We'll put up this little thing for people to sign up on OnePitch too. Fascinating. I've not heard that before. I've not heard anyone say, "Hey, a source actually told me to do this, and here you go." Okay. I do love that. Susannah, how's your inbox?

**[0:03:58] SS:** It's pretty wild. There are quite a few emails. One of my kind of favorite ways to think about it or favorite stories is when I came back from maternity leave, I had almost 2,000 emails unread after 12 weeks. That's not coming from my team. Those were pitches. So, they stack up. I think I spent the first half of my first day back just deleting, deleting, deleting, making sure I hadn't missed any important like HR announcements. And yes, if you sent me an email while I was on maternity leave, I probably didn't respond.

**[0:03:58] BB:** Yes, that makes sense. That makes sense. Okay. So, 2,000 pitches in like 12 -week time. I want to get into, as a managing editor, how different that could be because you might be getting the pitches. But then, your staff, your reporters, and so forth. So, what is maybe the mix between pitches, third-party publicists versus internal or people trying to pitch you to write stuff you know, as freelancers perhaps, and everything else you might be getting the HR emails?

**[0:05:02] SS:** It's a mix. I definitely get more pitches and outside emails than I do internal emails if that makes sense. But what I do and the way our email service works is, I have them all go right to a specific folder. So, I often am not looking at them until I want to, which is a beautiful thing.

**[0:05:18] BB:** Ooh. So, that's a good management tip. So, all pitches go into a folder, and then, you're speaking of when I want to. So, do you have certain times a day you specifically look in there or no?

**[0:05:29] SS:** I would say, it's not really on a daily cadence. It's more on a monthly or weekly cadence. So, the third and fourth week of September, we'll start to make our editorial calendar for October. That's when I might go into that pitching box and say, "Hey, did anybody reach out with anything cool? Any good sources? Anything I should send to my team or my freelancers?" And let them know like, "Hey, this is worth pursuing."

**[0:05:56] BB:** Wow. So, I've heard so many people on here who on a daily basis, hourly basis, they're going through, they're going through, they're deleting. You just have a folder, set it and forget it, go there when I want, and review then.

**[0:06:10] SS:** That's how it works for me. I'd say, the only time I'm sort of forced to see your pitch is the first time you ever email me. Because then, I'll have the option, does this go into this bucket or that bucket? So, make sure that first pitch is a good one.

**[0:06:23] BB:** It better be.

**[0:06:25] SS:** Then, the email will ask, "Hey is this where you want to file this person in the future?" I'll say, "Yes," and then, I only need to see you when I'm really thinking about story ideas.

**[0:06:35] BB:** I think everyone should adopt this from, from the journalists here who listen to maybe this show because they sometimes do. Okay. So, are you an inbox-zero person then?

[0:06:44] **SS:** That main inbox is at zero, yes. The pitch inbox is not at zero. It's at, you don't even know.

[0:06:50] **BB:** No, no. We don't even know.

[0:06:51] **SS:** But, yes.

[0:06:52] **BB:** Wow.

[0:06:52] **SS:** That's why I have to do it because if they were just sitting on red in my main inbox, it would not be good for me. I would not be able to do anything.

[0:07:01] **BB:** It is a wide spectrum though on the show. We have the let-it-ride, I have 137,000 emails. Then, there's a people, people in the cool club, really, malicious cool club, where the server just deletes everything in 90 days. So, some of the big, big outlets. It just goes away. It evaporates. Imagine every 90 days, all your emails, you just, "Oh, man." Amazing. Then, there's you. There's you, a very rare club who was like, "Yes, it's zero. It's zero."

[0:07:27] **SS:** It's zero.

[0:07:27] **BB:** God, I love it. Me too, I'm a zero person too.

[0:07:27] **SS:** But again, there's a kitchen box that is probably a thousand or more, you know.

[0:07:33] **BB:** Okay, yes. There's some nuance to this. Okay, got you. You touched on sources, the one who like told you to, of course, get this advanced degree, amazing. What are or who are the sources that are particularly of interest for you?

[0:07:45] **SS:** For my beats, I would say, we love experts. It's really helpful if you are an expert in your field. For the financial side, that might be a CFP, a CPA. If you're on the real estate side, maybe you're a realtor or a tradesperson who really understands a specific aspect of your practice. We're really looking for people who can demonstrate expertise, analysis, insights on the beat. There are a lot of people out there who want to give quotes. We really want to find

folks who understand what we're asking and can give really great advice. That's part of the challenge of sifting through all these sources.

