

WHAT THE TOP 100 SHOWS ARE DOING

THE STATE OF BUSINESS PODCASTING

2020

RESEARCHED AND
PRESENTED BY

ONE STONE
creative

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:
ABOUT THE REPORT
PAGE 3.

PART 1:
AGE AND RELEASES
PAGE 3

PART 2:
BRANDING AND MONETIZATION
PAGE 7.

PART 3:
SHOW PARTS AND TECHNOLOGY
PAGE 12.

PART 4:
SHOW NOTES AND WEBSITES
PAGE 20.

PART 5:
SOCIAL MEDIA
PAGE 24.

CONCLUSION:
AN EDUCATIONAL ADVENTURE
PAGE 20.

APPENDICES

INTRODUCTION: ABOUT THIS REPORT

As a producer of business podcasts – which is to say podcasts that exist as part of broader content marketing strategies, I am regularly asked things like:

- How long should my show be?
- Should I invite guests?
- How often should I release episodes?
- What kind of show notes should I have?
- Where should I promote it?

And I've always had well-educated guesses on those topics, based on paying attention to the industry and, of course, a digital marketing background, that I felt confident in communicating to my clients or anyone else who reached out – but I didn't have any hard data. That hard data didn't seem to exist for business podcasts.

There are plenty of fantastic industry-wide reports, but I wanted something that was specifically for the business owner, creating a podcast as one of many tools in a content marketing toolbox.

As my mother always used to say when I complained about anything:

"Better just do it yourself, then."

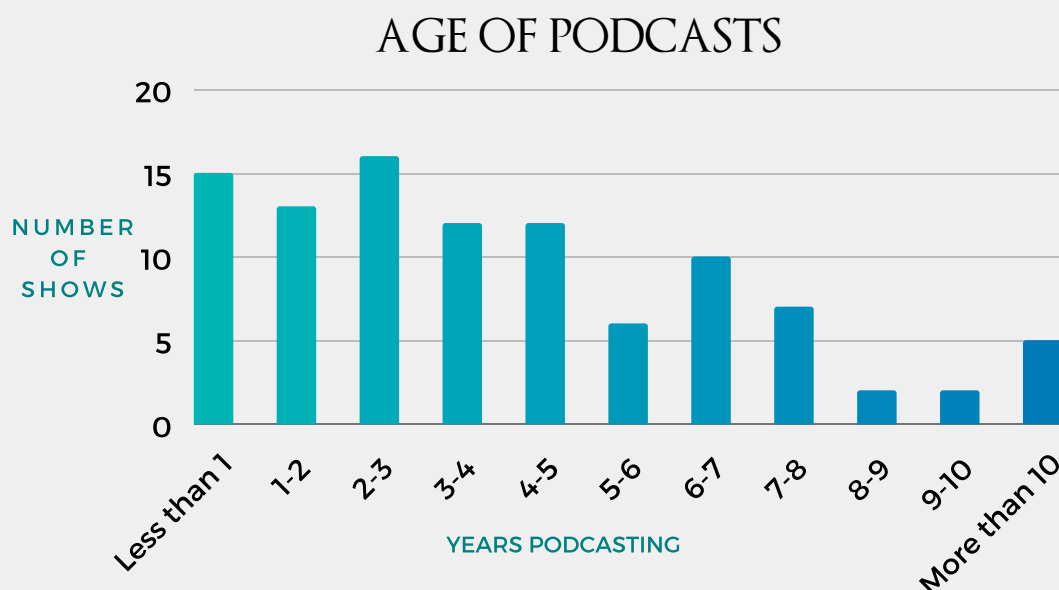
So I did. My team and I spent dozens of hours looking at the top 100 podcasts categorized as business in Apple Podcasts (discovered through Chartable on October 15th), analyzing each on over 30 individual data points like length, branding, show notes, CTAs and much, much more.

In this eBook, you'll find a more detailed analysis of all the results, as well as advice for how to apply it. We have also included some new templates and materials based on the best practices we discovered over the course of this research. You'll find them in the appendix.

I hope you enjoy, and if you have any questions, or would like to talk about designing a podcast informed by the best practices we're aware of – I hope you reach out!

PART 1: AGE AND RELEASES

If you're starting a new podcast, you have to make a lot of decisions, and among the first are how often you want to release episodes, and how long those episodes should be. Looking at what leading business podcasts are doing can give you an idea of what the options are, and more importantly, how it is important to be consistent over time. Once you commit to a schedule, it's important to stick to it. If you're getting your feet wet for the first time, start with fewer releases but be aware that the vast majority of top shows release weekly or more. You can always add episodes, but removing them could have a negative impact.



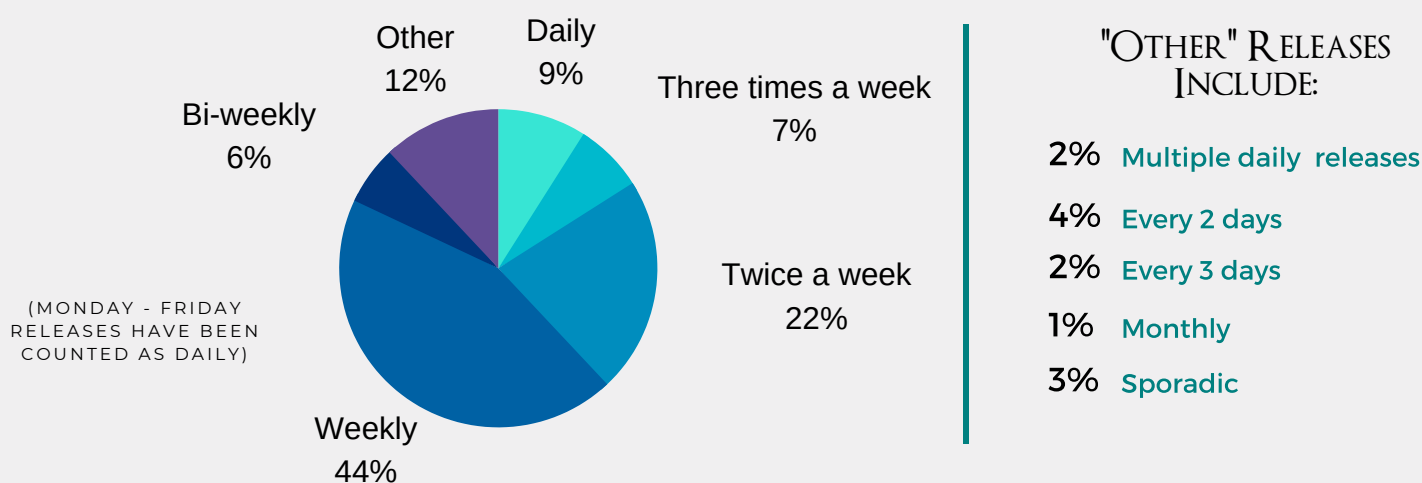
What I noticed about the age of the top shows was how many of them were new releases, with only a few months or sometimes only weeks of content. The majority of new shows in top spots are network-produced shows that have large networks of fans and multiple shows to run promotions on. I believe it also demonstrates the importance of a strong launch if high download numbers are a primary goal for you. Downloads shouldn't be the top priority for most new business podcasters. See **Appendix 1 – Goals for Business Podcasts**, for an overview of how to think about goal setting in the context of your podcast.

