

# THE **DOWNLOAD** ON **PODCASTING**

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## **The Download on Podcasting Presents: Emulate then Innovate: Lessons from the Pros**

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Podcasting is a unique medium that serves many audiences, from those seeking profanity-ridden comedy shows to stories for children and everything in between. A podcast can exist for every person, but reaching and retaining a larger audience is the hard part. *The Download on Podcasting* has compiled a series of best practices to help you launch a successful show.

Breakout successes such as *Serial* and *This American Life* have brought podcasting to mainstream audiences and led to a huge increase in media coverage of podcasts according to Rob Walch, Vice President of Podcaster Relations for LibSyn.

“Podcasting has steadily grown from 1.6 billion downloads to 1.9 billion to 2.6 to 3.3 [billion] last year,” Walch added.

This growth has attracted a wide variety of content creators.

April Mann, creator of the children’s show *April Eight Songs and Stories Podcast*, said she prefers podcasts over a more visual medium because they encourage listening and creativity. A teacher by trade, she believes podcasting is like reading aloud to a class.

Hubspot, on the other hand, created *The Growth Show* to further their brand. Manager of Content Strategy, Ginny Mineo, said Hubspot decided to use podcasting to reach busy executives who could listen during their commute, hoping to turn them into readers of their blog and eventually Hubspot customers.

Podcast listeners can quickly become a dedicated and loyal audience. One thing podcasters do to expedite that connection is create an intimate setting that draws listeners in and makes them feel like they’re part of the show.

Podcasting is an accessible medium for anyone with a microphone and an internet connection, but a good podcast requires time, dedication and preparation. *The Download on Podcasting* has collected tips, tricks and best practices from industry experts and newer podcasts to help you get your start. Those in radio will see many similarities between podcasting and radio, including the need to create

targeted, engaging content, but podcasting is much more than an on-demand radio show.

### **Starting your own podcast: content, format and creating a pilot**

A podcast can't thrive without sustained, compelling content. Your topic needs to be something you're passionate enough to talk about on an ongoing basis. You also need to know what your audience expects. Paul Riismandel, Podcasting Evangelist at Midroll Media, suggested knowing your audience as the first step to creating your show.

"Know who they are and make sure that you are delivering something that is of value and use to them," Riismandel said.

To do that, Riismandel says you have to examine other podcasts within your niche and see what can be improved on or done differently. Thanks to charts available on most podcasting apps, it should be easy to find shows with similar topics to your own.

"How are they tackling the subject? You may see that within whatever realm you're looking at there are gaps, things that aren't being done or that you would like to listen to or that would be more interesting to you," Riismandel said, "That's how you begin to differentiate yourself."

As you're developing your show and getting a feel for what you want to create, it's important to think about your format. A format is the outline for your show that helps you create the consistency and structure your audience desires. Having a format lets your audience return to your show every month, week, or day and know what to expect.

Formats vary, and what works for others may not work for you. Some shows are very structured, with produced intros for every segment. Others are more relaxed and don't follow a strict format. The key to formatting your podcast is developing something you can reliably reproduce on your show's schedule. It's hard to gain traction with your podcast when no rhythm is established.

Rich Boerner, PodcastOne's Director of Programming, suggests thinking about your format from the perspective of the listener. For instance, if your audience is likely to listen in their car while driving to work and the average commute time is 20 minutes, you should aim to have your segments — or your entire show — be about that length. That will allow your audience to consume your podcast in manageable chunks.

After you get your content and format outlined, it's time to create your first episode. This episode should serve as a pilot. Your pilot episode will be used to critique and revise your content, format, and the value you offer your audience.

Having an idea of what you want to emulate helps a lot here according to Riismandel. He says piloting will help you understand the time and effort required for the kind of show you want to create.

"Let's say that you're obsessed with *This American Life* and a lot of the Gimlet shows, and that's what

you want to do,” Riismandel said. “That’s very time and labor intensive... If that’s what you want to do, that’s the investment you need to make.”

Riismandel added that no matter how good your show is, advertisers won’t want to monetize it if you can only make one episode every six months. Being able to have a faster turnaround may be more valuable than having the most polished show on the internet. Riismandel said to consider your “hourly rate” and determine if the effort is worth the end result.

Jonathan Messinger, creator of children’s show *The Alien Adventures of Finn Caspian*, went so far as to produce a “secret podcast” for about 6 months. He said this allowed him to get used to the rhythm of podcasting so he wouldn’t disappoint his young audience by missing an episode.

“I tried to identify what common challenges podcasters had and what challenges I found while I was producing this other podcast for a little while so that when I was doing *Finn Caspian* I wouldn’t run into things that would throw it off,” Messinger said.

Having to do too many pilots might be an indicator your content or format just isn’t good, warns Boerner. If you find yourself on your fourth or fifth pilot, it might be time to scrap your original idea and go back to the drawing board. Once you find what works for you, it will finally be time to release your first episode!

