

EPISODE 62

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist brought to you by OnePitch. The guests on our show include some of the most notable journalists from the top US-based publications who cover topics including technology, lifestyle and culture, health, science, consumer products, and business news. We discuss their role, the types of stories they cover, what their inbox looks like, and how they connect with sources. If you're an avid listener to this podcast, we'd love to hear from you. Leave us a review to share your thoughts about past episodes and help spread the word to new listeners.

On today's episode, Tomio Geron, a Senior Reporter for Protocol, joins us. Tomio writes about technology with the focus on fintech. He has an extensive journalistic background and has previously written for the Wall Street Journal, Forbes, Dow Jones VentureWire, and Red Herring. On the episode today, Tomio starts by sharing more about Protocol's focus as a news outlet, a pitch he received about an FDA-approved product, answers an audience question about the best way to approach him with a story, and more. Let's hear more from Tomio now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:16] BB: Hi, everyone. Welcome to Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, Co-founder over at OnePitch and also BAM, an agency that represents venture-backed quickly growing technology companies. I know you're here to listen to our next fabulous journalist, as we've been on number, I don't know, episode 60 or something. Who's counting at this point? The point is we have wonderful journalists who are always joining us. Today, in fact, is Senior Reporter from Protocol, Tomio Geron. We're happy to have you here, Tomio.

[00:01:47] TG: Thanks for having me.

[00:01:49] BB: I'm very excited. Before we get into your inbox, tell us a bit about Protocol because it's newer of an outlet-ish. I don't think everybody knows completely what Protocol is about, so would you give us please an overview?

[00:02:01] TG: Sure. Protocol is a relatively new publication. It started just about a year ago, and we cover the people, power, and politics of tech is kind of our tagline. It's a sister publication of Politico. We're separate but we have the same owner and we cover everything happening in tech, with a focus on policy, politics, but also just straight tech and business stories and a lot of focus also on the people.

[00:02:36] BB: Yes. You guys are also known for in-depth reporting, kind of long form that is not so much seen sometimes in the tech world specifically.

[00:02:46] TG: Yeah. That's true. That's true. I mean, our editor has pointed out that he doesn't want us to just do long form, but we do do a lot of long-form stories. But we also want to do breaking stuff and other quick hit stuff, so it's kind of a mix, and I like doing long-form stories.

[00:03:07] BB: Yeah. They're meteor. Get into it. Well, we'll talk about that in just a little bit. Tell us how your inbox looks. How crazy is it in there?

[00:03:16] TG: Pretty crazy. I know it's not cool to complain about it but, yeah, it's pretty bad.

[00:03:25] BB: It is pretty bad. How many pitches are in there daily would you say, hundreds?

[00:03:30] TG: Yeah. Probably more than 100. Not necessarily all pitches but mix of different things.

[00:03:37] BB: How do you go about organizing your inbox then?

[00:03:41] TG: It's a constant struggle, so I wish I was better at it. It's kind of just because there's always different things going on, I'm usually just trying to figure out which is the most

urgent ones to deal with right now and then deal with the rest later when I have time to go through them, which usually ends up being much later.

[00:04:03] BB: You kind of go from like an urgency perspective like, “Okay, is this a breaking pitch? Is this from my editor? Is this like who do I got to shuffle through first?”

[00:04:11] TG: Yeah, basically. Because I have stories and then we're doing newsletters that are happening a lot, so there's always something pressing.

[00:04:21] BB: Yeah. That probably keeps you busy. Now, do you save though pitches or are you one of those master leaders?

[00:04:27] TG: Well, sometimes I'll save them and just flag them to look at later, but I don't really have a good system of saving them in folders and stuff like that, which would be would be great. I just –

[00:04:39] BB: Very few people do.

[00:04:41] TG: Yeah. Usually, just leave them in there. Then if in case I'm working on something about a certain topic, I can try to find it later.

[00:04:52] BB: Got you. Okay. That makes sense, makes sense. Now, is there a pitch that you have received recently or we'll take ever frankly that stands out to you that you're like, “Wow, that was a standout pitch. Loved it and here's why.”?

