

Jered Martin:

Hello, and welcome to Coffee With a Journalist, a podcast by OnePitch, featuring the tech industry's most well known journalists. The goal of our show is to uncover the real person behind the real stories you loved to read. We discuss their beat in news coverage, what their inbox looks like and a whole lot more. On today's show, we're joined by Macy Williams, a senior shopping editor for POPSUGAR. As her bio says, she literally shops for a living and writes about the best fashion, beauty, fitness, and home products. On the episode, Macy shares about the hundreds of pitches she receives and how relevant they are to her being, the way she builds relationships with PR pros and more. Let's hear more from Macy on today's episode.

Beck Bamberger:

Welcome everyone to Coffee With the Journalists. We actually have a journalist today who's drinking coffee. Macy Williams, thank you for being here.

Macy Williams:

Hi!

Beck Bamberger:

You are now the senior reporter over at POPSUGAR of shopping. Did I get that right?

Macy Williams:

Yes! Senior shopping editor at POPSUGAR.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh gosh!

Macy Williams:

Close enough.

Beck Bamberger:

We just spent about five minutes looking at this article you did on wedding dresses, 54 best wedding dresses, which happened to be, remarkably, most of them on sale right now, as you would imagine.

Macy Williams:

Yup!

Beck Bamberger:

Fun piece. How long did that one take you?

Macy Williams:

I definitely spent a little more time on that one. I took a few hours just because, you want to get all the good deals for everyone. It's definitely hard to be a bride in this current climate so, took some time.

Beck Bamberger:

It's a great roundup.

Macy Williams:

Thank you.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes. Well, let's jump into this, Ms. Macy. First off, how does your inbox look? Is it slammed with pitches? Is it hundreds of them? What do you do?

Macy Williams:

It's slammed with pitches. When I sit at my desk at 9:00 a.m., there's 200 to 300 emails in my inbox.

Beck Bamberger:

How many are pitches?

Macy Williams:

80 to 90% of them.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh wow. That's a high percent. Okay, that's high. That's a lot. So what do you do? What do you do?

Macy Williams:

That's my first thing. I can't concentrate on anything else until I get that to zero. So I'm a zero inbox person. Hands down.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, you're one of the rare ones here.

Macy Williams:

Yes. I cannot think unless that little inbox button doesn't have another.

Beck Bamberger:

You and Ryan Mac.

Macy Williams:

Oh, really?

Beck Bamberger:

Same thing. Viciously, within 10 minute increments, he likes to be at zero. How quick do you get to zero?

Macy Williams:

Well, in the morning, it'll take me about 30 to 45 minutes to go through all those pitches. To be honest, I don't, I mean, I'm deleting half of them because they have nothing to do ...

Beck Bamberger:

Yup. Yup.

Macy Williams:

Up and coming, Instagram star dropped a new single and I'm like, I'm a shopping editor. No, I'm not going to write about that.

Beck Bamberger:

What's the weirdest one you saw this week, would you say, off topic one?

Macy Williams:

Ooh. This week. I think someone sent me a pitch about this dusting device to clean your air conditioning vents, which is definitely not POPSUGAR-Y.

Beck Bamberger:

No.

Macy Williams:

And then I get a lot of micro-influencers looking to be featured in some way on POPSUGAR.

Beck Bamberger:

What?!

Macy Williams:

Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

Really?!

Macy Williams:

Yeah, a lot of the smaller influencers now have PR agencies trying to boost their visual.

Beck Bamberger:

Wait, wait, but micro ones?!

Macy Williams:

Oh yeah!

Beck Bamberger:

Less than 10, 000?!

Macy Williams:

I would say 10 to 50,000 follower type range, oh yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

Wow! Okay, that's news to me. I have not heard that, wow.

Macy Williams:

Yeah. But then I also label, the PR people that I work with a lot, I make sure they're labeled, so I don't miss their pitches.

Beck Bamberger:

Ah, okay. So that's a sorting mechanism you have.

Macy Williams:

Right. Those are the first ones I look at.

-

Beck Bamberger:

Ah, okay. I know, how does one get to be on that high first-dibs list? You met them in person? You like them? What happens?

