EPISODE 71

[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.

Today, we're chatting with Ben Stegner, a deputy editor and onboarding manager for MakeUseOf. Ben oversees the Android, iOS and macOS sections. He's been covering tech tutorials, video gaming recommendations and more as a professional writer for over six years. Ben originally started his career in IT and began writing in 2016 for Nintendo Life. During the episode, Ben tells us more about his role and the many responsibilities he has, like he tends to delete or the pitches he receives, where he gets ideas for writing articles and more. Let's hear from Ben now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:14] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, the CEO of BAM and OnePitch. I was just thinking. I don't even mention that sometimes on some of these episodes, but it doesn't matter because we really like to highlight the journalist that join us on this wonderful show. Now, 60 plus episodes in. Today, as you guys just heard, we have Ben Stegner on with us. He's deputy editor and onboarding manager of MakeUseOf, which he'll tell us about in just a second. Welcome, Ben.

[00:01:46] BS: Hello. Thanks for having me on. I'm glad to be here.

[00:01:49] BB: Yes. First Ben, just for people who do not know, can you give us a little overview of MakeUseOf?

[00:01:54] BS: Sure. MakeUseOf has been since about 2000 or 2007. I would describe it as a tech website for the everyday person, so it's for people that want to find a cool new app to use for some purpose or want to get help when something's not going right with their computer. We're not like an industry site or anything like that, we're all about helping the average person fix their problem in a clear and succinct way. It's kind of like when you ask your techy friend for help, and they give you an explanation, we want to kind of be that for people at large.

[00:02:25] BB: Yeah, it's beautifully outlined to for people who have not been on it. I love that stuff. Okay, we're going to talk more about this. First though, tell us about your inbox. Is it crazy with pitches? How is it in there?

[00:02:38] BS: Yeah. It's not too crazy. Right now, my inbox is mostly comprised of responses from article, feedback from the authors, a couple of random pitches, like I have one from Detroit public TVs. I get a lot of newsletters and things that I didn't remember signing up for. I think recently, someone is actually been using my email address to sign up for all kinds of weird services. I've gotten like Instagram, and Twitter like, "Hey! Someone signed up, here's your code" or like someone signed me up for Pampers, Diaper Clubs. I'm not exactly sure what's going on in there.

[00:03:10] BB: Oh no!

[00:03:11] BS: That's exciting I guess, but in terms of actual work stuff, yeah, feedback. Asana is the task management that we use, so I have notifications turned on for that. I get a lot of Asana updates from pitches and things like that. Not too many like PR pitches at the moment. I have a couple of things of like companies I met at CES in previous years that have updates. As the onboarding manager, I review samples for new writers, so I have some new samples to look out from my colleagues. That's mainly it. Yeah, most PR pitches, either I spam quickly because they're just not applicable to me or if it looks like something we might cover, I forward them onto the appropriate teammate who would deal with that.

[00:03:49] BB: Got you. At least, you're one of the few that's like the nice forward, you pass them along.

[00:03:55] BS: Yeah. I was the sponsored post manager for the site for a little over a year, so I appreciate when people did that for me. So I try to keep in that mindset and think if I was still doing that, what would I want them to do, so just forward it along and let them deal with it and decide if it's even worth dealing with really.

[00:04:11] BB: Yes, so you're doing the trafficking of the pitches. Now, do you do the inbox zero or do you file? What do you do?

[00:04:20] BB: No. You know what? To be honest with you, I have never really followed inbox zero. I use Mailbird for windows as a mail client. We just Gmail, but I prefer desktop mail. If it's spam, I spam it. I archive it if it's, okay, I have acknowledged that and I archive it. But everything, I just kind of leave in a giant bundle, and then if I need something, I search for it. In the past, like when I first started at college and somewhere along the line when I started to make use of, I did set up some folders and I started us them, but I don't know. I don't refer back to emails usually often enough, that it makes sense for me to spend time sorting them into folders. I'm more of just a, search for it if I need it. But otherwise, I just kind of — I do have my inbox set to always show unread emails at the top. I use unread as kind of like, "You haven't looked at this yet, you need to deal with this whenever." It's kind of like a task list in that way.

