

This transcript was exported on Jan 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Jered Martin:

Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist brought to you by OnePitch. Today marks our 50th episode of the show. We want to extend a huge thanks to our listeners and guests who have joined us along the way. For those that don't know, the guests in 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, and consumer products. We discuss their role, the types of stories they cover, what their inbox looks like and how they connect with sources.

Jered Martin:

Today, we're joined by Caroline Haskins from BuzzFeed News. Caroline has been a technology reporter at BuzzFeed News since 2019. Prior to then, she was a staff writer for Motherboard and an editorial intern at The Outline. During the episode, Caroline tells us about her process for finding unique stories to cover, how hectic her inbox can be, a major story she broke during the George Floyd protests and more. Let's hear more from Caroline and Beck now.

Beck Bamberger:

Hi everyone. Welcome to Coffee with a Journalist. This is the 50th episode. I'm Beck Bamberger. We have another wonderful journalist with us today. I honestly can't believe we're at 50 here. Caroline Haskins, BuzzFeed, we are so excited to welcome you here. Celebrate 50. Yes.

Caroline Haskins:

Yeah. Thank you for having me. Honored to be number 50.

Beck Bamberger:

Number 50. Wow. Well that went fast. I'll tell you that. We've been doing this for a while. So happy to have you here. First, we always like to start off with, what's in your inbox? How crazy is it?

Caroline Haskins:

I actually got... Oh man, just as I refresh it, I have a bunch of new emails, but-

Beck Bamberger:

Oh. Were you going to brag and say that you got to zero or something?

Caroline Haskins:

Yes, I was at zero as of a few minutes ago, but now a lot of this is nothing. Only three of these look important. So it's not that bad. If you had asked me about a week ago though, I would have had a very different answer. It has been quite a quest to keep my inbox in the single digits.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh. Is it a lot of pitches, would you say? How many on a daily would you get?

Caroline Haskins:

This transcript was exported on Jan 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

The main thing... Well, obviously I get a lot of pitches, but the main thing is that I'm working on a really big project right now where I sent out a lot of emails and then I got a lot of emails back. So it's just been a lot to keep up with.

-

Beck Bamberger:

Got it. Oh. As I like to tell my team, I dig my own grave, so sometimes that's what happens. Okay. Do you have a filing system of some sort with your inbox, or how does that go? How do you keep the craze at bay?

Caroline Haskins:

A very recent development as of about two weeks ago is that I do unread first. That's pretty much the only system I have. Before, I do have like a promotions tab, but when you do unread first, that's not visible. But yeah, I think that it's definitely helpful in terms of just seeing things in terms of priority. I don't know if I'll ever go back. I don't know why I didn't do this years ago.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh. So you mean you just see... That's how I do it, by the way. I just see, okay, what are the... I'm looking at my inbox right now. Okay. 39. You have 39 unread. That's all I care about. Like, boom, there it is. And you just navigate from there.

Caroline Haskins:

Yeah. My nice thing that I'd like to... I don't really delete emails really, but I'll just go to all the ones that look like nothing and I'll just mark it as read and then it just disappears into the abyss.

Beck Bamberger:

That's what I do too. We have similar uses, but people are not pitching me, so that's good. Is there anything that you love when it comes to a subject line of a pitch that makes you go like, "Wow, yes, I want to read this pitch. This is going to be good"?

Caroline Haskins:

Hard to say. I'll just say I don't like it when my name is included. It just feels a little weird.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, in the subject line, you mean?

Caroline Haskins:

Yeah. Like, "Caroline," comma. It's like, "Oh, you don't know me." You know?

Beck Bamberger:

It's very salesy.

This transcript was exported on Jan 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Caroline Haskins:

I don't know. Just something that's extremely to the point, hard to break it down to a formula though. Honestly, the amount of pitches that have turned into actual stories. I mean, the last time I could think of one is when I got a press release from Mobilewalla about a report that they did where they basically tried to estimate the demographic profiles of people at Black Lives Matter protests using cellular data being collected. And for some reason, no one had reported on it. It was an interesting story, obviously, because these people who were marching didn't know that their data was going to be used in this way, but no one had reported on this study and then it just landed in my inbox. So I guess that shows the importance of reading your emails.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes. Huh. And you pursued that story. Did you end up getting it out there?