Macy Williams:

Being a shopping editor, I feel those PR relationships are some of the most important relationships I have in editorial. So, I work with PR a lot on product releases, if they're going to give me some really good intel about something before it drops, if they work with great brands that I trust, I've definitely developed some great relationships over the years, and those are the PR people that I'm keeping an eye out for. And also I like their pitches because they really know what I'm going to write about. They understand the brand and they're not going to pitch me crazy stuff.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. Now you have also been now more than six years at POPSUGAR, does that make you one of the longest standing over there? That's a long time at one outlet.

Macy Williams:

Yes.

Beck Bamberger:

For today's climate.

Macy Williams:

In the millennial generation, everyone thinks I'm crazy, but honestly, every time I felt I've fulfilled all the challenges in a position at POPSUGAR, they've been very accommodating and giving me a new challenge and a new role. I was an intern my last semester of college in 2014, and then they hired me as an editorial assistant that summer.

Beck Bamberger:

For the living section.

Macy Williams:

Yes. And then I worked as an assistant editor on Smart Living, and Love and Sex for a couple years, which was very interesting.

Beck Bamberger:

I would imagine.

Macy Williams:

Lots of interesting interviews. I got to travel a lot, which was fun. And then when they decided three years ago that they wanted to start a Shop section, they asked me if I wanted to join it, and I was so onboard. I usually was the one doing a lot of the gift guides. I love shopping. If you want a recommendation on something, I will talk to you about it for 45 minutes. I don't care. I'm so happy about it. So I was thrilled to do that.

Beck Bamberger:

It's like a dream. It sounds like a dream.

Macy Williams:

Honestly, for someone who loves to write, who loves editorial, and who also loved to shop, there's not a better job.

Beck Bamberger:

That's fantastic. And you just recently, actually this is a few weeks old here, but you just had your gift guide that just got posted, too.

Macy Williams:

Yes. My summer in place.

Beck Bamberger:

So your summer, exactly, social distant appropriate. I got to check that one out.

Macy Williams:

There's just a lot of people looking for ways to show people they care. And obviously there's more ways beyond buying people things, but there was graduations coming up a lot of birthdays, and so that was just a cool way to get our entire editorial department together and recommend different gifts and different products that you may not necessarily know about. And I love it because it's a great way to feature a lot of DTC.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah! Yep.

Macy Williams:

Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah, you mentioned summering in place. Yes. Quite true. How do you go about deciding what stories you do? What's kind of your process.

Macy Williams:

I feel I'm going to give you a long answer.

Beck Bamberger:

That's great. We want a long answer. I mean, how does it start? How did the summer one take place, for example? Or did you like, Oh, that's the one I always do?

Macy Williams:

I think a shopping content falling under three different content buckets. The first one is SEO, so Search Engine Optimization and things people are looking for on Google. So I'm looking at Google trends every single day to see what needs we can fulfill for our readers through our shopping content. And one thing people were looking for is, what, or how can I gift people things while we're social distancing? So that's where that came about. And then that's also a bunch of euphoria stars are wearing colored eyeliner, so everyone's looking for colored eyeliners so I'm going to do a roundup of different colored eyeliners.

Beck Bamberger:

That's right.

Macy Williams:

Harry styles' knit sweater was going viral on TikTok, so we did a bunch of knit.

Beck Bamberger:

That's right.

Macy Williams:

Sweater content, that sort of thing. And then the second content bucket would be product releases, which could be anything from Nike coming out with a super cool, new sneaker that everyone's going to freak out about, H&M releasing a sustainable dress line, so things like that. And that's really where the PR relationships come into. Those are the sorts of things we're writing about when new stuff comes up. And then the last content bucket, which is my favorite, is product reviews. So, things that me and my editors have tested ourselves, whether it be organically, just randomly buying something and loving it, or a PR person pitching a cool, new product and us getting a first look at it or testing it out. And those are really fun because we get to do original photos and really get our hands on the products that we're writing about.

Beck Bamberger:

Now, do you just, seriously, randomly will get something and go like, "Wow, I really like this. Let me do a review." Does that happen?

Macy Williams:

Every week. Oh yeah. I just got, there's this really cool UK-based brand called Never Fully Dressed. They have awesome dresses. I was curious. I bought a wrap dress from them and it's the most flattering wrap dress I've ever tried. So I'm going to write a review about it in a couple of weeks.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay.

