

EPISODE 95

[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 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.

Have you heard about our brand-new video series featuring guests from the podcast, including today's? Head to onepitch.co and look for the video page to learn more and subscribe on YouTube. Today's guest is Jeff Benson, Senior Editor for Decrypt. Jeff covers a wide range of crypto news, including NFT's, cryptocurrencies, crypto trading companies, and more. He's also worked with organizations such as UNICEF, and spent time in Uganda as a consultant. During the episode, Jeff shares more about pitching thought leaders on the site, how to approach him with the exclusives, his favorite stories to write, and so much more. Let's hear more from Jeff now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:21] BB: Welcome everyone. This is OnePitch Coffee With a Journalist. The podcast where you get to hear live from real deal journalists. What they like? What they don't like? Pitches, etc. Do they like PR people? Some of them do. It's kind of nice. I'm Beck Bamberger. I have an agency, that's why we created this whole thing, called BAM. We work with all venture-backed technology companies. And then of course, I helped create this thing, OnePitch, to help your pitches get to the right people. With us today – Ooh! I hope you like some crypto, everybody. If you are, you're in the right place. We have the Senior Editor from Decrypt onm, Jeff Benson. Welcome, Jeff.

[00:01:57] JB: Hi, Beck. Thanks for having me.

[00:01:58] BB: Thank you for being here. So first, first, let's not get into the inbox real quick. For those who don't know, give us an overview of Decrypt.

[00:02:08] JB: Okay. Decrypt is Web 3 media. So essentially, it exists to explain the cryptocurrency and blockchain technology space to people that may not know a lot about it, and for people that do know a lot about it. So we try to meet people where they're at.

[00:02:23] BB: Mm-hmm. And can you give us maybe an understanding of how many people? How many writers are there? How many people are you overseeing, etc.?

[00:02:33] JB: We are fastly expanding, I'd said between people that doing the writing and people doing kind of back the house stuff. There're probably 30 folks at Decrypt. And we put up, I'd say, about 15 articles a day.

[00:02:47] BB: Fantastic. And by the way, for those listening, they're all over the place. You got people in Berlin, Venezuela, New York, Colorado. I see all types of people. So by all means –

[00:02:56] JB: We have people all over the globe. And we also have a Decrypt Español site.

[00:02:59] BB: Ooh! Dang, great. Habla Español. Great. Oh, yes. You're a social media manager. I see. It's in Mexico City. Oh, good city.

[00:03:06] JB: That's right **[inaudible 00:03:07]**.

[00:03:07] BB: Nice. Nice. Okay, now, Jeff. Now we have that primer. Your inbox, how is it? And is it out of control?

[00:03:15] JB: It's always a mess. The inbox is the thing that I never want to check. I've got Twitter. I've got Discord. I've got Telegram. I've got multiple email addresses. So yeah, the inbox sometimes doesn't get pruned as much as I would like.

[00:03:33] BB: How do you keep then pitches, particularly straight? Are you opening every pitch? Filing them? Forwarding them? Because you're also an editor? So you're not necessarily writing all the pieces, of course.

[00:03:43] JB: I do quite a bit of writing. Well, I will tell you that I do not open every email that I receive. If it's a cold email coming from a project that I'm not very familiar with, I may just kind of quickly archive it after seeing the subject line.

[00:04:00] BB: Subject line is the barrier to open.

[00:04:04] JB: Well, I mean, the subject line is barrier and also just who is sending it. There are umpteen thousand projects in the cryptocurrency space right now. And it's very hard to keep track of them. And most of the pitches I get are from small startups looking for some airtime.

[00:04:20] BB: And so with that, when they're small startups, because sometimes we ask this of more the tech publications we have, like the TechCrunches or maybe Fast Company. Is it the founders reaching out? Or is it publicists? I would imagine it's the founders. But tell me.

[00:04:36] JB: A lot of times it's publicist, or maybe it's the founder **[inaudible 00:04:40]** alias.

[00:04:42] BB: Oh, I see. Okay.