Of course, if you have an existing audience hungry for new content, then there's no reason not to try and get them!

PART 1: AGE AND RELEASES

This part of the data held one of the biggest surprises to me. I would have expected many more of the shows to be on an “every other week” release schedule, and I certainly didn’t expect a full 29% of them to be twice weekly or more!

FREQUENCY OF RELEASE



Creating a podcast episode is a great deal of work, even if you have a great team that can take a lot of it on for you, but based on this data, I think that aiming for a weekly episode is crucial to gaining and maintaining traction.

Many of the shows that have a weekly, or multiple weekly, releases are shorter than the average, or alternate different shows styles – typically a longer release followed by a very short one. This is a strategy that could easily be adopted by most podcasters. When recording a long, regular episode, spend a few minutes recording a short bite-sized one at the same time – maybe a Q and A, a thought exercise or activity for your audience, a commentary on recent news or a review of something or someone you like.

With podcasting, consistency is key.

ACTION ITEM:

Brainstorm short form or bitesized segments you can create along with your regular episodes to increase posting frequency.

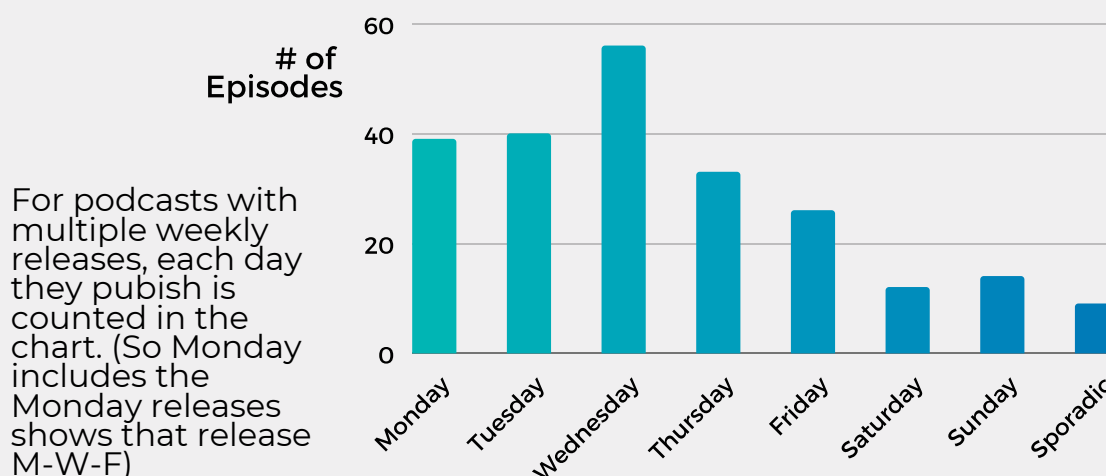
PART 1: AGE AND RELEASES

44 MINUTES

Average length of
Weekly Releases

To get to a reasonable average length of a podcast, we just looked at the weekly releases – that represents 44% of the shows, and they were the most likely to be the same from episode to episode. There are exceptions, however, and the industry overall seems to be trending towards slightly shorter episodes. Rather than working towards a certain episode length, it seems more important to have the show be *Just* long enough to be thorough and satisfying, and not worry too much beyond that.

RELEASE DAYS



Podcasts are most frequently released on Wednesdays. I found this slightly surprising as I know that Tuesday and Thursday are the big days for email, and I assumed the same would be true for podcasting!

For planning your own editorial calendar, don't worry too much about the day of the week it is, but do consider carefully what your weekly workflow is going to look like! Your runway, the number of people involved, your release schedule, your repurposing, your promotional activities and the schedule of your other content marketing assets like blogs and videos should all feature in that decision.

PART 2: BRANDING AND MONETIZATION

Having a solid audio-visual brand for your podcast is important, and having that AV brand fit under the umbrella of your overall brand identity is even more so.

40%

ARE PART OF A
PODCAST NETWORK(PRODUCTION NETWORK, AS
OPPOSED TO PAID OR
PROMOTIONAL)

First, let's talk networks. I was a little surprised by just how many of the top shows were part of content or broadcast networks – 40% of them. There were a few different categories of network:

Content Networks like Barstool Sports and Wondery, broadcast companies like CNBC and NPR, and networks created by parent organizations with their high-level purposes like the Motley Fool and Ziglar.

The benefit of being in a network is that you start and continue with support and more resources than your average indie show. It's important to note here, that all of these are production networks that have teams of creatives, have editorial influence or control, and probably large teams of people to contribute to all aspects of the show from recording to promotion. This is distinct from a “pay to play” or promotional network, although those can be valuable as well, if there is good value provided for membership fees.

The biggest thing that a network can help a new show with (after producing the actual content!) is promotion. Getting traction and growth for a new show is hard, and being on a network means that you've got a stable of existing, established shows that can promote the new one when it releases – this is why I think so many of the newest shows taking top spots are networked!

You can simulate this benefit by collaborating with other podcasters, joining a paid network, starting your OWN network, or using one of the many new services that facilitate podcaster networking. (Some of these are [Podbooker](#), [Audry.io](#), different podcasting Facebook groups and the [Independant Podcast Alliance](#).)

PART 2: BRANDING AND MONETIZATION

If you're considering joining a paid network, do your research and make sure you're happy with the quality of shows you'll be affiliated with, and the services provided as part of your fee! Those services can include hosting, ad management, content consulting and support, promotion and community. There are great ones out there, but it is the internet: your mileage may vary.

ACTION ITEM:

Think about the benefits a network provides like shared resources, promotional clout and networking, and see if there are ways you can build that into your community!

The big branding elements for a show are the cover art and the title. Close to half (44%) of the top podcasts have the hosts name right in the title. If your brand is based on you and your personality and relationships, then following suit would be wise. It's not a choice for everyone, however, especially if you've got multiple hosts, a brand name that is more critical to promote or eventually plans to transition the show to a new person or company, either through a sale, or as your personal priorities shift.

44%

USE THE HOSTS
NAME IN THE TITLE

If you have invested effort in branding your own name, you should do so in your podcast title, but if your topic area or company are more important to your growth strategy, then leave your personal name out of things.

The art is also an important early game decision (although it is considerably easier to change than the name if you want to shake things up in the future!)

COVER ART STYLE

50%

Use the hosts
photo

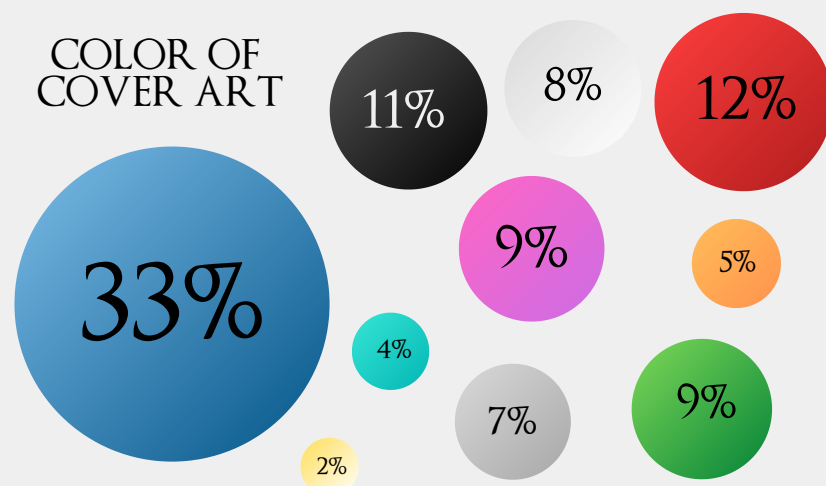
31%

Use graphic
art

29%

Text on
background or
a combination

PART 2: BRANDING AND MONETIZATION



For a dominant color, follow the branding you use on your website and elsewhere, and for the other show elements, consider adding some interesting graphics – whether that’s a picture of yourself, some art, or interesting typography. If you are part of a network, you may also want to include its logo on your art.

