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ONE STONE
Creative

PODCASTING — FOR — BUSINESS

*How to Create a Podcast That
Makes a Bottom Line Difference
in Your Business*

MEGAN DOUGHERTY

What Readers are Saying:

"If you own a business, run a business, lead marketing or communications for a business, or are simply podcurious, *Podcasting for Business* is a must-read. It provides five areas where a podcast can help—the Business Podcast Blueprints. And it teaches you how to use those blueprints to creates more opportunities, more efficiencies, and more profits. Plus, Megan Dougherty and her team produce my podcast, which is a leader in the communications industry. She knows what she's talking about."

Gini Dietrich, founder and host of [Spin Sucks](#) and creator of the PESO Model©

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"Having read (and reread) this book, I am even more convinced not simply of the importance of this book and its great utility, but why you as a business podcaster owe it to yourself to read it. Megan's book is literally a must read for every business podcaster, whether you have been podcasting since 2012 or you want to start in the fall of 2024. Many thanks to Megan for writing this book and making me a better business podcaster."

Tom Fox, The Compliance Evangelist and Creator of the [Compliance Podcast Network](#)

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"Podcasting For Business is an essential read for anyone considering starting a podcast. Megan expertly breaks down the different metrics for each type of podcast, making it incredibly useful. As a longtime podcaster, I gained new insights into prioritizing production and promotion. The book delves into the details that go into every decision, from choosing the format to crafting engaging intros and outros, and much more. These are all crucial considerations for podcasters to address before launching."

Nikki Rausch, Founder, Author, and Podcast Host at [Your Sales Maven](#)

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"I've read various books on business podcasting but always found them lacking in actionable insights. This book, however, I found to be helpful and relevant with tangible value. The content was approachable and accessible and easy to follow if you're new to the world of podcasting. If you're looking for a comprehensive step-by-step guide to launch your business podcast, I'd definitely recommend reading this book. It has lots of examples, links and resources which make it a great reference for when you're ready to enter the business podcasting world. It is evident from this content that Megan is a wealth of knowledge, with lots of experience to back up her expertise."

Fatima Zaidi, Founder & CEO of [Quill](#) & [CoHost](#), and a professor of podcasting at [University of Toronto](#)."

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"We know we ought to create value for our listeners, guests, business and stakeholders. Yet we struggle to define value and make it more tangible. Megan solved this puzzle for us in this book. Her "Podcast Value Math" framework is a work of genius. It offers a practical approach to measuring podcast success by focusing on metrics that align with specific business goals. This method helps businesses see the tangible impact of their podcasting efforts, making it easier to adjust strategies and optimize for results."

I particularly liked the detailed Blueprints for different podcast formats. They not only provide a roadmap to produce a profitable podcast but also give actionable steps to achieve the business objectives like audience engagement, establishing thought leadership, or driving conversions. This tailored approach makes the book highly practical and relevant for entrepreneurs looking to integrate podcasting into their marketing toolkit.”

Roshni Baronia, Founder and CEO, [Done For Your Podcasts](#)

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“If you’re looking to start a podcast to grow your brand and grow your business, I highly suggest you check out Podcasting for Business from Megan Dougherty over at One Stone Creative. There’s a lot of information out there on podcasting. Some of it’s true, some of it’s false and some of it is non-applicable to business podcasts. There are different things to make it a marketing activity not just a hobby and I love how Megan breaks down the fundamental Blueprints for Businesses. Too often, people try doing everything in one podcast, it becomes a Frankenstein podcast that never works. Megan walks through the ideas behind it, what your goals are – starting with the end in mind. She shows you how to measure that, to measure success and then shows you everything you need to do to execute on that.

Doing a podcast seems easy, but like so many things, it’s easy to do, it’s hard to do well. This is your brand, this is your business, this is marketing, and if it doesn’t make dollars it doesn’t make sense. You’ll be well served to invest the time and the money to read Podcasting for Business by Megan Dougherty.”

Tom Schwab, Chief Evangelist Officer & Founder, [Interview Valet](#)

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"Podcasting for Business by Megan Dougherty is an invaluable resource for business leaders to understand the power of podcasting to drive their business forward. What makes this book so valuable is its actionable framework, the Business Podcast Blueprint, which helps podcasters create measurable business outcomes. I found the emphasis on aligning podcast goals with broader business objectives particularly innovative and practical. This book is perfect for business owners, marketers, and entrepreneurs who want to optimize their podcasting efforts.

Compared to other podcasting or business books, Dougherty’s focus on clear, actionable metrics sets it apart, offering concrete steps for success. One key insight I gained is the unique power of podcasting to build genuine relationships with your audience and unlock a wealth of opportunities.”

-Julie Fry, CEO/Founder at [Your Expert Guest](#)

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"Start a podcast," they all said, "and your business will explode." Years later, it turns out "they" were all right, but wow, did I make a lot of missteps along the way. So much wasted money and time! Why? Because this book hadn't been written yet. It not only demystifies how to actually get ROI out of a podcast, but it breaks down each of the metrics that really matter. I highly recommend this book TO FOUNDERS who want to start a podcast, grow their business, and save their sanity along the way."

-Annie P. Ruggles, Marketing and Sales Fixer at Quirk Works Consulting

# **Podcasting for Business**

How to Create a Show That Makes a  
Bottom Line Difference for Your Company

By Megan Dougherty

# A Message and an Invitation from the Author

Thank you for downloading Podcasting for Business!

Podcasting is about to get a lot easier for you. This book is going to help you optimize your show for real business outcomes that you can measure – but this isn't the only way I hope to support you.

As you read, you might find yourself thinking: “Okay, sure, but will that work for *me*?”

And without knowing you and your business – I don't know! But I'd love to find out. If anything in Podcasting for Business sparks an idea that you'd like to talk over, you can book a [complementary strategy session right here](#).

You're also welcome to listen to The Business Podcast Spotlight, where I speak with business owners in all sorts of industries about their podcasts, how they're working and what outcomes they are seeing – you might find some inspiration there! Check out the episodes (and apply to be a guest!) at [OneStoneCreative.net/Spotlight](https://OneStoneCreative.net/Spotlight)

I hope to see you soon – and happy podcasting!

Best,  
Megan Dougherty  
Author of Podcasting for Business

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[www.podcastingforbusiness.com](http://www.podcastingforbusiness.com)

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For Audra Casino, who started it all.

# What I Wish I'd Known

Forward by Tom Fox

I started podcasting in 2012. Since that time, I have recorded, produced or guested in over 7000 podcasts. I have founded one B2B podcast network and co-founded a second Regional podcast network. I crank out 25-30 different podcasts each week. In short, I thought I knew about all there was to know about podcasting for business and the business of podcasting.

Boy was I wrong!

Megan Dougherty's new book *Podcasting for Business* is the most comprehensive and by far the best book for any person or business who is considering starting a podcast. While this book touches on the *business of podcasting*, the true focus is on *podcasting for business*. Dougherty lays out what you need to think about in each stage of your podcasting journey.

She begins with her company's unique framework, the Business Podcast Blueprints. These are types of podcasts that a business can utilize to achieve specific goals; Relationship Building Podcasts, Audience Engagement Podcasts, Thought Leadership podcasts, Conversion Podcasts and Content Podcasts. Megan (channeling her inner love for all things *Star Trek*) emphasizes that these Blueprints are the '*Prime Directive*' for your podcast, a touchpoint for guiding all strategic decisions.

She lays out the strengths and weaknesses of each one and how they will compliment your business going forward. She then goes to review the show formats, show types and even show notes for each Blueprint and details how each can be used to help grow your business. All of this is done through a business prism which will allow you to determine cost and expenses and the ROI at the end of the day.

But Dougherty does not stop there. She literally goes 'into the weeds' to detail for you how to work through each step of podcast content creation. Here I was introduced to the term "Podcast Value Math", which has three parts: (1) What makes podcasting valuable to you? (2) What are the specific parts of your podcast that create or facilitate that value; and (3) What are the actions you take to alter your show to change the value it creates and how. All of this allows you to identify specific actions or elements that create value so that you can measure it, increase it, then develop both the infrastructure to capture that information, and the habit of tracking it regularly so you always know the value your podcast is generating.

If you know Megan at all, you know she is all about the data. She brings that home in a hugely important section, entitled simply *The Metrics*. This section details 15 key metrics to optimize and measure the specific business outcomes your podcast can achieve for your business, providing clarity on its value. Combining these Blueprints and Metrics, Dougherty has outlined how to tailor a podcast to meet your specific business goals. As with the rest of this book, it is

this focus on the business (yours!) of podcasting which sets this book apart from the rest of the field. You will learn about the metrics of Sales Cycles, Promotional Opportunities, Referrals, SEO, New Product Creation, Brand Awareness, List Growth, Sales Qualified Leads, Product Sales, Monthly Recurring Revenue, Labor Cost Savings, Affiliate Sales, Sponsorships, Downloads and Social Media Engagement. In short, you will walk away a detailed knowledge of a strategy to help you get more value out of your show with less time spent on trial and error.

Combining these Blueprints and Metrics, Dougherty has outlined how to tailor a podcast to meet your specific business goals. Remember, there are no limits; if you find a new way for your podcast to add value to your business, you're doing it right.

Dougherty then moves to the practical part—*How to Podcast*. This section provides everything you need to transition from “I should have a podcast” to “I’m ready to submit to Spotify.” She provides specific actions for both starting a new podcast and refining an existing one, presented in the recommended order of approach.

First, there is guidance on the decisions and preparations needed to launch or re-launch your show. Next, the core principles for creating a compelling podcast, known as the 3 C’s of Podcasting, are laid out in clear, consistent language. Megan presents options for the cadence of frequency to release episodes, including ongoing, limited seasons, or a hybrid approach.