[00:05:14] BB: Same thing here. Okay. It's always interesting when we talk to editors, because then you're kind of funneling things if you are so lovely to do so, so that's good to hear. What should people be pitching you for, Ben?

[00:05:29] BS: Well, in terms of actual PR pitches, MakeUseOf really doesn't do too much with those. Because like I talked about earlier, we're kind of like the tech side for people that don't really know too much about the world of tech. Occasionally, the biggest one for pitches would be sponsored post. So if you have like a piece of software or sometimes even hardware, we have a workflow for that, that you think would make a good fit for our readers, I would send it on to the person that handle sponsored post and we an work out the terms for that.

But in terms of working with pitches, my more relevant workflow is working with authors for the sites that are pitching to us. I don't do that quite as much now as a deputy editor, but I did it a lot

in the past before we shook up our workflow last year. That's more of the pitches that I deal with myself.

[00:06:16] BB: You do a lot of how-tos by the way of your articles, like how to figure out this, how to fix that, which is like — yeah, the tech stuff you need.

[00:06:23] BS: Yeah. Those are kind of my bread and butter. As a site, we do a lot of different stuff, like app, listicles, and we do buyer's guides for hardware recommendations. Some of those, I don't really find as natural to write. I think for me, I like how-tos and I like explainers. I like taking something that's confusing and just laying it out in simple terms. I remember, this was like when I first started in 2014. At the time, there was a big controversy over new permissions for the Facebook messenger app. All these people were going crazy over it, it was like — people that weren't tech writers were going on like Facebook live or whatever it was at the time and saying, "Look at these permissions and it wasn't all accurate.

I remember at that time, I'm like, "Let write this article." I think one of my editors suggested it to me, explain how bad these permissions are, look at it from a level-headed perspective. I remember that article doing pretty well for the time, and I was excited because it was like, I'm taking something that's there's all these confusion about out there. Then if people find my article, they'll know actually what's up, so I love that type of article that just kind of dispels the confusion.

[00:07:24] BB: Yeah. That must be rewarding. How nice. Ben, when you are thinking of a story you are going to write, like here's one about Spotify Premium. Is it really good money? Is it not for your family? Should you spend it? Or maybe you're doing like, you have another one on like how to fix air codes. How do you get the ideas for stories?

[00:07:44] BS: Yes. I have a couple of different places I do it now. Early on, it was mostly pitching my own ideas as a new writer. Nowadays, I do a little bit of that, like if some of those ideas come from if I have a conversation with someone in real life and they have a problem with whatever with their computer. Sometimes that leads to an article. Sometimes there's like an update for a piece of software that has some new annoyance or some new feature that's not entirely clear at first, so I'll pitch something to explain that better.

I also do a lot of article updates now. We have a big push now to update a lot of our content at the site, so I'm also regularly updating stuff. I've been at the site since 2014 like I said, so a lot of stuff I wrote in the past is, people still search for it but it's really outdated so I do a lot of that. that Spotify one was actually an idea from the editor for our entertainment sections. Spotify recently raised its prices, and they raised all their prices in Europe and they raised just the price of family in the US. That was like a response to that, kind of like an offshoot of that, of people looking for maybe a better value after that price increase happened.

[00:08:49] BB: Got it. Okay. It's not something like you're like, "Oh! I go on my walk, I'm feeding the dog, I think about this." Nothing like that necessarily?

[00:08:57] BS: Occasionally. I've had a few times like that. Sometimes when I would need to come up with ideas like in the past, what I would do is just kind of, it sounds dumb. I would almost just like click around my computer, like I look at all the software I had installed, I would look at like options.

[00:09:12] BB: Really?

[00:09:12] BS: Yeah. I would just kind of think about, would someone see this and not know what it means or not know how to best set this option for their purposes. Like yeah, I would just kind of look around and see what I could explain on the interface that I use every day, yeah.

[00:09:27] BB: Huh! Self-analysis. Oh! I've not heard that before on this, but it makes sense because yeah, you're explaining tech, you're using all these techs so make use of that. That's cool.