Caroline Haskins:

I did. It did end up getting out there. And then Elizabeth Warren and a group of legislators ended up launching an investigation into the company. I don't think anything major has come out of it yet, but it's good to at least know that people's data might be used in this way. I think that some protest leaders are now telling people that if you're not among the leaders who are supposed to be posting on social media, it might be smart to turn your phone off or put it on airplane mode and just make sure that people know where you are.

-

Beck Bamberger:

And for people who don't know, you did do this story on October 30th, and it's titled DHS authorities are buying moment by moment geolocation cell phone data to track people.

Caroline Haskins:

That was actually a follow-up one.

Beck Bamberger:

That's a follow-up. Okay. Because I don't see the whole entire list of stuff, but yeah, there's the Department of Homeland Security. Okay. So this is tumbled into then multiple stories.

Caroline Haskins:

Yeah. That's another one, the geolocation. This one, we discussed the Venntel in it. Venntel is a company and they basically sell these subscriptions to agencies within DHS. Sometimes they've been used by immigration authorities to sort of organize raids and look after ports and such. And they argue that it doesn't violate the fourth amendment because when people... I mean, obviously a lot of places make this argument that it's built into the terms of service when you use a weather app or you use a game and you implicitly agree to any possible use with that data. But obviously if you download... I'm not going to name a real game. If you download like Candy Horses Building Mansions 50,000 and you really like that game, I don't think you're necessarily going to think that federal authorities are going to be buying that data, but it's happening.

This transcript was exported on Jan 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Wow. You've had quite a year. We're recording this in the end of December here. I know this will be out a couple months later. But man, if you want to look down the list of stuff, which is police, protests, everything you've covered this year, it's been quite the year. Speaking of, so you touched on it just a second ago about pitches and the use of them and okay, maybe you don't want to miss a good pitch because that could be that super interesting story. But when you're looking at creating and crafting a story, how do those story ideas come to you? Some people have said, for example, "Oh, I'm kind of on a walk and I'm thinking about something." Or some people are like, "Oh, I got a tip." Or, "Oh, of course I got an assignment." But for this one that you just got on with the Los Angeles Police just banning the use of commercial facial recognition, how does that come to you? Inbox pitch, story tip? What happens for those?

Caroline Haskins:

The one about the Los Angeles Police banning the use of facial recognition, that's come out of some reporting and investigating about Clearview AI. So we basically just asked the police department for comment about their use of the software. And for people that aren't familiar, it's a facial recognition tool and it's kind of gotten a lot of use around the country because they offer free trials to police departments. A lot of times higher ups don't know about it. The tool uses images that were scraped from social media. So Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, all these places. So if you were tagged in a college dorm party 15 years ago, it's possible that that could be used to match you an image from somewhere. But anyway, so we've been reporting on Clearview AI for, I guess, about a year now.

Beck Bamberger:

They've only been around since 2017 too. I'm looking at their page. So it's a young company.

Caroline Haskins:

Funnily enough, it actually didn't start as a company that was marketing itself to our police departments. It was really selling itself as the private sector. So stadiums and such, types of security for banks and everything. But then it's sort of expanded into the law enforcement sphere in like 2018. Then one of the founders was pretty well-connected within the law enforcement community because he used to be involved with the Rudy Giuliani administration. So that sort of enabled them to expand their reach into that specific type of group.

Beck Bamberger:

These are the rabbit holes you go down, I think, that are so fascinating. Is there ever a time that you've been able to just... You're just brainstorming or you had two friends tell you something, do stories ever happen like that for you?