She touches on the sometimes tricky question of whether to include a video version of your podcast, followed by a breakdown of common episode formats and which work best with various blueprints. She lays out the identification and use of different episode components to achieve your goals are detailed, along with choices for your podcast’s look and feel, including art, music, sounds, and other assets. Megan provides tips for optimizing your recording environment to ensure high-quality audio, as well as the process for selecting, inviting, and preparing guests to ensure a smooth experience. Managing the workflow associated with your podcast, including information storage and communication, is also included. She lays out the different types of show notes, or the written material that goes along with a podcast episode, and their strategic uses are discussed. Finally, she provides insight on how to find and engage a third-party service provider if you decide you want support with your show.

Having read (and reread) this book to write this foreword, I am even more convinced not simply of the importance of its importance and great utility, but why you as a business podcaster owe it to yourself to read it. Megan’s book is literally a must read for every business podcaster, whether you have been podcasting since 2012 or you want to start in the fall of 2024. Many thanks to Megan for writing this book and making me a better business podcaster.

Tom Fox, The Compliance Evangelist and  
Creator of the [Compliance Podcast Network](#)  
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# What is the Point of Podcasting?

In a podcast you have just seconds to grab someone's attention and start delivering value.

So, I'm in the habit of skipping the preliminaries and getting right into things. It makes better audio.

But this is a book not a podcast episode. Since it's already in your hands or on your screen, I don't need to convince you to get it in the first 30 seconds.

And what's more, the fact that you have it means that I can guess a few things about you:

1. You've either got a podcast, or you're feeling podcurious and a show might be in your near future.
2. You believe podcasting is a good marketing strategy but the exact details as to why and how it's a good marketing strategy are a touch vague.
3. You absolutely do not have the time or money to waste on audio-based wild goose chases.

If I'm right (or if I'm wrong but you're still interested), then hello! Welcome to a relentlessly practical approach to podcasting.

My name is Megan Dougherty. I'm co-founder of One Stone Creative Inc, creator of the Podcasting for Business Conference, and the Business Podcast Blueprints, which you're about to learn a great deal about. I am truly delighted that you've decided to read Podcasting for Business.

I'm a nerd about podcasts.

Not the art of them. Nor really the technical side of them, although both matter a great deal.

I'm a nerd about how businesses can use them to create more opportunities, efficiency and profit.

You see, I wanted to be a business owner from the very first time I organized my stuffed animals into an assembly line in a pillow fort factory. It didn't really matter what kind. I spent my school years running little side-hustles, from lemonade to handmade jewelry to summer camps. I went to business school, quickly dropped out, and got a job at a marketing education startup where I got a phenomenal education in digital marketing strategy that a traditional university couldn't provide.

I loved working with entrepreneurs on their businesses, and developing ways to make work easier, more efficient and more profitable.

And I dearly loved teaching people. Still do. My favorite thing to do for work was and remains answering questions.

So, fast-forward to 2017, I had recently moved back to my hometown, was between work projects and ready for inspiration to strike. I was just starting to think that maybe it was time to find another early startup to join when I got a random Slack message from a former colleague, the incomparable Audra Casino. She was a 20-year broadcast veteran who started getting involved in podcasts not long after the time they came up with the word 'podcast.'

She said, "Do you want to start a business together?"

I said, "With you? Absolutely."

We put our skillsets, digital marketing and broadcast audio, together, and decided to produce podcasts for businesses, and we've been doing it ever since. Our team is now 7 people strong, and we've worked with some truly impressive entrepreneurs and business owners. Some of them have picked up an award or two for their podcasts (including a Webby for best limited series podcast, thank you very much!), but all have seen real, tangible and measurable growth for their companies as a result of their podcasts.

Pre-pandemic, the podcasting environment looked pretty different than it does today. It was a much less sophisticated industry, and although there was beginning to be some corporate and professional interest in internal and B2B shows, most podcasts were started AS businesses, or were passion projects run and maintained by individuals as a hobby.

Now, of course, there is much more interest in podcasting as a marketing channel. The reach of podcasts is huge and growing every day. The [2024 Infinite Dial report](#) by Edison Research stated that 47% of US adults have listened to a podcast in the last month, and those who regularly consume podcasts listen to around 8 episodes a week.

That's a lot of ears for a business owner to be in.

So, more companies are, sensibly, starting to pay attention.

But since the beginning of podcasting as a marketing strategy there has been a problem for business owners who wanted to podcast.

It is infuriatingly difficult to see the impact a podcast makes to the bottom line of your business.

And that is a real problem, because unlike when you're running a podcast as a business and can measure success by your reach and revenue, or when you're podcasting for the love of the game and can measure success by how happy you are and how many lives you

touch, most small businesses can't afford to continue a content marketing project without having some kind of metrics that indicate the type and amount of value being created.

Most advice about podcasting focuses on the importance of passion, consistency, content and audio quality, and a small handful of metrics: downloads, and 30-day trailing numbers, or maybe listen-through rates or new leads generated if you're lucky.

These things are all important.

None of them are enough.

It's just not enough information to make good decisions, or even to really understand what impact your podcast is making.

Businesses, especially smaller businesses without massive budgets, need better. But how? That's the real heart of the problem: how do we know, for sure, what value a podcast is creating for a business, and how do we make sure we're getting as much of that value as possible?

And that, friends, is the kind of problem I live for.

And the kind of problem this book is aiming to solve.

Over the years that the team at One Stone Creative and I have been producing company podcasts, I've devoted a lot of my energy to value attribution, and figuring out how business owners can get clarity on exactly the role their show plays in different business areas.

And we've discovered a veritable buffet of ways to do exactly that.

In 2020, the team and I officially codified what we call the Business Podcast Blueprints, a mechanism to plan or refine a podcast so that it delivers clear value within a business. The kind you can measure with real math and track over time. Along with the Blueprints are 15 specific success metrics that can help a business owner understand instantly whether the company podcast is pulling its weight – or if they need to pivot or pull the plug.

This is a methodology we have tried, tested, examined and refined for years, and studied and reverse-engineered among the top podcasts in the world. We've proven it works with our own and our clients' shows, and ultimately distilled it into a simple framework with clear, actionable steps you can use to create a podcast that generates specific and measurable outcomes for your business.

It does require a shift in thinking.

A company podcast is not a standalone project with its own objective criteria for success or failure.

It is a tool in service of a business that needs to do specific jobs very well – and those jobs will vary based on the size, industry, priorities and product or service offerings of the business that creates it.

You (and your business) are effectively the client of your podcast: you need a clear understanding of what it is going to do, in what timeframe, what results you can expect out of it and how much it's all going to cost.

When you have that kind of relationship with your show, then the real fun can begin, and you can optimize it for a host of different benefits that you can point to and say, “There! That is the value, those are the dollars, that is the impact!” And you can control how much of it all the podcast creates.

And that’s what you’re here for, right?

Then let’s begin.

# **The Business Podcast Blueprints**

## The Role of a Podcast within a Business

To have a successful podcast for your business, you need to be clear on your business goals.

Note that I didn't say podcast goals, or even marketing goals.

I said **business goals**.

Because if you don't start there, with what your business actually needs to grow and be sustainable, then you stand a very real chance of investing a huge amount of time, money and energy on a large (and public!) marketing project that doesn't make a bottom-line difference to your business.

And none of us have time for that.

If what your business needs most is something that a podcast can't help you achieve, it might not be the right time to start a company show. It's much better to make that kind of evaluation before you start, instead of six months down the road when you're exasperated with the whole thing.

So, before going any further, we're going to do a little exercise that will let you make a pass/fail judgment about whether you should have a podcast for your business or not.

Step one is to think about your top 3–5 goals for the next 6–12 months.

They don't have to be too specific, but they should be clear and distinct.

Think: more traffic, lower costs, better retention, more leads, more backlinks, better company culture – that kind of thing. (Don't worry, specific measurable metrics will absolutely come into play, just after you've decided whether you should be podcasting at all.)

Write down these goals, or at least firmly affix them in your mind, before moving on.

And what if you ARE six months down the road and exasperated to the point of aggressively shit-canning the entire process?

Or just six months down the road and feeling like it should be a bit easier and more profitable than it is?

No worries. You can apply the same process to changing, refining and updating your show as you can to planning a new one.

The process is the same. Think about your business goals, without considering the podcast you already have. What does your *business* need?

Got them?

Good.

Really high level, there are five business and marketing areas that a podcast can help you make progress in.

We call them the Business Podcast Blueprints. They are:

- Relationship Building,
- Audience Engagement,
- Thought Leadership,
- Conversion, and
- Content.

Let's quickly look at each of these Blueprints and the types of goals they can help your business achieve.

More details about the Blueprints and how to use them is coming up in the next section – this is just to determine if you should be podcasting or not.

For each Blueprint, I'll share its main purpose and some specific goals it can help you achieve.

## The Business Podcast Blueprints

### Relationship Building Podcasts

A Relationship Building show is a foundation on which you build real, ongoing relationships.

This type of podcast is all about connecting with new people. These could be people you'd like to work with, experts you'd like to meet, referral or promotional partners, owners of complementary businesses, event organizers, journalists or influencers – anyone that would be, for whatever reason, a valuable part of your professional network.

**Goals that can fit:** More referrals, more customers or clients, sales of higher-ticket products and services, speaking and other promotional opportunities, guesting on other shows.

## Audience Engagement Podcasts

An Audience Engagement show is going to be a way for you to serve and connect with people who know you.

This Blueprint will help you connect with the audience you already have. These may be people who already follow you, like members of your email or social media community, or they could be people who become aware of you through marketing you are already doing, like paid traffic, speaking or other organic marketing. Finally, they can be people who work with you – your employees, team members or colleagues.

**Goals that can fit:** Training and onboarding (internal or client), hiring and recruiting, social media engagement, sponsorships, lead nurturing.

## Thought Leadership Podcasts

Thought Leadership shows are mainly for sharing and promoting your own brand and ideas.

Thought Leadership shows exist primarily to increase the influence, authority and reputation of the host and company that create them. These are shows where you are bringing your own intellectual property to the table, engaging in high-level conversations with colleagues and generally setting the tone and topics for what your industry is talking about.

**Goals that can fit:** Mentions and backlinks, interview requests, invitations to speak and present, brand awareness, shortened sales cycles.