Macy Williams:

There's a lot of beauty stuff we've tried. I mean, we're all slathering our faces with stuff every day anyway, we might as well write about the stuff that works.

-

Beck Bamberger:

Exactly. Yeah. I'm looking at the little kiddie pool in your, the spring flowers backyard cooler from Funboy on your gift guide. That is so damn cute.

Macy Williams:

I would love to put that on my tiny deck.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes! There you go. Okay. So it sounds like it comes from all types of places. And when you're getting down to zero inbox every day, making sure you appropriately categorize, by the way, do you delete, just fully delete, you never see another email ever again? Or do you ever file pitches?

Macy Williams:

I definitely star pitches that I know I can come back to, especially if I can't give them an answer right now, and if I'll have the bandwidth to cover something or I know it's not relevant right now, especially with COVID. There are some things I'm not going to write about right now, but maybe in the fall or next year I will. So, I've got a lot of starred pitches that I hold on to as well.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. So stars every, okay. Yeah, you're organized. On it.

~~Jered Martin:~~

~~Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to learn more about the unique ways OnePitch helps connect journalists with brands and sources? Head to onepitch.co for more information about how we're helping each side save time and connect more effectively. Sign up for your free account today. Now, back to today's episode.~~

Beck Bamberger:

Well, how about a word association?

Macy Williams:

Okay.

Beck Bamberger:

A little section. Are you ready?

Macy Williams:

I'm ready.

Beck Bamberger:

I'm going to give you a word, you tell me the first thing.

Macy Williams:

Okay.

Beck Bamberger:

Here we go. Food.

Macy Williams:

Pizza. Always.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes. Drink.

Macy Williams:

Whiskey, but only because I'm looking at my bar cart right now.

Beck Bamberger:

Hobby.

Macy Williams:

Sewing.

Beck Bamberger:

Shoes.

Macy Williams:

Too many. That's two words, but.

Beck Bamberger:

No, we'll take it. We'll take it. Beauty.

Macy Williams:

Vitamin C.

Beck Bamberger:

Fitness.

Macy Williams:

Leggings.

Beck Bamberger:

Bay area.

Macy Williams:

Home.

Beck Bamberger:

Now here's the one I'm surprised they put this on the list, Fenty.

Macy Williams:

Ah! Everything! Everything.

Beck Bamberger:

That's why they put it on the list, I'm sure. Makeup.

Macy Williams:

Favorite.

Beck Bamberger:

Cats.

Macy Williams:

Evil. Talking about mine, in particular.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Everyone, in case you didn't know, she's got the most evil cat in San Francisco. Allegedly. We could talk about that in a second. Okay. Journalism.

Macy Williams:

Heart.

Beck Bamberger:

Heart! That's the first time I've heard that.

Macy Williams:

Really?

Beck Bamberger:

Pitch. Yes. Pitch.

Macy Williams:

Tons.

Beck Bamberger:

Inbox.

Macy Williams:

Zero.

Beck Bamberger:

Damn straight. Yes. Okay. What's with the cat? What's with the cat? Tell us.

Macy Williams:

I have a cat. His name is Blue.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay.

Macy Williams:

Animal lovers are going to shake their heads in shame, because I named him Blue because when he was a kitten, his eyes were blue. Little did I know, cat eyes change color and now his eyes are yellow. So, that was the first warning sign that I was doing something wrong. He's just crazy. I love him. I love him like a troubled son.

Beck Bamberger:

There's a picture of you on Instagram with the stroller and he's in there and the eyes of demon.

Macy Williams:

I tried the stroller once. A, He hated it. B, everyone looked at me like I lost my mind.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. Yeah. I could see that. Yeah.

Macy Williams:

Yeah. The stroller has remained in the closet since that test.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. Well, the visual of the cat eye, please, everyone just do yourself a favor, check that out. Eyes of death on that cat on that stroller. Anyway.

Macy Williams:
Windows to his soul.

Beck Bamberger:
Well, tell us, what do you read? Obviously POPSUGAR. Of course. But what else are you reading? For fun, for work, for anything besides pitches?

Macy Williams:
Sure, yeah. My favorite site, every morning, I look at The Cut. I love The Cut.

Beck Bamberger:
Yes. Yes.

