

**EPISODE 87**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:11] ANNOUNCER:** Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, brought to you by OnePitch. The guests on our summer show includes 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 discussed their role, the types of stories they cover, what their inbox looks like, and how they connect with sources.

Today on the podcast, we're joined by Alex Knapp, a senior editor at Forbes. Alex covers and manages stories surrounding healthcare, science and cutting edge technology. He's been with Forbes since 2011, starting as a social media editor before becoming an associate editor in 2015, and finally rising to the ranks of senior editor in April of 2020. During the show, Alex answers an audience question, talks a lot about his inbox organization, what types of pitches he loves to receive, and more. Let's hear more from Alex now.

[INTERVIEW]

**[00:01:16] BB:** Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee With a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, founder of OnePitch, which you guys all know about. And then also BAM, which is an agency representing venture-backed technology companies doing absurd things in the world for the better. Yay on that front.

Today with us – Ooh! I'm so excited, because we got a senior editor from Forbes. I love it when we have editors on, because they're like the fanciest people that we typically get. This is Alex Knapp joining us. Hey, Alex.

**[00:01:46] AK:** Hi. It's great to be here, Beck.

**[00:01:48] BB:** Thank you for joining us. Now, you're the senior editor, as we just talked about, Forbes. And there're lots and lots of editors and reporters at Forbes. But specifically, healthcare,

science, and also it covers cutting edge technology, which is wide-sweeping, but must be a lot of fun.

**[00:02:04] AK:** It is a lot of fun. And that is where my B intersects, what I like to call science fiction. So I cover commercial space. I've written about quantum computing, about biological manufacturing, that sort of thing.

**[00:02:19] BB:** Nice. Are you a big sci-fi person?

**[00:02:22] AK:** I am a huge sci-fi person. This is like the first professional podcast I've done in a while. Normally, I'm on Star Trek podcasts and things like that.

**[00:02:30] BB:** Oh, really? As like a frequent guest or what?

**[00:02:33] AK:** As a guest. Yes. I've guested on several different Star Trek podcasts to talk about Trek as well as –

**[00:02:40] BB:** Several. There are several? Of course there are.

**[00:02:43] AK:** There's a multitude. There's a multiverse of Star Trek podcasts.

**[00:02:47] BB:** Wow! God, you learn something every – Okay. Well, we'll get to what you're listening to, reading and all those things a little bit later. But good to know. All right. I was born and raised on Star Trek. So Deep Space Nine, all these things. So we can talk about that a little bit later. First, Alex, let's start with your inbox. How crazy is it in there?

**[00:03:10] AK:** It is pretty crazy. Even with filters, and even when I focus, I'm still looking at upwards, close to 200 new emails in the inbox that aren't already separated out. So much of which are pitches and event notifications, things like that, obviously work stuff too. But I have a tendency to put that in a box where I know to look at it sooner.

**[00:03:37] BB:** Now, 200 a day? 200 in the morning?

**[00:03:39] AK:** Yeah.

**[00:03:40] BB:** A day. Okay.

**[00:03:41] AK:** That's where it's not already filtered. I'm sure if you counted it all, it'd be probably closer to three.

**[00:03:46] BB:** Oh, gotcha. Yes. Tell us about your filtering system because, often, for all the ones I've now done on here, which had been dozens and dozens, some people have flagging mechanisms. Some people do folders. But I have I don't know of anyone doing screening like you're talking about.

**[00:04:05] AK:** Well, I am old school. I do folders for the most part. So for example, all my newsletters go to one folder so I can just hit those all when I want to read them and I'm ready to kind of imbibe that. My analyst research notes on public companies, they go to one spot. I have different work projects where I can filter by subject line. For example, our under 30 lists, which is ramping up right now. We're accepting nominations. I have a folder just for that with a very easy filter of if under 30 is in the subject line, that's where it goes. And I know that's where all the incoming mail for that is going.

**[00:04:45] BB:** Wait a second. Are you running that list? How is that under your purview?

**[00:04:49] AK:** I don't run the list. Alex Wilson is our **[inaudible 00:04:53]** of those lists. But I do edit the science and healthcare list, as well as I oversee science and healthcare for Europe, as well as industry manufacturing for Europe.