## Conversion Podcasts

A Conversion Podcast is going to be a step in, or enhancement to, a sales or opt-in funnel.

These shows are about moving people from one point in a sales or opt-in process to the next one. They exist as a part of, or move directly into, sales funnels (can be top, middle or bottom for the funnel, depending on how you deploy them!). They often involve some kind of gated content or access to you as the host, or to your guests.

**Goals that can fit:** Community and email list growth, product and service sales, monthly recurring revenue, increased opt-in rates.

## Content Podcasts

Content Podcasts are for creating the content you need in other areas of your work

Content shows may or may not be a standalone Blueprint for your business. No matter what kind of podcast you make, content (and a lot of it) will be a side effect. But there are shows that exist primarily to create content that can then be distributed and repurposed, and that is a completely legitimate reason to have a show!

**Goals that can fit:** SEO, website traffic, content to repurpose, long-term content projects like books, courses, opt-ins.

So – should you have a company podcast?

If one or more of your goals fits into one or more of the Business Podcast Blueprints, then you can confidently proceed knowing that you're going to be taking action that moves your business forward.

If none of them do, then you can either pin the idea of a podcast for a few months while you handle what needs handling or read on and see if any of the Blueprints, or the specific metrics I discuss here, are something you're comfortable investing in even though it doesn't serve an immediate need. If you have the bandwidth, preparing for the future is no bad thing!

## A Note on Timelines

Before moving on, the other thing to consider is the timeframe. If you need more clients, a podcast can certainly help you win them (and maybe even better ones than you can get otherwise!), but if you need them yesterday, then other marketing strategies might be a better fit just now.

It's important to be realistic here. Podcasting is rarely profitable from day one.

Expect that a podcast can help you make meaningful progress towards your goals over 3–6 months – sometimes more, sometimes less, depending on your goals and how you are optimizing it. You should plan to spend time and money on the project for at least that long before you start to see a return.

In the next section, we're going to dig into each of the Business Podcast Blueprints in more detail and how you can use them to make strategic decisions for your show that will first, protect your investment, and then, start creating more and more value for your business.

## Using the Business Podcast Blueprints

Bad news first.

You gotta choose one.

One Blueprint to rule them all.

One Blueprint that is going to be the final “decision maker” that you turn to when you need to make a high-level strategic decision for your podcast.

I’m not saying that you won’t get any Audience Engagement if you choose Thought Leadership. If you podcast (well) for long enough, you’re going to see improvements and benefits in all five Blueprint categories.

But choosing one as the *most important* means you’ll be focused, and your show will be cohesive. It will be easier to produce and promote and to measure the impact it’s making on your company.

You wouldn’t be here if you didn’t want that level of clarity.

Ready to go?

All else being equal, choosing a Blueprint starts with your highest-level goal for how your podcast will work in your business.

Does your business most need:

- A passionate and engaged audience of people (or specific individuals!) that know, like and trust you? You want **Audience Engagement**.
- More and better relationships with fellow business owners, potential (higher ticket) clients, promotional and referral partners or colleagues? You want **Relationship Building**.
- To have an amazing reputation as a thinker, to be seen as a source of new and innovative ideas, and generally considered an expert’s expert? You want **Thought Leadership**.
- To get more people into your list and community, signed up for subscriptions, or paying for lower-ticket products and services? You want **Conversion**.
- To consistently create a lot of high-quality content for your company, social media, SEO and repurposing strategy? You want **Content**.

Your Blueprint is your podcasting Prime Directive. Ultimately, if the show does THIS one thing for you, it’s fulfilling its role.

If that's feeling a little restrictive (I want it all!) remember that you will accrue all or most of these benefits over time. You pick a single most important goal to make your life easier, so your show is more focused (and therefore more appealing), and so that you can easily see the impact it's making on your bottom line. You will be optimizing for other specific business outcomes, but this is the one goal to rule them all.

Even more importantly, your Blueprint is your decision-making filter.

If you're ever wondering, "Should I...?", your Blueprint will help you make the decision in a way that doesn't conflict with your ultimate goal.

This is important because it's easy to work at cross-purposes to your own goals. There are so many ways to get value and benefits out of podcasting, but they don't all mesh or overlap perfectly.

Your Blueprint can help you decide:

- What style and format of show you should create
- What style of show notes you should make
- Whether you should have guests
- Whether you should have ads or sponsors
- What kinds of promotions you should create for your episodes
- Where you should invest most of your time and money

This isn't an exhaustive list.

Any time you need to make a strategic decision about your podcast, your Blueprint will help you do so.

When I was working with my book coach, Amy Collette (of *Unleash Your Inner Author*), she had me identify my ideal reader so that if I ever ran into a decision to make like, "Should I include this topic?" or "Does this need to be repeated?", I could ask, "Will it help my ideal reader?" That process always provided the answer.

The Business Podcast Blueprints work in exactly the same way. If you have a question that starts with, "Should I...", you can find the answer by asking if it will help you achieve your Business Podcast Blueprint.

- Will this help me Build Relationships?
- Will this help me Engage my Audience?
- Will this help me achieve Thought Leadership?
- Will this help me get more Conversions?
- Will this help me create Content?

Below are each of the Blueprints, a reminder of their purpose, and answers to each of those questions.

As you are reading, remember: you can make different decisions if you want to! This is what we've found to be the most successful in our research and with our clients, not an inflexible rule carved into stone.

## Relationship Building

*Relationship Building shows exist to help you, as the host, connect with other people. These might be potential clients, referral or promotional partners, colleagues – anyone who could be an important part of your professional network.*

**Show Format:** Interviews. A Relationship Building show will be all about the interviews. You can't network if you're not talking to people, although many shows add the occasional solo episode. Those tend to perform well, and your listeners will enjoy the odd "just you" episode.

**Show Notes:** Show notes for this style of podcast should focus on the guest, the great things they said, their links and key moments. Since you're working on nurturing relationships, consider the show notes (and other assets) a chance to do exactly that and roll out the red carpet in terms of what you provide.

**Guests:** You should have guests at least 80% of the time in a Relationship Building podcast.

**Ads or Sponsors:** Avoid ads and sponsorships for this kind of show. You don't want anything that detracts from the relationship you are building with your guest. The only possible exception might be promoting your own or the guest's products or services.

**Promotional Priority:** Focus on the guest: who you're speaking to, why they're an expert, what else they're working on and the insights they shared.

**Investment:** Spend most of your budget and bandwidth on showing your guest a good time before, during and after the show. Run paid promotions to their episode, send a thank-you gift, invest in great booking software and spend the time following up.

## Audience Engagement

*Audience Engagement shows exist to let you connect with, nurture and engage an audience you already have, or people who become aware of you through other marketing channels. They might be on an email list, on social, members of a community or just general fans – but wherever they are, you want to provide them with content and attention in a scalable way.*

**Show Format:** You can get creative here. For an Audience Engagement Show, you can do Q&A style episodes where you answer questions your audience has, you can teach content in solo episodes, you can have information-style interviews where you talk to someone who has knowledge you don't, you can do coaching or audits – really anything you can think of. The key is to be very responsive to what your audience wants, needs and is interested in.

**Show Notes:** Focus on actionable information for your show notes: key takeaways, tips, instructions, and of course, opportunities for your audience to respond and share their own ideas and experiences.

**Guests:** Totally optional for an Audience Engagement show. Guests can be a great addition, but they're not required.

**Ads or Sponsors:** This Blueprint is the best fit for ads and sponsors. Just make sure you don't have so many that your listeners get irritated!

**Promotional Priority:** Get your episodes where the people who need them can easily access them. This might mean social media, email and sites like Medium or Substack, as well as different places on your website, in your communities and on landing pages.

**Investment:** Invest in quality production and making your content available in different formats like written, visual and video. Paid traffic and promotion might also be a good idea for an Audience Engagement show.

## Thought Leadership

*Thought Leadership shows exist primarily to increase the influence, authority and reputation of the host and company that creates them. These are shows where you are bringing IP to the table, engaging in high-level conversations with colleagues and generally setting the tone and topics for what your industry is talking about.*

**Show Format:** Solo episodes or conversational style Interviews. If you want to establish thought leadership, you need to BE a thought leader, and that means putting the ideas out there for the rest of your industry to respond to, reference and report on. You can do this by creating solo episodes with your own content or by having high-level conversations with fellow experts in your field.

**Show Notes:** Should contain action steps and key ideas that people can take and run with. Many people like to have timestamped bullets of important ideas or quotations, and this is also a good opportunity to provide a transcript, both for your audience who prefers to read and for later repurposing.

**Guests:** Optional. You don't need guests for a Thought Leadership show, but if you have them, make sure the conversations you have with them ARE conversations, not you running down a list of questions or exclusively making them look awesome. You're sharing the spotlight in a Thought Leadership show, not shining it solely on your guest (like you would in a Relationship Building one).

**Ads or Sponsors:** Either none, or those promoting your own content or personal recommendations of companies you know and trust. A Thought Leadership style podcast is no place for a pile of pre-produced ads. Be selective, promote your own content and always do

host-reads (where you as the host read the ad, rather than have it produced with a voice over) if you are going to have ads.

**Promotional Priority:** For promoting a Thought Leadership show on social media, focus on the ideas you're sharing, the questions you're answering and the conversations you're going to have with other experts. Consider reaching out directly to journalists and influencers who work in your industry and may want to comment on what you are saying.

**Investment:** The highest quality recording equipment, space and post-production that you can manage. There are a lot of shows out there, and people are selective about what they'll listen to. Two shows can have the same basic kind of content, and the one with better production value will win every time. This doesn't matter for every type of podcast, but if you're trying to be a thought leader, the quality of your sound must match the quality of your content. It's also wise to invest heavily in content repurposing. You're putting out IP – make sure it's distributed on all your channels and in all possible formats.