[00:04:43] JB: There's quite a bit of money in the space. And so I think most people are using PR firms. But yeah, it's typically a publicist. A lot of the times the pitches that I receive are publicists wanting to put me in touch with **[inaudible 00:04:57]** or to talk about a particular issue, which is nice in theory, but usually it's not someone with name recognition in the space. It's someone looking to build name recognition.

[00:05:10] BB: So they're trying to present you a thought leader, but there's no thoughts yet.

[00:05:13] JB: Yeah, there are thoughts but –

[00:05:16] BB: They're thoughts but they don't mean anything.

[00:05:18] JB: Yeah.

[00:05:19] BB: God, this comes up quite often in other PR circles that I'm part of in communities of, God, what do you do when this your first startup, you've been doing it 18 months, you may be dropped out of college or you didn't go to college, whatever it is, you just raise a little chunk of change. You really don't have a leg to stand on yet in terms of exits or something like that. We usually don't get into like thought leadership pitches particularly. But what's a good thought leadership pitch to you?

[00:05:48] JB: That's a great question. So I'll give an example of a recent piece that we did, where a startup raised about \$2 million in seed funding, which is not a big number. But they had a specific problem that they were looking to solve. And in the tech space, a lot of our readers are interested in, "Hey, I got this problem with this particular aspect of the technology. I haven't really seen a good solution for that."

So when we have something to present that says, "Hey, here's somebody who's working on that particular problem. They're just getting started." That's interesting for people. If you can present, "Here's the problem. Here's how this person aims to solve it." That's really great for us.

[00:06:31] BB: Okay, gotcha. So come with a solution of the problem solve. Gotcha. What do you do, Jeff – When we have editors on, we like to talk about this in terms of vetting and maybe sending along pitches. Do you vet them out to your team of the 30-ish people? I know they're not all writers. But do you afford them along? Because sometimes people wonder, "Do I pitch an editor? Or should I just only pitch writers, reporters directly?"

[00:06:56] JB: I find a lot of people, they throw the spaghetti up against the wall and they email every Decrypt address that they can find.

[00:07:04] BB: No. Such a no, no. Right?

[00:07:06] JB: Well, maybe, maybe not. Because usually what we're doing is we're sharing pitches among the editors anyway and saying, "Hey, is this something that we should consider

assigning?" Usually, we're looking for confirmation from another editor before we go ahead and assign you a writer.

[00:07:23] BB: Do you all have a Slack group or something where you're chatting about pitches and bad pitches? I know some outlets have those.

[00:07:28] JB: We do have a pitch channel Slack group. Yes.

[00:07:31] BB: Confirmed. Confirmed. Okay. Well, for you, then, Jeff, because you do get to write stories. You're not just doing all the editing and stuff. You got quite a bit on **[inaudible 00:07:42]**, particularly. And legislation I'm looking at. You're doing something in India. The regulations? Ooh! Looks like you're doing a lot of regulatory stuff. Ooh! You're talking about the Senate. How do you get your story inspiration?

[00:07:57] JB: How do I get my story inspiration?

[00:07:59] BB: Yeah. Does it ever come from a pitch? Or are you doing your daily walk and meditating? And that's where you think and contemplate stories?

[00:08:07] JB: You know what? I feel like I'm so busy I don't really have time to think about it. I have the spots where I show up. I show up on Twitter. There's a couple of aggregator sites that I look at. See if there's anything popping in certain Telegram channels. Most of my inspiration doesn't come from emails. Usually the news just somehow magically presents itself. Unlike writing a novel, where it's like, "Ugh! What do I want to have happened?" This I find much easier.

[00:08:39] BB: This is different. Yeah, gotcha. Gotcha. Gotcha. Okay. Thanks for showcasing that and letting us know. Is there something you're particularly looking for pitch-wise right now?