**[00:05:06] BB:** Got it. Ooh! Wide bench you got. What would you say are the things that will make you open a pitch? Or do you open every single pitch?

**[00:05:16] AK:** I try to open every single pitch. I am not always successful. I will say that what makes me respond to a pitch is when it's clear that it's not a blanket pitch. So when there's notes in there, like exclusive opportunity, for example, is always a great way to get my attention. Flattery is always a great way to get my attention when clearly you have read what I wrote.

**[00:05:42] BB:** Okay, yes, yes.

**[00:05:46] AK:** And little details to show that you understand the outlet and the beat. I will actually have a great example of this. I picked up a story that was interesting about a software company getting into the commercial space market. But what had caught my attention in the pitch, I get a lot of pitches for this industry, is that he referred to his customers, the customers of the company, as global 2000 customers, which is the Forbes list of big companies as opposed to the fortune 500. And that little detail actually caught my eye, because fortune 500 is, to give our hats off to the competitor, really the one more people think of than the global 2000 list. So actually using that made me say, “Hey, you get the Forbes angle. You know what outlet you're pitching to. This is not a blanket pitch.”

**[00:06:36] BB:** So the details do matter. Do you have a preference on length of pitches? That's been a topic of late.

**[00:06:42] AK:** I prefer them shorter simply because I don't have a lot of time. And I do like it to be a lot of power in the details. I understand that some companies are more sensitive about embargoes than others. So maybe you can't say you're partnering with Google until I agree that you agree to an embargo. But if you say we're partnering with a well-known search engine firm, I can probably puzzle it out.

**[00:07:10] BB:** Yes, I would imagine. Alex, as we were discussing, we've got an audience ask. This one comes from Karolina – Let's see. Throssell from Iden marketing. And this person is asking, “What's the best way to get potential experts on your radar for future commentary opportunities?”

**[00:07:30] AK:** That's a great question. And the best way to do that is not to try to introduce me as an expert, qua-expert. It's to hook it – And a lot of people who are very good at this. Hook it to something happening in the news that I might be covering. So for example, if you want to talk about booster vaccines, maybe you have an expert on vaccine equity that you would want to put on my radar, or maybe you have a virologist you want to put on my radar, or whatever that might be. Hooking it to the specific news and saying I've got an expert available. That's the best way,

because even if I don't use them for a story I'm doing, because I do have sources I may have already contacted, I'll have another idea of someone that I can reach out and talk to related to that issue. And it will be stuck in my mind connected to that issue.

Whereas if you just say, "Hey, I've got this guy who knows a lot about immunology. If you ever need to talk, great." That's great. But I probably forget that person because I don't have something to hook them to in my mind. Where I've already got – If you put the name in front of me because you're hooking the vaccine news, now I have their name associated with vaccines in my mind. If you just say, "Hey, this is an expert," I get a lot of here's my expert pitches, and I won't remember them. So hooking into the news event even if I don't use them, it's happened a lot that I've ended up reaching out to them later. Or maybe my first couple folks that I tried to reach out to couldn't talk, "Oh, I remember I got this email about an expert in this." And I'll go and try to find that email.

**[00:09:25] BB:** Yeah, tell us. Oh, that's what you'll do. Oh, yeah, yeah. Okay. By the way, so you mentioned, "Oh, I'll go back." How far back? Because that seems to be another trend I'm seeing or at least talking with people where they'll email someone from five months ago.

**[00:09:42] AK:** Oh, I have definitely done that. I keep things in my head for a while. And my Outlook inbox actually goes back a couple of years. And sometimes if I'm looking for an expert, that's what that search bar is for.

**[00:09:58] BB:** Exactly. Everyone on this show seems to be using their search bar as their personal internal Google for their emails, seems like.

**[00:10:06] AK:** Yes. I definitely do that. The folders are for the things that need my immediate attention. But it would take longer to sort everything. That I don't know is already going to regularly go to a place, the search function becomes the thing to do.

