



Podcasting 2018

What you need to know



Podcasting

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Introduction

A question often being raised by communicators these days is, “should we have a podcast?” The answer depends, of course, on who the current audiences are, who else they hope to reach, and why those people would engage with the content. These questions are often superseded, however, by more fundamental questions about what a podcast is and who listens to them.

This report addresses those fundamentals. It provides a brief overview of podcasts and podcast audiences to help teams get beyond the “what” so they can focus on the “why” of podcasts as a content product. To learn more about podcasts and discuss whether they are right for you, contact Richard Fawal at 202-285-7912 or rfawal@juntomedia.co.

Definition

A podcast is an episodic series of digital audio or video files that a user can stream or download to listen or watch. Podcasts differ from other digital content platforms because they are **syndicated** for direct delivery on any podcast player (called a “podcatcher”) the user chooses, whether Apple Podcasts, GooglePlay, Stitcher, or others. Podcasts can be delivered for free, through an annual subscription, or by per-episode fee.

The value of syndicated content

Syndication contrasts starkly with most other forms of content delivery. Building engaged audiences through social media requires “feeding the beast” with content that reaches the audience through the algorithms YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter all utilize to determine what users see. Once a user subscribes to a podcast, however, every episode is delivered directly to their

device as it's published, so it's ready when they are, not when an algorithm decides to show it to them.

While podcast subscribers will likely be a smaller audience than Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram followers, they are generally a far more engaged audience. They have actively requested to receive your content and can access it whenever they are in the mood to listen to a podcast, without interference from other people and brands vying for their attention. This intimate relationship means Podcast audiences don't have to be extremely large to be incredibly valuable.

Top 10 Facts About Podcast Audiences

1. *More than a quarter of all Americans listen to a podcast monthly*
2. *Forty-eight million Americans listen to a podcast at least once a week*
3. *Podcasts can have any format, from news show to performance art*
4. *Podcast listeners are significantly more likely to have advanced degrees*
5. *Thirty-five percent of Podcast listeners have HH incomes over \$100,000*
6. *Podcast audiences spend 6.5 hours listening to podcasts every week*
7. *Podcast audiences listen to an average of seven podcasts each week*
8. *Three quarters of Podcast consumers listen primarily on mobile devices*
9. *One third of Podcast consumers started listening within the past year*
10. *Eighty-seven percent of Podcast listeners finish all or most of each episode*

"The Podcast Consumer 2018", Edison Research

A brief history of podcasts

In the early 2000s, bloggers experimenting with audio distribution formats for “audioblogs” began using enclosures in RSS feeds to deliver files to Apple iTunes for downloading to iPods, and the “podcast” was born. In 2005 Apple formally added podcasts and built a directory for them in its iTunes Store, and “podcast” was named Word of the Year by the New Oxford American Dictionary.

By the end of the decade, most major media companies were offering audio podcasts and many public figures and celebrities hosted their own. Surveys indicated, however, that while 45 percent of Americans were familiar with the term, only 23 percent had ever listened to a podcast and just 12 percent listened to one a month. As a result, podcasting was generally considered a small, niche market that received little mainstream attention.

Recently, however, podcasts awareness and listing has grown significantly. According to Edison Research, which has been studying podcasting for more than a decade, an estimated 124 million Americans have listened to an audio podcast and 26 percent of Americans, 73 million people, listen to a podcast at least once a month. Forty-eight million Americans listen once or more each week, and one-third of those spend more than five hours each week listening to podcasts.

Did you know?

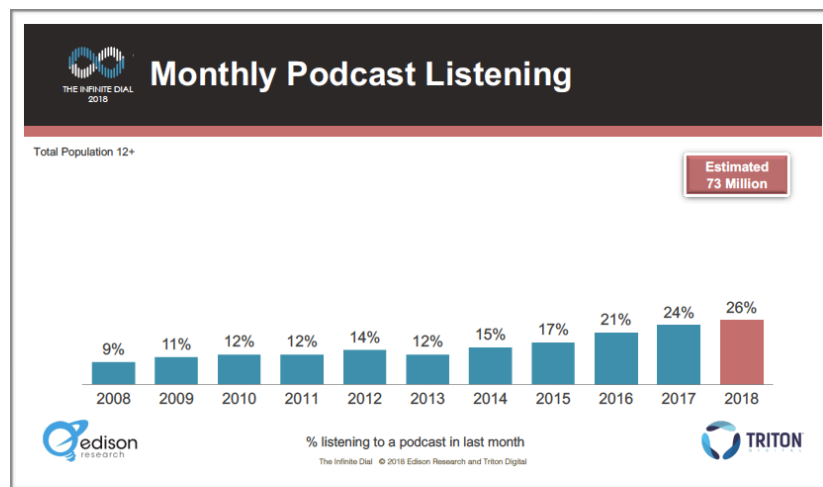
In 2005, the founders of a podcast directory company called Odeo realized their business was in jeopardy when Apple introduced a podcast directory in iTunes. After a day-long brainstorming session to find a solution, they developed a simple SMS one-to-many messaging system. They called it Twitter.

Why are podcasting audiences growing so fast?

The recent rapid growth in podcast audience size is due to changes in the technology, content, and user behavior for podcasts.

- **Technology.** Early podcasts had to be downloaded to a portable device through a computer, which required a manual process. Today, new episodes of a favorite podcast download to devices through wireless services, often automatically, so they’re ready to play anytime.