[00:08:51] JB: Yeah. I mean, not to get too much in the weeds, but I see some pitches that are very sort of general sort of cryptocurrency whatever. But since we're a cryptocurrency site, we're looking for something a little bit more specific. So if I can imagine a headline that includes

Bitcoin, Ethereum, Salona, Dogecoin, Shiba Inu, any sort of cryptocurrency that has brand name recognition, I'm really interested in that.

I'm also always looking for big numbers. If someone's doing a big fundraiser that's interesting, I want to get in on that. So I'm always looking for pitches that have to do with specific cryptocurrencies or improving a situation with a specific cryptocurrency **[inaudible 00:09:40]**.

[00:09:41] BB: Yeah. So not specifics. I imagine you get pitches that are like, "Oh, crypto, it's the new FinTech thing."

[00:09:48] JB: Right. Right. Pitches that aren't necessarily calibrated to our **[inaudible 00:09:51]**, which adds a little bit of knowledge coming in.

[00:09:55] BB: Yeah. Yeah, gotcha. Okay, everybody. Hope everyone's listening here.

[BREAK]

[00:10:01] 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 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]

[00:10:25] BB: Jeff, I have a little fill in the blank now part for us. So I'm going to tee up the phrase and you fill in the blank. How about that?

[00:10:32] JB: Sounds great.

[00:10:33] BB: Let's do it. My favorite sources always –

[00:10:40] JB: Are other writers.

[00:10:43] BB: Other writers? Oh, wow! No one's ever said that before. But that's good. Okay, the most annoying sources always are not writers?

[00:10:54] JB: The most annoying sources always are the PR folks that can't admit that their client might not have a story.

[00:11:05] BB: So sad. I feel for them.

[00:11:07] JB: **[inaudible 00:11:07]** because you're representing a client. But sometimes I want you to say, "Look, they want this. I don't know if there's something there. But maybe we can find something in them."

[00:11:17] BB: Well, that's then – I kind of go into something is amiss with the firm or what's happening, you shouldn't have that client. Or that's at the far end of the spectrum. But rather, you should be educating and working as partners. We're big about partnership at BAM on "Hey, you painted the wall? That's not a press release. We're not going to do that. But here's what we can do over here instead." I mean, like, you got to dance with the client. And I don't feel that many firms unfortunately do. And so it's like, "Oh, you painted the walls? Okay, we'll get that press release written right now."

[00:11:53] JB: Right. And I do get plenty of wall painting press releases.

[00:11:57] BB: Oh, that's a new term, Jeff. I'm going to call it that. Wall painting press releases. New phrase. New phrase. Do not send wall painting press releases. No wall panting. Okay. You'll get a response from me if –

[00:12:11] JB: You've met me in person.

[00:12:13] BB: There we go. We just talked about it on the pitch tips. You can follow up with me if –

[00:12:20] JB: If I tell you that I'll respect the embargo.

[00:12:22] BB: Oh, there you go. It would be a huge help if sources –

[00:12:28] JB: It would be a huge help if sources told me straight when they'd given the exclusive to somebody else.

[00:12:36] BB: Burn. The best compliment I received about my work was – This is so entertaining for you, Jeff. I love it.

[00:12:47] JB: Yeah, this is super entertaining for me. The best compliment was probably when a firm that I wrote about didn't retweet my article.

[00:12:54] BB: Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, rewind, rewind. The best compliment was when they didn't. I'm confused.

[00:13:01] JB: Yes. So I love when somebody tells me that I really got everything right and it was a good, good piece. But I also love it when it feels just a little bit – That it's not a puff piece. So enough that they're not sure whether or not this is the article that they want out on them. I know that's where PR and journalists are a little bit at odds. But I think there's sometimes an assumption that I'm just going to write up whatever you tell me and I'm not going to add in any context.

And sometimes I feel that the most exemplary pieces are the ones that a firm is maybe 50% happy with instead of playing 110%.

[00:13:45] BB: Oh, I got you. I got you. Ooh, that's good. Ooh, I haven't heard that before. Okay. My favorite stories to write are –

[00:13:55] JB: My favorite stories right are about regulations.