Looking at the different high level show topics was fascinating. The variety of topics, and the diversity within those high level topics, leads me to believe that there is room for all types. It can be tempting to look at the podcast market as oversaturated, but most people who listen to shows don’t just pick one on a certain topic and listen to it exclusively. If you have something interesting to say, or a podcast helps you achieve other goals like networking and content generation – just go for it and don’t worry about how many other shows are talking about similar things.

HIGH-LEVEL SHOW TOPICS

22%	Entrepreneurship	14%	News / Commentary
12%	Investing	12%	Money / Personal Finance
8%	Management/ HR / Leadership	9%	Economics/Finance
7%	Careers / Personal Development	6%	Marketing / Social Media
5%	Real Estate	3%	Documentary
1%	Agribusiness	1%	Multi-Level Marketing

Something to keep in mind, however is that as more and more shows are created, and more and more of them have network support (ie: the budget for high quality production) you need to make sure that your sound and content quality is high. It’s hard to be objective about your own work, of course – we all rate ourselves either too highly or too lowly, so make sure you

have a mechanism for getting objective feedback on both your audio-quality and your content. One Stone Creative offers [podcast audits](#) for this purpose, and many producers include coaching and consulting for audio and delivery.

PART 2: BRANDING AND MONETIZATION

This data about show topics should be looked at more for interest than as a way to inform your decision-making. Your own topic is going to be based on your business rather than following the trends of the most popular shows. Those popular shows are popular because of existing audience, content and audio quality, and promotional effort. Keep in mind that Apple podcasts gives a limited number of categories, and that you have a lot of flexibility in terms of the topics you cover from episode to episode. There isn't a fantastic podcast search engine out there yet (although many companies are trying to make that a reality!) and you're more likely to get new listeners with your own promotion and collaboration with other hosts than having your show presented by a mysterious algorithm. In other words – choose categories as accurately as possible, but don't stress about them.

ACTION ITEM:

Look at your podcast production process. Does it include a way for you to get feedback on your episodes? If not, look to colleagues, other podcasters, or professional services providers to make sure you're continually improving.

61%

Have ads or
sponsors

11%

Offer paid premium /
ad-free versions

Moving on to ads, sponsorships and premium access. “How do I monetize my podcast?” Is one of the more frequent questions you'll see in podcast land. And it's a question that has many answers. 61% of the top business podcasts have ads or sponsors as evidenced by produced ad spots in shows – typically as a pre or post-roll – or by host read endorsements or promotions, and by links to sponsors in the show notes. Let's look at each of these monetization methods, how they work, and how you might be able to use them (or why you might not!)

Ads are typically pre-produced, and inserted as pre-rolls or post-rolls in podcast episodes. They're generally purchased by advertisers in marketplaces, or negotiated a part of network deals. Listening to the ads in the top 100, most of them probably came from host-provided marketplaces, or larger advertising networks. With enough downloads, this can be a lucrative, and low-effort monetization strategy, but it isn't necessarily the best use of airtime for all podcasters.

PART 2: BRANDING AND MONETIZATION

Host-read ads are sometimes arranged through marketplaces, but more frequently, especially for smaller shows, negotiated individually. A host-read ad is much more valuable than (and effective!) than produced ads, and the podcast endorsement can be just a portion of a much bigger sponsorship package. Most of the sponsored shows in the top 100 placed their sponsorship read close to the top of the show after the introduction, or right before the final call to action, and most of them include links and descriptions in the show notes as well. If you negotiate a sponsorship deal for your own podcast, you should follow that lead.

Premium Access. Many podcasts monetize themselves through individual donations and support through services like Patreon, or membership sites and apps created by networks. Fans can pay a fee for privileged access to early releases, ad-free episodes, and other perks like access to the hosts or bonus content. 11% of the top 100 shows use this strategy, and about half of them are networked, offering access to bonus or otherwise privileged content for a variety of shows rather than just one.

A podcaster who is creating a show to serve their broader marketing strategy should carefully consider what kind of monetization they want to include. Airspace is valuable and is often better filled with cross promotions, and information about a company's own products, services and events over earning a few dollars with an ad.

ACTION ITEM:

If not sponsorship, than what?

Talk about another show you love, either as part of a swap, or just because you want to help someone grow.

Promote your own companies products, services, or events.

Talk about a recent or upcoming episode to drive interest.

Review a book, product or service you like - you can share the fact that you did so with the creator and perhaps start a new working relationship!

PART 3: SHOW PARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

The different elements of a podcast are what gives a show its overall feel. Broadly, the different parts of a podcast are what MAKE it a podcast rather than a generic piece of multi-media, and the choices you make about what elements to include in your own podcast are what make it a valuable, brand building media asset for your company.

There is lots of different nomenclature used to describe the different parts of a show, and at One Stone Creative we call them segments. Each unique show element is a different segment that you need to make a decision about. Segments we most frequently see (in order of appearance!) are:

- **Pre-Roll** – dynamic content at the beginning of each episode,
- **Hook** – a teaser or quote at the very top of the show,
- **Produced Intro** – a produced, repeated introduction, often with music introducing the show,
- **Welcome** – the host or hosts welcoming the audience and a guest if they have one. This is also where you'll find banter, if it's included,
- **Body Content** (often composed of multiple smaller segments!) – This is the main meat of the episode,
- **Mid-roll** – this can be anywhere between the Produced Intro and the Outro, depending on where you like to place your advertisements, sponsor reads and promotions. Can be dynamic or 'baked-in' the show,
- **Soft CTA** – generally a wrap up question, where the guest can be found, or where more resources can be found, often including a thank you to contributors.
- **Outro** – produced outro like the CTA
- **Hard CTA** – final words / request to share and subscribe,
- **Post-Roll** – the same as a pre-roll, but at the end.

There is the most flexibility around the end of the show. It's a good place to be creative and interesting as you really want people to stick around as long as possible, and if listeners know something good is coming – they will! Please see **Appendix 2 for a Show Segment Planner** that you can use to either audit your current segments, or plan them out for a new show!

PART 3: SHOW PARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

Now, let's look at how the top shows are using these elements!

48%

Start the show
with a hook

(A teaser
quote or
description of
the episode to
come)

I was happy to see nearly half of all shows using a hook – it's a great way to pique curiosity, and those first few seconds are critical to gaining the interest of your listener. The benefit of a hook is that it's fresh, unique content right at the beginning rather than the familiar sequence of a produced intro. It also sets a high-level theme for the show. Using a hook takes more time and effort than not using a hook, so that's a decision best made based on your available production time and budget – but if you can, you should.

