

****Jered:**** Hey everyone. Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, a podcast that is just that. Coffee, a journalist, and lots of conversation. I'm Jered Martin. I'm the COO and Co-Founder here at OnePitch.

****Beck:**** And I'm Beck Bamberger, also the Co-Founder of OnePitch, the CEO of BAM Communications, and the host for today's podcast. Today, we have on Alejandro Alba. He's from NowThis, where he's a host and a producer. What I love about Alejandro is, he was already gearing up for this position in high school when he was the morning announcer.

****Beck:**** You know that person who's on the P.A. saying "And today, in the week of the high school, lunch specials include..." So, that was him! That was his job. So, now he's here with NowThis, being the host and producer for all the things he does. We're going to have a great conversation with him. Alejandro, thank you for being here at Coffee With a Journalist.

****Alejandro:**** Thank you for having me and thank you for the coffee.

****Beck:**** Yes, you actually have it.

****Alejandro:**** Yes.

****Beck:**** Do you take it? Wait. What's in there? Got a little bit of cream.

****Alejandro:**** Soy.

****Beck:**** Oh, soy. Okay.

****Alejandro:**** I recently stumbled upon soy, you know, coffee, using soy. I love it.

****Beck:**** Any sugar?

****Alejandro:**** Uh, just one.

****Beck:**** Just one?

****Alejandro:**** Yeah, just one.

****Beck:**** Okay.

****Alejandro:**** Just a little bit of sweetness.

****Beck:**** A little bit of sweet and soy coffee for Alejandro. Alejandro Alba is from NowThis media. He's currently a host and producer. And, we're going to talk a lot about NowThis, because I don't think a lot of people know too much about the platform and such. But first, I like to get into how you got into media and where this came about, how you thought; I'm going to be a journalist when I grow up. So, take us back a little bit. First, you were in London doing your undergrad there.

****Alejandro:**** Yes.

****Beck:**** Or actually, at University of Texas, and then, The International University of London. So, take us back to University of Texas.

****Alejandro:**** Definitely. Well, I'm going to take you back even further of when I actually started...

****Beck:**** Uh-huh.

****Alejandro:**** ... doing journalism, and when my interest kind of fully developed. And, that was in high school, because growing up, I never thought I'd be a journalist. I actually hated the news.

****Beck:**** You did?

****Alejandro:**** My parents, my dad specifically, and my grandfather would always have a newscast on. Always. In the background it was always running, no matter what we were doing, the news were always on. And, I remember I was a happy child, and I hated sad news and all the tragedy that was happening around the world. And so, I remember that I wanted to stay away from that. But then, in middle school, there was a yearbook class. And, I remember I wanted to be a part of it so bad.

****Alejandro:**** And that was, I think, the early, early beginning of my interest for journalism of, you know, putting together a whole editorial, you know, book. And, interviewing people, and taking photos, and doing little video snippets. And then, in high school, I eventually joined, well, it was journalism yearbook class. And, the first day of my Sophomore year, an upperclassman comes up to me. The bell had just rang. I just had sat down.

****Alejandro:**** And, she comes to me. She's like, "Hey you. You want to do the school announcements?" I was like, "Uh." So she was like, "Cool! Awesome! Follow me!" She just grabs me by the arm, drags me to the library where they make the school announcements.

****Beck:**** Yeah.

****Alejandro:**** Yeah, like over the speaker and all. And, she's like, "Okay, so, just introduce yourself. Say good morning, and just read down this list." And from there on out, I just got more involved. I started doing internships and fellowships, and then, just kind of kept opening doors, you know, for myself. And I'm here.

****Beck:**** So, when you went to University of Texas at El Paso, just for anyone who's counting notes here, you did your Bachelor's in Multimedia Journalism. Did you go straight in knowing you were going to do this major?

****Alejandro:**** Yes. Definitely.

****Beck:**** Or, did you... Okay.

****Alejandro:**** Yeah. So, at that point, once I graduated high school, I knew that I wanted to be a journalist. So, I stayed home. It was... you know, I had some other, like, options in my head of where I wanted to go. But at the end of the day, money is a factor.

