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Jered Martin:

Welcome to Coffee with a Journalist, a podcast by OnePitch, featuring well-known journalists from the top US-based publications covering technology, lifestyle and culture, health, science, products and services, and more. The goal of our show is to uncover the real person behind the real stories you love to read. We discuss their beat and news coverage, what their inbox looks like, the types of pitches they receive, and lots more.

Jered Martin:

On today's show, we're joined by Julia Boorstin, a senior media and entertainment correspondent for CNBC. Julia joined CNBC in 2006 as an on-air correspondent and previously reported for Fortune Magazine. Today, Julia shares about the hundreds of emails she receives per day as a broadcast reporter, her preference for the types of pitches she wants to receive, how and why she started the Disruptor 50 list, how different it is pitching a broadcast reporter versus a digital reporter, the specific types of stories CNBC covers, and more. Let's dive into the episode today with Julia.

Beck Bamberger:

Hi everyone. Welcome to Coffee with a Journalist. Once again, we are here in the midst of Season Two. I'm so excited about today. Julia Boorstin, CNBC, book coming out in the future. Lots of interesting stuff going on with the work that you're doing. We're going to talk about that Disruptors 50 list, for example. We're just happy to have you here, Julia.

Julia Boorstin:

I am so happy to be here. I am drinking my coffee, as I do all day long.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, so you drink all day long coffee?

Julia Boorstin:

No, no. I try to cut myself off around noon, but I'm always happy to drink coffee.

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Beck Bamberger:

Me too. I'm in the same boat. Sadly, we're doing this in the morning, and I do not have my coffee yet. So you're going to carry the weight here, and enthusiasm, Julia. Here we go. But first, tell us, tell us, I know you have lots of opinions on this. How's your inbox and how do you like pitches?

Julia Boorstin:

My inbox is overflowing. I don't even want to look at my inbox right now. I closed my inbox so it wouldn't make noise during this podcast. I think yesterday, I actually went through and deleted 400 emails and I got it down to about 1,600.

Beck Bamberger:

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Oh, 1600.

Julia Boorstin:

Yeah, it's bad. But our storage system has been a little funky since we've all been working from home.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, yeah.

Julia Boorstin:

So harder to save things to folders. But I get a ton of pitches all the time. Some of them are good, some of them are not good. I love pitches when they're going to alert me of upcoming embargoed news. I hate pitches when they're a week after something has already happened.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. Do you get those?

Julia Boorstin:

Oh yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

"Hey, by the way, Julia, this thing happened 10 days ago. You want to talk about it?"

Julia Boorstin:

Yeah, I get those. I got a couple of those yesterday, and I sent a nasty email back saying, "Next time, please give me a heads-up ahead of time, and maybe we can talk about it."

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah.

Julia Boorstin:

But I work in TV, which is like the 24/7 world of needing to be ahead of things and not behind. So very sensitive to getting things late.

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Beck Bamberger:

How do you suss out the pitches? Do you look at the subject lines and deduce from there?

Julia Boorstin:

I usually, I look at the subject lines and the first couple of sentences. I feel like most people who pitch me don't make an effort to understand what it is that I do at CNBC. I think that there's just a lot of people who just send blanket pitches, because they have my email in there. They don't think, "Okay, this is a business network. She covers these kinds of companies. Here's how it might fit for her." So many people

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who pitch me have never watched CNBC once, and it's just not helpful. I'm always looking for new ideas. I'm always open to pitches. But I think the key thing is really to make sure that the pitch includes some knowledge of what it is that I'm doing, what kinds of stories I generally do. **If you're going to pitch me on some random entertainment event that has no business story, or some celebrity thing of a celebrity endorsement of something, we just don't do that kind of story on CNBC.**

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah.

Julia Boorstin:

I read the pitches. I just will delete them if it's useless.

Beck Bamberger:

Yep, got it. So you're a firm deleter. Are you a filer? Do you file any?