[00:13:58] BB: I was noticing with all your stories. What's generating that interest for you? Because some people are like, “Regulations. God! Last thing I want to touch with a poll.”

[00:14:06] JB: I was in politics nerd **[inaudible 00:14:08]** in school. And so anything about the regulatory sphere, there's kind of this battle between different powers that you can kind of get into. It's interesting kind of getting in the weeds there. And I also love stuff that has to do with international relations and politics. Stuff about Bitcoin mining moving from China to Kazakhstan. That sort of stuff is super interesting. The geopolitical ramifications of that.

[00:14:34] BB: Yeah, you look like you did politics for your undergrad. So yep. Oh, how fun. And now you get to still do today. Hey! Way to convert that degree to something you're still doing.

[00:14:42] JB: Yeah.

[00:14:44] BB: That's awesome. My perfect Sunday is –

[00:14:49] JB: One where I'm not on Twitter. Not on my email. Not in Discord. Not on Telegram.

[00:14:55] BB: Not in front of a screen maybe?

[00:14:56] JB: Not in front of a screen whatsoever.

[00:14:58] BB: Not in front of a screen. There you go. My favorite hobby is –

[00:15:02] JB: Well, I used to be writing. But now I do that for a living. So I'm in search of new hobbies.

[00:15:07] BB: Isn't that sad? I think about that all the time of when you have something you love and then it becomes the work that you're paid for in some way, shape or form. And it totally shakes the hobby fun of it. I don't know what it is. When money suddenly gets involved, it changes a little bit.

[00:15:25] JB: It can. But I feel like I'm lucky enough to do something every day that fills my cup. So I'm pretty happy about it. And when I did it as a hobby, there's like, "Oh, I need to make time to write." And now there's no question about doing that. I always get to do it.

[00:15:42] **BB:** Mm-hmm. Every day. The last song I listened to was – Tell us the truth, Jeff. If it was Mariah Carey Christmas, it's okay.

[00:15:54] **JB:** It was not Mariah Carey Christmas. It's the theme song to Peppa Pig.

[00:16:00] **BB:** Really?

[00:16:03] **JB:** Yep.

[00:16:04] **BB:** I take it. You have children perhaps?

[00:16:06] **JB:** I do.

[00:16:07] **BB:** Otherwise, it's just for fun. Okay, okay. Got kids. That's always a signal for those songs. During the holidays, I most look forward to –

[00:16:16] **JB:** Eggnog.

[00:16:18] **BB:** Eggnog! Wow, you don't hear that at all. Wow, Jeff. Okay. You have a certain brand you like? Or you make it? Or what?

[00:16:26] **JB:** No, I just go to Costco.

[00:16:28] **BB:** Go to Costco. [inaudible 00:16:29]. Okay. Quarantine has taught me –

[00:16:34] **JB:** That people really are social beings.

[00:16:37] **BB:** Yeah, we really are. Which I love. I don't think it's a bad thing. We need to connect to be like that. I just met someone for coffee in person. And it was like, "Oh, this is so nice."

[00:16:48] **JB:** It's a totally different ballgame.

[00:16:49] BB: Wow! We're just sort of like, "Oh, look at someone you can look in the eyes." Okay, Jeff, transitioning just a little bit. We always ask this of our journalists because y'all have the best stories that you're consuming in any way, shape, or form, via podcasts, via Netflix, wherever your stories are coming from. So what are you reading, listening to, watching that you're into right now?

[00:17:12] JB: I am reading *The Overstory* by, I believe, Richard Powers. It's a book about trees and their connection to people.

[00:17:19] BB: Oh, I have seen this. And it won the Pulitzer Prize, it looks like. I just pulled it up for fiction. Now it's fiction. Oh. Ooh! Ooh! Ooh! Okay.

[00:17:29] JB: I read a combination of nonfiction and fiction. So I'm reading another book called *Super Human* by Dave Asprey.

[00:17:39] BB: Yes, I have heard that. How's that?

[00:17:41] JB: Yes. He's the guy behind Bulletproof Coffee.

