

Jered Martin:

Welcome to Coffee with a Journalist. A podcast featuring the tech industry's most well known tech journalists. We uncover the real person behind the real stories you love to read. We discussed their beat in news coverage, what their inbox looks like, and a whole lot more. I'm Jered Martin, the co founder and chief operations officer at OnePitch. Our host for the show is Beck Bamberger, the co founder of OnePitch, CEO of BAM Communications, and a current journalist. On today's show, we're joined by Sara Jerde publishing editor at week. Sara tells us all about her favorite mammal, the recent shift of news stories that Adweek surrounding coronavirus, her favorite bedtime reads, and lots more. Let's dive into today's episode right now.

Beck Bamberger:

Hey everyone today on Coffee with a Journalist, we have Sara Jerde from Adweek talking to us. So excited to have you on the show, Sara, and actually to dig into particularly your role, which is a little bit different probably than what we have with regular reporters journalists, because you're the publishing editor over at Adweek. Coming in from New York city, by the way.

Sara Jerde:

Hey, how are you doing? Thanks for having me so much.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes. So we're going to dig into stories and what you think journalism is going, especially for the beats you cover. But first, can we please speak about your fondness of hippos which is on your Twitter page?

Sara Jerde:

Well, how much time do we have?

Beck Bamberger:

Well usually this is half an hour, but let's just start for a few minutes. Where do you get a fondness for hippos? I'm sure there's a story.

Sara Jerde:

There is actually. So when I was a little kid, I'm from the Cleveland area and my sister and I went to the zoo and there was this really big hippo exhibit at the time. And that hippo has since passed away, but I dropped my sister's hat in the exhibit and it was this bigger deal. And we had to alert everyone to go get the hat, but somehow that has grown into a love of hippos. And I just love that their ears twitch to get the water out and they don't actually swim despite them being in the water all the time. I've got a lot of fun facts geared up. So...

Beck Bamberger:

Oh. Wait you mean they don't swim? They just kind of bounce, I guess?

Sara Jerde:

Yeah they just like bounce and yeah they just walk along the bottom of the water and then bounce back up when they need air.

Beck Bamberger:

Wow. How old were you when you had that hippo incident with the hat?

Sara Jerde:

Oh my gosh. I must have been around seven and my sister was five. So it was a long time ago.

Beck Bamberger:

Wow. So deep childhood memory.

Sara Jerde:

If you ever have any pictures of hippos, particularly baby ones, feel free to send them by way.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh they are cute. Okay, good. Do you still get to visit hippos? You're in New York city. So I don't know. Do they have hippos in New York at the zoo there?

Sara Jerde:

Central Park definitely not. I think maybe at the Bronx zoo, but I haven't seen them.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. Oh, well I hope you see hippos soon.

Sara Jerde:

Thank you.

Beck Bamberger:

Even in the wild, maybe sometime I've seen him in the wild. It's crazy.

Sara Jerde:

You have?

Beck Bamberger:

Yes. In a Safari in Kenya. And I'm not talking one hippo, I'm talking heard of hippos.

Sara Jerde:

Holy mackerel. Was it terrifying?

Beck Bamberger:

Not terrifying. The most interesting thing about safaris and that is quite an incredible thing to ever do, is that it really is like the Lion King. Animals are everywhere and you are the one in the cage, like the car or whatever, fenced in resort you're in or whatever. Everything else is just free roaming. And there's everything from the crocodile next to the hippo, next to the cranes, next to the antelope next to the giraffe. It's all it is altogether. It's not like, you're like, "Oh, let me get my binoculars out to really see and

try to find." No, no, they're all out there. It's incredible. So hopefully one day, Sara, you can see hippos in the wild, if not in a zoo. I'm sure you would take that too.

Sara Jerde:

Yes, I would absolutely love to. I'll keep you posted.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes, they do have quite the hippo exhibit in the San Diego zoo and I think they just had a baby. So let's talk about Adweek. Let's talk about that. Tell me first about, just for education for everybody, what's the publishing editor role entail?

Sara Jerde:

Yeah so I, at Adweek, have been covering the media industry now for about a year and a half. And I still do that in my role, particularly covering the business models of publishers and how they're diversifying revenue streams. But I've been moved into this more elevated position where I'm also overseeing our political coverage.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. For 2020. Yeah. Presidential race.