**[00:10:22] BB:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Well, I'm glad we got that one audience asked in. I hope that answers the question, Karolina. Thanks for writing us in. Alex, we have a little section here that's the fill in the blank. So I'm going to give you the phrase or the prompt, and then you let me know what you fill it in with. Does that sound good?

**[00:10:39] AK:** Sounds great.

**[00:10:41] BB:** My favorite sources always –

**[00:10:45] AK:** Speak in soundbytes.

**[00:10:47] BB:** Yes. Why do people not understand this, Alex? The soundbyte, it's not 5-1/2 minutes long.

**[00:10:56] AK:** Frequently, especially if I do video, which we do a lot. We do a lot of video interviews at Forbes. The one real easy coaching thing, and I sometimes coach people on this for video, it's awkward to do it in an interview for a story. So I don't. But if anyone's listening, you can keep this in mind. If you repeat the question, reframe the question as part of your answer, it makes for a much crisper, cleaner answer. So if I asked you, what's your perfect Sunday? You say my perfect Sunday involves eating ice cream and going to the fair, whatever that might be. But the fact that you are rephrasing it as a sentence makes it crisper, makes it cleaner. And that's the trick we use for video.

**[00:11:41] BB:** Speaking of, that's one of our prompts. My perfect Sunday is – Seriously. It's on the list here.

**[00:11:49] AK:** My perfect Sunday is going for a hike and not thinking about work.

**[00:11:55] BB:** Yeah, that sounds nice. Just any? What about hiking do you like?

**[00:12:00] AK:** I like getting out into the fresh air, into nature. I like practicing my terrible iPhone camera skills on flowers and things like that. I'm mostly terrible at it, but I'm trying to get a little bit better. And just kind of getting out and away from my desk. I've worked from home for close to 10 years now. So the thing about the pandemic life I didn't realize was how often I got up and out of my desk and like work from someplace else. And it was not a thing I realized until I couldn't do it for several months. So getting up and going for a walk I think is really important for your mental health. And I do love to hike out away from people.

**[00:12:46] BB:** My favorite things, 15,000 steps every day. So I do a lot of walk and talk meetings. It's easier if you're not like writing notes, of course, obviously not.

[BREAK]

**[00:12:57] ANNOUNCER:** Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to see the unique ways one pitch helps PR professionals and marketers pitch journalists? Head to [onepitch.co](https://onepitch.co) learn about our new OnePitch score and see how easy it is to find the right journalists to pitch your news to. Sign up for your free account today. Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

**[00:13:21] BB:** Okay, the most annoying sources always –

**[00:13:26] AK:** The most annoying sources are people who are experts in their field, but also think that makes them experts in other fields.

**[00:13:36] BB:** Oh no! Oh my, sounds bad. You'll get a response from me if –

**[00:13:42] AK:** It's clear you've actually read my work.

**[00:13:47] BB:** I don't know what the deal is with that. So many people mentioned it, and exactly that response for this question. And I find it perplexing of how this doesn't happen. But anyway, you can follow up with me if –

**[00:14:01] AK:** It's an exclusive, it's high-dollar, or I've worked with you before and you know the kind of story I'm interested in.

**[00:14:08] BB:** Now what this high-dollar mean? High-dollar funding announcement, or billionaire status, or –

**[00:14:14] AK:** Yes. Those are the things that really catch my eye, especially with funding grounds. The thing I like to say about funding pitches is exclusivity buys you a little bit. And then there's a sliding scale of dollars and coolness. So if, for example, a cloud data software company that happens to cater to some companies in my beat has to be really raising a lot of money compared to a guy who made a robot that can fix satellites, if that makes sense. There's the sliding scale of money and coolness.

**[00:14:51] BB:** Mm-hmm. I like it. The best compliment I received about my work was –

**[00:14:58] AK:** It was militantly sensible, which is a phrase that –

**[00:15:03] BB:** I love it.

**[00:15:05] AK:** Yeah, I got that nine years ago, and I still remember it.

**[00:15:09] BB:** Militantly sensible. I love that. We already covered your perfect Sunday. So my favorite stories to write are –

**[00:15:19] AK:** My favorite stories to write are about people, first of all, people who are at the center of all the best stories no matter how cool or nifty the technology. And I love it when people have cleverly taken an idea from another field or sometimes even another era and are able to use it in a new and exciting way. For example, one of my favorite stories I've written was a profile of a company out in North Carolina called Phononic. And they are developing a cooling technology. And the technology itself is over a century old. But it wasn't really practical until modern material, sciences and manufacturing made it work better, but because it had been developed in the 1800s. It wasn't practical then. People kind of ignore the technology until these guys really put it to work and are doing interesting things with it.