[00:05:08] TG: I was thinking about this, and to be honest there have been some cold pitches out of the blue from a new startup that normally I would just ignore or not deal with. But occasionally, I do get them from the CEO or founder who says, “Hey. I have this new startup. We're doing X, and I thought you might be interested. Here's one sentence about or two sentences about it.” Sometimes, on top of that, it's, “Oh, this VC suggested I reach out to you.” That sometimes works.

[00:05:45] BB: That's nice. It sounds like you're saying like brief, succinct, quick. That's what you're looking for.

[00:05:51] TG: Yeah. If it's something that's relevant to what I'm working on, that always helps but yeah. Then for me, it's like I like hearing something from the founder directly because I feel like I get a better sense of like who that person is and what that company is about.

[00:06:07] BB: Got you. Okay. I hope people are taking notes on this.

[00:06:10] TG: I understand most CEOs aren't able to do that. But if they are able to, I think it does make a difference.

[00:06:18] BB: Does any of these pitches ever result in a story for you, or is that very rare?

[00:06:22] TG: Yeah, it does occasionally. I was thinking about it. I did get a pitch last year. It was kind of out of left field but it was about a product that was about to be FDA-approved for a device that was coronavirus treatment-related. That was timely and interesting. Even though not something I'd normally cover, it was interesting and it was from the founder directly who I never even heard of before. But, yeah, it turned into a story.

[00:06:54] BB: And that was from a pitch?

[00:06:56] TG: Yeah.

[00:06:56] BB: Okay. So that does happen. Got you. Is that often or are you kind of like, "Yeah, once in a blue moon."?

[00:07:01] TG: Not too often because most of my stories are more I already know what I want to write about.

[00:07:08] BB: Speaking of, we'd like to talk about how do you come up with your ideas to make a great story. How do you go about thinking of a great story that you want to write?

[00:07:18] TG: It's a mix of different things. There are certain topics and companies that I'm interested in or big themes, so I'm kind of thinking about like how is the way people manage their money changing, how is the definition of what money is changing or different things like that. Then stories related to different companies come out of that. But the other half of it is just talking to a lot of VCs or founders or people in the industry about what they're thinking about or what they're hearing. So it's a mix of different things like things that I feel like should be covered and then just things that I hadn't even thought about that people suggest. Pitches are part of that, but I feel like it's kind of a pretty small percentage of that.

[00:08:07] BB: But it could maybe spur some ideas.

[00:08:09] TG: Yeah. Sometimes, randomly it will be related to what I'm doing.

[00:08:13] BB: Gotcha. Okay.

[BREAK]

[00:08:16] ANNOUNCER: Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to see the unique ways OnePitch helps PR professionals and marketers pitch journalists? Head to onepitch.co to learn about our new OnePitch score and see how easy it is to find the right journalist to pitch your news to. Sign up for your free account today. Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[00:08:40] BB: We actually have an audience ask, from Liz Mckenzie over at Canva, which I use all the time. She says here, "What's the best way to approach work with you on a potential feature story?" She even threw in feature. What would you say?

[00:08:56] TG: Yeah. Just send me the idea. The shorter, the better. I just get a lot of pitches that are like 1,000 words long and I can't even look at it. It's just too much.

[00:09:06] BB: Are you kidding me? A thousand-word pitch? Who is writing a pitch that long?

[00:09:12] TG: I don't know. It's just like everything about the company or –

[00:09:14] BB: That's horrible.

[00:09:16] TG: Yeah. Just the shorter, the better, and why it's really interesting, and why it's unique. But, yeah, I'm definitely open to looking at those.

[00:09:23] BB: There you go, Liz. Tomio, I have a fill in the blank part now, so I'm going to read you a little thing, and you fill it in whatever you think. Here we go. My favorite publicist always –

[00:09:35] TG: Does not send me embargo pitches without telling me the date of the embargo.

[00:09:40] BB: Who doesn't – What? That's crazy to me.

