

Meet Chris Opfer, Bloomberg Law Team Lead for Business of Law

Reporter and editor Chris Opfer has been leading the Business of Law Team at Bloomberg Law since May 2020, covering “all things lawyers and law firms.” He previously served as the Deputy Team Lead for Labor & Employment News at Bloomberg Law, covering Congress, courts and federal agencies. He began his career as a journalist after serving as a trial attorney in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).



Jaffe Staff

Chris recently discussed his role and the legal media industry with Jaffe, including how the pandemic has changed reporting, what he looks for in sources and story ideas, and his newfound interest in browsing real estate listings.

You are the Team Lead for Business of Law News at Bloomberg Law. What does this role entail and how did you get to where you are?

CO: I oversee Bloomberg Law’s [Business & Practice](#) (B&P) coverage, which is BLAW’s version of the business of law and the company’s only news channel that’s entirely outside the paywall.

My team of reporters and editors is spread across the country and covers the legal industry through the lens of law firms and in-house legal shops at notable companies. We’re interested in who’s winning and who’s losing, who’s coming and who’s going, the opportunities and challenges facing lawyers, and the strategies that firms and their clients are using to meet their goals.

I joined the B&P team last May after eight years on the labor and employment news desk, where I covered courts, Congress and federal agencies.

How do you think media coverage and reporting has changed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic?

CO: The pandemic has made the reporting from BLAW and other outlets more essential to readers than ever before. Our health, labor and other news teams have provided comprehensive coverage over the last year to help readers understand the legal, regulatory and economic impact of the pandemic in a constantly shifting environment that is often shrouded in uncertainty.

For a newsroom that has a small army of reporters and editors whose jobs are to dig deep below the surface into the guts of their beats, the pandemic was a stark reminder that details matter. Drilling into the specifics gives our readers – lawyers, lobbyists and other professionals – the vital information that they need to do their jobs and serve their clients.

On the B&P team, the pandemic has largely been about looking at how firms and lawyers weather the storm. The good news for Big Law is that many firms not only survived but

wound up having banner years. What remains to be seen is what they do going forward, given that many of their clients have been ravaged by the pandemic, and as we (hopefully) start to see a light at the end of the tunnel.

In your opinion, what distinguishes Bloomberg Law from other legal media?

CO: We are a news organization and we take that responsibility seriously. That means you will not see a ton of fluff from us.

My team doesn't do "top super-duper lawyer" lists or soft-focus profile pieces that belong in law school alumni magazines. Stories about high-powered corporate attorneys who moonlight as carnival roadies, while clearly interesting, are generally few and far between. You generally also will not see service-journo pieces along the lines of "top tips for in-house counsel facing an SEC inquiry," which are more likely to be featured as Insights pieces from outside authors. That's not to say that there isn't a place for any of those kinds of stories, it's just not likely with us.

What do you want your readers to gain from reading Bloomberg Law?

CO: Business & Practice readers can turn to us for insight on what anyone interested in the legal industry needs to know now. That includes how their peers and competitors are navigating a wide range of issues, where firms and in-house shops see opportunities, and what they are doing to overcome obstacles.

What are some of the trends that you've started to see or plan to cover this year?

CO: We want to explore the biggest practice areas and industries ready to pop on the back end of the pandemic and what firms are doing to prepare. Special purpose acquisition companies (SPACs) are all the rage and bankruptcy is a booming area, but we want to know what specifically firms are doing to position themselves in those and other spaces.

What are your long-term goals for the Business of Law section?

CO: I want us to be the first stop for news for anyone who works in or is otherwise interested in the legal industry.

What is the best way to pitch you and your team?

CO: When in doubt, you can't go wrong with pitching Deputy Team Lead Rebekah Mintzer and me. We're perfectly happy to have folks direct their pitches to specific reporters, but remain ready to serve as a clearinghouse. We can also point people in the right direction for pitches to other news desks within the Bloomberg Law universe.

What are your preferences for story ideas?

CO: Like other legal news outlets, we get a ton of pitches about lateral hires and similar law firm announcements. It's incredibly helpful when a pitch includes the "why." Why is this particular move important? How does it play into the firm's particular goals, either by building on existing strengths or creating new opportunities? The chance to have at least a quick chat with a law firm leader about the "why" is nearly essential for those kinds of stories.

We also like to be exclusive. We have a big megaphone, given that our stories go out across Bloomberg Law news channels and on the Bloomberg Terminal, and it is vital that we get the news to our readers first.

What makes a good media source?

CO: Trust is the bedrock on which all journalist-source relationships are established. Experienced reporters and sources understand each side's role and the limitations that come with it. The ability to have a frank conversation – even if it needs to be off-the-record or on background, in some cases – is vital. We don't play "gotcha" with sources. In my experience, it is far more productive to show your cards. We simply want to ensure that our reporting is 100 percent accurate.

What is your biggest pet peeve as a journalist?

CO: I like to think that I'm a fairly laid-back guy, although you might want to fact-check that with my reporters. When it comes to pitches, sending emails with read receipts is bit of a turnoff. I'd much prefer a follow-up a couple days later.

What is the most challenging part about your job?

CO: I'm still less than a year in on the Business & Practice team, so there's a learning curve when it comes to who is who and what is what on the beat. Fortunately, I'm surrounded by seasoned journalists with a deep knowledge of the industry.

What is your favorite part of your job?

CO: I like telling stories and helping other people tell stories. Telling people what they need to know and why they need to know it. Plus, the people I work with are generally pretty cool.

What advice do you like to give to young reporters and editors in the legal news industry?

CO: Know what you don't know. Don't be afraid to ask dumb questions. Lawyers usually want to show off how smart they are, anyway.

What do you like to do outside of work?

CO: I've been riding out the pandemic in my apartment in New York City, which these days means lots of time indoors and hanging out on my "terrace" (which is actually a fire escape). I've developed something of an unhealthy interest in looking at Zillow and Airbnb listings in parts of the world that are warmer. My bosses might be surprised to hear that much of that is in places where we don't have an office... yet.

Need Help with Media Relations?

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