**[00:16:24] BB:** Oh, that's cool. Indeed. Did that come from a pitch by the way?

**[00:16:29] AK:** That did come from the pitch. And let me even help some of the frustrated PR folks out there. I had, I think, two interviews with the CEO over the course of a year, in which I didn't actually write anything until finally I thought the company was mature enough and I was



able to pitch my editor on making it a really nice feature story. I like the technology so much. I didn't want to kind of just do a little online post and move on. I wanted it to develop as a story and I wanted to mature as a company. Oh another thing, one of our digital cover stories. Yes.

[00:17:02] **BB**: Oh, a year later.

[00:17:04] **BB**: Yes. [inaudible 00:17:05].

[00:17:05] **BB**: Nice. By the way, for everyone listening, you might have just caught that. So you have an editor even though you're an editor.

[00:17:14] **AK**: That's correct. Yes.

[00:17:15] **BB**: Everyone has a boss. Yeah.

[00:17:16] **AK**: That's right.

[00:17:17] **BB**: I think everyone should remember that. Everyone has a boss to some extent. Okay. My favorite hobby is doing podcasts about Star Trek?

[00:17:29] **AK**: Well, that's certainly up there. But probably my favorite is poker.

[00:17:32] **BB**: Oh, poker. Okay, online, or like in-person, or what? Socially distanced?

[00:17:36] **AK**: Both, more online than not lately. But yeah, I've been playing poker for a while. Actually, early in my life, when I was between jobs for a few months, it was how I paid the rent. So I owed a lot.

[00:17:51] **BB**: Wait, wait. You paid your rent playing poker?

[00:17:55] **AK**: Yes.

[00:17:56] **BB**: Are you good at poker? What is happening?

**[00:18:00] AK:** I mean, I was probably a lot better then than I was now, because I have the time to devote to really diving into the nuances of the game. I'm pretty sure 25 year old me would probably beat 42 year old me pretty handily at poker. But I do keep it up. Yeah, I had gotten to the point where I could pay most of the bills. I was still looking for work and living in the Midwest. Making a living on poker really means –

**[00:18:26] BB:** Cheap. Okay.

**[00:18:28] AK:** Yeah, but making a living on Poker for a sustained period of time would really have meant moving to like Vegas, or LA, or something. I didn't really want to do that. That's why I did not become a pro poker player.

**[00:18:40] BB:** I think that's my favorite part about this whole thing so far, paid my rent via poker.

**[00:18:44] AK:** Yes.

**[00:18:45] BB:** Okay. The last song I listened to was,

**[00:18:49] AK:** It was a cover of The Foggy Dew, which is a traditional Irish folk song by The Chieftains featuring the vocals of Sinéad O'Connor

**[00:19:00] BB:** Okay. Wow! Let me get that off of Spotify. Okay and then, now, because this will be running when it is later in the year. It is August in current time, but this will be maybe September, October-ish. My favorite fall recipe or food is –

**[00:19:18] AK:** My favorite fall recipe without question is stuffing. That's the best part of Thanksgiving. It's the best part of thanksgiving

**[00:19:26] BB:** Okay. Is there a recipe or something that's really special? Or like any stuffing of any sort?

[00:19:32] **AK:** It's my wife's family recipe, which I don't know how to make. So I rely on her being in her good graces to make this one.

[00:19:41] **BB:** Got it. Pumpkin spice is –

[00:19:44] **AK:** Not for me, but if you like it, go nuts.

[00:19:47] **BB:** Go nuts. Go with God. Quarantine has taught me –

[00:19:53] **AK:** That I really, really, really don't like sitting still. And I thought I knew I didn't like sitting still. Now I really know.