Sara Jerde:

Yeah, exactly. So it really is entailing that. So doing some editing of folks who are writing about the media beat and I take sort of higher, more holistic look at what's happening in the media industry, as well as overseeing our 2020 stuff.

Beck Bamberger:

What do you think is happening in the media industry right now? I mean, obviously we're in the midst of this pandemic, but what are your thoughts?

Sara Jerde:

Yeah, it's such an interesting time to be covering media. I mean, it always is, but it is incredible to see how quickly COVID-19 has really affected business models. And it's really kind of a shame too, because I had been covering so much about how media has tried to diversify revenue streams, particularly as they get into events and try to move away from the reliance on advertising.

Sara Jerde:

And we're really seeing, even though we're now, I guess it's week five of it really taking hold here in the U.S, but what it has done to digital advertising budgets and of course we can't hang out in person anymore, so it's completely obliterated their events businesses. So it's yet another challenging time to be in the media industry. And it's really been kind of, we're getting to that point now in the coverage where dark and kind of grim things are starting to happen. We're starting to see layoffs and pay cuts. So hopefully we're able to all make this out alive. Hopefully we all see the market recover as quickly as it kind of tried up.

Beck Bamberger:

What about making a story? So we always like to cover, how do you craft an actual from the idea to hit me hitting the publishing button?

Sara Jerde:

Yeah because I cover media and I try to listen to as many podcasts and read as much as I possibly can, I do a lot of that on the subway on the way into work. It can be from Brooklyn and Manhattan. So I've got a good chunk of time to kind of just sit there and consume. In that downtime, I'm really thinking about how I am consuming media and what my consumption behaviors really look like. And if there's interesting journalism that's being done, or interesting journalism coming from the trade publication perspective, we want to cover those fascinating ad campaigns and really put a spotlight, especially to the innovative work that can be done in this industry.

Sara Jerde:

And especially, I'm optimistic about where the industry's going and even we're in this crisis, that is COVID-19, but it's going to create and enforce media companies to really think quickly and think innovatively about where the industry is moving. So I'm really fortunate and lucky to be kind of at the forefront of seeing what that looks like and hopefully it means some good things despite all of the sort of grim scenarios we're in right now.

Beck Bamberger:

And so can you get a little bit further into where the kernel of an idea comes from? Do you get, for example, a pitch that you actually go, "Oh, that's interesting. Let me go down that rabbit hole," or at this point, are you kind of, you don't need pitches? And this goes into our inbox conversation in just a second too, but where does those little kernels come from? Or is it just like, "Yeah I was riding on the subway, I like this idea and I was like, oh, I've got to do a story about that."

Sara Jerde:

Yeah, it really depends. So I actually used to be a local news reporter for The Star-Ledger, which is the paper in New Jersey. And a big part of that coverage was just constantly talking to as many people as I could at the beginning of the day and I would call police chiefs, and fire chiefs, and mayors, and just have normal conversations. And so I have sort of...

Beck Bamberger:

Just talking it up.

Sara Jerde:

Yeah, just Chatty Cathys.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah.

Sara Jerde:

But when everyone's comfortable with you, something that they may throw away at the end of the conversation led to some really good story ideas. And I've tried to kind of approach that my beat now in the same way. I have people that I talk to everyday just to check in and see how they're doing. And

sometimes what they'll say at the end of the conversation turns into a full blown story idea. And then once that story idea kind of bubbles up, then I'll pitch it to my editor who oversees a team of us and I'll go from there.

Beck Bamberger:

Do you sometimes find too that, okay, you're chatting and talking and then wrap up and then they just throw in some nonchalant, but absolute gem of an idea and you're like, "Oh, hold [crosstalk 00:08:45] on. The last 1 minute of this conversation was worth everything." Does that happen a lot?

Sara Jerde:

Oh, all of the time. All the time. And it's funny too talking to media folks because I think they do tend to be just inherently more gossipy and chatty. So, I mean, it's a whole different ball game if you can get folks that get with a cocktail of them, then they loosen up a little bit.

Beck Bamberger:

I can only imagine. Speaking of loosening up, does anything ever week into your inbox that's compelling? And this also goes into how does your inbox look? Is it full of hundreds of pitches a week? How do you organize?

