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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 cover technology, lifestyle and culture, health, science, 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, pitches they receive, and lots more.

Jered Martin:

On today's show, we're joined by Ilyse Liffreing, social media editor and reporter at Ad Age. Ilyse has served previous roles at NBC News and Digiday, and now covers the latest news surrounding social media, prominent platforms, and the emerging landscape. Ilyse shares with us how many hundreds of emails she receives daily, why she has to read every pitch in her inbox, the components of a good pitch that fit her beat, and more. Let's hear from Ilyse and Beck on the show today.

Beck Bamberger:

Hey everyone, welcome to Coffee with a Journalist. This is I don't even know what episode because it's COVID, and who knows what time it is, or day it is, or whatever we got going on. But, I'm so excited because today, on this lovely Friday afternoon so we are not drinking coffee, that's for sure, we have Ilyse Liffreing from Ad Age, who's here to talk with us about all the things going on with social media. There's a lot, I can tell you that up front.

Beck Bamberger:

We're just happy to have you here, Ilyse, thanks for being here.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Thank you, it's great to be here. Happy Friday.

Beck Bamberger:

Happy Friday. Hopefully whoever's listening right now is enjoying this on a Friday, but it's podcasts so it's in the future. But, we have lots to cover today because you're covering a lot and it's all within social media. There's a lot of topics in social media right now.

Beck Bamberger:

Actually, before I get into how you craft the story, how your inbox is looking, is there anything that's surprised you of social media in this last couple months, as you've been in this realm?

Ilyse Liffreing:

For me, it just seems like everybody is just posting more, and more, and more. COVID, racial injustice issues, everything has just made us all head to our phones, our laptops, anything to get the word out about how we're feeling about what's happening in the news. It just hasn't slowed down, if anything it's just gotten progressively faster.

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Beck Bamberger:

That's for dang sure. How does your inbox look, Ilyse? We like to talk about what's in there, how many pitches you're getting, how do you keep it clean, et cetera. Tell us what's going on in there.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yeah. Right now it's summer, so it's not as crazy as it is during the year. But, roughly I can get around ... It's hard to say, but if I do miss a day of work for whatever reason, I'm out, or sick, or something, I definitely have at least 300 emails waiting for me the next morning.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh gosh.

Ilyse Liffreing:

So, it's busy.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. How many are pitches, though?

Ilyse Liffreing:

I would say the majority of them are pitches, for sure.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, a majority? Okay. What do you do with those pitches? Are you one of those people who reads every single one? Or, you do the mass delete to get to inbox zero? What would you say?

Ilyse Liffreing:

I have to look at each and every one. I don't know if it's just a compulsion of mine, but I have to feel like I need to know what everybody's pitching me, because I don't want to miss anything, I don't want to accidentally pass over something that could be really good. So definitely, I'd have to check every email. All of my emails are read, in my inbox.

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Beck Bamberger:

Wow! Now then, what do you do? If you see a pitch you do like, do you respond to it right away, do you star it? What do you do?

Ilyse Liffreing:

It depends. Usually, I have to check first with my editor, to see if a story is of interest to us, so he has to approve. Sometimes, I will just email them back and be like, "Listen, I have to check with my editor about this, but this is really interesting. We might be interested." Sometimes, I'll say that. Other times, I'm

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pretty sure I'm editor will approve it so I will just say, "Yes, when can they talk?" Or just, "We're interested, and we want to get this ball rolling." It's different every time.

Ilyse Liffreing:

I try to respond as much as possible.

Beck Bamberger:

Wow, you're one of those! My goodness. That's great.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yeah, I try to. Sometimes, it just doesn't work out.

Beck Bamberger:

That's impressive. I don't hear a lot of people say that they even make the attempt to reply. And then, there's definitely quite a handful of folks who just do the mass delete like, "Oh, I don't know you? Boom, gone."

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yeah, that seems too rude for me. Maybe I'm too nice, for a journalist. I like PR people in general, too.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, that's ... Look at that! Great. What do you find redeeming about such people? These are the people listening to the show right now.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yeah. They understand what we want to hear, basically. I'm impressed, a lot of the time, by the pitches that I receive.

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Beck Bamberger:

Impressed? Wow!

Ilyse Liffreing:

There's a lot of journalists that go to Twitter, and they post bad examples of pitches that they get. I would never do that personally, just because I find that a little rude. But yeah, more often than not, I'm very impressed with the pitches, and I wish I could write about everything.