[00:20:03] **BB:** Got to get those hikes in. Got to keep moving.

[00:20:06] **AK:** That's right.

[00:20:06] **BB:** Well, Alex, we touched on this a little bit. What are you reading, listening to, watching? Frankly, we'll take anything, because we get all our recommendations from right now.

[00:20:17] **AK:** Well, right now I am reading *Money for Nothing* by Thomas Levenson.

[00:20:22] **BB:** Okay, Money for – What that's about?

[00:20:23] **AK:** Which is it is the history, 17th century history of kind of the beginning of the modern financial system. And it involves a lot of the scientific players of the time. I'm not super deep into it yet, but I had read one of his previous books, which is called *Newton and the Counterfeiter*, which is all about Isaac Newton stint as master of the Royal Mint, and his efforts to fight crime and counterfeiting.

[00:20:53] **BB:** Okay, *Money for Nothing: The Scientists, Fraudsters and Corrupt Politicians Who Reinvented Money, Panicked a Nation, and Made the World Rich*. That's the subtitle. Wow! That sounds riveting.

**[00:21:07] AK:** So far, it's fantastic. Yeah. In terms of other things, I'm currently watching Doom Patrol on HBO Max. Okay. It's based on the comic book series. With Brendan Fraser, Matt Bomer. It's a terrific show.

**[00:21:19] BB:** How is it? Do you like it?

**[00:21:22] AK:** I like it a lot. I don't know if it's for everyone. I would say if you're not like a comic book nerd. The way they judge your sensibility for it is if you like Umbrella Academy, you will probably like Doom Patrol. If you did not like Umbrella Academy on Netflix, you will probably not like Doom Patrol. It's a very kind of absurd superhero type of story. And if that's not your thing, you probably won't dig it. But I am also watching Ted Lasso. And I think we can all agree, everyone likes that, because it's awesome.

**[00:21:53] BB:** Everyone loves it. And I have not seen it yet. But you're like the fifth, seventh person, or so who's mentioned it. So I got to get on it.

**[00:22:00] AK:** I binged it because I recently upgraded my iPhone and got a year of Apple Plus for free. So that was my secret.

**[00:22:06] BB:** Nice, nice, nice, nice. Okay. Great. Those are all wonderful recommendations. Totally a different flip here. What do you think the future of journalism is?

**[00:22:22] AK:** I think that – And this is already happening in some respect, is we're going in a direction that looks, I think, a lot like the early 20th century, where news outlets tend to have more of a point of view. They tend to be stronger slanted one way or the other. I think the kind of traditional view from nowhere is going to struggle quite a bit. But I do think that it won't get quite as bad as the yellow journalism days. I do think that sense of professionalism, of fact checking, all of that is, I think, too ingrained right now in the culture. So even if you have a viewpoint, I do think that there's a lot of intellectual honesty. I think that I'm a little skeptical about kind of substackification.

**[00:23:20] BB:** Yeah, yes, yes. Lots of people are using it.

**[00:23:23] AK:** And this is just my own point of view, is I think there's a limit to how many newsletters people will subscribe to.

**[00:23:32] BB:** Right? Exactly. How many can you take? And then the thing is – This has been talked about on the show before. I mean, you could easily spend \$200 a month simply on your online subscriptions of media outlets. \$5 here, 9.95 there, whatever, whatever. It's like, “Ooh! Man.”

**[00:23:54] AK:** Well, I mean, as someone who likes to eat, I don't mind paying people for journalism. But I do think as time goes on, when you're looking at kind of value propositions, it makes a lot more sense to subscribe to an outlet for \$10 a month where you're getting tons of stories, lots of different writers. I don't see how – And maybe history will prove me wrong. But outside someone who's a real – I mean, I'm sure some niche – There are investment newsletters. I mean, we have them here at Forbes. And there are others where people do charge quite a bit. And there are certainly, I think, niche audiences where if you have real grounded research and expertise, you can make a suitable living.