****Beck:**** That's right.

****Alejandro:**** So, I, you know, I was able to get Financial Aid at UTEP. And you know, it worked out perfectly. I got a lot of great experience being there. I was able to work at a local TV station while I was going to school. I worked for the college newspaper, which sometimes was a competitor to local TV when it came to stories.

****Beck:**** Wow!

****Alejandro:**** You know, more campus-related stories, but you know, we had some stuff that happened that, you know, other TV stations wanted to pick up on, and we had the lead. We had the scoop, obviously, because of location.

****Beck:**** Mm-hmm.

****Alejandro:**** But, yeah it was a great experience. I think I learned a lot though, you know, being editor of the college newspaper and then doing other internships because of that.

****Beck:**** Mm-hmm.

****Alejandro:**** And from there, I was about to graduate. I was in such a rush to leave El Paso and, you know, start life elsewhere.

****Beck:**** Yes.

****Alejandro:**** And, I was going to graduate in three years. And, I had finished all my coursework and, I remember very clearly I was signing my application to graduate. And, once I was like filling it out, I just had an epiphany. And I was like, "What am I doing?" I like, I'm graduating, but without a plan, which is not bad. Sometimes, it's, you know, the best thing you can do.

****Alejandro:**** But then, I was like "I should be taking advantage of being a student." You know. There are so many scholarships. You know, you have the safety net, I like to call of being a student, you know. Don't take everything too seriously. And so, I didn't turn in the application, ripped it and applied to London and then I got a scholarship to go. So, it worked out perfectly, because all that traveling kind of gave me a whole completely different perspective on life, and world, and my craft, and what I wanted to do, and what I didn't want to do, which is equally as important.

****Beck:**** Mm-hmm. So, what did that travel do for you? You do know that you are a travel geek! So, you probably got a lot of exposure there.

****Alejandro:**** Yes. Yeah.

****Beck:**** What did you learn from that experience that made you go, Ah! This is what I do not want to do?

****Alejandro:**** Yes. Well, I knew I didn't want to do print. That's for sure. Although I, then, I came to New York to work for a print publication. But, that was also amazing. But yeah. I mean, there was a doubt in the back of my head, because before I wanted to be a journalist, I always said that I wanted to be a doctor and I have, still, a huge interest when it comes to medicine.

****Alejandro:**** And so, I think there was that doubt of like, you're graduating, what are you going to do? And, I think it helped me clear that doubt off. Like no, no, no. I don't want to pursue

another eight years in school or do something else. Like, this is a good track for me. So, that was one thing that got cleared up. But, to that whole travel geek, you know, I have it on my Twitter bio, I think, or my Instagram bio.

****Alejandro:**** But yeah, that actually started in 2012. I was part... selected as to be part of fellowship of sorts, to go do field research in Indonesia. And I focused on eco-tourism and I did a set of videos, and kind of like, small documentaries and a blog of what is going on with eco-tourism there. And then, we were able to present that in Sweden a year later. So, I think that, that's where it started. And then, all that came back when I was doing the applications.

****Alejandro:**** I was like, I should travel more. That was amazing. And yeah. After that, I just, I feel like it's good to leave the city. I try. I try, and I was really good about this last year and the year before. This year, I mean, life happens. But, if it's possible to kind of escape your bubble, your city, or wherever, ever so often, it just helps you clarify certain things in life, you know.

****Beck:**** It does.

****Alejandro:**** It just gives you a nice refresh.

****Beck:**** I've been to about seven countries, and it's...

****Alejandro:**** That's amazing.

****Beck:**** ... just remarkable to travel and refresh. And you don't need to go to fancy expensive places.

****Alejandro:**** Right.

****Beck:**** You can go to very sparse, very undeveloped places and find so many gems of learning about yourself via that way.