Sara Jerde:

Yeah, it's kind of interesting to compare before COVID-19 and in the midst of COVID-19. As our perspectives, I think on everything really changed, it's been sort of sobering to be able to take a step back and say what actually matters right now to readers and what am I interested in as a reporter? A lot of pitches that PR folks who are sending my inbox just aren't [inaudible 00:09:48]. I'm thinking just from a reader's perspective, anything at this point in this stage of the news cycle. Again, we're kind of week four, week five, but I'm still kind of very focused on stories related to the Coronavirus, but that's not going to last forever.

Sara Jerde:

And I think the appetite among readers, isn't going to last forever. And as we kind of move beyond this, I think readers are going to want more positive stories. They're going to want to hear about innovative products that publishers are doing or new experiences that they can have. And we're forward thinking too about where this is all going. So it's been kind of a challenge, I guess, in working with those pitches and reading about those pitches, because there's kind of more seemingly important stuff out there to talk about then maybe something that I would have thought was interesting before. Just because the bar now is different.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. What are you seeing when you mentioned it's not hitting the mark? Is it almost inappropriate? Is it just out of left field?

Sara Jerde:

Yeah, I think that, without naming names, but I think that the PR folks who are conscious of the news cycle and are seeing what I'm writing and taking that kind of extra mile to go through what the by-lines look like right now in Adweek and what we are writing about and what's on our mind. The ones that are more thoughtful, the ones that are geared toward things that we're already kind of writing about, are

going to land better than the one off. We're launching a new stuffed animal that has nothing to do with my beat or what we're covering. And so, yeah, it's def... and now that..

Beck Bamberger:

That is shocking though, to me, a bit of really you're still getting stuff, like "Look at my new stuffed animal hippo launch." Weird.

Sara Jerde:

Yeah. It is. It is kind of weird. And I wonder how, cause when when this first happened, it really dried up. My inbox went from a lot of emails a day to not many a day because I don't know whether that was just a reflection of shifts in staffing among PR people and what the comms teams look like.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh that's a good point.

Sara Jerde:

Yeah. But now it seems again we're in a new wave of this, as we all kind of accept this as our new normal.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. So the inbox is getting crazy again?

Sara Jerde:

Yeah starting to fill back up with useless pitches.

Beck Bamberger:

Gotcha. Oh, there you go. So what do you do with all those pitches?

Sara Jerde:

It depends. So the ones that I think are helpful... First off, I try to respond to everyone as much as I possibly can, but I will be the first to admit that I do have to sometimes just let things slide out of my inbox or further down my inbox because it gets just absurd.

Sara Jerde:

But I also will say though, that I do really appreciate the emails, particularly from spokespersons within media companies telling me about things that are going on in the newsroom. Even if I can't write a one off story about it, when I'm taking a broader look at what's going on in the industry, it's great to have examples that I can point to from those emails to just name names and to say publisher X is doing something that's innovative and this is what that is. But similarly, publisher Y is doing the same thing. And that's why that's interesting. So it's always kind of good to keep a pulse on those things. PR folks are really helpful in that respect. So even if, I try to say all the time, even if I'm not responding to every single email you send, things are in my inbox and I can draw on them for what I'm doing. Those broader stories.

Sara Jerde:

And I have different sections within my inbox or different folders. So if something is related to [crosstalk 00:13:23] I do. Yeah. I'm also the type of person who can not stand to have any notifications in my inbox on my phone. When I read it, if I don't file it away or respond right away, I'll forget about it. So I have to really stay on top of it.

Beck Bamberger:

Yes, yes. Okay. So you're one of those diligent organizers.

Sara Jerde:

Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

Some people just let them roll and they tell me they got 20,000 emails on read. I go, "Oh my God."

Sara Jerde:

The thought gives me so much anxiety.

Beck Bamberger:

Right, right. I think there's two distinct camps, like the high, organized, anxiety people. And we were like, "Yeah, just let it roll." It's Crazy. Oh man. Well, let's play a little word association game here. I'll say a word, Sara, and you just tell me the first thing that comes to your mind.

Sara Jerde:

Great.

Beck Bamberger:

Sound good? How about food?

Sara Jerde:

Spaghetti.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, that sounds good right now.