[00:09:43] TG: I'd say probably half of the embargo pitches I get are like, "This is embargoed for some unknown date."

[00:09:48] BB: I've never heard that before that that percentage is that high too. Wow. That's disappointing. The next fill in the blank, the most annoying publicist always –

[00:09:57] TG: Where do I start? I don't know. Calls me on my cell phone. I guess now they can only call me on my cell phone but –

[00:10:03] BB: What? They find it?

[00:10:04] TG: Yeah. Or maybe it's in my email or however. I don't know.

[00:10:08] BB: Oh, no.

[00:10:09] TG: Usually, I have a desk phone, and those are the messages that I don't listen to. But now that I don't have that –

[00:10:14] BB: Wow. All right. Don't call him, everybody. You'll get a response from me if –

[00:10:20] TG: It's exclusive information.

[00:10:23] BB: You will never get a response from me if –

[00:10:26] TG: It's not exclusive or it's unrelated to what I write about.

[00:10:30] BB: You can follow up with me if – Never.

[00:10:35] TG: I know it's important and sometimes useful. A lot of times, I won't see it on the first time. But sending 10 follow-ups or whatever the number is is just –

[00:10:46] BB: I really wonder about that too. I mean, I've heard people say like 17 follow-ups. It's way too much. I'm like, "Who is doing that?" Is it a bot? It might be a bot. I wonder.

[00:10:55] TG: It must be automated. I don't know but it's got to be.

[00:10:58] BB: It has to be because who has time for that. All right. My perfect Sunday is –

[00:11:03] TG: Hanging out with the family or being outside.

[00:11:07] BB: The nicest thing I ever heard about my work was –

[00:11:11] **TG:** I'm fair. I give everyone a fair shake, and the stories can be tough but fair on all sides.

[00:11:18] **BB:** The last best thing I ate was –

[00:11:21] **TG:** Dungeness crab from Costco.

[00:11:23] **BB:** That sounds good. I bet it's good too from Costco. Is it good?

[00:11:27] **TG:** It is, yeah. It is.

[00:11:28] **BB:** Okay. Quarantine taught me –

[00:11:31] **TG:** How to stay connected with people.

[00:11:33] **BB:** One thing I think people should know more about me is –

[00:11:38] **TG:** I like connecting with people and learning more about them and having that connection.

[00:11:43] **BB:** Then last thing, one piece of advice for aspiring journalists is –

[00:11:48] **TG:** Always get the person's cell phone number.

[00:11:52] **BB:** Like the subject that you're talking to?

[00:11:54] **TG:** Yes.

[00:11:55] **BB:** So you can follow up?

[00:11:56] **TG:** Yeah.

[00:11:57] BB: That's good. A little tip for people but make sure the publicist doesn't get your phone number basically.

[00:12:03] TG: Right. Everyone wants someone's number and everyone doesn't want someone else's number.

[00:12:08] BB: Exactly. Is that not life? What are you reading right now? By the way, we expand that to watching, listening to, indulging in, whatever, Netflix, Audible, etc.

[00:12:21] TG: I've been using this app called Mater, which is like a reading app. I thought it's really good. I'm reading a lot of people's newsletters and Substack and stuff like that. I just finished Watchmen finally, the TV show.

[00:12:36] BB: Yeah. Was it good?

[00:12:37] TG: Yeah. It was really good.

[00:12:38] BB: I'm very behind on all content. I tell people I have a crisis of content right now. It's just too much and it's so good right now. I feel like everything on small screen. Obviously, we don't have a lot of big screen film-wise. I'm such a Sundance person but – So many books around and so many podcasts. I mean, obviously look at this thing. It's just too much. Anything you're looking forward to read? Is there anything like coming out that you're like, "Oh, I can't wait to get my hands on it."?

[00:13:07] TG: An old book called *Sea of Poppies*.

[00:13:10] BB: *Sea of Poppies*. Okay.