Caroline Haskins:

For sure. **There's definitely stories that start from just curiosity. I mean, for instance, a lot of the times I feel like stories come out of reading an article by somebody else or checking my Google alerts and seeing something, having additional questions, and then either reporting it out using traditional methods or filing a public record request. I'm a big fan of like FOIAs and FOILs, which means like state**

This transcript was exported on Jan 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

and federal level public record requests, because that's a great way to really get the raw material, which is pretty exciting and cool.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh. How long do those take by the way, if you request one? Is that like a 24 hour turnaround?

Caroline Haskins:

Oh no. No. It depends. One story that I published at the end of September about the LAPD, those were actually... The documents that came into that story, I've requested those like more than a year earlier, but the key is to just kind of keep filing things. **A lot of times things on the surveillance feed are like... Yeah, it's like ongoing things. So by the time you get stuff back, there's often just kind of like, if you file enough, then you can kind of get a flow of documents that come in every two days or every two weeks.**

Beck Bamberger:

That's a great technique. You just inundate them. Very smart.

-

Jered Martin:

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 store 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.

Beck Bamberger:

I have a little word association game here, so I'll give you a word and then you tell me what the first word you think of is. Let's do it. Okay. Food.

Caroline Haskins:

Coffee.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes. That counts. That counts. Well, the next one is drink.

Caroline Haskins:

Coffee.

Beck Bamberger:

We can do coffee for that. Okay. Double coffee. I like it. Hobby.

Caroline Haskins:

Drawing.

This transcript was exported on Jan 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Beck Bamberger:

Twitter.

Caroline Haskins:

Twitter, like stupid.

Beck Bamberger:

VR.

Caroline Haskins:

What is it? I've never used VR. Like I've used AR. I've never used VR. So it really wasn't a word that came to mind. It was more just like a big question mark. Obviously a couple of years ago, it was on the news about something that was going to rip us and change society and change the way entertainment works. It definitely has a strong subculture, but I don't see the whole mainstream thing happening anytime soon.

Beck Bamberger:

No, I don't think we're doing the Ready Player One.

Caroline Haskins:

Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

Although I love that book. Okay. Social media.

Caroline Haskins:

Twitter.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Now, we're going to get into the... a little bit. Okay. Facial recognition.

Caroline Haskins:

Police.

Beck Bamberger:

Misinformation.

Caroline Haskins:

Facebook.

Beck Bamberger:

Social justice.

This transcript was exported on Jan 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Caroline Haskins:
Black Lives Matter.

Beck Bamberger:
Democracy.

Caroline Haskins:
Elections.

Beck Bamberger:
AI.

Caroline Haskins:
Computer. Oh my God.

Beck Bamberger:
Journalism.

Caroline Haskins:
Typing.

Beck Bamberger:
Pitch.

Caroline Haskins:
Email.

Beck Bamberger:
Oh, and the last one is inbox.

Caroline Haskins:
Emails.

Beck Bamberger:
Emails. Okay, perfect. That was a fun list.

Caroline Haskins:
I will say I think that this kind of gets into my theory about word association games, which is that people misrepresent their answers. This is my honest to God bare bones what am I thinking about thing. I think that some people are dishonest. Like if you were to tell me journalism and some guy was to say like, I don't know, freedom of the press, first amendment. If someone were to say that, I'd be like, "I don't believe you." My journalism is typing. That is what I do. I type.

This transcript was exported on Jan 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Beck Bamberger:

No one has said that answer, by the way.

Caroline Haskins:

Good.

Beck Bamberger:

Out of the 50 I've done now. I have a lot of data on this. No one has said that.

Caroline Haskins:

What is the most common answer? I'm curious now.

Beck Bamberger:

Now I want to go back. This is a really great content idea because we always ask about pitch, inbox, and journalism. And then we also have the food and drink so we could do a whole round up on this. So with journalism, some people have said like concerned or democracy or truth, but also like overwhelming and time. The answers are all over the board.

Caroline Haskins:

Yeah. I hear you. I could have said something... Concerned. That's a good answer.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, man. Well, we'll talk about that in a little bit because we're going to do a little bit on the future of journalism. But before that, is there anything you're reading, consuming, bingeing that you want to mention that you love?