****Alejandro:**** Yes. I think that's very important to say that. It doesn't have to be expensive. Like, a lot of people here travel and immediately think, Paris, Spain, or like, you know, something glamorous, or something far. But, travel could be Upstate, New York. And, you're going to encounter a completely different crowd. Everything will be different, because you're just not used to it. You probably didn't know that existed. You know, go to Beacon. That's probably a 30 dollar, like, train ride. And, you saved yourself a lot, and you got to disconnect a little bit.

****Beck:**** So, how did you get your first job at the New York Daily News? Well, how did you even get to New York? What was this about?

****Alejandro:**** So, yeah. So, BuzzFeed was in between that. So, I went to London. I was there for six months, although, of course, six months felt like a really long time, which I love. I was trying to stay there longer. That didn't work out. And then, I came back, and I really had a internship lined up at Washington, so, I was in D.C. for five months working for Scripps Howard. And, I was reporting from The White House a lot, whether it was the Press Room, like the Briefing Room, or I was at, like, in some event within The White House.

****Beck:**** So, you were in The White House? Hanging out?

****Alejandro:**** Yeah. It was pretty surreal.

****Beck:**** Wow! What's it like?

****Alejandro:**** It was cool. I mean, I'm sure now, it's very different.

****Beck:**** Okay. So, you were there during Obama's Administration?

****Alejandro:**** I was, yeah. I was there during the Obama Administration. It was very surreal, because there were events where you were in the East Room, and Michelle comes out with

Janelle Monae, or, you know, they have, like, two Olympians that they're giving them awards or veterans that have done so many amazing things for this country and you're there with a bunch of elite journalists that everyone knows. And, you're like, a student like, Oh, I have a question, you know. It's just... it was an amazing experience. And, yeah.

****Beck:**** Did you ever raise your hand to say, "Hey, I got a question. In the back!"

****Alejandro:**** I didn't... so, that's the thing. Like, you may raise your hand. Will you be called upon? Maybe not! But yeah, I was able to ask a question once or twice. So, yeah, it was an amazing experience. And, you know, even though I'm not in politics now, I mean, every now and then, there's a lot of crossovers and I've done some political coverage. But, it was an amazing experience.

****Alejandro:**** And so, I think that kind of reinforced the idea that I should stay in journalism. And so, while I was in D.C., I... BuzzFeed was kind of, like, hot at that moment, and it was 2014, and you know, everyone wanted to, like, share Listicles and all that. It was a new format, in a way. And, I applied for a fellowship they had in L.A., but they offered it here in New York. And so, I said, Yeah. I had been to New York once.

****Beck:**** Once?

****Alejandro:**** Yeah. Like, everyone wants to go to New York. It's an amazing city. Why not? Let's see what's... If it doesn't work out, either I go somewhere else or I go back to El Paso, you know, it doesn't... I don't know. Let's just try it. So, I said, yes. I came with a four-month fellowship. At the end of the fellowship, there was an option to stay and see, like, what's open within the company.

****Alejandro:**** But yeah, at the end of those four months, like, kind of, BuzzFeed was going through like, some transitions. Like, when BuzzFeed News came aboard, it was like an exciting time during the company. But, I had an offer from the New York Daily News and I thought it would be amazing to work for a legacy paper in New York. But, you know?

****Beck:**** Yeah. Yeah.

****Alejandro:**** And, I think that would also be an amazing... I jumped on that opportunity because I thought it would be a great introduction into the city and really, really get to know it. And, it turned out to be an amazing two-and-a-half years. I learned a lot.

****Beck:**** So, yeah. Let's talk about what you learned there, because that is legendary publication. I don't even know how long it's been around, 1919, according to Wikipedia. What did you gather there for two years that you were there?

****Alejandro:**** You know, there's a lot of very well-trained journalists. And, I think, I think I got a lot of, like, the confidence I have as a journalist now, through there. You know, just not being timid when it comes to asking questions, or trying to get a scoop. Also, kind of, like, caged that you know, like aggressiveness or that, like, that confidence, you know. You don't want to be over-aggressive. But, I think I learned a lot of those little things that you don't learn in school, you know. It's not a textbook teaching type of thing.