Sara Jerde:

I love spaghetti.

Beck Bamberger:

Drink.

Sara Jerde:

Water.

Beck Bamberger:

Hobby.

Sara Jerde:

Reading.

Beck Bamberger:

Ad tech.

Sara Jerde:

Programmatic.

Beck Bamberger:

Publishers.

Sara Jerde:

Books.

Beck Bamberger:

Paywall.

Sara Jerde:

Subscriptions.

Beck Bamberger:

Paid advertising.

Sara Jerde:

Programmatic came to mind again. I feel like I'm giving you horrible answers. I'm so sorry.

Beck Bamberger:

That's okay. That's okay. How about newspaper?

Sara Jerde:

The New York times.

Beck Bamberger:

2020.

Sara Jerde:

Election.

Beck Bamberger:

Journalism.



Sara Jerde:

Reporters.

Beck Bamberger:

Pitch.

Sara Jerde:

PR.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. That was good. What are you reading right now Sara? Or maybe just previous to the pandemic currently. Anything you're reading? Do you scroll through Twitter? Do you read certain news outlets every day? What are you looking at?

Sara Jerde:

Yeah, my usual, I guess, media diet would be to get onto Twitter and go through and see what people are reading. And then I read the times and the journal websites just to see what the top news of the day is. But since the pandemic, I have tried to keep up with the news as much as possible, but I'm sure like a lot of other people it's been kind of overwhelming just to know what's going on and coping with it and then reporting on it.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah.

Sara Jerde:

So I will admit that I have been reading a lot of really trashy beach reads just so that I can turn my brain off at the end of the night.

Beck Bamberger:

I get it. I get it. Well throw it. You got one that you particularly love? Throw it out there.

Sara Jerde:

Well, I haven't started it yet, but I'm going to read the Crazy Rich Asians series.

Beck Bamberger:

Oh, I hate to tell you, but I've read that. It sucks you in. I hate to say it.

Sara Jerde:

Does it?

Beck Bamberger:

It does, but I read a recent article too, about talking about fiction and how good that is for your creativity and points of view. And I loved that article and it was from a reputable site somewhere. I want to say

Harvard business review or something like that, but I felt redeemed a bit because I've long thought, "Oh, fiction. That's too fluffy." Even though there's obviously phenomenal fiction of high regard, not Crazy Rich Asians, but anyway, I love that you're reading that. It'll totally suck you in. For sure.

Sara Jerde:

I'm really excited to do that. And also I've tried to read all, of course, the nonfiction and the more serious [crosstalk 00:16:35] fiction books too, but I can't focus. I cannot turn my brain off.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah.

Sara Jerde:

So I just feel like I need a good solid romance, you know?

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. Hey, I get it. It's good. What do you think the future of journalism looks like?

Sara Jerde:

It's funny because I think about how I would've answered this question five weeks ago, or two months ago [crosstalk 00:16:58]. And it's honestly outside of how devastating this is going to look like for a lot of journalists and a lot of media companies. It's really kind of sad because I feel like 2020 was a really good year, or it was going to be a really good year. A lot of media companies were positioned to be profitable and a lot of companies were hiring and there's a lot of hiring freezes right now. So if advertising, and the marketplace, and the economy returns as quickly, I guess, as it dried up, I think a lot of media companies are hopeful that that's still going to be the case.

Sara Jerde:

And they're still acting that way, which kind of worries me because even if they are planning for two, four of this year to be really optimistic and great, what's going to happen if that doesn't happen. We have no idea what this timeline looks like for COVID-19 to kind of make its course throughout the U.S and the world. So I guess it's a bet that a lot of media companies are still making. My only hesitation with kind of accepting that as reality, is that this timeline is so unknown and so uncertain...

Beck Bamberger:

I know.

Sara Jerde:

... that I hope we don't see kind of another grim period for media. Come Q4 when the marketplace hasn't reentered, as quickly as it dried up.

Beck Bamberger:

Would you, if you could rewind, go into journalism again?

Sara Jerde:

Yeah.

Beck Bamberger:

When you first started out your career.

Sara Jerde:

Yeah, definitely. I think the challenges in media are the same a lot of ways that they were before. No one gets in the media for the money.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah.