- **Content.** Early podcasts were nearly all formatted like radio news magazines, talk shows, or audio diaries, limiting their audiences. Today’s programming runs the full gamut of news and entertainment, including audio novels and plays, interviews, monologues, magazines, and game shows.
- **Behavior.** On-demand content has become normal in audio content just like on TV, and podcasting’s direct syndication model offers audiences great content available anytime. Syndication also makes “binging” easy, and today it’s normal for a user who discovers an older podcast to listen to a year or more worth of older episodes in a matter of days.



Programming

Thousands of podcasts are produced and published each week, ranging from professionally produced programs created by established media brands to amateur efforts made with nothing but a computer and built-in microphone. There are well over 100,000 podcasts in the Apple Podcasts directory, although many do not produce regular content.

Podcast formats are as diverse as any media. Some are audio magazine programs with several segments that each cover a different topic. There are talk show formats, some hosted professional journalists, others by subject matter experts, and still others by average people from all over the world. Others are simply monologues, from the famous and unknown alike. Podcast novels and plays are fictional stories performed episodically by professional actors, and are a popular form, hearkening back to the radio shows of the 1930s and 40s.

Examples of top award-winning podcasts in a variety of formats



Stuff You Should Know
 Produced by How Stuff Works
Apple Podcast ranking:
 Top 20

Hosted by Josh Clark and Chuck Bryant, who explain a different topic in each of 3 weekly episodes with wonder and humor.

<https://www.stuffyoushouldknow.com/podcasts>



Serial
 Produced by This American Life
Apple Podcast ranking:
 Top 20

Serial tells one true story over the course of a season. Each brings the next chapter in the story, so episodes must be listened to in order.

<https://serialpodcast.org>



Nerdist Podcast
 Produced by Nerdist Industries
Apple Podcast ranking:
 Top 200

An interview show hosted by Chris Hardwick and friends featuring comedy and film celebs. It led to Hardwick's fast-growing media company, Nerdist Industries.

<https://nerdist.com/podcasts/nerdist-podcast-channel/>



Welcome to Night Vale
 Produced by Night Vale Presents
Apple Podcast ranking:
 Top 100

Welcome to Night Vale is a fiction podcast presented as community updates from a small town where strange lights in the sky and dark hooded figures are common.

<http://www.welcometonightvale.com/>



The Daily
 Produced by *The New York Times*
Apple Podcast ranking:
 Top 5

A 20-minute daily news summary hosted by Michael Barbaro and powered by *New York Times* journalism.

<https://www.nytimes.com/podcasts/the-daily>

Audio versus Video Podcasts

The most critical difference in audio and video podcasts is in consumption behaviors. Audio podcast listeners can consume their content while driving, exercising, knitting, etc. – times when watching video is not an option. Unlike radio, podcast content is downloaded so can be stopped, started, and rewound at will, so it is most often consumed in the home or in the car.

Video content is available on many popular platforms, including YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook, and more, so these are usually the default platforms for video content publishers. As a result, most podcasts are audio-only and most podcast consumers are listeners. The syndication at the core of podcasting is very effective for episodic video, so video podcasts published by regular video creators such as TV networks and TED Talks are becoming more common.

The medium for a podcast impacts its cost, of course. Producing high quality video content requires professional staff and equipment, as poorly shot or edited video will not retain viewers. Audio podcasts, conversely, can generally achieve high production quality with far fewer resources. Video edits, for example, are usually obvious to a viewer, while audio can be edited without a listener realizing that any edit has been made.

The Future of Podcasting

The current joke among podcasters is that, today, *everyone* has a podcast. The number of podcasts is increasing rapidly, and that bodes well for the medium. Factors driving the growth in podcast production include:

- **Cost.** Anyone with a computer and internet access can start an audio podcast for very little cost. While this leads to more “average Joe” podcasts, usually of low quality, such accessible costs are also attractive to publishers who have the ability to create higher quality content without big budgets.
- **Audience Growth.** As audiences grow, awareness does, too, and content producers – amateurs and professionals alike – are finding niches to fill and making new shows to fill them. More people listening means more to listen to.

- **Competition.** For years, iTunes has been the dominant delivery platform for podcasts, with 60-80% of all podcast plays. That's changing, however, as Stitcher, GooglePlay and other platforms compete for listeners by promoting podcasts to more and more of their users and creating better revenue generation for publishers. In 2017 Apple rebranded it's podcast platform, separating it from iTunes and calling it "Apple Podcasts". In May of 2018, NPR, WNYC Studios, WBEZ Chicago, and This American Life jointly purchased Pocket Casts, one of the most popular mobile apps for podcast listening.

Don't expect the growth in podcast content to end soon. Because podcasts are delivered directly to consumers, and production costs can be low, a show can be extremely successful with even a small audience, depending on the goals and objectives of the producer. Reaching a few thousand engaged audience members every week, for just a few hundred dollars, is a an exciting prospect for many publishers.

In addition, awareness will continue to increase. New podcasts rarely generate an initial audience organically. Unless there is already engaged audience (such as for an existing media channel), they require well-developed marketing plans to reach target audiences and turn them into listeners. As more podcasts are created, more will be marketed, and more people will start listening.

Podcasts are coming of age. In the next several years they will likely become a standard component of most professional, sustained content publishing and marketing practices, and will become fully integrated with digital and terrestrial content. As the marketplace becomes more crowded, however, it will become more difficult to draw and retain audiences, so those who start sooner will stand the best chance to find a successful model quickly.

Find out more

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