[00:17:44] BB: Yes. Is it BS? How is it. Tell us the truth?

[00:17:48] JB: I don't know. I think probably a lot of what's in their works, I think he's probably a little bit ahead of the science in terms of some people just kind of want to see all the evidence first. And he kind of has good enough evidence.

[00:18:03] BB: Cool. Gotcha. Yeah. By the way, back to this Powers book. The genre is environmental fiction. I did not know –

[00:18:11] JB: Yes. **[inaudible 00:18:11]** if you will.

[00:18:14] BB: Wow! It says here – I just got it on Audible. So thank for you that. I get all my suggestions from this podcast. It says the book is about nine Americans whose unique life experience with trees bring them together to address the destruction of forests. Well, I'm in. I am

in. Thanks, Jeff. That's fantastic. Okay, now we got those stories all under our belts. That's fantastic. What do you feel is the future of journalism looking like?

[00:18:43] JB: That's a great question. I have no idea. I feel like I got on to the journalism train about 30 years too late. But journalism has been dying for ages now. So I think it'll continue kind of chugging along. We're trying something really interesting at Decrypt where we are starting a decentralized news wire, us along with several partners. So that news articles can come to us from other sources. It'll be like the AT and Reuters, except more blockchain-based. So it's an interesting experiment to try. I'm not sure if it's the future. But I think there's lots of experimentation going on in media right now. Not just kind of, I was going to say, traditional websites, I guess. But now you're seeing this through TikTok. You're seeing lots of different things happening. So I think the future is going to be more experimentation.

[00:19:39] BB: Hmm. And do you have any thoughts on I think what we're seeing more and more, which is the subscriptions to newsletters. What do you think about that?

[00:19:49] JB: I don't think that's going to work.

[00:19:50] BB: Okay. Why is that? Why is that? That was an answer. That was clear.

[00:19:54] JB: Yeah. I think when you're at the New York Times and you have a huge readership, you have a huge readership not because of your own name per se, but because your name at the New York Times. When you go into a Substack, good luck. Like I have writers that I really liked and use to read that I just don't read anymore because I don't want to pay for their Substack. There's so much content out there that I think a lot of people feel like they don't really need to pay for anything but talk to your stuff.

[00:20:23] BB: Well, therein lies the conundrum of the saturation of the subscriptions. Because how many – Well, one, just saturation overall. Because can you read 30 of those a day? And two, can you have \$170 a month paying on subscriptions for outlets and stuff? I mean, some people can, but many people can't. So how are we going to figure this out?

[00:20:44] JB: Yeah. It essentially probably will. What will be happening is batching.

[00:20:48] **BB:** Yeah, exactly, exactly.

[00:20:50] **JB:** And it will start looking a lot more like websites used to, except now it's kind of an ala carte sort of Substack batch.

[00:20:58] **BB:** Mm-hmm. Yeah. Interesting. I wonder if it'll be like the Spotify of Substacks or something. We'll see. We will see. But as noted earlier, Jeff, you all are hiring. So hey, journalists, publicists, you're looking for a job? Maybe this is the place to be, Decrypt. I love it.

[00:21:14] **JB:** Yeah. I will always read pitches from potential freelancers and new hires.

[00:21:19] **BB:** Oh! Ooh! That's a good insight. Perfect. Okay, everybody, you heard it here. You heard it here. Jeff, our last part for the day here is our little mad lib. Super fun. I'm going to give you the words. I want to write it out, fill it in, and then I'll read you back our whole little paragraph and see if it makes sense, or if it's just silly, or whatever. Who knows? But you never know. And sometimes we get a lot of kicks out of it.

So the first word is an emotion. Any emotion.

[00:21:50] **JB:** Guilt.

[00:21:51] **BB:** Guilt. Oh, yes. An adjective.

[00:21:56] **JB:** Exasperated.

[00:21:58] **BB:** Exasperated. Another adjective.

[00:22:02] **JB:** Charmed.

[00:22:03] **BB:** Charmed. These are good ones, Jeff. Okay. A greeting of any kind.

