

Jered Martin:

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 love to read. We discuss their beat and news coverage, what their inbox looks like and a whole lot more. On today's show we're joined by Robert Archer, senior editor at CE Pro magazine and tech editor for Commercial Integrator, a sister pub to CE Pro. Robert covers a wide range of consumer electronics, including audio, TVs, computer electronics, and more. On the show, Robert shares the types of stories CE Pro covers as a trade publication, the types of tech products he covers for the magazine, what he enjoys most about his job and more. Let's hear more on today's episode.

Beck Bamberger:

Welcome to "Coffee with a Journalist." Here we are again. Today on our show, we got Bob Archer, who is currently the senior editor at CE Pro magazine, as well as the tech editor for Commercial Integrator, CE Pro's sister publication. We'll talk about CE Pro in just a second, if you're not too familiar, but Bob, thanks for being here.

Robert Archer:

Thank you for inviting me.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes. Are you drinking any coffee? This is a morning recording, actually.

Robert Archer:

I'm an early riser, so I've had my coffee. I've now phased into the water part of my day.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, okay. And you're in Boston, right?

Robert Archer:

Yes.

Beck Bamberger:

Based in Boston, hunkering down in Boston?

Robert Archer:

Thankfully our hunkering isn't quite as dramatic at this point as other parts of the country.

Beck Bamberger:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Archer:

Nevertheless, I am hunkered down.

Beck Bamberger:

Excellent. Me too, in California. So it's earlier here. I'm going to get my coffee after we do this. First, Bob, for those folks, listeners who aren't too familiar, sometimes we have trade publications on and I like to give people an orientation of what that publication is. So can you tell us in brief what CE Pro magazine is about?

Robert Archer:

Yes. It's a targeted trade publication for the custom install electronics industry. To simplify that in terms that people can understand, it's a trade book for the people who install these smart home systems. Now the industry has been around for at this point, 30 years, but now given the evolution of today's tech market, smart home is a buzzword now that people can understand.

Beck Bamberger:

Everyone understands.

Robert Archer:

Yeah, exactly. So, that's the easiest way to convey that.

Beck Bamberger:

Got it. And so you're targeting the buyer, the people that are installing all those systems and all those functionalities in the homes.

Robert Archer:

Yes, exactly.

Beck Bamberger:

So you might be one of the more interesting inbox questions. So we always like to know what's in your inbox? Typically, when we chat with people here, they go, "Oh, I get hundreds of pitches a week. It's crazy. I have to just delete them. They're off topic, et cetera." What does your inbox look like for pitches?

Robert Archer:

Honestly, it's not that bad. I think having been doing this for a very long time, I know most of the marketing and PR people in the industry, and they're pretty aware of what isn't our scope of coverage. It does come up that I tell someone politely that that isn't an area that we cover. But for the most part, it's the typical thing, product reviews, product info, maybe questions about market trends or something similar. But for the most part, I have a really good working relationship with the PR and marketing people in the electronics industry.

Beck Bamberger:

Wow. We've never heard that before on this entire show - I have a good working relationship with the PR people. That is fantastic. So with your inbox then, how many pitches would you say you get a week?

Robert Archer:

Probably between 15 and 30.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh a week?

Robert Archer:

A month.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh a month. Oh gosh. That's not crazy.

Robert Archer:

No. I think again, going back to that relationship part. The one really neat thing about the industry that I happen to work in or cover. It's a very friendly environment. I've covered other industries and it's very professional, very business-like, but the custom electronics market is very friendly. You noted that I'm from Boston. So people who know me know I'm from Boston, they know I follow the Bruins and the Patriots and they ask about that.

Beck Bamberger:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). You're a big fan. Yes. Oh, that's cool. So they mention that in their pitches.

Robert Archer:

Yeah. Because they've gotten to know me over the years, so there's a personal element that may be unique to the install industry. So any kind of email I get for story ideas is pretty succinct.