Unsurprisingly, 84% of shows have some kind of produced intro – it's an important part of audio branding. Just like when you're watching the news, or a favorite television show, the produced intro is the familiar cue that "the thing you care about is starting!" The sound and vocals become familiar to your listeners and signal to them mentally that the show is about to begin.

84%

Have a produced
intro

14% of the top 100 shows have an ad as the very first thing anyone hears, which is almost certainly achieved by a pre-roll ad inserted from a marketplace, host or network. I'm not wild about using that critical spot for a CPM ad – instead of telling your audience what they're about to listen to, it's telling them about a product or service. It isn't the wrong thing to do – but it may not be the best thing to do.

14%

Start with
an ad

ACTION ITEM:

Audit the top of your show! How are you using the critical first few seconds of listening time?

If you're not using a hook - experiment with them! If you've never had a produced intro, make one and see what it does to the tone and feeling of your show.

PART 3: SHOW PARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

79%

Have guests always,
sometimes or in
segments

Moving into body content: a staggering 79% of the top 100 shows have a guest either as the main body content of the episode or as a sub-segment. There are lots of reasons why this can be:

- Guests offer fresh, interesting perspectives and information to your audience.
- Guests occasionally help promote shows. (This is not something to count on, however!)
- Talking to experts and authorities increases your own authority – this is a thought leadership play (but make sure to aim for about equal talking time!)
- Guests don't take less preparation than a solo episode, but they can offer an easier, more natural speaking dynamic and overall energy for a host.
- Plainly, based on the data: it's what the thing that's done.

This doesn't mean that you have to have guests, of course. If your show is highly educational or developed specifically to build your own personal brand, you may elect to do it solo or with a co-host rather than sharing the spotlight. Guest wrangling can be its own challenge as well, but the benefits of guest relationships outweigh the challenges.

78%

Have a
produced CTA

Produced CTA's or Outros are almost as common as produced intros. There was a wide variety of ending, and CTA types, as you'll see below - ranging from some nice music, to a very polished closing script with thank yous to the guests and audience and previews of the content to come in the future. Having a consistent pattern for your close is a good signal to listeners: It's over!

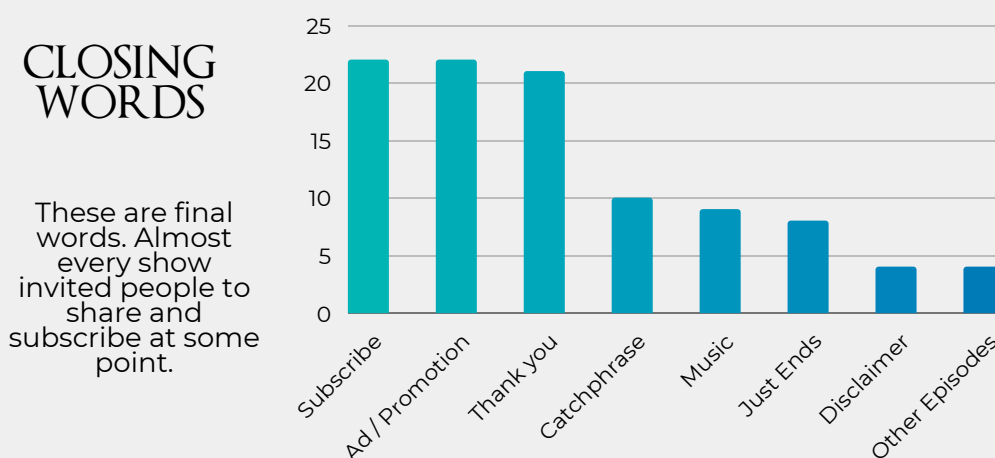
16%

Thank the
production
team.

Moving towards the end of the show, we noticed that about 16% of shows thanked the team that helped them create it – this is always a nice thing to do, but is also probably reflective of the trend in theatre and other live performances to highlight the contributions of the tech crew and musical support. I suspect this trend is going to increase over time.

PART 3: SHOW PARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

The final words was a fun bit of research to do – these represent a variety of actual end points – some ends were produced outros, some were soft CTA's and some (the ads) were post-rolls. How you end the show in terms of what segment it is matters less than the actual content of your closing. As I mentioned above - chose a sequence and stick to it.



About a quarter of the shows ended with a request to share and subscribe, but almost all shows, even those with other closing words, asked for a share or subscribe at some point. You might want to vary how you do it from episode to episode, but it should always be there. Some hosts do it right at the beginning of the show, after the welcome, which is kind of a nice way to get it out of the way early.

Another quarter ended with an ad or promotion – a mix of post-roll style advertisements, and more customized host-reads – I was surprised by how many ended this way. If you want to end your show with a sponsor read or an ad, make sure you know what percentage of your listeners listen all the way to the end! That's information you'll need during negotiation, or when you're estimating your potential earnings.

Almost as many people ended with a thank you! This could be to their guest, their audience, their team, their co-hosts, their families – if in doubt, a thank you is never a bad thing to include.

PART 3: SHOW PARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

A significant percentage ended the show with a “catchphrase.” In our parlance that is any specific phrase that wouldn’t be part of a normal conversation but is repeated week to week. My personal favorite was a short goodbye by one of the host’s children. More common was “goodbye [special name for fans!]” This reminds me of a Youtuber, Ze Frank who years ago, started his broadcasts with “Hey there, Speedracers!” and a chocolate shop who addresses all Facebook posts with “Dear Fudgelings.” This might border on gimmicky, but if you have a really engaged, tight knit community, then it’s a lovely way to make people feel like one of the in-group, and if it’s a brand-affiliated name or title you’ve developed, a nice way to work it into every episode!

Moving on – there were a double handful of shows that ended either with just music, which is a fine stylistic choice (watch your licensing!) or abruptly, which struck me as odd in all instances it occurred. Have a real closing – it sounds neater and more polished.

If you are in anything approaching the legal, financial, medical or other protected industries include a disclaimer like 4% of the top 100 shows do! Several others included disclaimers at different points in the show, but if there’s a possibility someone could take your advice, use it, fail and be mad at you, get that disclaimer out there at some point! The same number of shows ended each episode by directing people to either past, or future upcoming episodes. I love this idea – it’s a great way to help a new listener orient themselves in your show, and tease the fantastic episodes you have in the pipeline. (Of course, you can only do this last one if you’re working with a solid runway!)

ACTION ITEM:

Audit the end of your show!

Would a thank you, catchphrase or disclaimer be appropriate for your brand or business? If so, try recording a few and test them with your community.

Record a few different ending sequences and test them out on your audience!

PART 3: SHOW PARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

Let's look a little bit at some other show style elements. What I like about this data is that it demonstrates how flexible you can be with this medium – a quarter of shows use multiple styles! That's awesome – it means you can really shake things up without worrying you're going to alienate your community. I wouldn't go so far as to say you can have a different type of show every week – but for bonuses, specials, or alternate-week shows, there's no reason not to do something a little different! Before doing this research I would have thought that more consistency was always better, but I can see the potential for fun and creativity!