[00:09:37] BS: Yeah. Sometimes our technology explain section, which sounds silly because the whole site is tech explained. But that's more like, something that — like the Spotify one is entertainment, it's a streaming service, but tech explained is more just like explaining concepts, a lot of those one. Those kind of come from my own curiosity. Like when you think about something basic like what actually happens when you connect to a website. Yeah, you type in the address and you hit go, but what is actually happening in that process. Sometimes that stuff.

If I'm not already familiar with it, I think about it, and then I teach myself about it and then I write about it. That's kind of another way I come up with ideas, through my own curiosity.

[00:10:15] BB: That's probably one of the best spots. Awesome. Okay. Ben, I have a little fill in the blank section here. I tee you up and you tell me what you go?

[00:10:24] BB: My favorite sources always —

[00:10:28] BS: Sources? Well, I feel like my workflow is different. I would say, my colleagues honestly are kind of a good source. We have public Slack channels. This might be more than fill in the blanks, so it's like filling the paragraph.

[00:10:40] BB: That's okay.

[00:10:41] BS: Sometimes we have in our public Slack channels, we kick around ideas fairly often. I think sometimes I've gotten ideas from there where we'd kick something around and either someone has an idea but doesn't want to write it themselves. Or a conversation leads to me coming up with an idea. Yeah, because of the nature of our articles, that's where some of my ideas come from if they don't come from me, or an editor or something.

[00:11:03] BB: The most annoying sources always —

[00:11:07] BS: Annoying sources? I hate — I don't know if I would say it. It's on like a source I guess. Like I said, since our writing is a little bit different. I don't like when titles mislead. How do I phrase that? I hate when you click on something, and you think it's going to be one thing and then the kind of like twist it.

[00:11:23] BB: And it's not.

[00:11:25] BS: I guess this is pivoting from the question, but yeah. We've tried to — if an article is How To Do X, I don't want to give you a list of apps, because that would be the best X Apps for blah, blah, blah. That kind of thing. Or like bearing the lead also drives me crazy. That's not

really a source thing, but I guess when I see other sites like us do sometimes, that I look at that and think, "I don't want to do that on my own articles."

[00:11:47] BB: Got it. Okay. We'll keep going here. You'll get a response from me if —

[00:11:52] BS: If I can tell that you've actually looked at our site and know how we're different and it's really easy for me to tell if I get a PR email, if it's just copy and paste form letter or if it's actually like — I've looked at your site and I understand what you cover, and I think this would actually be beneficial for your readers.

[00:12:10] BB: Ben, did you get this? This is something people have been noticing, but they get the actual like, "Hello _____". Like that level of laziness is so confounding to me. Are you getting those?

[00:12:22] BS: Yes. Not super often, but I've had it a couple of times. Hello! I mean, "Hello, friend" is bad enough.

[00:12:27] BB: Hello, INSERT NAME, all caps

[00:12:29] BS: But yeah, when it's literally like blank or publication name here. I get it because occasionally when I was doing sponsored post, I would have like a form, like a clipboard manager. I would sometimes forget to type the name in, but like that was once in a great while and was a copy and paste error. Not because I was sending out a form to a thousand addresses and just having, "Hey, _____." That shows that you're not —

[BREAK]

[00:12:59] 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]

[00:13:23] BB: Okay. You can follow up with me —

[00:13:27] BS: You can follow up with me up to three times. I don't know if that's fair.

[00:13:29] BB: Three? Wow! You're generous.

[00:13:31] BS: Yeah. When I did sponsored post because I was sending initial email and I would follow up, and then I would follow up again. If they didn't respond, I'll drop it after that. I would say — that's what I did, but that was also typically when they had interest. So like when someone express interest in a sponsored post, I would contact them back when I was in that role, whereas a lot of these are just — can't think of the word, blanket, like cold call, whatever you want to say. I guess maybe three times is generous.

A few times I have email back. I've gotten the initial email and then three more. On occasion, I'll email back and say, "If I haven't responded by now, I really not interested." I do that sometimes, but I don't want to be a jerk, but I don't want people to email me for six months on end.

[00:14:13] BB: It would be a huge help if you publicist —

[00:14:17] BS: Email be about things that are relevant, and that's kind of blunt, I guess.