**[0:08:23] BB:** I'm sure you get a number of like, "I am an expert." What's a qualified expert versus not? Do you want to see the letters behind the name, for example, or the years of experience, or whatever it may be?

**[0:08:35] SS:** It's going to be dependent on the story and on the beat, for sure. Letters after the name can certainly help if it's kind of like a hard financial topic, say taxes. I'd really love to see a CPA, or a CFP, or an enrolled agent, somebody who works in the space. But if it were a design story for real estate, maybe they don't necessarily have letters after their name, but they're still very knowledgeable in the space, that's fine. So, it's a case-by-case basis, but anybody can start a website, and say that they're an expert. So, we want to make sure that that person really has experience in the field.

**[0:09:08] BB:** That's why I was asking, yes, because expert is so broad these days, unfortunately. So, yes. Okay, good. What about pitches then? While we go into that folder, that is, who knows how many are in there. What is standing out to you? Does it start with the subject line or do you actually open all the dang pitches?

**[0:09:25] SS:** A subject line is great. That's probably 90% of them, all I'm going to see. Preferably a very clear, concise, no spelling errors kind of subject line. Definitely the first hurdle.

**[0:09:38] BB:** Okay, exactly to get the open. So further with that subject line, you're seeing like the name of the expert, or is it tied to some piece? We've heard some people just have specific looks, specific aspects of what they want to see in a subject line. So, thought I would ask.

**[0:09:52] SS:** Dependent again on the beat and the story. Seeing a source name is great. We're not necessarily looking for like – what sort I'm looking for? Like celebrity interviews in the same way, maybe another publication would. So, their expertise or who they are is probably just as important. We don't do breaking news, but if it were tied to maybe something happening in the next month, that would be of interest to me. So, rate cuts, inflation data. If you can tie it to something that maybe we're going to be covering, that's helpful too.

**[0:10:24] BB:** Okay. Good to know. Then, how about the approval process for a story? I love when we have editors on here because you're usually up the food chain in determining that. Tell us more about that, so the publicist can know.

**[0:10:37] SS:** So, I think of our editorial calendar a little bit like an old-school magazine editorial calendar. Like again, we're thinking four to six weeks out and we build out the month, like in one or two meetings. So, again, no, if you're pitching for October in October, that calendar is set. From there, it's a collaborative process. We work with a lot of freelancers to assign things out. So, again, it really helps for us to work in advance, to have a lot of advanced notice of what we're doing so we can communicate with our team of writers.

**[0:11:09] BB:** Okay. You're saying "team of writers," how many is this team for you?

**[0:11:14] SS:** Oh gosh. We work with many freelancers, many writers, at least a dozen, maybe two dozen people.

**[0:11:21] BB:** Oh, okay, so that's another chunk of people to manage. Okay, got it. So, this is good to know. Four weeks, six weeks out in advance, you got to be thinking about that. Tell us a little bit more. Is there a meeting held with you and other people, or the whole team, how does that go down?

**[0:11:38] SS:** I meet with each of my editors, we often have our homepage editor in that meeting as well, and we're talking through what's happening next month. We've got inflation data coming out, say it's October, Halloween, maybe we'll tie some Halloween stories to real estate, or personal finance, or careers. Then, what are some evergreen stories that we need to refresh? What's due to be updated, refreshed, looked at again? I think people might not understand how much we go back to our old stories and see if they need to be updated.

**[0:12:11] BB:** I'm glad you touched on this. Someone from Wirecutter who was on was saying, "Hey, we update the reviews and stuff because the SEO value was so high." Tell us a little bit more about that. What does updating mean?

**[0:12:22] SS:** So, it depends on the piece and what it needs. It could involve going back to former sources, it could involve going to new sources, it could involve putting in new data, new graphical, or visual elements. It could be a light review, or we could be totally rewriting and adding a whole new section. So, it's really, again, going to depend on the story, but it's great to sometimes have new sources to go to for those updates.

**[0:12:48] BB:** Okay. I'm thinking, just, what's the volume of those stories that need updating? Is it like a tenth of all the stuff you work on or is it like, "Oh, no. It's like 20% percent of our content."? I don't know.

**[0:13:00] SS:** A lot of our stories are updates, at least half.

**[0:13:03] BB:** At least half? Wow. Never heard.

**[0:13:07] SS:** Again, that doesn't mean that there isn't any reporting, but it's worth, I think noting that we're not always looking for new story ideas. We're looking for the data, the source, the analysis.