### **Living the dream: launching your show**

You’ve finally created some solid content and you’re ready to send it out into the world. Even if you’re an existing radio personality or someone with prominent name recognition, you still need people to find your show and give you a shot.

You need to put your show where your audience will find it. To Boerner, this means having or developing a strong social media presence. Being active on social media gives you validity to potential guests and allows you to engage with your audience and build an intimate community.

Mann uses social media to host a monthly “Stay Up Late with April Eight” live stream on Facebook. She compares this to seeing a musician live, and having a different experience with them. On the other hand, paying for Facebook ads has had little to no effect for Mann, who outside of her live streams prefers to use Instagram.

Another avenue for finding your audience is press releases. Contact blogs within your niche and make them aware of your podcast. Doing so gives you access to pre-existing audiences that are already interested in your topic. Messinger was able to get coverage from one of the largest newspapers in the United States through this method.

“I think what press the show has gotten has been very productive. The returns on that are certainly significant,” Messinger said. “*The Chicago Tribune* wrote a really nice feature article about the show in November of last year. It’s weird, they posted it on Nov. 3, then it ran in the newspaper on Dec. 1, so it’s

kind of cool because we got two bumps from that, and that was huge.”

Once you get a small following, your show might look attractive to guests. Guests provide value to your audience by giving fresh perspectives or new information. If a guest is a celebrity or has a following of their own, there is also the potential for you to walk away with some of their audience. Riismandel warns against bringing on a guest just because they’re famous, however, because it could be a bad fit for your show and get you nowhere.

“Let’s say you’re creating a podcast about rose gardening and for whatever reason Gwyneth Paltrow agrees to be on your show,” Riismandel said. “You might bring in part of her audience for that episode, but will they actually care about the next episode about rose gardens? They may not. So that brief boost may not get you as much as you might hope.”

Riismandel suggests seeking out people your audience may already know. Similar to how sending press releases to blogs that represent your niche can help you find new listeners, guests who are experts on your topic can provide a better service to your fans.

“They may not be famous to the world, but in the world of rose gardening they’re an absolute superstar who probably hasn’t been on so many podcasts and might be much more willing to try out being interviewed in a new medium than someone who gets asked all the time,” Riismandel said. “It’s easy to overshoot your own limitations, but your own limitations aren’t bad, they’re actually really good, because they tell you about what you’re trying to accomplish.”

Hubspot does this with *The Growth Show*. Instead of trying to get celebrity guests, they bring on CEOs and marketers -- people who matter to their audience and have true insights into what they want to learn. Sure, a celebrity guest might be enticing, but you must give your listeners something they can use or they’ll find it elsewhere.

As you start to grow, a common goal is often to be included in iTunes’ coveted *New & Noteworthy* section, which is a curated selection of podcasts comparable to getting a book review in *The New York Times*. Although it’s a great way to generate awareness for your show, it’s certainly not the only method.

If there are opportunities for you to be a guest on other podcasts, that’s a popular way to promote your show. In addition, each episode ask your audience for reviews and facilitate the share by inviting them to share the podcast with friends and co-workers.

Podcast audiences are valuable to advertisers because of their unique relationship with the shows they listen to. The intimacy of podcasts makes listeners feel like they’re part of the show. To create this feeling, Boerner suggests speaking to one listener at a time, and imagining you’re talking to your best friend while you perform your show. Radio professionals already do this, as they have a very clear image of the person they’re connecting with, while speaking into the mic.

“You’re having a one-on-one conversation in a car with a friend,” Boerner said. “The people who

connect [with their audience] the best understand that, and they're themselves."

This relationship makes listeners trust live reads from podcasters, who often serve as product advocates. When a podcaster advertises a product to their audience, they're often giving an endorsement rather than reading an ad. Keep this in mind as you start to monetize your podcast -- your audience trusts you, and betraying that trust can have huge ramifications.

Once you're able to reach a significant audience, you can begin to monetize your podcast and reap the rewards for your hard work. There are multiple forms of monetization, but the most common is live ad reads. Advertisers pay for pre-roll, mid-roll and post-roll ads. These are often sold as packages, either through your own efforts or by a network. Other forms of monetization include subscriptions or crowdfunding websites including Kickstarter™, Go Fund Me® and Patreon™. For a more comprehensive view of monetization, check out the article from *The Download on Podcasting*: [Monetization - A Race to \\$100,000,000](#).

Advertisers will want to know your metrics, specifically downloads and demographics, to ensure they're getting a return on their investment. Boerner suggests having at least 30,000 downloads per episode before approaching advertisers or a network.

"The bar has been raised to the point where we need a certain amount of success or social media capital," Boerner said. "We have to be able to guarantee to them and to us, that we can reach a certain success level within 6 months."

Even for established personalities, having an organized plan for your podcast is important to expedite the launch. By emulating these best practices, you will limit trial and error and be able to generate engaging content that resonates with an ever-increasing podcast audience.