[00:14:22] BB: So simple but not, yes. Okay. My favorite stories to write about are —

[00:14:30] BS: The ones that help people with something really practical. I like when I can look back on an article and think, I really explain this succinctly. I covered everything I needed to, but not anything I didn't. I think it will help people for months and years to come.

[00:14:45] BB: Years to come, I love that. Okay. The best compliment I ever received about my work was —

[00:14:50] BS: Oh! That's hard. Specific compliment? Early on, I really look forward to feedback emails. I loved how at the site we had detailed feedback. And when I would have an editor tell me like I didn't have to change anything, or like I'll use this as a sample, as a good article in the future, that type of stuff. That makes me feel really good. Specific compliments, I have to really think about. They do stand out to me, but it's been a while since I had like a very specific compliment that really meant something to me. I guess as onboarding manager recently, I've had a lot of people tell me that I was very helpful in them getting started and they feel more confident in their —

[00:15:24] BB: Oh! That's so great.

[00:15:25] BS: Yeah. When I first joined, there were a lot of great people at the site that made me feel comfortable and confident. So being able to kind of pay that forward in the role is really great too.

[00:15:36] BB: I like it. The best thing I ate or cooked was, the last one, the last best?

[00:15:43] BS: The last best?

[00:15:44] BB: Yes.

[00:15:44] BS: I tried KFC's new chicken sandwich and that was pretty good.

[00:15:47] BB: What?

[00:15:47] BS: That's not a very high-class option. That's some really good general, so it was a couple of weeks ago too. That was good. I'm pretty simple. That's pretty basic kind of.

[00:15:56] BB: Hey! You know what, that's freaking honest. Quarantine has thought me —

[00:16:00] BS: Don't take anything for granted. That's like super cliché. But I remember, when I first started, it was like, you'd go to the store and you wouldn't see toilet paper, hand sanitizer or any paper products. That was a weird thing, and I think for a lot of people, especially younger

people alive, it was kind of the first time that we ever had any disruption like that. That's a super cliché answer, but the relative like stability we've had in the world and are part of the world in the last since I've been alive shouldn't be taken for granted.

[00:16:32] BB: That's true. I was talking with someone today, Venture Capitals, it's based in India, which at the time of this recording because it might air a little bit is having a horrific time on the COVID front.

[00:16:44] BS: I have heard about that, yeah.

[00:16:45] BB: Yeah, things are just not — things are cliché. My perfect Sunday is —

[00:16:55] BS: Relaxing and playing some video games normally. So Saturdays are pretty busy for me.

[00:16:59] BB: Oh! Which games?

[00:17:00] BS: Oh! I play a ton of different single-player games. Overwatches the main multiplayer game that I still play. But as far as single-player games, I'm always playing some indie game. I just finished Luigi's Mansion III on Switch. I started the game called Kaze and the Wild Masks, which is like a Donkey Kong country style platformer. I love platformers, I love shooters, I love puzzle game, so anything in that.

[00:17:22] BB: You are vast on your collection of games.

[00:17:23] BS: Yeah. I've been playing games since I was four, so they're definitely my like, my favorite form of entertainment.

[00:17:26] BB: Oh my gosh! You're totally a gamer.

[00:17:29] BS: Yes. I love like everything about them too. I love like discussing games with people and like reading about their music, and reading about their development and secrets, and trivia and stuff. They're my favorite like medium of art, I guess if you would say that.

[00:17:44] BB: Yeah. Okay. You just said a second ago, not yesterday. A second ago. You said that Saturdays are pretty busy. What are you doing on Saturdays?

[00:17:51] BS: If I'm doing something like hanging out with friends, or like seeing my family or something, then I have church on Saturday nights too so that's usually my time, yeah.

[00:17:57] BB: I see. Okay.

[00:17:59] BS: I do like the media, I put the words up on the screen for the songs and stuff like that. I get there a little early and things like that, so that's my busy time on Saturday. But I'm not really that busy in the grand scheme of things, I guess. I guess Saturdays, I always have that in mind at the end of the day. That's my commitment and my routine on Saturdays. I like on a Sunday when it's just not to worry about anything, full day off of work.