Beck Bamberger:

That's great. By the way, it is noted in your Twitter handle or in your Twitter bio, that you are a big Boston sports fan. What's your favorite team by the way?

Robert Archer:

I'm a hockey and football guy, so Bruins and Patriots.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, but you get the outdoor, the coldness year round. You're you're pretty set.

Robert Archer:

Yes.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh man. Excellent. Well, what about making a story? I'm sure this is quite different than some other folks we talk to who are investigative news or trying to find some breaking exclusive, something like that. When you get a pitch, or let's just say you don't even look at a pitch, who's to say, you tell us. How do you come to craft a story that you want to pursue?

Robert Archer:

For me, it's all about servicing the reader, providing the reader the information that they find relevant to help their business.

Beck Bamberger:

And you're thinking about the reader constantly. So you go, okay, does that reader want this? They're going to want this review. If no, then you don't do it.

Robert Archer:

Yes. You know the neat thing, and I suppose sports is like this too, where at the end of the day, it's fun stuff. I always try to think to myself that at the end of the day, I'm writing about TVs and stereos and home control systems, fun things.

Beck Bamberger:

That is fun.

Robert Archer:

Yeah, exactly. Like sports, it would be fun to write about the Bruins or Patriots or whatever your thing is - cooking, whatever it may be. So I try to boil it down to those terms. So thinking through that kind of lens, I know that many of our readers are as passionate about those topics as I am. So, it's being able to convert that into a story or convey that into a story that provides useful information.

Beck Bamberger:

What's the most fun thing you reviewed lately?

Robert Archer:

I am lucky. I get to review a lot of fun products. A few weeks ago I was lucky enough to review the Sonos Arc soundbar.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, the immersive auto soundbar. Yes.

Robert Archer:

And it's a great product.

Beck Bamberger:

I'm looking at your article right now. It looks good.

Robert Archer:

Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

It's this thin little bar, for folks who don't know. The sound quality of this apparently is ridiculous.

Robert Archer:

Yeah. And it's accessible for people too. It's a product that you can get at a retail level, but you can get it through your custom integrator, too. It will enhance the sound of your TV, whether it be Netflix. You can also listen to your favorite music through it too. So, it was a lot of fun to review that product.

Beck Bamberger:

This would be my job. If I got to be in journalism, it's just like, I want to touch and review all the products out there, all the time. Just what you're saying, like fun. It's fun. This isn't like a heavy area that you have to be constantly talking about. And do you get to put the products in your house, by the way?

Robert Archer:

Yeah. That's a big part of it, is that the stuff comes into my house. The idea is to try to review it in a real world environment. It's one thing to put anything in a lab, but that's not real world. So in the case of that Sonos Arc soundbar, I connected it to a TV. I hooked up my phone, music, accounts, Apple music.

Beck Bamberger:

Then you also say it only took you like 15, 20 minutes to set this thing up.

Robert Archer:

Yeah. It's all prompt driven through the app.

Beck Bamberger:

Well, we should all aspire to be like you, Bob. One day. That's that's our dream. Well, cool.

Beck Bamberger:

Well, let's play a word association game. I love this. So I'm just going to say a word. And you tell me the first thing that pops in your mind.

Robert Archer:

Okay.

Beck Bamberger:

Food.

Robert Archer:

Fun.

Beck Bamberger:

Drink.

Robert Archer:

Fun.

Beck Bamberger:

Hobby.

Robert Archer:

Music and martial arts.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Karate.

Robert Archer:

Kyokushin.

Beck Bamberger:

Jujitsu.

Robert Archer:

Brazilian, my school bender that I attend.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Boston.

Robert Archer:

The best of everything.

Beck Bamberger:

It is a good town. Smart home.

Robert Archer:

Fun.

Beck Bamberger:

Consumer electronics.

Robert Archer:

Fun. That's a reoccurring word, here, fun.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes. Yes. AV tech.