****Beck:**** Was there ever a scoop you got that you were like, "Damn, that was good?"

****Alejandro:**** There were a couple stories that... Okay, there was one that was kind of got ahead of the headlines, so that's good. That, like, other, you know, if you could produce a story that, then, other people, you know, aggregate, that's a good- that's a win. Yes, what is that dating service? I'm lacking on the name right now. That dating service...

****Beck:**** Bumble?

****Alejandro:**** ... No. The one that...

****Beck:**** Tinder?

****Alejandro:**** ... seeking arrangements.

****Beck:**** Oh, seeking arrangements.

****Alejandro:**** Was it?

****Beck:**** Ashley Madison.

****Alejandro:**** Ashley Madison. So, the big Ashley Madison hack.

****Beck:**** Because, that was a PR disaster!

****Alejandro:**** Yes.

****Beck:**** Yes.

****Alejandro:**** So, I was kind of ahead of the game with that one. And, I remember, like, one of the stories that, I don't want to say I broke. But, I was definitely early with it, was, like, how to find out if someone you know is on the list. And so, obviously, that did well, because that produced a lot more stories. Because then, you would put in a congressman or you would put, you know, your next door neighbor or a family member, and you would find out they're on the list. And then, you know, people like drama, so, that generated a lot of it. But... so there you go. A scandal piece.

****Beck:**** Okay. There's no shame in that.

****Alejandro:**** But, yeah, I was there for two-and-half-years, and it was just amazing. I learned a lot about the city as well. To be quite honest, I'm not the most versed in sports. And so, it was nice to know, like, about the Mets, and their history, and like, also know about the politics within New York City. I knew some, but I wasn't, you know, fully in it. And, I think the New York Daily News was an amazing introduction to the city.

****Beck:**** Yeah, what an introduction indeed, because you get the whole grasp. And then, you're covering landscape in which you're reporting. I'd love that.

****Alejandro:**** And, I'm also working with a bunch of locals, so...

****Beck:**** Yeah, yeah. Exactly.

****Alejandro:**** ... they, you know...

****Beck:**** They tell you what's up.

****Alejandro:**** ... they were born and raised around, like, in the area, so, they help you.

****Beck:**** So now let's go to the, now, this job where you did a little freelance and stuff. Now, you're a tech reporter. Now you're there, and you're the Editorial Producer, but also, you know, Hosting Producer of sorts. Can you give everybody an overview on what NowThis is about and what's going on there?

****Alejandro:**** Yeah.

****Beck:**** Because, this is a new-ish entity.

****Alejandro:**** Yeah, and NowThis is getting a lot of attention. I mean, it's, I feel like it's always been big on social media. But... so, we're a social media and news organization. And, we have a website now, which is recent, recently new. But, we're mostly on Facebook. That's our biggest platform. We're also on Twitter. We're on Instagram. SnapChat's another big one of ours and YouTube.

****Alejandro:**** But yeah, we kind of cover the issues that everyone cares about, especially millennials. That's our biggest audience. That's the biggest demographic. And, we have a really,

really good audience that we'd like to say that we definitely understand. I mean, we have the content and the numbers, you know, to prove that. But, yes, we're a social media news platform, in short.

****Beck:**** In short. So then, to help publicists out who are listening, what do you want to be pitched? Especially when you have the title of, host, you know, producer. Do you get a bunch of pitches?

****Alejandro:**** I do. Yes. And, it mostly comes from previous jobs and previous connections.

****Beck:**** Got it. Okay.

****Alejandro:**** But, pitches are always welcome.

****Beck:**** Pitches are welcome.

****Alejandro:**** Always.

****Beck:**** Holy cow!

****Alejandro:**** And they weren't...

****Beck:**** We don't usually hear that.

****Alejandro:**** ... you know. But, yeah, pitches are always welcome. You never know. I... some of my... I can't think of an example in the top of my head. But, I know this for sure, that, a lot of unexpected pitches have turned out to be amazing in the past. So, you just never know where your next big pitch is going to come.

****Beck:**** This is true.

****Alejandro:**** And, if it's something juicy, you know, we're on signal. We're in places that are encrypted. Please message us.