Julia Boorstin:

I file, but with a pitch, either it's going to be, either I'm going to respond to it or I'm going to delete it. But the main thing, and I don't know how much you want me to dive into this, is this idea that TV is really different than magazines or other things. **I really need a news peg. I really need to know why I'm getting this story now. If I'm going to try to do a CEO interview or a story, tell me, why now? Also, tell me what's new or different and give it some business context. I need to know what the business implications are, not just that it's a cool thing.**

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Beck Bamberger:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Tell us a bit about the Disruptors 50 list. That's something you came up with, or had the baton with. I know a lot of people listening want to hear about that. And for folks who are listening, and maybe this is, I don't know if this is why you're hard to pitch particularly, but not only are you covering the interconnectedness of technology and media and how that ties in with the business angle, but you got the Disruptors 50 list, and then you're also working on the Closing the Gap beat-

Julia Boorstin:

Yes.

Beck Bamberger:

... which has to do with women's workplace advancement. So all of those things, how do you suss out, let's say for the 50 list or the Closing the Gap content?

Julia Boorstin:

Okay. First, just to give you a sense of my regular beat, so my day job, my main job is, I cover media and social media companies. That means primarily the big public companies. CNBC cares about public companies. That means Disney, it means Facebook, Twitter, Comcast AT&T, anything about content or

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advertising, anything about communications. That's my beat. I think the important thing to remember is that, CNBC really cares about public companies, because we want to inform investors.

Beck Bamberger:

Yep.

Julia Boorstin:

But then there are all the private companies associated with that. TikTok is a perfect example, so I've spent a lot of time recently-

Beck Bamberger:

Yes, I see that.

Julia Boorstin:

... covering TikTok and all this craziness about who's going to invest, who's going to buy it, whether it's going to be controlled by the US or China. I'd say my day-to-day is really about covering these dominant companies in the social media and tech space. That's the day job. There's a certain cadence of things there, with quarterly earnings and big announcements. I love to get things under embargo, so I can make sure our coverage is ready.

Julia Boorstin:

Then I have this other project, the Disruptor 50 list. I launched it eight years ago, and we've done eight of these lists. My idea back then, so I came up with it maybe almost nine years ago, the idea was, we cover big public companies at CNBC, but some of the most exciting things are happening at private companies.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes.

Julia Boorstin:

These startups are not only challenging the status quo and challenging the big established giants, but they might be bought by the giants. So the investors in those big giant companies need to know about them, and they could go public one day. The first Disruptor 50 list included companies like Twitter and Snap, which then went public. The idea was to get these companies on the radar of our viewers and to really identify the 50 fastest growing, most powerful venture-backed startups. And specifically, to look at how companies are using technology to disrupt all sorts of different industries. It's not just consumer technology companies like Snap and Twitter, or now we have Pinterest and Airbnb, we also have companies in the agriculture technology space, the ag tech space. We have a company called Indigo Agriculture that was number one on the list a couple of years ago.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. I remember that.

Julia Boorstin:

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We had Impossible Foods, which is disrupting the food space. We have education companies. We had a company called Guild Education.

Beck Bamberger:

Yep.

Julia Boorstin:

That's taking on disrupting education. The idea is these are to be startups, but not just tech tech startups. We have companies in the enterprise space, in cloud and security companies, but to really understand who's using technology to disrupt the status quo across industries. That's been really fascinating. For that, I'll say, to get those companies, we have an open application process. Any company can nominate themselves and any VC can nominate one of their portfolio companies. That's totally open. We start that process usually in January and then the list comes out in May or June.

Beck Bamberger:

Yep.

Julia Boorstin:

Yeah, and so for that, I would generally say the more data we get, the easier it is for us to evaluate. I think, I really do believe that the more data we get, the better chance that a company gets added to the list from there.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah, it's a very influential list.

Julia Boorstin:

Yeah, very. It's great. The list becomes sort of a year-round thing where we have events and speaker series and we do stories and we actually have an index of the former disruptors that have gone public. That is performing very well this year.

Julia Boorstin:

It's really fun and fascinating. I think for me, a lot of reason I read pitches is just to understand what the tech trends are, so if I get a pitch on a startup that is similar to a startup that's been on the list, or I think this is a category that might be on the list, I'm always just looking for insight into what the next big thing is, and trying to figure out what I should be looking out for. A lot of times, that's companies that are too small to be on the Disruptor 50 list. Then the third thing that I work on that you mentioned is-

Beck Bamberger:

Closing the Gap.