Robert Archer:

Fun.

Beck Bamberger:

Music.

Robert Archer:

Fun.

Beck Bamberger:

This is the theme, Bob... I think of your whole life.

Robert Archer:

Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

How about journalism?

Robert Archer:

Exciting.

Beck Bamberger:

Pitch.

Robert Archer:

Interesting.

Beck Bamberger:

And then inbox

Robert Archer:

Full.

Beck Bamberger:

Full. Okay. Mm-hmm (affirmative). What else is in your inbox by the way? If it's not pitches?

Speaker 4:

You know one of the things about being a trade publication is that we're covering all aspects of the electronics industry. So not only does it include products, products are kind of the headline thing, but there's manufacturer news, there's dealer news. Under that umbrella of news, there could be many things such as trade associations. Unfortunately given the economy and in this COVID environment right now, there could be good news or bad news associated with personnel. There are lots of things going on in an industry, simply beyond products.

Beck Bamberger:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So you got to be up on all that stuff.

Robert Archer:

Yeah. It's about keeping the reader informed.

Beck Bamberger:

What else are you reading? Not just for your industry, but just overall. Do you read The New Yorker, for example? We always like to know what journalists are reading.

Robert Archer:

This goes back to why I kept using the word fun. I read music magazine mostly. I also play guitar as a hobby. You could say it's making noise, but I read a lot of guitar magazines and I love the products associated with the musical instrument industry.

Beck Bamberger:

I see you have guitars on your Twitter photo, too.

Robert Archer:

Yes.

Beck Bamberger:

How many guitars do you own?

Robert Archer:

My wife would probably say too many, but around seven or so.

Beck Bamberger:

That's not too many. That sounds just perfect.

Robert Archer:

There's always room for another one, in my opinion.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. So you're reading music stuff. On the weekend if you go to a beach, is that what you're going to look at?

Robert Archer:

If I travel, I may read maybe a biography if it's interesting, or Michael Creighton books, Dan Brown books, The Game of Thrones books. Something you would consider probably light reading.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes.

Robert Archer:

You know and I are probably similar, we probably do a ton of reading.

Beck Bamberger:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I do.

Robert Archer:

Because it's a part of what we do. It's nice to kind of separate from that heavy reading to something a bit lighter.

Beck Bamberger:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). By the way, just re-read Jurassic Park. What a great time.

Robert Archer:

Yeah, he's got a number of books.

Beck Bamberger:

He is legendary. Sphere was my favorite.

Robert Archer:

Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

May he rest in peace. He passed a few years ago.

Robert Archer:

Yeah. Timeline was a book that I really liked and I was disappointed the movie wasn't so good, but...

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah, but Spielberg, I think did it justice, even though the story is quite different. So just if you watched Jurassic Park. I also had to watch that a while ago, that is just such a fun summer movie. And it actually holds it pretty well. It doesn't seem like, Oh God, the most, I don't even know what to say - like shuttering electronic dinosaurs. No, it actually, that's pretty good. It holds up.

Robert Archer:

I completely agree.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, that's great. I love some SciFi myself. Well, what do you think, Bob, is the future of journalism? Would you go into this career again if you could? What would you tell people that are currently considering journalism?

Robert Archer:

I would say go into it if you think you can have fun. At the end of the day, you have to like what you're doing. And it doesn't matter whether you're an auto mechanic or you're a doctor or whatever it is. You have to like what you're doing. Because at the end of the day, the way I look at it is, a bad day of what I'm doing is better than any day I could be doing something else

Beck Bamberger:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). You are, I believe, and I've done a handful of these, the first person who said, you got to love what you're doing, have fun. There's never been a person on the show. Who's said I'm in this industry to have fun. I really hope I'm having fun.

Robert Archer:

Yeah, no, it really is the case. I mean, if you're looking to make money, why would you go into this field, when you could get into business and get in the stock market or whatever it may be.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah.