[00:18:25] BB: Nice. Okay. Ben, what are you reading right now? We love to know or we'll take also, listening, observing, watching, anything that gives us some content here.

[00:18:37] BS: I used to like reading books and that kind of dropped off during college. I have a bunch of books I want to read. But YouTube is my favorite like information source I guess in this context. I love like YouTube videos about games that we talked about, but recently, something I've actually been into is like, any concept related to like time, and like international standards, like time zones and boarders and stuff like that. I did an article recently on What is UTC?

[00:19:05] BB: I saw that. Yeah, Universal Time.

[00:19:07] BS: Yeah, that's a little bit like slightly less techy for us. I tied it back to how computers use it. It was more of a general explainer. I've been interested in that, so I found this YouTube channel. What's the name of it? WonderWhy I think it is, that had a video about like the strangest time zone dividers. He also did a video about how the world map has changed since the end of World War I, 1918 to 2018. That was super interesting. It was school to see like just how the boarders of the world have changed, and learn more about time zones and stuff like that. I know it's super weird, but I find time zones interesting for some reason, I guess

because I work with a team that's all around the world at the site. They're on my mind more than the average person, but I think it is helpful.

[00:19:50] BB: You know. I have thought about that more recently was when you're up and I would get up at 5:00 AM and I'm like, "Oh, you know" and it's quiet in your little world. But the world over, someone's at a dance party, and someone's having dinner and — you just think of like, "Oh! This is so —" it strikes me as so relative to a laughable level.

[00:20:11] BS: Yeah, it is really strange. I, two years ago, I got to go to Australia with the site, which was really awesome.

[00:20:16] BB: Oh! That's awesome.

[00:20:17] BS: Which is far away from my normal time zone of Eastern US Time. When we were there, it was weird because in Slack, you can click on someone's name and see their local time. You'll get used to when I'm online, so and so. When I'm getting up, so and so is going to bed and all of that. It was weird to be there and your normal routine is disrupted because it's morning in Australia, so India is only a couple of hours behind you, so they're still up and working and that kind of thing, it's pretty cool. Being in different part of the world and thinking about time in a different way.

[00:20:46] BB: Oh, yeah.

[00:20:46] BS: Also, fun fact related to all these. Did you know that some countries have changed time zones over time, so the Island of Samoa —

[00:20:54] BB: What?

[00:20:55] BS: Yes. This was one of my favorites like time zone fact. So Samoa is like east of Australia. They were like at the end of the date line, meaning like they were one of the last ones to see the New Year. That was a problem for them, because they did most of their trading with Australia and New Zealand. So when they would get up on Friday morning, it was already Saturday in Australia and New Zealand, so business close obviously. In 2011, Samoa, at the

end of the year, they skipped December 30th. They went from December 29, 2011 to December 31, 2011 because they went all the way around the date line, so that their time would be a few hours ahead of Australia instead of all the way ahead of it. Yeah, that was in 2011. I mean, obviously, they didn't physically move, they just redrew the date line.

[00:21:42] BB: Very interesting.

[00:21:45] BS: Yeah. It's like a day that didn't exist, depending on where you are in the world.

[00:21:49] BB: Huh! It also gets into the more sci-fi science thing of like time is just relative. What is it? It's just a construct.

[00:21:56] BS: Yeah, it really it. In that UTC article, I wrote about how like there's leap seconds. Because like UTC isn't perfect and like the Earth is slowing down it's rotation over time.

[00:22:08] BB: Yes, I've heard that.

[00:22:09] BS: So even our most accurate sense of keeping time will break off of like what you see when you look up at the sun because of that.

[00:22:18] BB: Got it.

[00:22:19] BS: Time is very complicated.

[00:22:22] BB: Time is complicated, it's true. It's so true. Okay. Now, do you have a specific title of something you — or even like a YouTube link that we should be like looking up, like anything specific because I —

[00:22:35] BS: Yeah. I would say that WonderWhy YouTube channel. That's named WonderWhy

[00:22:39] BB: Oh, WonderWhy. Okay.