Julia Boorstin:

I co-founded this Closing the Gap franchise at CNBC. A bunch of my colleagues and I were talking about all of the ways that either individuals or companies were making efforts to try to close gender and

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diversity gaps and saying, "Hey, we know women are so underrepresented in business, minorities are so underrepresented in business, but this isn't an impossible thing to fix." You have companies like Salesforce, which have closed the pay gap and they figured out how to measure things to ensure that they were paying men and women equally. Or, I did a great story on PayPal, which says it has closed the pay and promotion gap, because one reason women get paid less is because they get promoted less frequently than men.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes.

Julia Boorstin:

For that, I did a deep dive into understanding how they did that, with the idea that if we share those stories, it's the kind of thing that other companies should be able to recreate. It's not impossible. So those are my three main things at CNBC. I think I probably read more of my emails because I have such a diverse assortment of things I'm working on.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. I was going to say, you kind of need to, to make sure you're not missing anything. And then, I don't know how much you want to go into this, but you're also doing a book.

Julia Boorstin:

Yes, so I am working on a book. It will be published by Simon & Schuster in spring, Simon & Schuster's Avid Reader imprint in spring of 2022, which seems like a long ways away. It's about female founders. I'm currently calling it Mother of Invention: how female founders defy the odds, drive profitability and manage leadership in uncertain times. I'm sure the name will change. But for that, I'm looking for female founders with really remarkable stories who I can profile, in an effort to elevate the diversity of stories of female leaders, and try to help shift the archetype away from this certain image of what a CEO looks like. That image is usually of a man.

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Beck Bamberger:

Yep, this is true. Wow, I have to say, you seem like the damn busiest reporter I've had on here yet, Julia, and there's been 40 other people on this show. Wow, love it. Go you. Tell us a bit about the making of a story. For example, you did just, you mentioned the TikTok stuff that you've been doing. You had something with the NFL and you had something with Disney and of course this is your beat. But when you're thinking of actually creating the story, does anything ever originate, for example, from a pitch? Or are you just in the news circuit and going, "Okay, I now must do something about X company, because it's bubbling up"?

Julia Boorstin:

It's all of the above. TV is so news-driven that if I get a pitch saying, "Okay, this news is coming tomorrow." Or, "We're going to be releasing this report on cord-cutting tomorrow," then I will very much say, "Okay, you know what? This is a great time to do a story on cord-cutting, because we're going to get

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earnings from the cable companies next week, and they're going to tell us that their cable numbers have dropped off." **To me, it's really about integrating the stuff I get in pitches with the news cycle and things that are happening.** For instance, if there was something on the rise of gambling on sports, sports betting, and I said, "Okay, well, the NFL season is coming up. We should do a story on ..." Let's say it was a pitch on DraftKings. We should do that story the week that the NFL season starts. Because it makes sense to peg them together. I think a lot of it is about integrating like little heads-up I'm getting from pitches with stuff I know I have to do anyways. Does that make sense?

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah, yeah. Most of the answers for this, too, is that it vastly depends. Sometimes it's, you see it on Twitter, you see it from a pitch, you see it from a news site. It's all across the board.

Julia Boorstin:

Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

Sometimes I think people also have a little bit of a, like a method, a bit. I'm like, "Let me noodle on that." And then a couple hours later, they're doing that. But it totally depends on the beat. If someone's in a fast news cycle versus investigative journalists, they can be working five months on a thing. So it just, it totally changes. It's fascinating.

Julia Boorstin:

This is much more the fast news cycle, just because it's TV. It's like, okay, I wake up in the morning and if something happens or a stock pops or news comes out, I'm on TV immediately.

Beck Bamberger:

Yep.

Julia Boorstin:

**It's more important than ever to be able to jump on things.** Or let's say for instance the TikTok thing is happening. If I get a pitch saying, "Okay, Triller actually was number one in the app store last week," and so I did a story on Triller. Because I was like, "Well, you know about TikTok, let me tell you about this other app that's similar." **So being able to take things that are in the news, do the breaking news, and then figure out how to take the story one step further and advance it.**

Beck Bamberger:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). You got to be in shape for this.

Julia Boorstin:

**You get used to it. It's a certain metabolism for news is,** and it's very ... I used to work at a magazine. I used to work at Fortune Magazine, and it's totally different than there, where you can ... you're looking ahead months and months. Now, I'll work on stories that are not going to go on TV for a month, but it's

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more about keeping an eye on things and knowing that no matter what I plan, no matter what I plan the day of the story, if something changes, I'm going to have to be able to figure out how to pivot it.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes. Wow.