Robert Archer:

Hopefully, things take care of themselves. If you find a career path, regardless of what it is, that you like doing eventually. While you may not be Elon Musk, but if you can make enough money to support your family and do some of the things that you want to do in your life, and then maybe hopefully save a nest egg up, you know that's a worthwhile career.

Beck Bamberger:

I love that answer, Bob. That's great. Well, let's finish off with our favorite part probably, at least what we've heard from a lot of people. Just a little mad lib here. So I'm going to give you the word or the phrase or whatever, and then I'm going to put it all together and read it back to you. Usually these are quite accurate, has been the consistent pattern. So let's see what happens here. First off. What's a catch phrase?

Robert Archer:

Since we talked about it, smart home.

Beck Bamberger:

We'll go with that. Let's use it. How about a journalist's scare phrase?

Robert Archer:

You know, I hate to say it, but it would be revenues.

Beck Bamberger:

Yep. What about empowering journalism buzzword, maybe like positive reviews or...

Robert Archer:

I don't want to go off topic here, but I don't look at positive reviews. I try to tell this to the younger people in my office - don't base what you're doing on the feedback of the internet.

Beck Bamberger:

Maybe like a positive praise, perhaps? When someone says "that was a really great piece. Thanks so much."

Robert Archer:

Yes. I will say that is nice.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. We'll go with that. What about an adjective?

Robert Archer:

Evolving.

Beck Bamberger:

Evolving. Ooh, that's a good one. Okay. What about a part of a pitch?

Robert Archer:

Relevancy.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. This is going well so far. Okay. Another adjective.

Robert Archer:

Flexibility.

Beck Bamberger:

And then one other part of a pitch?

Robert Archer:

Descriptiveness.

Beck Bamberger:

What about an amount of time?

Robert Archer:

I'm willing to invest as long as the pitch is on target.

Beck Bamberger:

All right. Now I got you. I'll fix it. What about another adjective?

Robert Archer:

Competitiveness.

Beck Bamberger:

How about a noun?

Robert Archer:

Home.

Beck Bamberger:

Home?

Robert Archer:

Yeah, we're all at home.

Beck Bamberger:

Perfect. And what about a topic?

Robert Archer:

I'm going to bring it back to smart home.

Beck Bamberger:

And then a verb that ends in I-N-G.

Robert Archer:

Running.

Beck Bamberger:

And then another verb, just a verb.

Robert Archer:

How about thinking?

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Are you ready for me to read your mad lib?

Robert Archer:

Okay.

Beck Bamberger:

Here we go. To me tech journalism is all about smart homes. It consists of declining revenues and rare, positive praise on the daily. If a pitch has an evolving relevancy, I will absolutely respond to it. However, if a pitch has a flexible description, you can expect no reply from me. I will go as long as the pitch is on target in order to respond back to you. But if you do not hear back from me, you can assume I am not competitive about it. The best stories always have homes and are usually about smart homes. The best way to reach me is by running it to me, but you can also think about me.

Beck Bamberger:

I kind of like that one.

Robert Archer:

I do too. The beginning's a little depressing because it maybe has a negative connotation to it, but it brightens up as it goes a little deeper.

Beck Bamberger:

It does, it does. I really enjoyed this. Oh, Bob. Well thank you for being on for a "Coffee with a Journalist." This was great. I hope your teams are back in action soon. I know they're not playing right

now, but love that you're in Boston and hope you get some more tech stuff to play with in the home here.

Robert Archer:

Thank you and have a great day and a good holiday weekend.

Jered Martin:

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of "Coffee with a Journalist" featuring Robert Archer from CE Pro magazine. If you like our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google podcasts, and anywhere else you've listened to your podcasts. To learn more about OnePitch head to our website at OnePitch.co to learn about the unique ways for helping journalists and public relations professionals start great stories. We'll be back next week with an all new guest and even more insights about the tech journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.