**[0:13:16] BB:** For updates, yes. This is good to know. I think for a publicist to go like, "Okay. Could I have something to update to this piece?" And maybe you reference that in your pitch.

**[0:13:24] SS:** Sure. Although I have a caveat about that.

**[0:13:27] BB:** Oh, tell. Tell us now.

**[0:13:27] SS:** Which is, one of my pet peeves is on – we write a story and somebody pitches us and says, "I know you just wrote this story, can you write it again and quote me this time?" That's not how it's going to work. It's going to be six months or a year later when we would revisit it.

**[0:13:44] BB:** Yes. Why do you think people do that?

**[0:13:45] SS:** I don't know. I'd be curious what – why do you think people do that?



**[0:13:48] BB:** I don't know. We got to ask our community or our pitch posse to figure out why do you do that because I've heard it many times on here. If the story was just fresh 24 hours ago, it is complete.

**[0:13:59] SS:** It's not like a breaking news story where something happens, and you're on the scene, putting out story after story on it.

**[0:14:04] BB:** It's not a correction.

**[0:14:05] SS:** Right. We do this – and maybe we're on this beat, but we're not going to rewrite that same story every day for a week.

**[0:14:12] BB:** Very interesting. This is a good community ask. Kendall and our producers, let's make an ask of that. "Why Publicist, why are you doing this?"

**[0:14:18] SS:** Okay. Let me know what you find out.

**[0:14:20] BB:** I will report back.

[BREAK]

**[0:14:24] 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 CONTINUES]

**[0:14:47] BB:** Okay. You're in Pittsburgh. Do you want to make any relationships with publicists, whether like in person or at all? Let's just even start with that, like at all.

**[0:14:55] SS:** Sure. When I was doing more reporting, I really, really, really liked to get to know the sources that I used. One of the things that was helpful was like, let's say, I was doing a story

on adoption, and like the cost of adoption. If I knew you were adopting a child, I might come to you as an expert source, but also somebody who had a personal experience with what I was covering. Or, if I was doing the cost of weddings, and I knew you were getting married this year, maybe you'd be the perfect person to speak to about that. So, I liked having those life event pieces of information from people I worked with.

**[0:15:31] BB:** Oh, fun. So, from the publicist or from your source?

**[0:15:35] SS:** I'd say more from the expert source.

**[0:15:37] BB:** Maybe from the experts.

**[0:15:38] SS:** Than the publicist itself. But yes – so, yes. If they're – I'm constantly working with a financial advisor who I know a few things about, like they're sending their kids to college, know, be helpful to say, "Okay, I'm writing a piece about the class to college. Can you talk to me about like what you're doing in your family?"

**[0:15:57] BB:** Okay, this is good. I never thought of like personal little –

**[0:16:01] SS:** It's always nice to have a family relationship, but less helpful to have, maybe like their life story.

**[0:16:07] BB:** Yes, you don't need that. Okay. Got you. You had mentioned earlier, pet peeves. Do you have any others?

**[0:16:13] SS:** The only other thing would maybe be, you know, just not understanding our timeline, pitching breaking news to us. We're just not going to be able to cover it, and five follow-ups isn't going to change it.

**[0:16:23] BB:** Okay. Yes. Five, doesn't sound good. Maybe on the flip side, is there anything that publicists do or could do to make your life easier?

**[0:16:34] SS:** If they, and the clients or the sources they work with are just very available, willing to maybe be a source not on the story they pitched, but on a different story, that's really helpful.

**[0:16:47] BB:** I've heard this so often, "Oh, they don't respond in 24 hours or 48 hours." It's like, what are you going to do with that? Now, you have no story. In terms of getting the interview booked, or getting the expert that you need, and it's like, now, we got nothing. Has that happened before, by the way, where you're like, "Okay. Book me the interview" and crickets.

**[0:17:06] SS:** Very rarely. Very, very rarely, but it does happen.

**[0:17:10] BB:** Difficult, difficult. Okay. Susannah, we talked about how to make publicists make it easier for you. Okay, great. I do have my rapid-fire questions if you want to play that.

**[0:17:21] SS:** Let's play.

**[0:17:22] BB:** Let's do it. Okay. Video or phone interviews?

**[0:17:25] SS:** Phone.

**[0:17:26] BB:** Phone all the way. Bullet points or paragraphs in a pitch?

**[0:17:30] SS:** It doesn't matter as much as long as it's kind of easy to read, brief, to the point.

**[0:17:35] BB:** Okay, great. So, we're going with short pitches versus long pitches. Next question, okay. Images attached or a Dropbox zip file?