[00:22:41] BS: He had a video on time zones and that what I said about World War I. Another article if you're interested, I just read when I was doing research for that UTC. There's an article written by someone named Zach Holman and it's called UTC Is Enough for Everyone, Right? It's like a look at time from the perspective of programmer. He just talks about the history of keeping time and all the various problems and adjustments that have happened. That's an interesting read if you're curious about this.

[00:23:08] BB: Yeah, fascinating. Okay. What do you think, Ben, the future of journalism?

[00:23:17] BS: I think that's a hard question. I guess I'll split my answer in two parts. I don't really consider myself a journalist in a traditional sense, because I don't really like — I see a journalist as someone who like digs into stories, I think of like Lois Lane or something, who's like out there looking for information and digging into it and then reporting it. I call myself more of like a tech writer informally. I think for sites like ours, I think there will always be stuff to explain because there's always going to be new products, and new problems, and glitches and things like that to explain and write about. I do wonder from our perspective how the future will change in terms of monetization with all the pushes lately like with privacy, you're probably seeing with like Apple's privacy nutrition labels and things like that with a lot of sites that rely on advertising as their main source of revenue. I do wonder what's a lot of sites will do if that kind of gets the rug pulled out from under it.

In terms of general, the future of journalism, I think kind of the decentralization is really interesting with podcast, and YouTube channels like we're talking about and all that. Other are more focused on news obviously. I wonder how in the future it will change between — you have journalist that dig in report stories, then you have any average Joe with a podcast that can do research and some guy could discover crazy information that leads to the discovery of Big Foot or whatever. Then instead of it being like a journalistic story, he can just make a YouTube video about it or go into podcast. I think that's an interesting thing to consider with the future of the industry, if that's fair.

[00:24:49] BB: You're more of a recent grad, so it's not like you've been in journalism for 27 years or something. Do you regret going into journalism?

[00:24:58] BS: No. Actually, my background is actually computer information systems. That was my major, which is like half computer science, half business. It was where I went to college. When I went to college, I knew I wanted to do something with computers. I just didn't really know exactly what — because I knew I was good at like fixing them, and just kind of explaining to people, but I didn't think I wanted to be a programmer, which I ended up having trouble with that in school. I'm glad I didn't get locked into that, because I wouldn't be very happy doing that. I love what I do. I definitely don't regret getting into this field. I love being able to work with a team from around the world, and like I said, write articles that help people.

My biggest regret in terms of like school, I wish that I would have been able to start writing before I went to college. So I was in my sophomore year when I saw a post on MakeUseOf's Facebook page about, "Hey! Here's 10 signs you might be a great writer for us" and I thought they all fit me.

[00:25:48] BB: Oh! That's awesome.

[00:25:48] BS: I don't remember —

[00:25:50] BB: Wait! So you saw it from an article on the website you now work for?

[00:25:53] BS: No. It's a little bit fuzzy, but if I recall correctly. I think what happened was, so in my first year of college, I had like a basic like productivity software class that was all just about like Word and basic computer use. In that class, I don't remember for sure, but I'm pretty sure that the professor I had for that class recommended an article that was on MakeUseOf. It was about like alternative password methods or something. Because I like the article at the time, I follow them on their social pages.

Then fast forward to sophomore year, it was like whenever I came back from Christmas break, I think, yeah it was. On their Facebook page, they posted like an infographic that was 10 Signs You'd Be a Great Writer for Us, and almost all of them applied to me. I remember this clear as day, finally enough, I remember the night that I determine to sit down to write my sample article. I wrote down, I opened up my email and my computer was hard drive crashed. Like at that exact moment. It could have been like sillier timing. There was a problem. The college I went to had all

the laptops like issued from the school. They had a problem that year with a batch of bad solid-state drives.

My computer drive died, so I had an old crappy laptop that I was using as a backup, that I use to write the article. Yeah, sent the article in and they liked it.

[00:27:04] BB: Wow! Look at that.

[00:27:08] BS: Yeah, it was a really cool moment. I wish all that to say, I don't know. It probably couldn't have happened a different way. But if it could have, it would have been nice to do that before I went to college and save a bunch of money, but I learned a lot in college, obviously.