I think where I question sustainability is essentially the sub stacks as blogs. I don't see how that sustained itself. I could be wrong. But I do think that that – I think you'll see some consolidation where if I want to get these five sub-stacks are \$5 a month. I think you'll see more stuff like that. And then you're essentially –

**[00:25:06] BB:** Bundling?

**[00:25:07] AK:** Exactly.

**[00:25:08] BB:** I kind of feel like this is what TV went through in a way, because it's like, “Okay, now there's these gazillion channels.” Well, no one wants to deal with gazillions of channels. You just buy a bundle.

**[00:25:17] AK:** Right.

[00:25:17] **BB**: Yeah, maybe that'll happen. To be seen. We shall. Alex, I have now our fun little madlib, which can go many different ways. It can sometimes be very accurate. Sometimes it's just silly. Sometimes it's just surprising overall. We'll kind of see what we get. Are you ready? I'll tee up the word.

[00:25:39] **AK**: I'm ready.

[00:25:40] **BB**: Okay. First is an emotion.

[00:25:42] **AK**: Hungry.

[00:25:45] **BB**: Hungry. Speaking the language. An adjective.

[00:25:50] **AK**: Luminescent.

[00:25:52] **BB**: Luminescent. I like it. Another adjective.

[00:25:56] **AK**: Incandescent. These are my light adjectives today.

[00:26:00] **BB**: Incandescent. Perfect. A greeting of any kind.

[00:26:06] **AK**: Hello.

[00:26:06] **BB**: Hello. A verb.

[00:26:11] **AK**: Run.

[00:26:12] **BB**: Run. A noun.

[00:26:15] **AK**: Sandwich.

[00:26:17] **BB**: Speaking of hungry. I like what we're going with here. An adjective.

[00:26:23] **AK:** Blue.

[00:26:24] **BB:** Blue. And then what is a PR term or phrase?

[00:26:30] **AK:** Renowned.

[00:26:32] **BB:** Oh god! I really can't stand that word.

[00:26:35] **AK:** It's a pet peeve of mine. If someone is renowned, you don't need to tell me they're renowned.

[00:26:40] **BB:** That's a true. A part of a pitch.

[00:26:44] **AK:** Valuations.

[00:26:46] **BB:** Valuations. Okay.

[00:26:49] **AK:** That's more of like a dream, ideal scenario than a reality though.

[00:26:53] **BB:** Mm-hmm. Length of time.

[00:26:56] **AK:** 30 minutes.

[00:26:56] **BB:** 30 minutes. And then a name of a person.

[00:27:00] **AK:** John.

[00:27:01] **BB:** Any John? Or do we have a specific john?

[00:27:04] **AK:** I did not have any specific john in mind.

[00:27:06] **BB:** Okay, I'll just go with John. Then and emotion.

**[00:27:10] AK:** Happy.

**[00:27:10] BB:** Happy. Great. Okay. Here we go, Alex. When I think of the future of journalism, I feel hungry. The pitches I receive have gone from luminescent to incandescent. If I receive a pitch that starts with Hello, I run. When I write stories on sandwiches, I get kind of blue. My favorite pitches include renowned nobodies and valuations. I normally take around 30 minutes to respond to my emails. But if it's a John, I will respond immediately. If you do get a response back from me, you should know that I am very happy for you.

I kind of like it. It's a friendly kind one.

**[00:27:52] AK:** It is.

**[00:27:54] BB:** We get some real ones that are not flattering. So this is great. Alex, thank you so much. This was a lot of fun. I hope you get on more Star Trek podcasts. You could send them this one and say, "See? Listen to me on here. I'm fantastic. Clearly, I should be on yours." And I can't wait to read more about some science crazy stuff and commercial space specifically.

**[00:28:19] AK:** All right. Well, I'll write with you in my next send back.

**[00:28:22] BB:** Excellent. Have a good one, Alex. Thanks.

**[00:28:25] AK:** All right. Thank you.

[OUTRO]

**[00:28:27] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for joining us on this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Alex Knapp from Forbes. If you enjoy listening to our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and anywhere else you listen to podcasts. And if you have a moment, please leave us a review to share your thoughts about the show and today's guests. To learn more about the latest tools on OnePitch, and to subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter, head to our website at [onepitch.co](https://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]