## Conversion

*Conversion shows exist as part of, or leading directly to, sales or opt-in funnels, usually with some kind of gated or privileged content level. These are a little tricky because podcasts are notoriously difficult to convert from, but it can be done!*

**Show Format:** You have a lot of flexibility around the format for a Conversion podcast. As long as it is designed as part of a sales funnel, it passes muster. Some particularly useful formats are case study-style interviews if you're looking to make client sales, episodes that include clips or references to paid or premium offerings and having multiple instances of podcast episodes – some free and some paid, like ad-free or extended versions.

**Show Notes:** Notes for a Conversion podcast should be expansive and replicate the experience of listening as closely as possible, often with a companion blog post or cleaned-up transcript. If the goal is conversions, it doesn't really matter if someone is reading or listening, so make sure to get all of the information in as many places as possible.

**Guests:** Totally optional. Guests can help you achieve the goal of getting your listeners to do something, or you could have solo episodes that do the same thing. A Conversion podcast is more about the framing and where it exists in the customer's buying journey.

**Ads or Sponsors:** Ads and sponsors do not belong in a Conversion-style podcast *unless* they are ads for what you want people to convert on!

**Promotional Priority:** Show growth. There is a direct line from listeners to sales or opt-ins, so you want to get as many new listeners as possible to your podcast and should promote any and all elements of the show that will be intriguing, spark conversations or get people excited to take another step in your direction. This might mean sharing clips, teasing what you teach, direct 1:1 outreach to potential listeners or promotional partners and paid promotions.

**Investment:** This is a type of podcast where you might consider paying for marketing help or show growth (but avoid those folks on Instagram who guarantee you thousands of downloads. They will be bots). SEO, Pay Per Click and other content marketing experts can really help you get your numbers up, however.

## Content

*Content Shows exist to create content that can be used by your company, either internally or externally. This may or may not be a standalone Blueprint for your business.*

**Show Format:** Absolutely anything goes. Follow your creative heart to the ends of the earth! One idea to consider is outlining a course or book you want to create, breaking it into episode-sized chunks, and recording it over the course of a year. That can be a great way to tackle huge content projects and build your repurposing right into the process.

**Show Notes:** As detailed and expansive as you can manage. Since your main goal is content, make sure your notes are standalone pieces that can be referenced, reused and shared easily.

**Guests:** Go for it! You can take a content platform and get extra value out of it by also networking, shining a light on clients and case studies or expanding the areas you can speak about by bringing in other experts.

**Ads or Sponsors:** Absolutely any kind you like. Or none if you prefer.

**Promotional Priority:** For promoting a Content Show, if you decide to promote it at all, there aren't any real rules – whatever is most important to your business is what you should focus on promoting. Depending on how you are using the content it may not even be appropriate to promote the show itself, as opposed to the content you are repurposing from it. You can look at the podcast as a chance to experiment with ad learn new promotional strategies, or just plug your favorite episodes into your normal content promotion channels.

**Investment:** Your main investment here is going to be in formatting, presenting and then repurposing your podcast. That might mean transcripts that get organized into a book or course; that might mean episodes that get sliced and diced into a world of social media posts. The sky is the limit, but it will be the best use of your resources. It's also not a bad idea to invest in recording and post-production quality so your content stays more evergreen.

## Using the Blueprints for Other Decisions

We've just covered the high-level best practices for each of the Business Podcast Blueprints, but podcasting is and will remain a constantly changing and creative practice. Your specific situation, needs and priorities could result in a different way of designing your podcast. And that's amazing. It's why the Blueprints are designed to help you make strategic decisions of all

kinds, not just the ones mentioned here. They will help you verify that anything you want to do is aligned with your most important goal.

To use the Blueprints for a strategic decision not on our list:

**Step 1:** Identify the strategic decision you need to make.

**Step 2:** Formulate a question that includes your specific situation and/or constraints.

**Step 3:** Answer the question to find out if the decision is aligned with your goals or might conflict with them.

Here are a few examples of how this works:

| Strategic Decision                  | Blueprint           | Question                                                                                                       | Answer                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Should I have guests on my podcast? | Thought Leadership  | Will having guests help me establish thought leadership in my industry, so our brand awareness increases?      | <b>Yes</b> , if taking the format of conversations between experts – not interviews where I just ask someone else to share their expertise.              |
|                                     | Audience Engagement | Will having guests help me create a better relationship with my existing audience so they trust my brand more? | <b>Yes!</b> There are lots of things I don't know that would be helpful to my audience and bringing them that information will improve our relationship. |
| Should I try to get sponsors?       | Conversion          | Will sponsors help me get more memberships in my community?                                                    | <b>No.</b> Sponsorships will take valuable airtime and attention I could be using to direct people to the membership site.                               |
|                                     | Audience Engagement | Will sponsors help me serve my existing audience?                                                              | <b>Maybe!</b> There are lots of companies offering services that could be useful to them, and they take my recommendations seriously.                    |

Always format your questions in relation to your business goals, and in your answer include any restrictions you might be working under, like time, budget and bandwidth.

It's how you choose to use the Blueprints for your specific show and business that will make your podcast unique and profitable.

What works for you may or may not work for anyone else.

You're the boss of your podcast. The Business Podcast Blueprints will help you be a good one.

## A Tale of Three Podcasts

What does any of this actually mean in practice?

Well, podcasts that look very similar from the outside can actually be creating completely different kinds of value for the businesses running them.

Imagine a standard podcast. The podcasty-est podcast you can dream up. You know what I'm talking about: around 40 minutes long, one host interviewing one guest, releases every Tuesday. The Ur-Podcast.

There are a lot of them.

And it's tempting to think they're all the same. The more cynical among us might say that they are. But they can be serving very different functions for the companies that run them, and be making a very different impact based on the Blueprint used and the individual metrics they're optimized for.

Let's look at a few examples.

### Company A

Company A's podcast is a Relationship Building show that is optimized for getting more referrals, with a bonus of SEO-rich content creation.

This 'bread-and-butter' show is the main vehicle that the host uses for networking to build the professional relationships they rely on for referrals and collaboration partners.

Their decision-making process might have looked like this:

James runs Company A, a boutique legal firm specializing in family law, typically divorces. This is an often an emotionally fraught area of practice, where his clients are making important decisions about their property, family and legacy while under considerable stress. Trust is all-important, and most of his clients are direct referrals.

Knowing that word-of-mouth is the most reliable way to fill his sales pipeline, James wants to expand his professional network so more of those referrals come in. He also wants to have resources available for new connections so that, even if they don't speak to each other right away, they could learn about this area of law, his personal philosophies and priorities in practice. Even though referrals are his main new business source, he always wants to make sure that when people Google "divorce lawyer near me", his name comes up.

In planning a podcast for Company A, James spent some time thinking about the types of business owners that regularly send him new clients – and those that he regularly sends leads to in turn. These make up the bulk of his guests.

Podcasts can be a magic ‘calendar-opener’ – someone who probably wouldn’t be interested in jumping on a 15-minute networking or discovery call will be delighted to spend 45 minutes with you for a podcast interview. James optimized the show to get more referral partners by creating a booking workflow that included multiple chances to connect with his guests, like a prep call to plan the interview, as well as the interview itself. He also always makes a point to invite his guests to a debrief and brainstorming session a few weeks after the recording.

After each conversation he has on the podcast, James has his team write a blog post about the episode, interlink it with related content and make sure it is SEO-optimized, allowing it to act as an evergreen resource for new traffic.

## Company B

In Company B, that same-on-the-surface show is an Audience Engagement podcast, optimized for sponsorship dollars, social media engagements and labor cost savings. It was designed to engage their large existing audience who are really passionate about the brand and the host, and constantly want more and more and more interaction with them, which can be a challenge to provide at scale.

Heather owns a social media marketing agency, is a multiple-book author and is a sought after speaker in the social media industry. She has amassed a large audience through her active Instagram and LinkedIn accounts, her books and keynotes, and a few videos that went viral. Her clients are mostly in the health and wellness space, and she often finds she is spending more time than she wants to answering questions and providing the same guidance over and over again.

When she decided to podcast, Heather wanted to create resources for her clients so they could help themselves to information and support rather than requesting it directly from her and her customer service team. These resources have become a part of her service offering and can also be used to help members of her community that aren’t able to hire her team directly.

Her industry has a huge number of technology and service providers who are always looking for exposure to new audiences. Since she has such a large following to begin with, Heather decided to pursue sponsorships for the show, initially to cover the costs of production, but later to try and develop them into an additional income stream for the agency, either through direct sponsorship deals, or with affiliate offers.

Finally, she wants her podcast to be something that her community could really talk about and engage with, so most of her episodes are Q&A style, where she brings in guest experts

who can speak to highly specific topics in areas directly related to social media. Most of the questions are sourced directly from her audience, which improves her engagement rates. She makes sure to regularly post advice, questions and discussion topics from the podcast on her social media accounts and directs people to engage with her there.

## Company C

In Company C, our bread-and-butter podcast is a Thought Leadership show, optimized for backlinks and citations and shortening the sales cycle. It is a sophisticated weekly conversation between experts hashing out the details and nuances of their respective specialties, that reporters and journalists love to comment on, and that their very high-deal-value clients go to for advice and insight.

Mike's business, Company C, is a public relations agency that primarily works with pharmaceutical companies. He helps his clients influence the stories told about them in a constantly revolving news cycle that isn't always kind.

Being in an industry with so much controversy and strict regulations, Mike wanted to create a space where subject matter experts could talk about the products they were developing, and the reality of working with new drug technology in a not-always-friendly media environment. His clients choose him and Company C because they are intimately familiar with the issues facing drug companies, they have a reputation for intelligent and surprising strategies and they seem to know anyone who is anyone.

When he decided to podcast, Mike wanted to make sure that his show was one that always takes a stance and was 'the thing to listen to' for anyone who wanted to be up to date on what was happening in the pharmaceutical industry. He decided that his conversations would be with R&D experts, executives, scientists, researchers, and government officials, and each episode needed to add something new and important to the conversation happening in the industry.