Caroline Haskins:

Strangely, I've been on a documentary kick lately.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh yes. What are you watching?

Caroline Haskins:

I just finished a documentary about the Korean War and I haven't seen When the Levees Broke in a couple of years. So I rewatched that last night and that was... It was intense. It was intense.

Beck Bamberger:

When the Levees Broke.

Caroline Haskins:

Yeah. Just a reminder about that one. That's a two-part series and four acts about Hurricane Katrina and it sort of goes through how people were responding to the storm, the initial aftermath, then obviously...

This transcript was exported on Jan 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Because the interesting thing about that, obviously, is that it wasn't the hurricane itself because the hurricane actually missed the city, but it was really just a human caused disaster.

Beck Bamberger:

This is a Spike Lee directed film.

Caroline Haskins:

Right. Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

You can watch it on Amazon, everybody. Okay. Wow. It has a huge, great rating on Rotten Tomatoes. This is my favorite part of the podcast, by the way, because I get all my new content that I consume from wonderful journalists. Okay. That's good. Anything else? Anything else you loving?

Caroline Haskins:

I just started reading a book. I'm not that far into it. It's called The Forging of the American Empire by Sidney Lens. Yeah, I'd watched a couple other documentaries about the Gulf war, the Vietnam War. I watched the Ken Burns one, the 10 parter. I'm kind of on a history kick right now.

Beck Bamberger:

I was going to say, historic.

Caroline Haskins:

It's kind of how my brain works. I get into like these phases where I'm hyper-focused on something for several weeks.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh yeah. Totally makes sense.

Caroline Haskins:

Trying to kind of continue the momentum and read in addition to watch stuff.

Beck Bamberger:

Do you have anything that you're looking forward to reading, watching, et cetera, discovering, as we get into 2021?

Caroline Haskins:

I'm looking forward to being in the place where I'm emotionally ready to watch Fleabag and Little Women.

Beck Bamberger:

Fleabag. I love it.

This transcript was exported on Jan 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Caroline Haskins:

Yeah. I've heard it's so good.

Beck Bamberger:

It is great. I think now is a good time because it's not rosy, wonderful, zippity doo da. It's not that type. I don't know what you've heard from them, but it's an appropriate time for that.

Caroline Haskins:

I've heard it destroys you.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. Maybe. I don't think destroys is where I'd put that, but interesting and weird and very well done. Truly. I wish that had another season. I don't think they are though. You can get so attached to some of these and you're like, "Oh, we only had two seasons." And then what are you going to do? It's so sad.

Caroline Haskins:

Right, right. I hear you.

-

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, well those were good, Caroline. Thank you for those. I'm going to be looking up that documentary. Okay. Now, future of journalism. Actually, before I even get into that, you're a relatively new ish journalists. You haven't been doing this for 20 something years. So I will say sometimes answers seem to depend on length of stint into industry, but what do you think the future of journalism is?

Caroline Haskins:

Yeah. I mean, it's hard to say what it is, but I will say the things that concern me the most. **Mainly the fact that people of color and women seem to not have much representation and higher paying or leadership roles. This is something that is really across different publications. What really concerns me is when you get especially people of color into positions and companies say, "Well, this marks our effort into diversity."** But sometimes these are dead end roles where there's not really an opportunity for promotion or you're in these roles... It doesn't really mean anything if you're in a role but editors aren't listening to you or they're trying to make your ideas more palatable for like a white audience, but audiences aren't white. I mean, we're seeing this, especially with... I mean, I'm thinking about the reckoning that Bon Appetit had lately. Really reckonings that a lot of publications have had with how they've treated Black and Brown people, especially women and non-binary writers.