Beck Bamberger:

Now, your focus is a bit narrow, because you're doing completely social media focus. But, how often are you getting pitches where you're like, "Dang, that's so off in left field, I don't even know why someone sent me something." Do you get those at all?

Ilyse Liffreing:

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I definitely do, and I definitely still forward them to other members of the Ad Age team.

Beck Bamberger:

Wow, you are really nice. You forward them along, amazing!

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yes I do. Often times, I will tell the PR person that I am doing that, or even CC the other person in a forwarded email.

Beck Bamberger:

Wow! You're the nicest person, Ilyse, I've ever heard on this show. Wow! Nice. Okay everybody, this is a pro-PR person and actually responds to pitches, amazing. I love it.

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Beck Bamberger:

What does it take for you to come up with a great story? Let's say you get all those pitches, you see something. You're like, "Oh! Yeah, that's a cool thing, and let me run with it," from a pitch? Or, are you starting from ... Do you go into Twitter and you go down a rabbit hole and you're like, "Oh, okay. Now I've got to talk about this, and I'm just going to go ahead and do that?"

Ilyse Liffreing:

Sometimes it is like that. Sometimes I do go down a rabbit hole and I want to include everything in the story, basically. I just can't. Often times, if I just keep looking for things to include, I'll just keep including them and it just gets too long.

Ilyse Liffreing:

But, what I'm really looking for, a good pitch has ... At least when I write about social media and things that are happening, I'm focused on trends a lot. So any pitches that have recent examples of brands and what they're doing on social media, if it's part of a trend, those are the really helpful pitches that often becomes stories.

Beck Bamberger:

You've been doing a lot on Animal Crossing, for example.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Beck Bamberger:

Now with that, did any of these recent pieces you've been doing, do those come from pitches? Or, was that just you doing what you do, to research and dig in?

Ilyse Liffreing:

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I've done a couple roundups about Animal Crossing, and then a few separate stories. Some of those came from pitches, and then others I found on my own. Basically, I was pitched one story about an Animal Crossing experience, and then maybe the next day I was pitched another one. Then it was oh, there might be a trend going on here, let me see if I can find others on my own. That's how it became a story, because I was able to find some others.

Beck Bamberger:

Got it. Is that often the case? Does this happen for you, where okay, maybe something started with the pitch, then you see it somewhere else, but then you see it again. In other words, are there sometimes multiple indications that you should then do something, that then compels you to make the story happen?

Ilyse Liffreing:

For sure. Yes. Mostly, that does come across in PR pitches, at least with news that has not been reported yet. That's where I realize, "Oh, there might be something here, I should take a look at it because this many people are pitching me about this."

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. That's a good barometer to see, "Oh shoot, everyone's talking about Animal Crossing," and you have extensively covered that. So, there you go.

Beck Bamberger:

Frankly, I didn't even know that there were brands making their own worlds on there, I just learned that in one of your articles. Wow, look at that. Custom Animal Crossing islands, who would have thought?

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yeah, it's a fun one.

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Beck Bamberger:

That is a fun one. But also, wow. Okay, I guess that's happening.

Ilyse Liffreing:

We all have a little too much time on our hands.

Beck Bamberger:

Maybe so, but it's a different time. It's a different time these days, so I get it.

Jered Martin:

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

Jered Martin:

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Jered Martin:

Now, back to today's episode.

Beck Bamberger:

Let's play a word association game. I'm just going to give you a word, and you just tell me the first thing that pops up. Are you ready?

Ilyse Liffreing:

Okay. Yes.

Beck Bamberger:

Food.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Bananas.

Beck Bamberger:

I love bananas, myself. Okay, drink.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Soda. I don't even drink that much soda, I don't know why I said soda.

Beck Bamberger:

Hey, look at that brand impact, though. You think drink and soda. You're like water, you're like, "Soda!"

Ilyse Liffreing:

I know!

Beck Bamberger:

Okay, hobby.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Swimming.

Beck Bamberger:

Memes.

Ilyse Liffreing:

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Reese Witherspoon.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh yeah, that was a good one that you wrote about. Yeah.

Ilyse Liffreing:

She's the Meme Queen now, in my head.

Beck Bamberger:

She is kind of, yeah. Twitter.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Oh gosh. Tweetdeck.

Beck Bamberger:

Influencers.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Influencer houses.

Beck Bamberger:

New York City.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Washington Heights.

Beck Bamberger:

Facebook.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Branded groups.

Beck Bamberger:

TikTok.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Phone.

Beck Bamberger:

Data.

Ilyse Liffreing:

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Privacy.

Beck Bamberger:

Animal Crossing.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Boredom.