****Beck:**** Nice. And, your email address is, by the way, on your Twitter Feed, so people can easily find you there.

****Alejandro:**** Yes. Mm-hmm.

****Beck:**** But, as you were saying, in welcoming pitches, what in a pitch stands out to you?

****Alejandro:**** We definitely want a human interest story, something that really affects the bigger demographic. We don't want something super, you know, specific. So, it's like, for example, like, for NowThis Future, our audience, they love robotics, you know. They love cool gadgets. But, they also care about the issues when it comes to, like, privacy and climate change. They love space.

****Alejandro:**** And, this is like, NowThis Future, you know, we have different verticals. But, kind of like, when it comes to, like, numbers or sales. That's kind of, you know, that's more on the CNBC, you know.

****Beck:**** Mm-hmm . You're not doing funny announcements, for example?

****Alejandro:**** Funny announcements?

****Beck:**** Yeah, for companies.

****Alejandro:**** Yeah. Mm-hmm , yeah.

****Beck:**** No.

****Alejandro:**** No. I mean, unless it's like something everyone's talking about.

****Beck:**** Ridiculous, yeah.

****Alejandro:**** Yeah.

****Beck:**** Got it. So, as the host, tell us a little bit about just the day-to-day for you. Obviously, you're on camera. But, you're also producing. So, are you're cutting your own stuff? Or, how does that work?

****Alejandro:**** Yeah. You know how it works nowadays, you have to be a one-man band. Yeah. So, yeah. I see a project through from beginning to end from, you know, from inception to scripting, to, obviously, there's the whole production crew behind the camera. So, then, I host. And then, I cut myself. And, I think, I like that. It's like, I know angles, or I know, like, how I scripted it.

****Alejandro:**** But, there are... there have been times when I do get to work with other producers and I love that too, where they see a project from beginning to end. And, they know what we're working with, and then, they'll cut it themselves. But, yeah, most of the time, I'm cutting my own stuff. Yeah.

****Beck:**** How long does that take? So, let's say, you go out today. You film something. Give us the whole round-a-bout, because a lot of the folks that we have on here, and who we are normally pitching, are behind the desk. You know, they're writing a piece. There is no video component. They don't need to go out and shoot the photography for it. It's provided, let's say.

****Beck:**** So, you're in a different grouping. But then, at the same time, you know, you're not a host on, let's say, CNBC. So, you're not doing that part of it. So, just give us an overview. Like, how much time does it take from pitch to submission of the piece?

****Alejandro:**** If it's an explainer, for example, an explainer that doesn't require interviews-

****Beck:**** Give us an example of that. Like, what's an explainer?

****Alejandro:**** So, for example, I did an explainer on robocalls, what they are, why we're getting them so often, nowadays. And then, what is being done to stop them, and what you can do to reduce the amount that you get. And so, that obviously required a lot of research, but, to say it takes, like, a day of research. But, it's also kind of low lift. You know, it's nothing too serious, where like, you know, as maybe a number. It's an app, you know, that you could help reduce that amount. So, say that was, like, maybe a day or two of research. At the end of that day, the second day, you shoot. And then, you start editing and that can take like an hour or two. So...

****Beck:**** That's it.

****Alejandro:**** ... I mean, just, yeah. I think, I mean, that was, like, also before, like, we have a new... it depends on the format. It depends on the graphics. It depends on the B-roll. And for example, that was, like, one of my low lift type of videos. If it's an event, obviously, you know, there's traveling included. But then, it's an event that happened the same day, so, you should probably get it out that same day. It just, it depends. But...

****Beck:**** Just asking.

****Alejandro:**** ... you know, it could be something from, like, a day, or like, two hours, actually. Like, something really, really short to like, a week, or like, two months if it's something that's very deep or longer. And so, it just, it depends. There's, I don't think there's a clear answer.

****Beck:**** And what about what you like to do. What's your favorite stuff that you like to be posting on, or filming, or what not?