When planning his episodes, Mike makes sure that he is having conversations with, and not interviewing, his guests, and always creates a robust introduction and closing section for the show after recording the main body of the episode so he has a chance to share what his, and his company's, stances are on the issue being discussed.

Part of the post-production for each show is categorizing the episodes with keywords, and noting down a few details about what types of clients will find the episode valuable. This information is shared with his sales team so that when they are connecting with leads, they have a library of resources that lets them get to know Mike and his viewpoints. His social media team also makes a point of directly tagging journalists and commentators in the industry and encouraging them to link back to the whole episode.

These very similar shows are creating vastly different outcomes, which came from the vastly different reasons each of those companies had to podcast. By taking the time to really think about what the podcast was going to do for the business, and optimize the workflows, recordings and post-production work, these companies ensure that their podcasts do the job they are intended to.

## **Don't Worry about the Competition**

This is because you can design a show to accomplish your specific needs, it doesn't make a lot of sense to worry too much about 'the competition' for your podcast. While it's true that your potential listeners have a finite amount of time, I can promise you two things:

1. **One:** No one has ever found a podcast on a topic they are interested in and said, "That's it! I have found the one and only podcast on this topic I'm going to listen to, I will never seek out or listen to another one." It doesn't happen.
2. **Two:** Lots of other shows in your topic area means lots of potential listeners – it's a good thing, not a bad one. And you don't need all of them anyway! For most businesses and business goals, you just need a handful of the right people to be listening, not everyone who's ever had a passing interest in your area of focus.

When you optimize a podcast for the business outcomes you need and can create enough of those outcomes that the project is profitable, or at least sustainable, it doesn't really matter how many other people are out there doing the same thing.

# Podcast Value Math

Have you ever heard the quote from Peter Drucker, “You can’t improve what you don’t measure?”

I couldn’t agree with it more. In order to make something better, you have to know what your baseline is, and your goals are. Without good measurement, you won’t be able to accurately identify how far you’ve come.

This is the principle that underlays the entire Business Podcast Blueprints concept.

*Your podcast can be optimized and refined to provide specific business outcomes in a way you can clearly measure.*

I call this **Podcast Value Math**.

The first variable is the value: What makes podcasting valuable to you?

The second is the specific parts of your podcast that create or facilitate that value.

The final variable – or perhaps it would be more correct to say the operators, the plus and minus, and multiplication signs – is the actions you take to alter your show to change the value it creates and how.

The result is the amount of value being created. In other words: *how much of what you want is the podcast generating?*

In this book, I’ve done the podcast value math for 15 different business outcome metrics you might want to optimize for, so you can take them and run. But I also want you to understand the thinking that went into them so you can optimize your podcast for whatever it is you happen to want.

Let’s go through each of the variables in more detail.

## Variable 1: What is the Value?

First of all – **what is value** for you in the context of podcasting?

Well, it’s up to you.

Value can be anything you want it to be.

Most of the work I do at One Stone Creative and Podcasting for Business, and what you’ll find in this book, revolves around business value. Things like sales cycle length, number of referrals, promotional opportunities, SEO and labor cost savings and brand awareness. We’ll be

reviewing all of that, and more, shortly. But it's not an exhaustive list. There are all kinds of different value, business, personal or otherwise, that you can measure using this method.

Maybe it's new business ideas, or potential hires for your company, or moments of joy in what feels like a chaotic world. Maybe it's the reach of your message or the number of people you can impact, or the number of fans who recognize you in public.

There are no wrong answers – you're the boss of your podcast, and there is no one standing over your shoulder saying, "*You must find it valuable for this reason!*"

Podcast Value Math always works when you can identify what is valuable to you, and what within your show is creating it.

## Variable 2: The Parts of the Show That Create the Value

For the **second variable**, what about the show creates the value that you want? What specific parts in the planning, workflow, recording, promotion or repurposing impact the type of value you care about?

### Value: Labor Cost Savings

What parts of the podcast create it?

One part is *the planning* when I decide what content to create that can easily be repurposed for team members to refer clients and community members to. Another part is *the recording*, where I make sure that I am creating easy-to-separate segments the production team can turn into short-form videos, that we can add to a self-serve content library.

### Value: Sponsorship Dollars

What parts of the podcast create it?

Value is created during *planning* to make sure that my content topics are aligned with both potential sponsors and with my audience. Another is investing in *quality production* that brands will want to be associated with, and a third is the *size and engagement rates* of my audience, as well as my knowledge of them.

### Value: Joy and Amusement

What parts of the podcast create it?

What parts of the podcast create laughter and joy? It might be *in preparation* when I find pleasure in writing and editing a script, or during recordings when I get to *connect with the people* I have as guests, or when I post my favorite parts of episodes on social media and *my community responds* and adds their own stories and experiences to mine.

What within your podcast is creating the value you want?

Is it the people you speak to, or the work you or your team does surrounding the podcast? Is it in your promotion and repurposing, or engagement with your community?

Really think about it and try to isolate the specific things that facilitate the creation of that value. This is going to be different for every person and every podcast, and you can't get it wrong – it's *your* podcast.

When you know what they are, then the fun – or the real work, depending on what kind of cat you are – can begin.

Because if you know exactly what causes the value, you can start tracking it.

For my labor cost savings example, I might track *how often my team members refer people to podcast episodes*, or the *playtime of audiograms* we created with specific Q&A, or even the *total time spent on customer service* within my team. (Audiograms are short clips from the episode, either audio-only or live-action video that are prepared and distributed separately from the whole episode.)

For the sponsorship dollar example, I can track the episodes that have the *highest click-through rates* when I share them, and the *length of time between pitching a sponsor and getting a response*, as well as the *rates I can command* because of my quality and niche definition.

For times I laughed or experienced joy, I can look at the *specific topics* I was working with when it happened, the *specific people* I was talking to, or the *particular questions* I asked.

The trick is to identify specific actions or elements that create value that you can measure, then to develop both the infrastructure to capture that information, and the habit of tracking it every time the thing you value happens.

The infrastructure can be a spreadsheet or a database, however you like to organize information. I like having a spreadsheet as part of your episode guide, which is a way to organize and keep track of the content you create for your show, for easy cross-referencing! The habit just takes diligence. Or delegation.

When you have the data, you can identify patterns, measure progress and make decisions so that your podcast creates more of what you want – whatever that is.

*Without* data, you cannot measure, and without a measurement you cannot effectively improve your podcast to create more of the value you want.

## Variable 3 (The Operators): What We Do to Increase Value.

This brings us to our **third variable**, or the operators of the equation: The things we do with the parts of our podcast to alter how much value the podcast creates.

### Labor Cost Savings

For labor cost savings, we determined that the parts that create value are: *how often my team members refer people to podcast episodes*, the *playtime of audiograms* we created with specific Q&A, the *total time spent on customer service*.

So how can I alter or optimize those things to create more of the value I want?

To increase how often my team refers podcast episodes, I can ensure that instructions for when and how to do so are included in our customer service documentation, and make sure there is clear indexing of which podcasts to use for different situations.

To increase the playtime of audiograms, I can make them available on different platforms, and make sure they are searchable so people find the one they need easily.

To improve the total time spend on customer service, I can consult with the team about which topics they are discussing most frequently with clients and create content specifically for those issues.

### Sponsorship Dollars

For sponsorship dollars, we determined that the value are *click-through rates when I share episodes*, and the *length of time between pitching a sponsor and getting a response*, as well as the *rates I can command because of niche definition and engagement*.

To increase click through rates, I will workshop my titles and calls to action, as well as the frequency and number of platforms I am sharing them on.

To improve my response times from potential sponsors, I will keep my sponsorship information deck updated with current show data, testimonials, client information and previous sponsors.

To improve the rates I can command, I can spend extra time engaging with my audience getting to know them, seek out sponsorship partners I know will resonate, and expand my sponsorship packages to include more touchpoints with the audience where I know they are most engaged.

## Laughed and Felt Joy

For the times I laughed or experienced joy, we determined that what creates value are the *specific topics, people I talked to* and *questions* that sparked a laugh or good feeling.

To increase the amount of value the podcast creates, I just need to identify the patterns in those topics, people and questions, and include more of them in my episodes!

***Identify the value. Determine what creates the value. Optimize what creates that value to get more of it.***

The process of clearly identifying and tracking value generated by a podcast is completely goal-agnostic.

You can track anything.

It's why the benevolent forces of the universe gave us spreadsheets.

If you want to track something that isn't outlined here – go for it!

When you understand and use Podcast Value Math, you can optimize for and track anything you want to. That's what makes it so fun – and so powerful.

# The Metrics

## How to Use the Metrics Section

This section is really the heart of the book – it’s why you’re here.

This is where your podcast changes from a fun project that is certainly doing something for your business, but you couldn’t say exactly what, to a laser-focused value-creating machine that you can dial up or down to get more of what you need to drive your business forward.

I’ve identified 15 separate and distinct business outcome metrics that you can use to attribute real bottom-line value to the work you do podcasting.

These metrics are clear and measurable, and your podcast can be optimized for any of them.

For each of the 15 metrics, I’ve provided a breakdown of the metric, what kinds of businesses it might work best for, how to fit it into your workflows, what to prioritize in production and promotion, examples – and of course, how to clearly track your results.

It’s best to initially pick a small number of metrics to optimize for, one, two or three, because most of them require some real work and diligence to maintain.

Speaking of which...

It may come to pass as you’re reading this section that you think something along the lines of, “I really want to do this kind of work for my show, but I don’t have the time/team/bandwidth/patience.”

To that, I say: *Why hello there, beautiful stranger.*

My team and I would love to help, and there are a variety of ways we can.