Beck Bamberger:

Journalism.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Writing.

Beck Bamberger:

Pitch.

Ilyse Liffreing:

PR.

Beck Bamberger:

Inbox.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Email.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay, that's good.

Beck Bamberger:

Especially given your role with social media coverage, what do you read? Books, or podcasts, or Netflix series. What are you consuming?

Ilyse Liffreing:

I consume so much.

Beck Bamberger:

Tell us, tell us. We want to hear everything.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yeah. I consume everything. As much as I can, really.

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Beck Bamberger:

Yeah.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Mostly, it's Twitter, Twitter feeds, any type of news that ends up on Twitter. I share that to my colleagues on Slack, so I do that all day. Basically, at night it's Netflix. Usually, I work out while I watch a show.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, there you go.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Then, I read.

Beck Bamberger:

What shows are you watching, by the way?

Ilyse Liffreing:

Oh gosh, so many shows. I've been really into the cooking shows lately, on Netflix.

Beck Bamberger:

People love those.

Ilyse Liffreing:

You know, I actually am a very bad cook, I don't cook that much.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh hey, that's okay.

Ilyse Liffreing:

But I love watching the competitions, and I love watching Sugar Highs, one of the recent ones.

Beck Bamberger:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ilyse Liffreing:

I've been watching all those, non-stop.

Beck Bamberger:

Nice. Okay, and then you said reading.

Ilyse Liffreing:

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Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

Novels, magazines, what are you reading?

Ilyse Liffreing:

Novels. I've been trying to read more books, because I feel like I got away from that a little bit. So right now, I'm reading American Dirt.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes, good one! Yes.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yeah, New York Times bestseller.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah, that's an Oprah Book Club one, too.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yes.

Beck Bamberger:

Don't you love ... Oh, gosh. I remember this very fondly, in summers, and we're here in summer right now. Which is, man, I used to consume novels upon novels in the summers, growing up. Now, I love it, too. When you get one that you just love so much, and you're so invested in the story, and then it ends. You're sad, because that book, you're with the characters, it's sad. It's like when you end a series, too. You're like, "Oh, now what am I going to do?"

Ilyse Liffreing:

Sure.

Beck Bamberger:

At least, that's how I feel.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Oh, definitely.

Beck Bamberger:

Is there anything else on your coming up book read list for the summer?

Ilyse Liffreing:

That's a good question, I don't know. I don't know what my next one will be.

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Beck Bamberger:

Oh! Did you read, by the way, No Filter?

Ilyse Liffreing:

No, I haven't. Sounds like my next book.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh! Oh, let me pull it up real quick. It's by Sarah Frier, it's the inside story of Instagram.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Oh! I have seen this, I have seen this.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh my God, it's so juicy. If you're into bad blood, which was the whole story of Theranos. Oh man, this isn't as juicy, because that was a flaming turd of a crashing story of Silicon Valley Doomsday stuff, related to Theranos. This isn't that, because of course Instagram is still here, and here to this day. But oh, is it juicy, with just the inner workings of Facebook.

Beck Bamberger:

It's one of those stories, too, that's, and I love books like this, where the story's still going. Another book could come out about what, now, is the fate of this app.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, it's so good.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Okay, that's my next book.

Beck Bamberger:

Sarah Frier. She's currently still, I believe, a reporter at Bloomberg, so she extensively studied this.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay, now what we like to go into is on a more serious topic, perhaps. What do you think the future of journalism looks like?

Ilyse Liffreing:

Right now, it's so sad just seeing so many journalists laid off. It's a depressing time, for sure. And seeing a lot of these newsrooms, too, not even say that much about racial injustice issues, but people are leaving

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because of them. That Bon Appétit stuff that happened last week, for instance, that was just very, very sad. I hope it gets better from here. I think it can only get better.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah, that's an optimistic output. Yeah.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yeah, and all these issues have been brought to light, and these companies are basically forced to say something. I don't think it'll go away, and I think we'll expect some more layoffs before this is all over, but hopefully it'll be better. It might take a couple years to get there.

Beck Bamberger:

It might take a couple years, that's for sure.

Beck Bamberger:

When you started off as a content intern at the Orange County Register, which was almost 10 years ago-

Ilyse Liffreing:

Oh my God!

Beck Bamberger:

And then, even in Huntington Beach when you were an intern there, too. Would you say to that intern self, "Yeah, go into this industry, go into this field?"

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yeah, I would I was told not to go into this field by a lot of people, including my professors at NYU, when I was in grad school.