[00:22:09] **JB:** Howdy.

[00:22:11] **BB**: Howdy. A verb.

[00:22:13] **JB**: Lambasted.

[00:22:14] **BB**: Lambasted. Okay. Damn! Jeff, with the words today. I love it. Lambasted.

[00:22:21] **JB**: What's popping into my head is like happy, sad –

[00:22:25] **BB**: Yeah, I know [inaudible 00:22:27]. I love it. Okay. Next, a noun.

[00:22:32] **JB**: Credit card.

[00:22:32] **BB**: Credit card. Okay.

[00:22:36] **JB**: That's what's on my desk right now.

[00:22:37] **BB**: There you go. Okay. An adjective.

[00:22:41] **JB**: Let's do happy, finally.

[00:22:42] **BB**: Happy. Okay. Okay. There we go. A cringe-worthy PR term or phrase, like, "Just following up for the 7th time."

[00:22:55] **JB**: Probably just putting this back at the top of your inbox or something.

[00:23:00] **BB**: Okay. Just putting this back at the top of your inbox. That's particularly annoying. I'm like, "Great. Now I have two of your things in here." God damn. Okay. Part of a pitch.

[00:23:16] **JB**: Yeah. The Amazon of blank.

[00:23:20] **BB:** Oh God! Blank. Yes, exactly. Perfect. Yup. At least it's no longer the Uber of, because I'm getting tired of that a couple of years ago. Okay, length of time.

[00:23:31] **JB:** 30 minutes.

[00:23:32] **BB:** 30 minutes. Great. A name of a real person.

[00:23:38] **JB:** Alexander Hamilton.

[00:23:40] **BB:** Alexander Hamilton.

[00:23:41] **JB:** It's somewhat Broadway show I just saw.

[00:23:43] **BB:** Yup. Hey, we'll take it.

[00:23:46] **JB:** The song is still in my head.

[00:23:47] **BB:** Gotcha. And then an emotion.

[00:23:50] **JB:** Jealousy.

[00:23:50] **BB:** Jealousy. Okay. Great. Where did you see Hamilton by the way? Are you in New York?

[00:23:57] **JB:** No. No. Is the tour here in Reno.

[00:23:59] **BB:** Okay. Okay, great. I was like, "Ooh!" It's on tour now. They're back in action. I love it. I love theater myself. Was it good by the way? Did it live up to the hype?

[00:24:08] **JB:** I mean, it was great. I was quite skeptical going in because it's tough when you've been hearing about something for five plus years.

[00:24:15] BB: Right? That's kind of how I feel about it too. I'm like, "Oh." But okay. Yeah. Okay. Good. I'll go with your endorsement then. That sounds good.

Okay, Jeff, here is our mad lib. When I think of the future of journalism, I feel guilty. The pitches I receive have gone from exasperated to charmed. If I receive a pitch that starts with howdy, it looks like I am lambasted. When I write stories on credit cards, I get happy. My favorite pitches include just checking back, putting this at the top of your inbox, and it's the Amazon of blank. It normally takes about 30 minutes to respond to emails. But if it's Alexander Hamilton, even if he comes back from the dead, I will respond immediately. If you do get a response back for me, you should know that I am very jealous for you.

[00:25:01] JB: Perfect.

[00:25:02] BB: I like it. I usually qualify that name of a person with a specification of ideally alive. And I did it this time. And then sure enough, it's someone dead. But you know what? Stranger things can happen. Maybe it'll be in some kind of meta form or something in virtual reality. I don't know, Jeff. Who knows?

[00:25:20] JB: Yes, you can be Alexander Hamilton in the metaverse.

[00:25:23] BB: There you go. I like it. Well, thank you so much, Jeff, for being on today. Jeff Benson, Senior Editor at Decrypt. Appreciate all this great time and the chat.

[00:25:33] JB: Thanks, Beck.

[OUTRO]

[00:25:34] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist featuring Jeff Benson from Decrypt. 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. 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]