[00:27:21] BB: My sister said yesterday too, "No one can take away your education however you apply it."

[00:27:26] BS: That's true, yeah.

[00:27:28] BB: It's true.

[00:27:30] BS: I have always said that. Especially at the beginning when I wasn't sure. Like when I started writing, I still worked at Subway that year in college, and it was like — I wasn't sure if this was just like something I was doing for a summer. I didn't realize it was going to be my career going forward. So I always said, it's nice to have that degree to fall back on in case something terrible happen, and I had to completely switch fields or whatever. It is nice to have that.

[00:27:53] BB: Well then, we have come to the end where we do our very now famous mad libs, which sometimes are shockingly accurate, and other times are just fun. But we never know, so we'll try it out and see what we get if you're ready.

[00:28:07] BS: Come on. Let's go for it.

[00:28:08] BB: I'll give you a word and then I'm going to read back the whole thing. Okay. First thing is an emotion.

[00:28:12] BS: Anger.

[00:28:15] BB: Anger. An adjective?

[00:28:19] BS: Shiny.

[00:28:20] BB: Shiny. Another adjective?

[00:28:23] BS: Smooth.

[00:28:25] BB: Smooth. I like the literation here, okay. A greeting? Any greeting?

[00:28:31] BS: Howdy?

[00:28:32] BB: Howdy. I use that all the time. A verb?

[00:28:37] BS: Kick.

[00:28:38] BB: Kick. A noun?

[00:28:41] BS: Desk.

[00:28:43] BB: Desk. Another adjective?

[00:28:46] BS: Tall.

[00:28:48] BB: Okay. A cringe-worthy PR term or phrase?

[00:28:52] BS: Here's what I don't like, "On us." I don't know if this will fit. I get sick of the phrase, "On us" every like company talks about, "Buy this and get X on us." Does that count?

[00:29:04] BB: Mm-hmm.

[00:29:04] BS: Okay.

[00:29:04] BB: Yeah. Or I would imagine, do you get any like PR pitches that say, "Oh! We'll send you sampler on us"? Like do they do that ever.

[00:29:12] BS: Probably, yeah, if I look at them for long enough before —

[00:29:16] BB: Okay. A part of a pitch?

[00:29:18] BS: Part of a pitch like the opening?

[00:29:22] BB: Yeah, the opening. We'll go with that. Okay. We'll go with that.

[00:29:26] BS: An amount of time?

[00:29:29] BS: Six months.

[00:29:33] BB: A name person who is ideally alive? The name of the person, any person.

[00:29:38] BS: Anna Kendrick.

[00:29:40] BB: Anna Kendrick. Then an emotion?

[00:29:44] BS: Excitement.

[00:29:45] BB: Excitement. Okay. Here we go. Ben, we have. When I think of the future of journalism, I feel anger. The pitches I receive have gone from shiny to smooth. If I receive a pitch that starts with "Howdy, Ben?" I kick it. When I write stories on desk, I get very tall. My favorite pitches include, "On us" as a sample and very specific openings. I normally take about

six months to respond to emails, but if it's Anna Kendrick, I will respond immediately. If you do get a response from me, you should know that I am very excited for you.

[00:30:23] BS: That's not too bad.

[00:30:25] BB: Right? I kind of like it.

[00:30:28] BS: Yeah, I love when I get tall when I read an article about a desk. I did switch to a standing desk recently, so there's something in there.

[00:30:34] BB: Hey! There you go.

[00:30:35] BS: Huh! How about that.

[00:30:37] BB: I like it. Well, Ben, thank you for being on today. This has been such fun. I hope you are dreaming up your next batch of how-tos. I'm going to look at that time now and now I'm like, "Oh wait! What about the time? I got to get back on it." I hope you get some good video games soon.

[00:30:52] BS: Yeah. Thank you. I appreciate it. It was a lot of fun and there's always something to write about. When I started, I was nervous about running out some time, and seven plus years later, it hasn't happened so I think I'm good.

[00:31:02] BB: Keep on writing.

[00:31:02] BS: Yep.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:31:06] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Ben Stegner from MakesUseOf. 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

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[END]