**Business Podcast Action Plans:** If you’ve got a great in-house team for your podcast, a service provider you love working with, or you want to go it alone, we would be delighted to give you the action plan to follow. A Podcast Action Plan includes an initial consultation about your goals, a review of your current or planned show structure, a customized metrics tracking document and a step-by-step plan to optimize your show for what you need the most. [Learn more here.](#)

**Business Podcast Sprints:** This is, without a doubt, the easiest podcasting you will ever do. In a Podcast Sprint, we will learn about you and your business, prepare a 12 episode podcast season, complete with episode outlines for you to practice. Then you’ll record live with a producer and we’ll produce the season. In 90 days, you can have a complete business asset ready to bring value to your business for years. [Learn more here.](#)

**Full Service Production:** We also do it all. We have podcasting packages specifically designed to work with the Business Podcast Blueprints that can be customized for your unique situation.

Whether you want to produce weekly or bi-weekly, in multiple seasons per year, in audio or video, to network or to build your authority, we have the service that will help you achieve your goals. [Learn more here.](#)

As one of our clients said, “If I’d known that the podcasting process could be this easy and fun, I’d have started podcasting years ago. I recommend One Stone Creative with no reservations – they are absolutely the best.” (Feel free to find me and verify, or reach out for a chat on [LinkedIn!](#))

You’ll find access to all of these services at [OneStoneCreative.net](#), and I’m always happy to jump on a call to help you decide which path forward makes the most sense for your podcast.

Now – I know you’ve been waiting for it. Let’s talk metrics.

## Metrics Breakdowns

What follows here is the outline I’m using to describe each of the 15 metrics and how to use them. For each one, you’ll find information about what kind of business it will work best for, which Blueprints it works the most effectively with, what you need to keep in mind for your workflow, the production of episodes, the promotion and how to track and analyze your results.

### Metric Details

This will be a general introduction to the metric, how we’re defining it, why it is valuable for a business, and how a podcast can help you create more of it.

### Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

In this section, we’ll look at the types of businesses and industries that will be the most likely to have success or find value in optimizing for a specific metric. I’ll explain the reasoning and give a few examples.

This isn’t prescriptive. If you think a metric will work for your goals and your business type and isn’t on the list, go for it anyway! Consider it inspiration. But if you’re not sure what you want to optimize for, look for metrics where your industry or business type is mentioned.

### Blueprints Fit

In this section, I’m going to share whether a particular Blueprint is a perfect fit, a good fit, or not a fit for a particular metric.

A **perfect fit** means that the overarching goal of the podcast and the specifications required to optimize for the metric fit together beautifully and won’t need any particular extra consideration or amendments.

A **good fit** means there isn't anything directly in conflict between the Blueprint and the metric, but there might be elements to keep in mind and account for as you're developing your show.

**Not a fit** means there is a conflict between the overarching goal of the podcast and the particular metric, usually because optimizing for a specific metric goes counter to the overarching Blueprint goal and would make it harder to reach.

Remember that this information was not passed directly to me from a podcasting deity but is instead a logical analysis of potentially competing priorities.

Can you work around something I say isn't a fit? If you believe in yourself, I believe in you.

Test, track and analyze the results, and make your decisions accordingly.

## **Example**

Where possible, I am including examples from shows that my team has worked on, seen, or studied, but you'll note that I am, for the most part, not naming shows specifically. There are a few reasons for this:

1. I'd like this book to be relevant for longer than 6 months, and podcasts can change, end, rebrand, move hosts and URLs, or be archived without any notice.
2. Since I don't own the companies or podcasts I'm referring to, I can't share internal strategies and decision-making.
3. For shows we haven't produced personally, I can only see the results of their decision-making. Just because the results fit within the Business Podcast Blueprints model doesn't mean the show's owner would categorize their own decisions the same way that I do from the outside looking in.

The examples are all real, and I include them so you can get a sense of how these metrics can work and be optimized within an existing business.

## **How to Optimize for It**

This section will cover what changes, modifications, extra tasks and tracking or priorities you need to include within your podcast in order to get better results for the specific metric you're tracking.

## **Priorities in Episode Workflow**

This section will explain the modifications or changes needed when you're planning, arranging, recording and communicating with your team members about episodes.

## Priorities in Production

Production priorities are specifically about the editing of the episode and creating the assets, like show notes and graphics, that go along with it.

## Priorities in Promotion

Promotional priorities are all about what you should focus on and build into your episode promotions via email, social media or elsewhere.

## Costs

Optimizing for some metrics is going to mean incurring additional costs as part of your creation or promotional efforts. To the extent possible, I'm sharing where you can expect to spend extra money and why it's necessary.

## How to Track It

Here, we're going to provide a methodology for collecting and organizing the data for each metric – where to find the information and what to record so you have what you need to analyze it and make your strategic decisions accordingly. I have prepared a sample tracking spreadsheet with individual pages for each of the metrics that demonstrates how we track that specific metric. You can consult it at: [PodcastingforBusiness.com/BookResources](http://PodcastingforBusiness.com/BookResources).

## Evaluating Success and Failure

In this section we'll look at how to *interpret* the data you collect, because a pile of data and no analysis will get you nowhere. Evaluating success and failure is often subjective and needs to be done based on where you started and what your goals are, rather than an objective or external measurement.

There is something you'll notice as you read through these metrics.

A lot of them involve planning, executing, or tracking work that is... hard.

And I wish I could tell you that approaching podcasting in this way was easy.

But it's not.

Real results usually aren't. So you, your team or a third party service provider can do the work and reap the rewards, or skip it and hope for the best.

Finally, I'd like to repeat again that these are not hard and fast rules. You might be doing things totally differently than I am recommending here, tracking metrics for Blueprints I've said they don't fit with, or trying to optimize for all of the Blueprints at the same time.

That's cool.

And if it's working and you're happy with the results, then it's exactly the right thing to be doing for your show.

Podcasting is such a flexible medium that there is no one-size-fits-all or perfect solution. What you find in these pages is the result of our research, practice, experimentation and observation – and if you're looking for a strategy to help you get more value out of your show with less time spent on trial and error, this methodology will do that. But it's written on paper, not carved in stone.

You or the experts you're working with might approach things differently for your show, and there is nothing wrong with that if you have goals and are making progress toward them.

Data is king. Trust it.

Take what works for you, leave what doesn't, and if you have a brilliant new idea not covered here at all – reach out at [Megan@OneStoneCreative.net](mailto:Megan@OneStoneCreative.net) and let me know! I'd love to hear it.

# Metric: Referrals

## Metric Details

Referrals are one of the most powerful sales tools at the disposal of most businesses. There is nothing like getting that email from a friend or colleague introducing you to someone they think would be a perfect fit.

As you know, those are often the easiest sales and the best customers.

What business couldn't use more of them?

A podcast can help you build relationships with referral partners, so they can directly refer business to you by making personal introductions. A referral partner might also share your content with people they think would find it valuable, and work with you on any large campaigns you may be running, like book and product launches.

## Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

Any business is likely to be happy to get more referrals but making it a production focus for the company show is best for businesses in industries that require a high level of trust, sell higher ticket services, have an involved, relationship-driven sales process and have a very clearly defined customer avatar.

Some examples are:

- Lawyers and attorneys with clear specializations like divorce, trademarks and copyrights, real estate transactions or estate planning
- Business brokers, exit strategists and legacy planners
- Coaches and consultants with high-level programs
- Marketing and PR agencies
- Financial services providers
- Recruiters

If your business thrives on the personal relationships you build with your clients, then a podcast that helps you acquire more warm leads through personal referrals is a high-value investment with a great potential return.

## Blueprint Fits

**Perfect Fit:** Relationship Building, Audience Engagement

This is one of the strongest Relationship Building Metrics. It has a very high potential to generate a lot of income and allows for other kinds of optimization with a minimum of conflicts. The potential upsides extend well beyond just new referral partners – the relationships you build by optimizing your show in this way can generate countless opportunities.

It also works very well with Audience Engagement shows, when your guests are likely to be complementary business owners whose own clients and audiences might be a great fit for what you do.

**Good Fit:** Thought Leadership, Content

You can also optimize a Thought Leadership or Content show for referral partners – it just probably won't be your primary focus, may not be for every episode, and may be secondary in importance to something else.

**Not a Fit:** Conversion

The only Blueprint this doesn't really mesh with is Conversion. In a Conversion style podcast, you will most likely be asking your guests, if you have them, for something else, like access to their audience, or to directly monetize the content they share with you. That tends to be enough of an ask in a newer relationship, and seeking referrals is a bridge too far.

## Example

To get Referrals you need a couple of things: You need to know who you want to have referred to you, and you need to create the opportunities to comfortably and politely ask for them.

Hopefully, you already have clarity on your niche and ideal customer avatars, so what you need from your podcast is the people to ask and enough of a relationship that they are happy to help you.

The relationship-building often comes in the pre- and post-recording steps. For our podcast, The Company Show, I like to have a pre-interview prep call with guests. This gives us a chance to get to know each other a little and workshop an amazing episode topic together. We didn't always do this! The first iteration of The Company Show was following the Thought Leadership Blueprint, rather than Relationship Building. As we got into production and looked at the data, we decided it would be a better investment of our time to focus on relationships, networking and, of course, referrals!

During one of these prep calls, I was talking to my future guest and mentioned that we'd recently adjusted our niche and targeting, and how that was going to impact the podcast, and our conversation. She asked who we were specifically looking to work with going forward, and when I told her – her eyes lit up! "I've got an idea!"

She had a great insight for our episode that would speak directly to our ideal customer, which made our conversation much more vibrant, engaging and valuable to those customers, which is great by itself.

It didn't end there.

After we got off the call, I received an email where she introduced me directly to someone from her own network who fit our new niche, and she thought we could help.

And that's how it's done.

When you have a podcast well-optimized for Referrals, you have a great reason to talk to your guests about who you want to work with and why, and enough touchpoints with them that making a request for referrals is natural – and sometimes, you don't even have to ask! (But you should.)

## How to Optimize for It

To optimize for more referrals, you have to ask for them.

But you can't exactly write a fellow business owner a note that says, "Hey, I want you to come on my show so you'll like me enough to send me referrals."

It would be weird and gross.

A good referral partner is someone who likes and respects you – and more than that, they believe that you can deliver on the promises your business makes. They need a little time to get to know you. They need to see how you are going to treat them so they know how you would treat any referral they send your way. In a Referral-optimized show, you're going to be creating the opportunities to build your relationship enough to make the request appropriate.