SHOW STYLE ELEMENTS



8% of the top 100 have a call in or Q and A segment – this is a great way to get more audience engagement, and can be the foundation of either a permanent part of your body content every week, or possibly a good way to add shorter episodes to a bi-weekly schedule. You need to have the audience engagement to pull this off, but if you do then it's a wonderful way to help your community be a part of the show.

14% of shows were solo shows or discussions between co-hosts. If you don't want the trouble of guests, or if your main goal for podcasting is consistently generating content to repurpose, this is a strategy you might want to try.

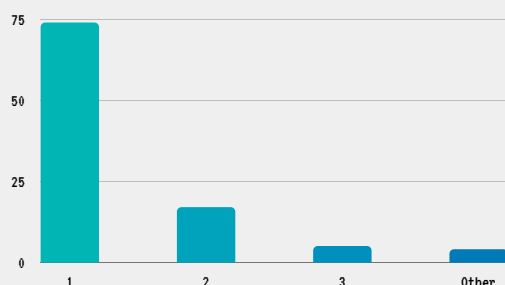
9% of the shows had different, clearly defined segments within the body portion of the show. This style of podcast requires a great deal of organization, and more post-production than a simpler style, but it can result in a beautifully polished show.

PART 3: SHOW PARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

If you want to have a segment like industry news, a speed round of rapid-fire questions, a book review or anything else, having a special segment is a way to include it. These can be great elements of the show to repurpose. See the **Show Segment Planner Appendix 2** for more ideas.

Finally, 3% of the shows were documentary style with narrative, sound design, and talent elements. This is a huge amount of work at every stage, from planning to post-production. Usually this kind of project is taken on by a big production network with the resources to draw on, or by hobbyists whose passion fills in any gaps. Most business podcasters need something that is a little easier to execute week to week, however.

NUMBER OF HOSTS



The vast majority (74) of the top 100 shows have a single host who presents the content. Of those that had other arrangements, 17 had two co-hosts, 5 had three, and the rest had either a variable number hosts, a whole roster, or, on one very strange show, (which just seemed to be clips of motivational speeches and an advertisement!) none that were identifiable.

Now, let's talk hosting companies. Your host is, of course, where on the internet your podcast is stored and from whence it is distributed.

There are so. Many. Hosts. Available. And you can host your own!

Several of the big networks appear to generate their own RSS feeds for their podcasts – something I would recommend only to the extremely tech savvy. There were also several incidences where we couldn't determine, based on the on-site player, exactly who the host was. We grouped them together.

With those out of the way...

PART 3: SHOW PARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

HOSTING COMPANY USED

29	Libsyn	22	Self Hosted / Unclear
16	Megaphone	13	Art19
9	Other*	7	Anchor
4	Omny Studios		

Other Includes: 2 Redcircle, 2
Blubrry, and 1 each: Soundcloud,
NOX Studio, Podbean,
Simplecast, PRX

Libsyn was the most popular of the podcast hosts for the top 100 with 29% (as near as we can tell!) being hosted on that platform. It's one of the older hosts out there and has earned its popularity over the years. Looking at the shows using Libsyn, more of them were independent than networked, which makes sense. I believe Libsyn does offer enterprise level service for multiple shows and dynamic ad management at some levels, but other hosts have dedicated more of their development energy and marketing efforts at networks.

We can see this in hosts like Megaphone, Art19, and Omny Studios, who together host 33% of the top 100 shows – most of them part of larger networks.

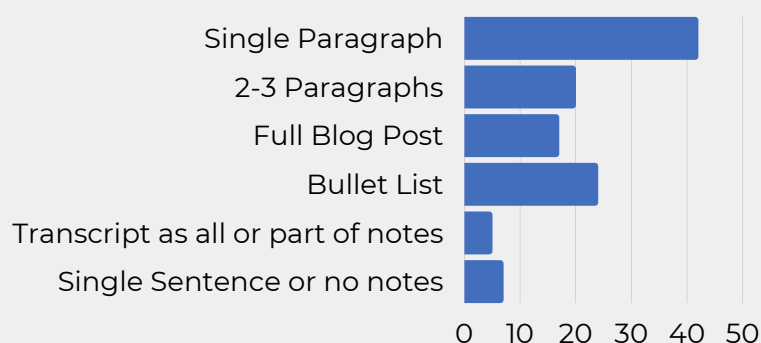
Anchor hosts 7 of the top 100 shows – including some very big names! Anchor is a host people have strong feelings about, either hugely positive, or hugely negative. They're one of the only hosts represented in this list with a robust free level of service, which makes them great for hobbyists and folks starting out – but plainly, serious business owners and podcasters are using them as well.

Your choice of host should be based on the functionality you need, and the price that works within your budget. (I will provide a brief shoutout to Megaphone! We use them to host our client's shows, and they are fantastic. Absolutely superb customer service and very user-friendly dynamic ad management. They are not paying me to say this. I've just had a great experience since we started using them.)

PART 4: SHOW NOTES AND WEBSITES

How you present your podcast on your website, and whether you use your website, YouTube, a podcast host or something else to promote your shows can make a huge difference in terms of how your podcast integrates into your business. Let's look at what the top 100 shows are doing with their show notes and their websites.

SHOWNOTES STYLE



You can tell when you read a show's notes where the host or company is placing more of their emphasis. I was extremely surprised by how many of the top 100 business shows had only a single paragraph of notes! This is the amount of content that makes sense to include in your host as you're scheduling an episode, but I would have expected there to be more robust notes on more of the shows.

Just over 40% provide one paragraph, and another 20% provide 2 or 3. This leads me to believe that they are more concerned with social media content, engaging people on YouTube, or using their podcast for networking and authority rather than as a source of SEO-rich educational content.) Please note, that I am not counting links to resources or guest information here – this is the description of the show.

There is also an argument to be made that for an audio medium, it's just not necessary to include a lot of text!

Just under 20% of shows had a full blog-post style set of notes for each episode, and some of them are *extensive* with tables of contents, quotation call outs, parts or the whole transcript and other assets. As a reader, I love this style, but as a producer, understand it's not on the table for many, or even most shows. If you have a very strong content marketing strategy or department, it's well-worth the investment, but if you don't then a briefer style will be more appropriate for you.

PART 4: SHOW NOTES AND WEBSITES

Bullet-style notes were another popular option with around 24% of shows using some kind of bullets. Represented in this percentage were highlights, questions asked and answered, and key takeaways. A few were timestamped, but most weren't. Almost all of the bullets were quite brief – really focused on encouraging listening to the episode rather than as a standalone document, like the blog post style shows.

47%

PROVIDE TRANSCRIPTS
OF EACH EPISODE

In 2 instances, transcripts were
part of premium access.

A few podcasters included the transcript as part of the notes which is great for accessibility (although vastly more had them separately from the notes). 47% of the top 100 made transcripts available in some way, either as a download, on a separate tab, and in a couple of cases, as part of premium access. Transcripts are going to become more popular, I believe, and it will be worth the effort to have them created, and edited. This can also make repurposing easier down the road!

Finally, a few shows had just a sentence of description, or none at all. This isn't something I'd recommend, if only because it's so out of line with what most other podcasters are doing.

ACTION ITEM:

What are the goals for your podcast shownotes?

Do you want to increase your on-page SEO?

Do you want to create a content path that can guide listeners and readers to more of your material?

Do you have long term projects like books and courses in mind that would make having transcripts useful?