****Alejandro:**** Yeah. I love hosting. And, I love going out to the field, you know. When it comes to tech, I think robotics is pretty cool. I personally am a fan of virtual reality and augmented reality. That doesn't, you know, the camera's not great at capturing that stuff. But, yeah, no. I love hosting. I, you know, I like... privacy's another big thing that I focus on, especially nowadays with so many breaches and so much information up for grabs. I think it's important to help people realize how serious this is and how they can protect themselves. So, I do a lot of explainers that are kind of service-y.

****Beck:**** Helping the consumer.

****Alejandro:**** Mm-hmm . Yeah.

****Beck:**** Especially tech-savvy ones.

****Alejandro:**** Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, it's kind of like the intersection of tech and culture, in a way.

****Beck:**** That's fun.

****Alejandro:**** Yeah. Never gets boring.

****Beck:**** How has your bilingual asset helped you, would you say, in storytelling? And, English, obviously. What else do you speak?

****Alejandro:**** I speak very little Portuguese, but that does not make it on to my resume. That's like an, after I'm hired fact. But, like, yeah. I, so Spanish, I'm fully versed in Spanish and English. And, it's great. It helped me a lot more when I was in D.C. and in El Paso. You know, there are bigger demographics there. I'm not doing anything coverage-wise that requires for me to, like, translate a lot.

Alejandro: But, in a newsroom, it's always important. It's always important to have people that speak other languages and they're from other cultures. Representation in diversity, it's so helpful, because whether it's a headline that might have a turn that might not be well received, someone could catch it, and you could run it by those people. So, I think...

Beck: Does that happen too? At NowThis. Do you guys do that, and kind of crowdsource like, "Hey, how does this article fit? How does this headline look?"

Alejandro: Yeah, I notice what's really good- I notice what's really good about kind of like, a checks and balances, you know, of using everyone in the newsroom when needed, you know, to see if something should be brainstormed a little more. You know, really tinkered with. But, yeah, I think, you know, I think that's where my lingual skills come in handy much more often than in my coverage.

Beck: Mm-hmm. If you had to look back, and this is only a few years, because you haven't been doing this for 10, 20, or 30 years!

Alejandro: No, no, no.

Beck: You have some people who have been doing it for that long. Would you do journalism again? Would you go back and be like, "Absolutely pursue this career path"?

Alejandro: Definitely, unless someone was like, "Be in my movie. You're going to be an Oscar-winning actor", then I wouldn't.

Beck: Well, so, if Hollywood calls, then, bye, bye!

Alejandro: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

****Beck:**** Okay. And then, what do you think about the future of media? What is the future? You mentioned the VR stuff.

****Alejandro:**** Mm-hmm.

****Beck:**** Maybe there's an element of that.

****Alejandro:**** That's been, you know, mentioned. Blockchain has been mentioned, but, it's not going to happen anytime soon. People are still trying to figure out what Blockchain is. To be quite honest, every time you do a piece on Blockchain, it's like, oh, there's a new thing about it. Okay. Cool! How do we conceptualize this to people, especially, like, in video?

****Alejandro:**** There's that. I feel like, you know, the year's thing is definitely, like, I can't speak for, like, the evolution of it so far. I mean, obviously, I know it's like, how it's evolved. But, yeah. I mean, it's not going to die. And, you know, people are like, "Journalism's dead." It's like, no, journalism's never going to die. It's just going to adapt to the times, and it's going to change its presentation. But, for now, it's on social.

****Beck:**** For now it's on social?

****Alejandro:**** Yeah.

****Beck:**** Well Alejandro, thank you for being here.

****Alejandro:**** Thank you for having me.

****Beck:**** Oh, you're almost done with your coffee. See.

****Alejandro:**** Almost done, yeah.

****Beck:**** Perfect timing. Thanks again.

****Alejandro:**** Thanks so much.

****Jered:**** Thanks for listening to Speak To Coffee With a Journalist, featuring Alejandro Alba from NowThis. If you're a journalist who loves coffee, or a publicist who loves this podcast, we'd love to hear from you. Head to onepitch.co to drop us a line. Until then, let's end bad pitches, and start great stories.