## Priorities in Episode Workflow

Who you talk to on your podcast is the most important consideration for this metric, followed closely by what you ask them for and when.

Guests that will make great referral partners will likely be working in complimentary businesses – those that your ideal clients might also be using. This has the additional and considerable benefit of meaning that these guests will have important and interesting information for your listeners.

So, you want to invite people who serve clients similar to yours, and to invest in the relationship-building touchpoints in your workflow, like:

- The invitation

- Connecting on social media
- A prep call
- The episode recording, including any chatting before and after
- A thank-you note
- The 'your episode is ready' announcement
- A follow up with feedback and audience comments

In your podcast workflow, after a few initial touchpoints, you'll want to identify one or two different spots where you could make the request, and give your new referral partner the information they need to easily fulfill it, like a description of your ideal client and a little swipe copy. If you offer a referral payment or commission, you can be upfront about that as well.

I like the post-interview chat for that, as well as a message right after letting them know your episode is live – maybe when sharing a little feedback you've received from listeners. You might want to experiment with different times to make this kind of request – it can feel a little awkward, but if you are sincerely approaching the relationship as one that is mutually beneficial, making sure to do "your share" in terms of highlighting them and their work, and supporting them through sharing their content and sending referrals back at them when you can, then it can be quite seamless.

## **Priorities in Production**

Because this is primarily a relationship-building metric, your production should be focused on making the guest look and sound as good as possible. You want them to feel *amazing* about the fact they created this content with you, so make sure you're editing for clarity, extracting great moments for promotion, and creating notes that accurately reflect what they said, just riddled with links to additional useful content – both yours and theirs!

## **Priorities in Promotion**

Share as much about the episode and the guest as possible. You want to announce they're coming, announce when it's live, share your favorite moments in audio or videograms (short clips from the episode, either with or without live action video) with captions that explain why you like those moments, and actively direct people to the episode. I would go so far as to solicit feedback from your audience about the episode that you can then convey to the guest. (There's another touchpoint!)

When you treat someone well and do them a service, it's entirely natural that they want to return the favor, and you have given them the means to do it by explaining exactly who you would like to work with, and demonstrating how you'll treat them when you do.

Similarly, if you have the opportunity to refer someone to your guest – DO IT.

## Costs

The biggest cost to optimize a podcast for Referrals is the time. Production isn't going to be noticeably more or less than a usual episode, but there are many more touchpoints that need to be executed on. Because it's about building a real relationship, you can only outsource so many of them – a lot is going to have to be done by you, personally.

You can mitigate this somewhat by having your team do the scheduling and drafting of messages – and you can really lean on templates and automations – but no one likes to feel like just a step in your process, so if you really want to drive referral partnerships, then take the time to actually build the relationship.

## How to Track It

You want to track which guests are sending you Referrals, and how many Referrals they are sending you over time.

You'll find the data a few different ways:

- Your inbox, where personal introductions happen
- Your calendar, if you have a “who did you hear about us from” section (you should)
- Your sales/discovery calls if your calendar doesn't have that field

You might want to track this in your relationship-managing software or CRM. Create fields within the entry for the referral partner, the # of referrals given (and maybe your close rate on them!), along with the date of each referral.

You can also track this in your episode guide, by creating a sheet or row for each guest you have and the referrals they do or don't send every month after you speak with them.

## Evaluating Success and Failure

You'll want to update your tracking document or database whenever you get a new Referral. This is something great to hand off to a team member or your podcast producer – they can make sure the information is captured and do the monthly evaluation. You'll just have to let them know when a referral comes in and from whom.

What success means is up to you, but as a rule of thumb: Revenue from Referrals should be higher than the cost of producing the podcast. What does that mean for you? Is it one Referral per guest? Two per month from all guests? A certain dollar amount from all referral sources? I would recommend not setting a firm goal right away; instead use this process for a few months and look at the results to establish a baseline. Once you have several months of data, there are a few things you can determine:

- Which guests send you the most Referrals? (Keep nurturing that relationship! Send a thank you! Maybe a fruit basket.)
- What types of guests send the most/best Referrals? Those in specific types of industries or targeting specific types of clients? Invite more guests like them – even ask them for ideas of who you should interview!
- How long after being on your show do they start or keep sending you Referrals? This will let you make decisions about how often you need to release episodes, or how many of your episodes should have this kind of referral-partner nurturing element.

On the other hand, if you're not having any success getting Referrals for your business, you need to try and diagnose the problem.

Is your ask for Referrals unclear, or too soon? Experiment with different timing and phrasing.

Are the people you are having conversations with in a position to send you referrals? Compare your guest list with the people who have, outside of your podcast, referred business to you in the past.

Are you not tracking accurately? This is the issue more often than you might think. I'm not kidding when I say you need to track every single referral from every single guest in a format that lets you know, at a glance, if it's working. If you put that step on the backburner, then you don't get to whine when you don't have clarity about whether or not the strategy is successful.

If you continue experimenting for six months and get nowhere with Referrals, admit it's not the strategy for this show at this time, and direct your energy elsewhere. Good thing you optimized for more than one metric to make the show valuable to your business, isn't it?

# Metric: Sales Cycle Length

## Metric Details

Sometimes the wait between the time you first talk to a new lead and the time they decide to do business with you is absolutely agonizing.

Especially when it takes months, and you've got cashflow goals.

Sales Cycle Length is a critical data point when it comes to things like financial forecasting, hiring, managing your work and managing the work of your team. Shortening that length is a goal most business owners have, since a short cycle means more flexibility and often, more profit.

A well-planned and strategically deployed podcast can do a lot of the heavy lifting in terms of building the knowing-liking-trusting factor that new leads need to make a buying decision, and all without your involvement beyond initially creating the podcast and making sure the right people are hearing the right episodes at the right time.

## Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

Most B2B businesses have longer sales cycles than B2C ones, so if the journey that a new prospect takes to become a customer has more touchpoints than 'Sees a product and presses Buy Now,' a podcast could potentially be useful in shortening that process.

More specifically, high-ticket training, consulting, financial and insurance services – services where there is a contract and extensive scope of work – and anything even remotely connected to the words 'government,' 'procurement,' or 'non-profit' could see a huge return on a podcast to cut down the time it takes to get that signature.

For example:

- Wealth managers, Insurance brokers
- Corporate consultants, executive coaches, fractional C-suite services providers
- Vendors of licensed training and software
- Legal services providers
- Real estate and automobile sales

If your product or service is something that clients tend to have to think long and hard about before buying, and when you are often one of several quite similar offerings available, this is a metric you should consider optimizing for.

## Blueprints Fit

### **Perfect Fits:** Thought Leadership, Audience Engagement

This is a good metric to optimize for within either a Thought Leadership or an Audience Engagement Blueprint.

In a Thought Leadership podcast, the content you are creating is going to be positioning you and your company as an authority in a way that lets your future clients get a real sense of your abilities, philosophies and priorities, and lets listeners get to know the host of the show. This is particularly effective when the host of the show is the face of the company, or one of the individuals doing higher-level service delivery.

For an Audience Engagement podcast you can focus directly on the issues, problems and objections you know your best clients face, or provide full and detailed case studies they will be able to see themselves in. When these episodes are shared with potential clients, they go a long way in terms of demonstrating your ability to fulfill your promises in a scalable, evergreen way.

### **Good Fit:** Content

Content shows can absolutely have an optimization for Sales Cycle Length. It can be one of the many ways that a content show pulls its weight in a company. Often, in Content shows, specific episodes or a series of episodes will be created for this purpose, which may or may not be the same as regular episodes.

### **Not a Fit:** Relationship Building, Conversion

It might seem counterintuitive, but this metric often doesn't work particularly well with a Relationship Building podcast. Because the focus of a Relationship Building podcast is the personal relationship with guests and potential future collaborations with them, the episodes are going to be more focused on the guest's expertise than yours or the company's, which means it won't be able to play the same evergreen role in your sales cycle.

Likewise, with a Conversion podcast, the 'ask' you make of your listeners comes too quickly in the process for it to be effective at shortening the lengthy sales cycle associated with very high-touch and high-ticket offers. Conversion shows are better optimized for less expensive offers.

## Example

Several years ago, we worked with a partner at a wealth management firm to create a Thought Leadership style podcast that would help position the firm as a trusted, reliable resource for high-net-worth individuals looking to protect their legacy.

If you looked at their downloads, it was far from an impressive show. A great month might be 150 or 200 unique new listeners.

But was anyone worried about that?

Nope. Not for a minute.

Because each episode of that podcast was a working partner at the firm talking about their and the company's philosophy, the challenges they'd helped clients overcome, the creative ways they approached wealth building and legacy management, and commentary on issues that their clients were aware of and concerned about.

After a few months of production, the host and I were having a strategy call, and he told me:

"The wildest thing happened last week. I got on the phone with a new lead and was ready to do my usual thing, but he stopped me and said: 'You can skip it. I've heard you on your podcast. I like the way you work. I'm ready to get started.'"

And that was only the first time. *It kept happening.*

This was a company that often saw weeks or months of back and forth, consultative sales calls, and extensive follow-ups. But as we produced episodes together, the host was communicating with his sales team about the kinds of clients that could benefit from specific episodes, and the salespeople were sharing those episodes with leads as part of the discovery process, so by the time they spoke with the host, they felt like they knew him and how he did business – and they were in.

The show came to a conclusion because the critical content was created and integrated into their sales process. If you achieve the specific goal you started a podcast for, there's nothing wrong with ending the project and using what you've got!

## How to Optimize for It

To optimize for Sales Cycle Length, you need to be intimately familiar with the customers you serve, the problems you solve for them, and how they think and feel about those problems.

No level of detail here is too extreme because when it comes down to optimizing, it's all about replacing yourself or other members of your team with podcast content.

The conversation you would normally have with a prospect about the stress around creating a secure future for their children after they sell the family business, or how to evaluate different website designs, or what expenses can be written off in your state, for some examples, is going to happen in one or more podcast episodes you make available publicly.