Macy Williams:
I love the writers. They have such a gift at making really simple, impactful headlines, which I love. I'm obsessed for Fashion. I love Man Repeller. I'm a day one, Man Repeller stan.

Beck Bamberger:
Nice.

Macy Williams:
Still get subscriptions to magazines. All of them.

Beck Bamberger:
Yes. Me too. You get all this, okay.

Macy Williams:
My coffee table is stacked high. Books I'm reading ... Right now, I'm actually reading The Last Black Unicorn by Tiffany Haddish, which is hilarious. I highly recommend. I've been looking for funny stuff right now while we're all cooped up at home. I want to read. Read and binge funny stuff.

Beck Bamberger:
Yeah. Lighter stuff.

Macy Williams:
Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:
I like it. What do I have? Oh, we are never meeting in real life. Samantha Irby. It has a cat that's pissed on the cover, by the way.

Macy Williams:
Oh my God, that's amazing.

Beck Bamberger:

It's fantastic. It's her personal essays. It is roll over on the floor. I've had many burst-out-loud laughs from it.

Macy Williams:

I love a good rec. I'm going to add it to my cart.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes. She has had a couple of best-sellers on New York Times list, and it's very light stuff, for the most part, lovely.

Macy Williams:

Awesome.

Beck Bamberger:

So you're reading everything.

Macy Williams:

Yeah. I'm a big reader. I'm a big reader. I have a very robust bookcase.

Beck Bamberger:

I love it. Good. What about your thoughts on the future of journalism?

Macy Williams:

So, a lot of journalists see the future is very bleak, I feel right now, and I don't. Maybe it's because I'm on the side of revenue diversification in this whole big media world, but I see affiliate shopping content as a great way to diversify revenue for big media sites where you're not sacrificing the journalism. We have partnerships with brands and are making revenue from those partnerships, but I'm not sacrificing my integrity when I'm writing about them. I'm still writing things I would recommend, I would like, I would write about anyway. And it's a great way for media to get in on making more money, which is what we all need right now to avoid layoffs and downsizing and the way the landscape is changing right now. So, from my point of view, I'm excited and hopeful for the future of journalism. But I do also get, I get why some people, a lot of people, a lot of my journalist friends are feeling a little defeated and exhausted right now from what's going on in the world.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes. I have to say, this season, we've done season one, we had very doom and gloom answers to this question. This season has been shockingly different.

Macy Williams:

Really?

Beck Bamberger:

And much more on the positive side. Mm-hmm (affirmative). And resoundingly, I mean, on varying degrees, but optimistic and hopeful, and it's been cool to hear.

Macy Williams:

That's awesome. That makes me happy. I'm not the only one out there excited to write for many more years.

Beck Bamberger:

You are definitely not. So then, do you ever have folks that ask you like college students, "Oh, hey! How do I break in or should I do it? Should I get a journalism degree?"

Macy Williams:

Oh yeah. All the time.

Beck Bamberger:

What do you say?

Macy Williams:

I say, do as many internships as you can. That's my number one recommendation to anyone breaking into journalism. Participate in your college publication. One, internship, unfortunately, isn't enough anymore because everyone's doing them. You need to do a few.

Beck Bamberger:

That's right.

Macy Williams:

I went to San Francisco State, which has an awesome journalism program, and I live in the area so a lot of rising seniors tend to reach out to me, especially around this time of year. They're like, "I've one year left. I need to find a job. What do I do?" And I would say, "Do the internships!" I'm honestly not sure, it'll be curious to see how internships are handled this year with social distancing. We're all working from home, but I mean, we still need the help. We still need people to transcribe interviews and help us build articles and do a lot of the work that takes up a lot of time and is really important still, and you'll learn a lot from so. Hopefully the internships won't dwindle.

Beck Bamberger:

How many entrants would you take on, let's say, a semester or a summer?

Macy Williams:

I think it really varies on our content goals for that quarter year, et cetera. We've had everywhere from two to, I think at one point we had like five or six when we were really doubling down on content. It really depends, but internships are awesome. It's such a great way. And I would also say don't be afraid to ask to write. I think a lot of interns are terrified to ask if they can get in on the action, but your clips are going to be everything, when you go out into the real world, so.

Beck Bamberger:

I haven't heard that before. So, you will have interns that will actually write a byline, write an actual piece.