Caroline Haskins:

I don't think that's going to be something that's going to change tomorrow. But I think if we're thinking about the future of journalism... I mean, it's hard to say, I mean, I could pontificate about newsletters and all this other thing, but **really at the end of the day, when we're talking about what the actual content of it is, who's getting representation, and who is actually getting an opportunity to contribute**

This transcript was exported on Jan 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

here and make this landscape better, I mean, I think that's probably the most important thing we should be thinking about.

-

Beck Bamberger:

I think you're the first who's mentioned this actually. I'd have to go back in all the notes, but a lot of times people talk about the death of local news, the importance of news, the digital migration. Okay. What do paid subscriptions mean? What does the world mean when you only have paid readers? I mean, there's many ways to answer this question, so I appreciate your answer on this.

Beck Bamberger:

Well, let's round out with one of my favorite parts of this whole thing besides the content, because I do like to know what everyone's reading or listening to and all that good stuff, but the little Madlibs here. So I'll give you the phrase or whatever. Oh, it's going to be great. Then I will read it back and we will see if it's just silly or sometimes it's shockingly accurate.

Caroline Haskins:

All right.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Let's do this. So first just a catchphrase. Any catchphrase of any sort.

Caroline Haskins:

Oh my God. The first thing that came to mind is, "Bazinga." I don't even watch that show.

Beck Bamberger:

Bazinga. Great. Okay. What's a journalist scare phrase, like a scary thing you'd hear?

Caroline Haskins:

"Hi, want to chat?" Like a note from an editor.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. Oh, that is scary sounding. Okay. And then what about a buzzword that you'd hear that's positive or empowering?

Caroline Haskins:

Impact.

Beck Bamberger:

Impact. Great. Now, how about an adjective?

Caroline Haskins:

This transcript was exported on Jan 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Fuzzy.

Beck Bamberger:
A part of a pitch?

Caroline Haskins:
Intro. That's really basic.

Beck Bamberger:
Then another adjective.

Caroline Haskins:
Sweet.

Beck Bamberger:
Sweet. Another part of a pitch.

Caroline Haskins:
Signature.

Beck Bamberger:
Signature. Yes. Okay. Amount of time.

Caroline Haskins:
An hour.

Beck Bamberger:
One hour. Great. And then how about another adjective?

Caroline Haskins:
Carbonated.

Beck Bamberger:
Love it. Great. Singular noun.

Caroline Haskins:
Banana.

Beck Bamberger:
Banana, banana. Great. Let's do it. And then topic.

Caroline Haskins:

This transcript was exported on Jan 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Let's go with hurricanes.

Beck Bamberger:

Hurricanes. And then a verb ending in ING.

Caroline Haskins:

Running.

Beck Bamberger:

Running, and then another verb. Just any verb.

Caroline Haskins:

Jumping.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Are we ready?

Caroline Haskins:

I guess so.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. To me, tech journalism is Bazinga. It consists of, "Hey, want to chat real quick?" and impact on the daily. If a pitch has a fuzzy intro, I will absolutely respond to it. However, if a pitch has a sweet signature, you can expect no reply from me. If one hour goes by and you don't see an email back from me, you can just assume I am not carbonated about it, and the best stories have a banana and are usually about hurricanes. But the best way to reach me is by running it over to me. But you can also jump it to me.

Caroline Haskins:

Well.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. That was a weird one. I have to say, but I liked it and I liked the banana part.

Caroline Haskins:

Fascinating.

Beck Bamberger:

I liked the banana part. Well, Caroline, thank you for being on today, being our 50th episode. So great.

Caroline Haskins:

Thank you.

This transcript was exported on Jan 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Beck Bamberger:

This was lovely. And I so appreciate the time and all your wonderful inputs and suggestions.

Caroline Haskins:

Thank you. I appreciate you having me. This was nice.

Beck Bamberger:

Have a good one, and thanks again.

Jered Martin:

Thanks for tuning in to the 50th episode of Coffee with a Journalist featuring Caroline Haskins from BuzzFeed News. 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 as well as today's guest. To learn more about the latest tools on OnePitch, head to our website at onepitch.co. We'll see you next week with an all new guest and even more insights about the journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.