**[0:17:43] SS:** I don't know if this is what you typically hear, but I'd say, you don't really need to attach anything. If we need a headshot, or a data visualization, or something from you later, let's definitely collaborate. But, I think my tech team will be happy to hear that I try not to click on downloads and attachments from emails from outside sources.

**[0:18:03] BB:** Oh, good point. Oh, increasingly good point. We haven't talked enough about that probably on this show of just, "Hey, there's a lot –" especially bigger outlets, like security filters, all types of things.

**[0:18:16] SS:** Yes, I try not to click on anything unless I know I'm working with the person that I think I am.

**[0:18:23] BB:** Email or a DM of any sort?

**[0:18:26] SS:** A hundred percent email. I'd say, the big reason for that is because you have to think about how I'm communicating with my editors or my writers. Way easier to forward an email than – I don't even, I don't even know how you forward like a DM, or like a LinkedIn message or text.

**[0:18:41] BB:** Just email. Just email. Oh, do you ever want people – no, no.

**[0:18:46] SS:** No, never.

**[0:18:47] BB:** Everybody, do not text, no. Okay, clarified. Okay. You said the five follow-ups. Do you ever want a follow-up though?

**[0:18:54] SS:** A follow-up is okay, but again, it's not – I think sometimes people feel like they have to be doing something. It's really not going to make a difference. Either we're covering it, and reaching out to you, or we're not.

**[0:19:03] BB:** That is another question to bring to our community. Who is telling you, "Go do those follow-ups?" And they're like sending the fourth follow-up. I think it's coming from maybe junior publicists who are just like, "Okay, but my boss told me I had to like do it," but it gets you nothing.

**[0:19:18] SS:** It feels like you're doing something, but really truly, it's probably been sent to spam. It's just not.

**[0:19:25] BB:** Direct or creative subject lines? You mentioned this before, direct.

**[0:19:29] SS:** I think direct. The topic can be fun and creative, but what it says should be easy to understand.

**[0:19:34] BB:** Easy to understand. Press release or media kit?

**[0:19:37] SS:** Oh, press release.

**[0:19:39] BB:** Okay. And the next question is, what time do you read pitches? But I think your answer is, when I want. When I want at the end of the week, maybe, or whatever.

**[0:19:46] SS:** Yes, when I'm looking for ideas.

**[0:19:48] BB:** Oh, that's some freedom here. Then, we also covered sources, so I think we're good on that. Susannah, is there anything we could do to celebrate, promote, tout anything that you're up to perhaps?

**[0:20:01] SS:** I'd say, just my big takeaway is as I mentioned before, U.S. News is a big company. Everything that I edit or review is on usnews.com. So, if you're curious about what I'm covering, or what our real estate editor, or a personal finance editor, or retirement editor is covering, just go and click on their byline and you can see everything they've edited like since the beginning of time. So, please, it's no mystery what we do, it's no mystery what we're assigning out or who we work with. Feel free to just go to usnews.com and explore.

**[0:20:30] BB:** I like that, and explore.

**[0:20:32] SS:** Explore, click on bylines, look at people's names –

**[0:20:36] BB:** Read the news outlet, hmm. I imagine that.

**[0:20:40] SS:** Yes, and maybe you'll come away with some good financial advice, or real estate advice, or career advice.

**[0:20:44] BB:** You're going to learn something. Indeed. Indeed. By the way, to end us for today. Susannah, what's the craziest money thing you've heard or you've written about?

**[0:20:54] SS:** Oh, I was working for the investing team during the meme stock, it was 2021 when all of that was happening on Reddit. That was a really fun, very wild time. We got some very, very fun pitches. So, those were good times. I kind of miss those days.

**[0:21:11] BB:** Oh yeah, that was some crazy time. Oh, Susannah, thank you so much for being here today. Everybody, this is the Managing Editor of the Money Section at U.S. News, Susannah Snider. Thank you so much, Susannah, and thanks for giving me a little memory lane walk to Pittsburgh, good old Pittsburgh. I got to go back.

**[0:21:28] SS:** Yes. You're welcome whenever you'd like, back in the city.

**[0:21:31] BB:** Can't wait, can't wait. Perfect. Thanks, Susannah, I appreciate you. Bye.

**[0:21:36] SS:** Bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[0:21:36] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode with Susannah Snider, Managing Editor of the Money Section at U.S. News. 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]