Set an intention for your shownotes, and equally importantly, keep a spreadsheet or database of what you discuss on which show, so you can see what is working and easily find what you need down the line.

PART 4: SHOW NOTES AND WEBSITES

12%

Separate website for
podcast (vs. a section
of company website)

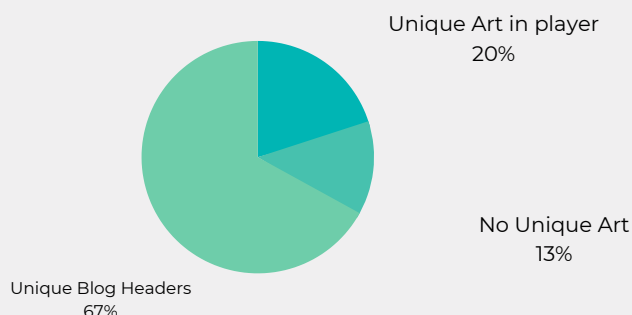
Most shows include their podcast content on their main site, which makes sense from an audience-nurturing standpoint. You want your podcast on your site where people can, if they are listening or reading there, engage with you further. Of course, most people listen to podcast on apps, not a not insignificant number of listeners are browser-based! Only 12% of the top 100 shows had a website uniquely dedicated to the podcast, so if you're wondering where your show should live, on your main website is fine, and probably preferable.

Most podcasts had unique posts for each individual episode, irrespective of the length of their notes, or host, or type of player used. This is definitely on the 'best practices' list! Having each episode on it's own page gives you a new chance to optimize the content for SEO and curate the on-page experience your audience gets, directing them to other content and providing

chances to opt-in that are directly related to the episode they're listening to. It also gives you a nice unique URL for your guest to share – something they'll be more inclined to do when the page features their episode as the standalone bit of content rather than having to tell people to scroll down the player until they find the right one!

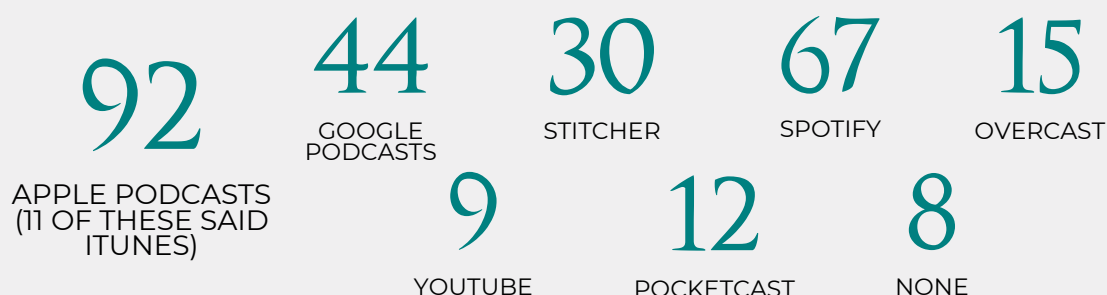
78%

Have the show notes
on Unique Pages

UNIQUE ART FOR
EACH EPISODE?

Likewise – Art! Most podcast hosts allow the option to add unique art for each episode, but most of the top podcasters don't do that (although 20% of them do!) Only 13% don't make any unique episode art at all however, the majority create a blog heady style image to put on the unique post page with the episode player and notes. A good blog post header can do double duty as a sharing graphic or audiogram background, so it's worth the effort to do.

PART 4: SHOW NOTES AND WEBSITES

WHICH PODCAST PLAYERS ARE LINKED TO
FROM PODCAST WEBSITES?

Now, one of the last website-based data points we looked at was “which podcast players do people link to from their websites?”

Apple. They link to Apple Podcasts. Also ,Spotify, Google Podcasts, and Stitcher, but if you’re only going to pick one, pick Apple Podcasts.

Having this kind of link directly to a host is done for a few reasons. It demonstrates a level of professionalism, it aligns you with the host, and it's a considerate way to make subscribing easy for your readers. That said, most people already have their podcast player of preference on thier phone, so it's not necessarily a link that is getting clicked frequently. (Now there's some data I'd like to get my hands on...)

Most of the players offer nicely designed “badges” that you can include on your website, and a significant majority of shows did so! [Podcast Insights](#) has a great page with details about how to get your badges, and some direct downloads you can use!

The most important thing when it comes to how you present your podcast on your website is how intentional you are being about what is where and WHY. Thinking about the different benefits you want from your show, and the different ways your audience uses your online assets well help you determine how much of an investment you should make in your podcast website materials.

PART 5: SOCIAL MEDIA

How do I grow my podcast? Is a question that comes up, if not hourly, than at least daily in most of the podcast groups out there!

And there are a lot of answers! The most common one is: *“Just make great, amazing, wonderful content and share it, and success will come!”*

Which isn’t at all true.

Growing a podcast takes work. More work than creating it! You need to email your list, you need to be guest on other shows, and you may even need to buy traffic to it!

And you pretty much need to be active on social media.

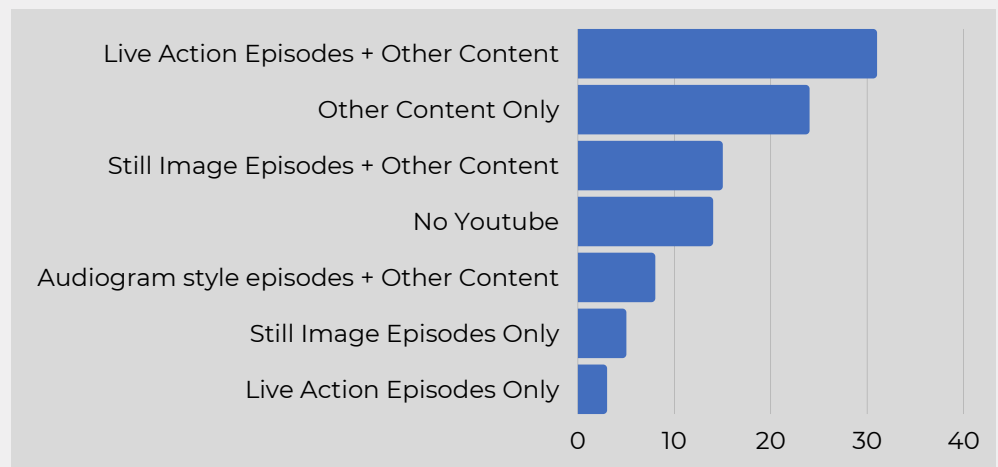
Of course, any company with an established audience and online presence is going to find this easier than a complete newbie – but we can look at what the top shows are doing and use that to try and find the fastest path to success.

Let’s start with YouTube, where I officially have to admit that I was kinda wrong about something.

HOW SHOWS ARE
USING YOUTUBE

88%

Have Active Youtube Pages.
13% of them are Network Pages,
or contain multiple shows.



PART 5: SOCIAL MEDIA

I've always recommended keeping your audio audio and your video video because the experience of listening to a podcast is very different than the experience of watching a video. And almost as importantly, new podcasters should focus on making good audio before focusing on looking good on camera while making good audio. And I still think that both of those things are entirely true for a variety of reasons – but the math is the math and the math says that 88% of the top 100 podcasts have a YouTube channel – so being on YouTube makes the best practice list.