Sara Jerde:

Certainly you have to ask really hard questions sometimes and make people uncomfortable. And if you don't have the personality for that, maybe this industry isn't for you, but it is so rewarding. When you have a good conversation with a source, and even understanding a topic to a deeper level, and then being able to synthesize that in an article, it's just so rewarding. And I feel especially, I mean, this has been more, it has really stood out and become more apparent in this crisis that we're covering, but you're able just to connect with people on a really genuine, in a genuine way.

Sara Jerde:

And when you're having to talk about sensitive topics, just to understand someone and to have a good conversation is really meaningful. And so those opportunities exist now in media as they did before and will always. And so I always think that media is a great field to get into, even though it might not be the most profitable or you're going to have bad days, and you're going to cry in the bathroom, or at the lunch table sometimes just cause it gets tough, but whatever. You're going to have a good time too. And that's the best part.

Beck Bamberger:

Yeah. Oh, that's great. Crying in the bathroom some days. It's okay.

Sara Jerde:

You got to do it.

Beck Bamberger:

Hey. Yeah. That's all right.

Sara Jerde:

You read those trashy reads. You cry in the bathroom. It's going to be fine.

Beck Bamberger:

It's just, yeah. Okay. Now I have a little mad lib to finish this off here. Sometimes they're quite accurate. So we'll see what happens with this one. Sometimes they're quite random, but let's see. Let's see. Okay. First off, what about a scare phrase that you would hear as a journalist?

Sara Jerde:

Like shaking, like a leaf.

Beck Bamberger:

And then what about a positive buzzword that you hear in journalism?

Sara Jerde:

I guess thoughtful.

Beck Bamberger:

Thoughtful? Yes. How about an adjective?

Sara Jerde:

Beautiful.

Beck Bamberger:

Then part of the pitch.

Sara Jerde:

Okay. How's about body.

Beck Bamberger:

Then what about another adjective?

Sara Jerde:

Bright.

Beck Bamberger:

And then another part of the pitch.

Sara Jerde:

Salutations.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Do you have a catch phrase?

Sara Jerde:

Yes let's do "I'm lovin' it." Would you accept that? The McDonald's?

Beck Bamberger:

Oh yeah. Oh, that's perfect too. You're going to like it. Okay. What about an amount of time?

Sara Jerde:

Infinite.

Beck Bamberger:

Perfect. And then another adjective.

Sara Jerde:

Scary.

Beck Bamberger:

What about a singular noun?

Sara Jerde:

House.

Beck Bamberger:

And then a topic? Any topic?

Sara Jerde:

Ad tech.

Beck Bamberger:

Okay. Then a verb that ends in ING.

Sara Jerde:

Raining.

Beck Bamberger:

And then the last one. Just a verb.

Sara Jerde:

Right.

Beck Bamberger:

Perfect. Okay. Are you ready? Here we go Sara.

Sara Jerde:

Ready.

Beck Bamberger:

To me, tech journalism is I'm loving it. It consists of shaking like a leaf and thoughtfulness on the daily. I think that's quite accurate Sara given what you just said about crying in the bathroom. If a pitch has a beautiful body, I will absolutely respond to it. However, if a pitch has a bright salutation, you can expect no reply from me. If an infinite amount of time goes by and you don't see an email back from me, you can just assume I'm not scared about it. The best stories always have houses and are usually about ad tech. And the best way to reach me is by raining it to me. But you can also write me.

Sara Jerde:

That's amazing. That's perfect.

Beck Bamberger:

It's so perfect. I love it. Well, Sara, thank you for hopping on here. Stay safe. Stay sane out there. Appreciate you drinking some water with us, not coffee, but just some water with us today.

Sara Jerde:

Thank you.

Beck Bamberger:

And people will see you in your inbox. I'm sure.

Sara Jerde:

I'm sure I'll see you guys there thank you so much.

Beck Bamberger:

Thanks Sara.

Jered Martin:

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist featuring Sara Jerde from Adweek. The goal of our show is to give you an in-depth look into the tech industry's most well known and coveted journalists, and we hope you found today's episode insightful. If you haven't already, make sure to subscribe to our show on iTunes, Spotify, and everywhere else, you enjoy listening to podcasts. We'll see you next week with an all new guest, and even more insights. Until then, let's quit bitching about pitching, and start great stories.