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Jered Martin:

Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to by OnePitch.

Jered Martin:

Are you curious to see the unique ways OnePitch helps PR professionals and marketers pitch journalists? Head to [onepitch.co](http://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.

Beck Bamberger:

Well, speaking of fast-paced, here's a little word association we love to do. I'll give you a word and you give me your first thought. Are you ready?

Julia Boorstin:

Yes.

Beck Bamberger:

Here we go. Food.

Julia Boorstin:

Soup. It's really cold right now.

Beck Bamberger:

Drink?

Julia Boorstin:

Wine.

Beck Bamberger:

Hobby.

Julia Boorstin:

Hiking.

Beck Bamberger:

Tech.



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Julia Boorstin:

Streaming.

Beck Bamberger:

Facebook.

Julia Boorstin:

Work.

Beck Bamberger:

Stock market.

Julia Boorstin:

Volatile.

Beck Bamberger:

Gender gap.

Julia Boorstin:

Problematic.

Beck Bamberger:

Princeton.

Julia Boorstin:

Alma mater.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. Disrupter.

Julia Boorstin:

Exciting.

Beck Bamberger:

Journalism.

Julia Boorstin:

My life.

Beck Bamberger:

Pitch.

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Julia Boorstin:

Interesting.

Beck Bamberger:

Inbox.

Julia Boorstin:

Overflowing.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes, we've had many overflowing, out-of-controls on that one. That was fun. What are you reading right now, Julia, whether digitally, or in paper, or in print, or a book, or whatnot. I get all my recommendations from this.

Julia Boorstin:

I am reading a bunch of books to help me think about how to write my book. I'm reading this book right now that I love called, *Upstream: How to Solve Problems Before They Happen*. It's by an author named Dan Heath. I think it's so interesting, because it's really about how to be preventative in problem solving, rather than wait for things to happen. I'm reading it because it's a sort of ensemble story. It's not a business book about one or two main people. I sort of hoped, aspire to structure my book in a similar way. I think it's fascinating.

Julia Boorstin:

There was also another book I read called *The Culture Code*. That's a business book, *Secrets of Highly Successful Groups*. I really enjoyed it, and I thought it was, actually looking back on it now in these times of COVID and the challenge of being creative and innovative when we're all isolated, I think it's almost more interesting. I really liked that book.

Julia Boorstin:

Then I'm reading a lot of stuff by Barbara Annis. She's an expert on gender diversity, and also the advantages to companies acknowledging the differences of their employees. She wrote a book called *Gender Intelligence* with a co-author named Keith Merron. I just think that Barbara, I've never met her, but I think she's super smart. I think the idea that the differences of employee bases can be a huge asset, and the fact that she basically trains companies to learn how to leverage that diversity of thought of their workplace, I think is really cool.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, that's great. Good lineup. What do you think about the future of journalism? You've been in it since the early 2000s here, when you started at *Fortune*, since the 2000s, almost been, it's been 20-plus years. What do you think about it?

Julia Boorstin:

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I think that it's challenged and I'm concerned about the future of long-form journalism and investigative journalism, which need meaningful backing. I think that the TV business is going to be fine. I think that organizations like CNBC are. What I'm worried about though is, making sure that there are resources to back journalists to go off and do the work they need to do to hold public figures accountable. I think journalists play a really important role in society, and the fact that so many news outlets have really struggled or have gone out of business is just horrible.

Beck Bamberger:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Julia Boorstin:

I'm a little nervous. I think the fact that you have people like Jeff Bezos buying companies like The Washington Post is not necessarily a bad thing, as long as they can remain independent. Or, you have Time Magazine was purchased by the CEO of Salesforce, Mark Benioff, because he wanted it to keep operating. I think that's not a terrible thing, but that shouldn't be what we have to rely on for journalism to keep operating. I think that's a nice thing. It's nice, but it shouldn't be necessary.

Julia Boorstin:

There's a lot of experimentation right now happening with the subscription newsletters. I think that's a great thing. I hope people will realize it's necessary to pay for journalism. I subscribe to The New York Times and I subscribe to The New Yorker and The Atlantic, and I'm happy to give them my money. I think it's, you say for the cost of a cup of coffee, you could sustain these really important news outlets. I just think that these are amazing journalistic institutions, and actually The New York Times has been doing pretty well lately. I hope they can keep it up. I hope they can keep it up.