[00:13:13] TG: Then I'm reading this detective series about – The name of the detective is Bruno, and the author is this guy, Martin Walk. He's actually a journalist but he wrote this series

about this detective in the French countryside, and it's just like a kind of like silly detective series of books. But it's a good like escapist series of books, so I've been –

[00:13:40] BB: But sometimes, silly is fun. Thanks for sharing those with us. I get all my recommendations basically from this entire show, so very much appreciate it. What do you think the future of journalism looks like?

[00:13:51] TG: Yeah. There's been a lot of talk about that with people going off and doing their own Substacks and that kind of stuff. I think there's a lot of different strands. There's people doing their own individual things like that. There's new startups like Protocol and The Information and Axios and local news startups. Unfortunately, like local newspapers are having a lot of problems, but I think there's still a lot of interest in news and a lot of people who want to write. It's just those business models and building those companies is hard. It's going to be just a lot of different outlets and a lot of different ways of getting news out, but there still will be news. There still will be people reading it and watching and listening. It's just that it's going to come in a lot of different forms than it used to. It's a really tough industry. I'm hopeful for a lot of those new startups.

[00:14:45] BB: We need journalism, this show for example. Let's end here if we can on frankly my favorite part, which is our little mad libs. So I'll give you the word, and then you will fill it in, and then I'll read you back the phrase, the whole entire little paragraph here. Are you ready?

[00:15:02] TG: Okay.

[00:15:03] BB: Okay. What is an emotion?

[00:15:05] TG: Joy.

[00:15:06] BB: Great. An adjective.

[00:15:09] TG: Crazy.

[00:15:09] **BB:** Crazy. I like it. Another adjective.

[00:15:13] **TG:** Intense.

[00:15:14] **BB:** Intense. Good one. What about a greeting? Any greeting.

[00:15:19] **TG:** Toodles.

[00:15:20] **BB:** No. I like that. A verb.

[00:15:23] **TG:** Running.

[00:15:25] **BB:** Noun.

[00:15:25] **TG:** Playground.

[00:15:26] **BB:** Playground, yes. Another adjective.

[00:15:31] **TG:** Sunny.

[00:15:32] **BB:** Okay. I like it. What about a cringeworthy PR term?

[00:15:36] **TG:** Embargoed.

[00:15:37] **BB:** Embargoed. Yes. Part of a pitch.

[00:15:42] **TG:** Groundbreaking.

[00:15:44] **BB:** Groundbreaking. Yes. Length of time.

[00:15:48] TG: Until I get a vaccine.

[00:15:51] BB: Okay. That's a new one. Then name of a real person, ideally alive.

[00:15:57] TG: Maya Angelou.

[00:15:58] BB: Actually, I think she's dead, but that's okay. She's recently passed sadly, the late Maya Angelou. We'll go with her. What about another emotion?

[00:16:08] TG: Anxiety.

[00:16:09] BB: I'll go with that. Okay. All right. Tomio, here we go from the top. When I think of the future of journalism, I feel joy. The pitches I receive have gone from crazy to intense. If I receive a pitch that starts with toodles, I run. When I write stories on playgrounds, I feel sunny. My favorite pitches include embargoes and a very specific groundbreaking piece of news. I normally take around until I'm going to get the vaccine to respond to my emails. But if it's Maya Angelou, I will respond immediately. If you do not get a response back from me, you should just know I get anxious about it. I like that one.

[00:16:50] TG: I do like that one.

[00:16:51] BB: I love it. I like the crazy to intense. That is great. Tomio, thank you so much for being on today. This has been fun. Appreciate you, and I hope everyone now has a better understanding also of Protocol and how great the stuff you are doing there is.

[00:17:10] TG: Yeah. Thanks for doing this.

[00:17:12] BB: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:17:14] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with A Journalist, featuring Tomio Geron from Protocol. If you enjoy listening to our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and anywhere else you listen to podcasts. If you have a moment, please leave us a review to share your thoughts about the show and today's guest. To learn more about the latest tools on OnePitch and to subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter, head to our website at onepitch.co. We'll see you all next week with a brand new guest and even more insights about the journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.

[END]