Let's look at this data more closely.

Just over 30% of the shows have live action videos of their podcast episodes on YouTube, along with a host of other content, and a pretty consistent use of playlists. YouTube is a serious marketing channel for these podcasters.

The next most popular way to use YouTube involves no podcast episodes whatsoever – about 25% of shows have active YouTube channels, but not podcast episodes. This makes me wonder just how effective the episodes on YouTube are.

Next comes still image episodes on channels with other kinds of content as well, around 15% (Still image episode is where the audio has been placed against a backdrop – usually custom header art, and that's it. That's the whole video.

Audiogram style episodes (still image with some animation, either of the graphics or a wave pattern, but not fully custom animated) are about another 8% - all on channels that have other content as well.

About 5% of channels have still image episodes, but nothing else on the channel. These were among the least popular channels according to subscriber numbers, so it's not a recommended strategy. Likewise, just a few podcasters have their live action episodes on YouTube, but no other content.

PART 5: SOCIAL MEDIA

About 12% of the top podcasts didn't have a YouTube Channel that we could find at all.

Overall, my impression is that YouTube is its own standalone channel, and if you have a podcast, it might as well be a part of it – especially if you're recording your episodes on video. People are listening to podcasts on YouTube! The most successful channels have a diverse array of content, and I am not wholly convinced it is worthwhile to place just podcast episodes there, with nothing else. One of the best parts about YouTube is the ability to curate playlists and really design a beautiful multi-media content path for your audience, and that's hard to do if all of the content you have for it is all the same type and a direct replica from another medium.

But that said – YouTube probably won't become LESS popular as a place to distribute podcasts, and it won't likely do any harm at all for you to upload your content there as part of your post-production workflow. See **Appendix 3: Ways To Use YouTube** for a list of ideas for other content (much of it repurposed from your show!) that you can put on YouTube, based on our analysis of the top 100 shows!

One thing to remember: If you decide to place your episodes there, make sure to track those stats separately, they won't be counted by your host!

The other social media platforms we looked at were Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook.

97%

Twitter
AccountsMost Followers:
2.2 MillionFewest Followers:
261

Of all the platforms, Twitter was the most popular amongst the top 100 shows. 97% of either hosts, or networks had an active Twitter presence. Some were considerably more active than others, however.

ACTION ITEM:

Tweet. Then do it for the 'gram.

PART 5: SOCIAL MEDIA

93%

Instagram
AccountsMost Followers:
8.5 Million
Fewest Followers:
28

81%

Have Facebook
pages.Most Likes: **13,691,223**
Fewest Likes: **134**
Most Followers: **15,171,206**
Fewest Followers: **141**

16%

Of shows with Facebook
pages also have a group.

Membership:

>5000: **2 groups**
5000-10,000: **5 groups**
<10,000: **6 groups**

Instagram was next on the list with 93% of shows, hosts or networks having some kind of presence there. Instagram is, of course, part of the same company as Facebook, where 81% of shows had a Facebook page. Of the shows that had Facebook pages, 16% of them ASLO had a group. These groups were typically (but not always!) private, and we only counted the ones created by the owner company or host, not unofficial fan groups, of which there were several.

63%

LinkedIn
AccountsMost Followers:
11.5 Million
Fewest Followers:
71

Finally, LinkedIn. 63% of the top shows had a LinkedIn account (we didn't count personal accounts with no activity, although we did count personal accounts that were active.)

The huge variance in number of followers (on all platforms!) indicates that there's always room for another podcaster to join the scene and start connecting. It would be wise for a business podcaster to try and develop a presence on each of these platforms, prioritizing based on where your audience tends to be. I also think that LinkedIn is the social platform with the most potential for growth. It may be that with less "noise" it will be easier to get more attention there, although the flip side may also be true, and more people are on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, anxious to talk podcasting.

Prioritize your social media activities based on where you see the most engagement and where your audience is most likely to be. And have Twitter.

PART 5: SOCIAL MEDIA

ON-WEBSITE SOCIAL SHARING LINKS

These are the options provided for social sharing on podcast websites.



These are the social media sites that were linked to from podcast website pages. This was really interesting because there are many more people using the social platforms than directly linking to them.

My guess would be is because it's much more important to drive traffic *from* social media and podcast players to your own environment on the web rather than directing people away from your website to a social media platform.

The disparity between social media platform use and links to those social media platforms seems to indicate that the on-page links that go along with shownotes aren't an absolutely mission critical element of those pages. Just like the different podcast platform options, it probably doesn't hurt to have them there, but it seems wise to not rely on them for traffic to your platforms.

As with your shownotes, being intentional about where you're investing your social media time and promotional efforts is going to ensure you get the best results from them.

ACTION ITEM:

Think about the path your audience is going to take from one platform to another. Where are they going to start interacting with you? Where do you want them to end up? Actually draw it out! Then look at the different touchpoints you have and make the transitions (links and instructions) between them as easy as possible.

CONCLUSION: AN EDUCATIONAL ADVENTURE

This was a fantastically interesting project (that was, as most fantastically interesting projects tend to be, twice as expensive and 3 times as time intensive as originally planned) that has really given me some insight into how podcasts are being used by business owners and other professionals.

It's hard to make any absolutely iron-clad rules about podcasting, but it's excellent to know which way the wind is blowing and how to present yourself as on the same level as other people in your industry.

In the Appendices to this document you'll find the following resources to help you optimize your own show according to what we know now is industry best practice:

- Goal Setting For Business Podcasts
- Podcast Segment Planner
- Repurposing to YouTube

I am planning to make this an annual project, to keep a close eye on changes in the industry, and I'd love your input! What information would you like about the top 100 business podcasts? Please, respond to any email I send you, and let me know.

If you are interested in launching or relaunching a show and would like to do so with the support of One Stone Creative, I invite you to [book a call with me!](#) I'd love to talk about your ideas.

All the best,
Megan Dougherty,
And the rest of the team at OSC.

APPENDIX 1: GOALS FOR BUSINESS PODCASTS

To have a successful business podcast, the first thing you need to do is determine what success looks like. This means getting clear on your business and/or marketing goals.

It's great to have thousands of downloads every week, but if what you really need is to increase traffic to your website... then is your popular podcast really a success?

Podcasting is a big project! It takes time, money and energy, none of which are resource you want to squander willy-nilly. The trick to making sure that a podcast is a good investment of your time, money and energy is looking at what podcasts CAN do and comparing that to what your business needs.

You start with your business or marketing goals. Not a title idea. Not a guest list. Not even a great social media promotional plan. Business and Marketing goals first.

Stop reading right now and think about what your top 3 goals for the next 6 months are. You don't have to be too specific. Think: more traffic, lower costs, better retention, more sales calls, more backlinks, that kind of thing. (Don't worry, serious and measurable metrics do come into play – just after you've decided whether a podcast is a good idea or not!)

Write them down before reading the next page.

Did you write them down? Really? Okay, please read on.

APPENDIX 1: GOALS FOR BUSINESS PODCASTS

Now let's look at what podcasts are can accomplish and see if anything matches up. At a high level there are three main types of business podcasts, and if you're seriously considering starting one, it should have the overarching purpose of getting you towards that particular goal.

After each overarching goal, are several smaller goals, or variations of goals that are possible within that overarching podcast type.