Macy Williams:

Oh yeah! All the time.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh wow!

Macy Williams:

All it takes is one awesome clip for us to give you more and more and more opportunities. And a lot of interns, including myself, I'm an example of an intern who became an employee.

Beck Bamberger:

Exactly.

Macy Williams:

It's an opportunity to say, "Hey, I can do this. Hire me. Please."

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. Yeah! Wow. How proud must you be that first day. You get your first article up on a national outlet.

Macy Williams:

Oh my God. I was quivering. I was quivering, I remember.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. It's a big deal! It's a big deal.

Macy Williams:

Very exciting.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, that's great. Well, for all those potential interns out there, you heard it. You got to reach out, got to get in and do a couple internships. Hopefully you're writing for your papers. Everyone still needs help. So, that's good. Well, let's play, Macy, if you're down for it, our favorite part, which is our mad libs, which sometimes turns out to be shockingly accurate. So, we'll see how this one goes, if you're down.

Macy Williams:

I can't wait. Let's do it.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Here we go. Here we go. Okay, first off, and I'm going to type them down. What's just a catch phrase?

Macy Williams:

Like my own catchphrase?

Beck Bamberger:

Sure! You could do your own.

Macy Williams:

How about, "But is it shoppable?" That's what I ask about every article anyone pitches, "But is it shoppable?"

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah, what does that mean? Can I click to buy it right now?

Macy Williams:

Yes.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Okay. Yes. Very good. All right. How about a journalist scare phrase?

Macy Williams:

Libel.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh yeah. Yeah. Okay. Empowering journalism buzzword.

Macy Williams:

Ooh, trending!

Beck Bamberger:

Trending. Mm-hmm (affirmative), there you go. What about adjective?

Macy Williams:

Ludicrous.

Beck Bamberger:

Great. Part of a pitch?

Macy Williams:

Virtual desk side.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Another adjective. Yeah. Another adjective.

Macy Williams:

Sassy.

Beck Bamberger:

Sassy. And another part of a pitch.

Macy Williams:

How about just bubbling this back up? Or bubbling this back up.

Beck Bamberger:

God! Gross. Sorry. Okay. I'll keep to myself. Amount of time?

Macy Williams:

Three hours.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. What about another adjective?

Macy Williams:

Frothy.

Beck Bamberger:

Good ones. Some people get really stumped on these, which I find so ironic because these are all writers, journalists, okay. Singular noun.

Macy Williams:

Chicken. I don't know why, that was the first thing that came to my head.

Beck Bamberger:

Great. And then a topic?

Macy Williams:

A topic ... How about DTC? Direct-to-consumer.

Beck Bamberger:

Then we need a verb ending in -ing.

Macy Williams:

I feel you're getting weird insight inside my brain. Body-rolling.

Beck Bamberger:

Body. Rolling. Awesome! And then just a verb, and then we're done.

Macy Williams:

Swat.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Are you ready?

Macy Williams:

I'm so ready.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, this is going to be a good one.

Macy Williams:

I'm so excited.

Beck Bamberger:

All right. To me, journalism is, "But is it shoppable?" It consists of libel and trending on the daily. If a pitch has a ludicrous, virtual desk side request, I will absolutely respond to it. However, if a pitch has a sassy, just bubbling this back up, you can expect no reply from me. If three hours goes by and you still don't get an email back from me, you can just assume I'm not frothy about it. The best stories always have chickens and are usually about direct-to-consumer. Best way to reach me is by body rolling it to me, but you can also swat me.

Macy Williams:

Oh my God! Please don't pitch me about chickens. That was not a clue.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, I hope you get an emoji or something. That'd be great.

Macy Williams:

That's amazing.

Beck Bamberger:

Well, thank you, Macy. This has been so fun.

Macy Williams:

Thank you so much. It was so fun to talk to you.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes, and congrats on the new updated role, because now you're senior shopping editor, which is fantastic.

Macy Williams:

Thank you so much.

Jered Martin:

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee With the Journalist featuring Macy Williams from POPSUGAR. If you like our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and please leave us a review if you enjoyed what you heard today. If you'd like to learn more about OnePitch, head to our website at onepitch.co to see the unique ways we're helping journalists and public relations professionals start great stories. We'll be back next week with an all-new guests and even more insights about the tech journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.