Beck Bamberger:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Looking back at your college self, in your Princeton days, when you graduated, would you still tell that younger self, "Yeah, get into journalism"?

Julia Boorstin:

I had no idea that I was going to be in journalism.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh.

Julia Boorstin:

I thought I was going to go to grad school. I was going to do all sorts of things. I was going to go work in international relations. No, journalism was not the plan. So, yeah. I've had an amazing, fabulous, exciting career. I've been so, so lucky, so lucky in so many ways to have the mentors I had, to have the opportunities I had. I feel like I just landed in the industry at a very, very fortuitous time. I also feel like I made the switch to TV at a really lucky time. I feel like I really lucked out and I have no complaints. I am just so grateful to have had the opportunities that I've had.

Julia Boorstin:

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I don't know. I don't think I could have imagined most things back in 2000, when I was taking this job. I've only had two jobs, of taking my first job at Fortune Magazine. The one piece of advice I got that I still think about every day, is take the opportunities as they come and make the most of them. I didn't think I was going to get into business news. I didn't think I cared about business news.

Beck Bamberger:

And here you are.

Julia Boorstin:

It turned out to be the most fascinating thing ever. So I don't think I would do anything differently in retrospect, other than maybe get more sleep along the way. But no, I just feel really grateful and lucky to have had so many amazing opportunities.

Beck Bamberger:

Double click on that. Yay. Julia, we're going to do now, perhaps my favorite part, the Mad Lib part, which sometimes is very accurate. Sometimes it's just funny. We'll see what happens here. I'll give you the thing we need, the word or whatever, and then I'm going to read it back to you once you fill it all out.

Beck Bamberger:

First of all, a catchphrase, any catchphrase

Julia Boorstin:

Go for it.

Beck Bamberger:

How about a journalist scare phrase?

Julia Boorstin:

Cut it down. Meaning like shorten it, like shorten your script.

Beck Bamberger:

Cut it down. Got it. A positive or empowering journalism buzzword

Julia Boorstin:

Great scoop.

Beck Bamberger:

Great scoop. Yes. An adjective?

Julia Boorstin:

Determined.

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Beck Bamberger:

A part of a pitch?

Julia Boorstin:

News peg.

Beck Bamberger:

News peg. There we go. Okay, another adjective?

Julia Boorstin:

Curious.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay, and then another part of a pitch?

Julia Boorstin:

Like, a closer.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah, sure. Okay. Amount of time?

Julia Boorstin:

An hour.

Beck Bamberger:

One hour. Great, another adjective?

Julia Boorstin:

Tired.

Beck Bamberger:

Tired, yes. I can relate. A singular noun?

Julia Boorstin:

Cat.

Beck Bamberger:

Perfect, and then what about just a topic?

Julia Boorstin:

News.

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Beck Bamberger:

Then, we're almost done here, a verb ending in I-N-G?

Julia Boorstin:

Running.

Beck Bamberger:

Running. That is frequently mentioned on this show. And then just a regular verb, any verb?

Julia Boorstin:

Write.

Beck Bamberger:

Write. Okay, here we go. The Mad Lib for today is the following, Julia.

Beck Bamberger:

To me, tech journalism is go for it. It consists of cutting it down and great scoops on the daily. If a pitch has a determined news peg, I will absolutely respond to it. However, if a pitch has a curious closing, 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 tired about it. The best stories always have cats and are usually about news hooks. The best way to reach me is by running it over to me, but you could also just write me.

Julia Boorstin:

That's hilarious. I would say, I do love cats. I have two cats, but I'm not going do stories about cats.

Beck Bamberger:

No one pitch Julia about cats, please. Everyone, that was just fictional. Okay.

Julia Boorstin:

Unless it's a tech story about cats.

Beck Bamberger:

Julia, thank you so much for being on. This was so fun.

Julia Boorstin:

Thank you.

Jered Martin:

Thanks for tuning in to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist featuring Julia Boorstin from CNBC. If you like our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and anywhere else you listen to podcasts. If you have a moment, leave us a review to share your thoughts about the show and today's episode.

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Jered Martin:

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Jered Martin:

We'll be back 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.