Business Development. Podcasts are a natural networking and conversation machine. At each stage in your process, from booking a guest to promoting the episode, you have the opportunity to build relationships with people who could help your business.

For example:

- Lead Generation,
- Networking
- Partnership and JV creation,
- Influencer Marketing
- Affiliate arrangements etc.

Audience Engagement. Audience Engagement Podcasts are is all about connecting with an audience you already have that is hungry for more content from you. Goals this kind of podcast can help with are:

- Increasing Engagement
- Testing New Ideas
- Providing a free level of content
- Promoting products and services

APPENDIX 1: GOALS FOR BUSINESS PODCASTS

Thought Leadership. If you are trying to become more well-known in your industry as a serious thinker, innovator and authority, then a podcast can help you there. Some of the things a thought leadership podcast can help you achieve are:

- Media Mentions
- Backlinks
- Conference Invitations
- Smoother Sales (because of established authority)

Bonus:

Content Generation. Content generation is just what happens to you when you have a podcast. Every week, or every other week, you're releasing an episode. That adds up to a lot of content over time. Specifically that means content for:

- Blog content,
- SEO,
- Guest post content
- Social
- Media
- Sales
- Materials
- Large Projects (like books and courses)

Content Generation is a bonus because every podcast will do it, regardless of what the overarching goal is. The three main types inform the **style** of podcast that will be the most effective for you, and the content generation aspect is going to cover a lot of the extra value you get out of creating it.

Now – the critical question:

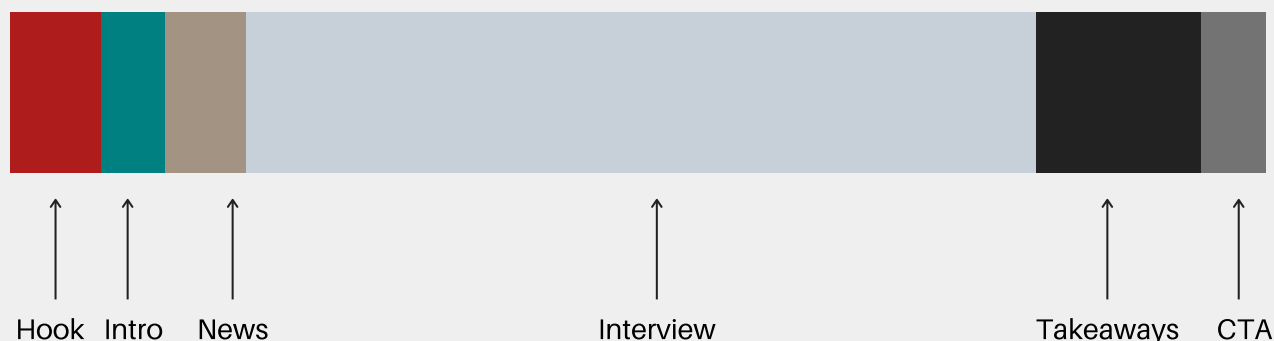
Are the goals you wrote down listed under one or more of the podcast types?

If yes, then amazing – a podcast could be a valuable part of your marketing strategy!

If no, then a podcast probably isn't a great investment for you right now, and you should prioritize other business and marketing activities. Open this up again in 6 months and see where you are.

APPENDIX 2: SHOW SEGMENT PLANNER

Segmenting your content is the most effective way to make sure you are using your time wisely.



SEGMENTS FORM THE "SHAPE" OF YOUR SHOW

This is not always obvious to the listener, but it can be, and either way it provides consistency that they will appreciate!

At a very high level, there are two kinds of segments: the STRUCTURAL like your intros, hooks, calls to action sponsorships and ads, and then there are the CONTENT segments - what all of your structure supports and emphasizes. Overall your content segments should make up around 70% or more of your shows.

We have a selection of The MUST have segments and then a starter list of other segment types you can pick and choose between. You're also completely free to make up your own segments that work specifically for you or your audience. Some ideas not on our list might be advertisements or sponsorship spots, listener spotlights, clips of other media you'll then talk about, clips from past or future shows... the only limit is your imagination!

Look at the options, consider how you want your show to FLOW, then use the worksheet to create your own high-level segment structure. You can change it up from time to time, or alternate structures - but being consistent helps you focus, keeps you on track and at the end of the day, means you are delivering consistent quality.

APPENDIX 2: SHOW SEGMENT PLANNER

According to the top 100 business podcast best practices, you should make sure to include all of these:

Hook

A short clip, question or quotation about the episode.

Produced Intro

Who you are and why your show is awesome, with music.

Guest Contribution

Actually optional, but ideal if you can work something in.

Produced Outro

A regular, repeated closing sequence, often with music.

The above are mostly top of the show and bottom of the show elements. As much as possible it makes sense for your opening and your closing to be consistent - humans like regularity, and over time you'll be training your audience - "It's starting!" and "It's over!"

The body content should have longer, meatier sections, although many successful podcasts do have a variety of segments. Don't insert segments just to have them, but include them if you know your audience will find them interesting and valuable, or you have a great way to repurpose them. Some of the options include, but are in no way limited to:

Interview

Long-form discussion with a guest or guests.

News

Updates and commentary about the industry.

Wrap-Up

a summary of points covered, or takeaways for listeners.

Speed-Round

A fast-paced Q and A session.

Reviews

Your review on a book product or service,

Mid-Roll

An ad-read for a sponsor or advertiser. (AKA Ad-Read)

Action Step

An exercise or activity for listeners to apply something.

Q and A

Questions from the audience, for the host or a guest.

APPENDIX 2: SHOW SEGMENT PLANNER

Use this page, or just write down, either the segments that you currently have, or the segments that you'd like to include in a future show. Describe the content and the length of each segment. Note down anything you'll want to keep in mind, like length, purpose, necessary segue, post production instructions etc. If you are describing current segments, note any changes you might like to make, or feedback you need to seek out.

1st:

2nd:

3rd:

1st:

4th:

5th

6th

APPENDIX 3: REPURPOSING FOR YOUTUBE

YouTube, after Twitter and Instagram is the social media platform most frequently used by business podcasters. While not all of the top hosts put their episodes (in full) on YouTube, many do, and many others use YouTube for a variety of content.

Here are some ways to repurpose the content, topics, or time with guests that you are already devoting to your podcast.

Live Action Recordings of your guest segments, or audiogram versions of same.

Clips of certain segments like Q and A, Ask the Audience, Speed Rounds, Reviews or Commentary. (These could even be recorded live-action if the rest of your show is audio-only.)

A special feature or bonus question with the guest that isn't in the main podcast. Similarly, while you have your guest with you, you can record a brief promotion or follow-up to their episode.

Follow-ups to ideas introduced in podcast episodes. Recording a separate, live action video that continues the conversation is a good way to develop audiences on different channels. Make sure to introduce a new idea, resource or use-case!

Demonstrations of ideas, skills or techniques described on an episode. If you ever talk about something that could be more easily explained visually, adding it to your YouTube channel can really add value to your audience.

Clip certain points or highlights and turn them into videos, or include them in a longer video with concepts from multiple episodes. (This could also work as a playlist!

You can cross-post your episodes directly, but you'll get more value out of each platform if you also create at least some content specific to each one.