Beck Bamberger:

Really? They were like, "Yeah. No, don't do that."

Ilyse Liffreing:

They were like, "If I was in your shoes, I don't know if I would continue in this field," which is very disheartening to hear. Even at our graduation speech, one of the professors was like, "Congratulations everybody, on graduating! But, only a couple of you will actually become journalists."

Beck Bamberger:

Oh my God, that's depressing! I mean, realistic but, God.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yeah. I've been lucky to get opportunities, I guess. I don't think it's because of people I've known or anything like that, I'd like to think it's just because I work hard. I think anybody can do it, if they put their mind to it.

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Beck Bamberger:

Yes. We must point out, just so people know, that okay, you were a web and photo content intern, for City of Huntington Beach. Then, you were a content intern, OC Register. Then, you did some stuff for the San Francisco Performing Arts Examiner. Then, you were a social media videographer intern, at a foundation. Then, you were photographer for a brief time, University of San Fran. Then, you were a social media intern, City of Long Beach. Then, you were a teacher for English second language. Then, you were editorial video intern, City Weekend. Then, you were an editorial intern, New York Magazine. Then, you were editorial intern at NBC. Then, you were an intern at Tom's Guide Laptop Magazine. Then, an audience development intern at NBC News.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

You've clearly paid the dues, to get there.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yeah, I hope I never have to do another one.

Beck Bamberger:

No. My God, that's seven or eight internships, but here you are.

Beck Bamberger:

Have you ever thought about writing to that guy who give the speech?

Ilyse Liffreing:

Honestly, no I haven't thought about writing to him, but maybe I should.

Beck Bamberger:

Maybe an idea. Just be like, "Just to remind, I'm one of the people you mentioned probably wouldn't, but here I am." Just a thought, for your COVID time. I'm sure you're busy.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

Well Ilyse, we've come to my favorite part, which is our Mad Lib section.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Woo!

Beck Bamberger:

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Usually, shockingly accurate, a lot of these. But, we'll see what we get this time.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay, first thing is what is a catch phrase? Any catch phrase.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Important to important people.

Beck Bamberger:

Important to important people.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yes. The Ad Age catch phrase, if you will.

Beck Bamberger:

I love that. Someone told me today, a good friend of mine, we were talking and she just had a breakup. She has four criteria now, four criteria for her next partner. One of the requirements is kind, which you know ... But, then her other one was important. Oh, it was just fascinating, so we had this whole conversation about what that means. Oh, fascinating. Anyway, important to important people. Good, okay.

Beck Bamberger:

What's a journalist's scare phrase?

Ilyse Liffreing:

Deadline.

Beck Bamberger:

How about an empowering journalism buzzword?

Ilyse Liffreing:

Viral.

Beck Bamberger:

Viral? Yes. Then, an adjective?

Ilyse Liffreing:

Sparkling.

Beck Bamberger:

Then, what about a part of a pitch?

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Ilyse Liffreing:

Headline.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay, headline. Another adjective?

Ilyse Liffreing:

We'll do colorful now.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay, colorful, colorful. Good. What about another part of a pitch?

Ilyse Liffreing:

Examples.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay, yeah. Examples, that can work. Amount of time?

Ilyse Liffreing:

A decade.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, okay. This will be a good one. Another adjective?

Ilyse Liffreing:

Frosted.

Beck Bamberger:

Frosted? Yes. Okay, a singular noun?

Ilyse Liffreing:

Storm.

Beck Bamberger:

A topic?

Ilyse Liffreing:

History.

Beck Bamberger:

History, great. We're almost done. A verb ending in ING?

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Ilyse Liffreing:

Running.

Beck Bamberger:

And then, just any verb?

Ilyse Liffreing:

Fly.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Are we ready?

Ilyse Liffreing:

Yes.

Beck Bamberger:

Here is your Mad Lib, Ilyse. Okay.

Beck Bamberger:

To me, journalism is important to important people. It consists of deadlines and virals on the daily. If a pitch has a sparkling headline, I will absolutely respond to it. However, if a pitch has colorful examples, you can expect no reply from me. If a decade goes by and you don't see an email back from me, you can assume I'm not frosted about it. The best stories have storms, and are usually about history. The best way to reach me is by running it over to me, but you can also fly to me.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Nice.

Beck Bamberger:

I would like someone to fly to me.

Ilyse Liffreing:

That's great.

Beck Bamberger:

This was fun. Thank you for being on with me today.

Ilyse Liffreing:

Thank you so much.

Jered Martin:

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