## Priorities in Episode Workflow

The most important thing to do to optimize for this metric is to make sure you're recording content that is going to:

- Answer specific questions that you know your prospects have
- Demonstrate the ways you solve problems
- Share your experience, and your beliefs in and about your industry
- Show how well you know your business

This happens at the planning stage when you are deciding what to record and when. It's good practice to review sales conversations and other touchpoints within your sales cycle and try to replicate them in your episodes, or use them as inspiration for the different things you'll talk about on the show.

If your podcast has guests, I would strongly recommend including some solo content once in a while so you can really focus on creating the materials your team will use within the sales process. Guest conversations can demonstrate your expertise, but the focus needs to be on the *prospect* at least some of the time for this to work.

## **Priorities in Production**

During the production process, make sure that your team carefully tracks and indexes the topics you cover in the show. This is so important because if it is a major chore for you or your sales team to find the right content at the right time, like when you're sending a follow-up email or on a live chat, then it's too easy to skip the step – and then all that effort will be wasted.

## **Priorities in Promotion**

The promotion to optimize for Sales Cycle Length is going to be much more internal than for other metrics you might be optimizing for. You need to make sure that the members of your team who have the first touchpoints with your audience – maybe sales or social media, or even support – know exactly what content is available for what kind of client and how they can best deliver it to them. This flows directly from the production priority.

Setting clear expectations with your team about how to distribute this content and to whom is the key to making it work.

## **Costs**

This is one of those metrics where, after a little initial planning and training with your team, there are no specific costs above and beyond ongoing production.

Woohoo!

## How to Track It

To track your Sales Cycle Length, you first need to know what your sales cycle length *is* for the different products and services you offer.

Hopefully, you do, but if not, then start tracking it now!

Seriously, put this book down and dig into your metrics for a couple of hours. You want a good sense of the amount of time it takes and the number of touchpoints that happen with your clients, from the first time they become aware of you to the time they buy from you.

If you've got that, then you simply need to review every month or quarter and see if and how the sales cycle length changes after you start deploying your podcast content within your sales process. Track whether the number of touchpoints between "hello!" and a signed contract has gone up or down.

## Evaluating Success and Failure

It's important not to look for results too soon to judge the success or failure of this particular optimization. This is a long-game play, not an immediate one.

If you are starting with a sales cycle that lasts several months, you need to wait until two or three cycles go by before you'll even have data to look at. For example, if you know that from the time you have a discovery call with someone to when they buy is usually three months, then you should wait six to nine months after you start using your podcast in this way, so you have enough data to examine.

If you're seeing people start to purchase more quickly or with less effort from you and other expensive team members within the first year, that is awesome, and you can call it a success.

If, after 18–24 months, you're not seeing any change at all, write this one off as a worthwhile but ultimately unsuccessful experiment.

# Metric: Promotional Opportunities

## Metric Details

At the risk of sounding like a materialistic weasel, sometimes you want to make sure that you're getting as much as you're giving when it comes to podcast interviews.

This doesn't mean that you want to engineer a purely transactional 'you scratch my back, I scratch yours' situation, where you only invite people to your show if they can do something specific for you. That's unpleasant.

But it does mean designing a podcast that will connect you to people who have access to audiences you need, and providing enough value to your guests that you can politely and appropriately suggest ways for them to help you as well.

When you do that, you're optimizing a podcast for Promotional Opportunities.

Promotional Opportunities here means:

- Guest appearances on other shows
- Feed drops and promo swaps (when you either place a whole episode from another podcaster on your own RSS feed and they do the same with yours, or when you each run ads for each other on your shows)
- Invitations to speak at or participate in events like conferences, keynotes, summits and roundtables
- Creating promotional partnerships (like for launches of products, programs and services)

A promotional opportunity is when you are able to get any kind of extra exposure based on the relationship you have with the guest.

## Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

If your business depends on regularly reaching new audiences, or you know there are certain times in the year when having that kind of exposure is helpful, then this is a metric to consider.

This can work well for businesses like:

- Event creation or promotion (especially conferences, summits, trade shows and conventions)
- Technology and SaaS
- Authors and course creators
- Coaches and consultants
- Personal finance and investment professionals

- Speakers
- Physical product inventors or vendors

There probably aren't too many businesses that will look at this metric and say, "Pfff, I don't need any exposure to new audiences!" If you want them, try to get them! These are just the industries where we see this type of optimization make the biggest impact.

## Blueprints Fit

### **Perfect Fit:** Relationship Building

Just like with Referrals, a Relationship Building podcast is ideal for developing these kinds of strategic and promotional partnerships.

### **Good Fit:** Thought Leadership, Audience Engagement, Content

A Thought Leadership podcast is where you have conversations with someone at your professional level or higher and in a complementary business. If you are serving the same audience, it can be perfectly fine to suggest a next step like a Promotional Opportunity.

Similarly, if you have guests on your Audience Engagement Podcast, you'll be doing so with business owners who can help your audience, so it stands to reason you could help theirs!

If your Blueprint is Content, then your content can be anything, including interesting conversations with people you'd like to form different kinds of partnerships with.

### **Not a Fit:** Conversion

In a Conversion podcast, you're optimizing for a different type of outcome that could make asking for a Promotional Opportunity seem excessive. It's not that it couldn't ever work, but I would be careful about asking for too much from your guests.

## Example

The first time you hear, "I'd love to have you on my podcast, but I'm only doing episode swaps right now. Will that work?" It can feel a little jarring.

It happened to me this year after I had pitched a show I was interested in being on, and I was a bit taken aback. Isn't my insight and content important enough without an exact trade?

But when I thought about it for a moment, it actually made really good sense according to the goals of my podcast and hers. We were able to discuss topics that would work on each of our shows and that together covered more than we would individually. I mentioned her show and

episode on mine, and vice versa. This made planning promotions for each other's work natural. It was a win for each of us and for both of our audiences.

I look forward to more swaps in the future.

## How to Optimize for It

The first thing you need to do is decide exactly what you want to optimize for, and the type of people you need to connect with to make it work.

**Guest appearances on other shows.** This is easiest to arrange as a guest swap, where you trade interviews back and forth. The best type of person to approach for this is podcasters who serve your audience but with a *complementary*, not directly competing, audience.

**Feed drops and promo swaps.** Like for guest appearance swaps, you'll look for a podcast host who serves the same audience with a complementary or unrelated offer.

**Invitations to speak at or participate in events** like conferences, keynotes, summits, and roundtables. Think about who has access to the opportunity, like event organizers, business owners and publicists.

**Creating promotional partnerships**, like for launches of products, programs and services. Try to find business owners, journalists, influencers – anyone who has access to the type of audience that you are serving in your business.

## Priorities in Episode Workflow

The main workflow consideration is adding a research step to make sure you're inviting the type of person who has access to the type of promotional opportunity you're looking for, and who can also provide meaningful value to your audience.

The ask for that promotional opportunity you want is a critical part of the workflow, and just like when you're looking for referral partners, you want to make sure that you're providing value, being genuine in your efforts to connect and making sure to focus on how such a promotion will be beneficial to their interests as well.

The size of your ask (a guest appearance swap is a much smaller ask than a chance to keynote!) will dictate when in the workflow you make it.

For promo and appearance swaps, you might do them as part of your initial outreach (you'll find an example at the end of this chapter!) or immediately after recording.

For more involved requests, you might want to invest some time in relationship-building first by producing the episode, sending a thank-you note, following them on social media, sharing their content, promoting the episode, sending feedback you received about it, etc.

Then, when you're feeling comfortable and the relationship is starting to grow, you can propose something like a co-creation or co-promotion – always in terms of how it will be mutually beneficial.

## **Priorities in Production**

If you are doing a feed drop or a promo swap, you'll need to make sure you share the audio you get from your promo partner with your production team (or whoever is doing the scheduling on your podcast host – where the episodes get uploaded for distribution) so they can make sure it runs when it is supposed to.

Sometimes, especially when you are doing a feed drop and sharing a whole episode with your audience, you'll want to record an intro and outro explaining what is happening so your audience doesn't think they pressed play on the wrong show. A brief introduction with your own AV branding where you talk about the host of the episode you're sharing, why it's such a great show, and how they can subscribe for more episodes from the other creator works well here. At the end, thank them for listening, thank the host you are promoting, and let your audience know when they can next expect an episode from you.

Hopefully, the host you are swapping with will be doing the same for your show! It's perfectly fine to ask if they are and to provide any particular details, like landing pages or social media handles, you would like mentioned.

The other types of promotional opportunities don't tend to need any additional production work.

## **Priorities in Promotion**

When promoting an episode featuring a guest you hope is going to do you a favor or collaborate with you again, don't skimp. You want to demonstrate how much you value the time they spent with you and their expertise, and that might mean doing a little more on the promotion end than you would for a solo episode.

Make sure you've got multimedia assets like quotation graphics and short-form video, as well as thoughtful text to share and tag them in on social media, and a customized guest kit for them (but do NOT press them hard on sharing; you have another, more important ask in the works).

You should also consider repurposing your best podcast content on your website, speaking information page, about page, in your speaker reel and on your social media platforms so that when the people you are approaching do their due diligence, they get an immediate idea of your presence, ability to speak and topic areas. It's a nice way to get a little extra value out of your episodes.

## **Costs**

This is a pretty low-cost way to optimize your podcast, which means it has a pretty appealing ROI. You or your assistant will spend a little extra time researching your guest list, and you might want to add a few extra promotional assets, but otherwise, episodes optimized for Promotional Opportunities will cost about the same as any other kind.

## How to Track It

There are a few different numbers you can track when you're looking for promotional opportunities.

The first, of course, is how many opportunities you get using your podcast as the icebreaker.

You might also want to calculate the ratio of asks to positive responses. This will give you a sense of how many requests you need to make to hit a certain target.

You can also keep track of the traffic, sales or other results you get from each promotional opportunity. Over time, this will give you important information about what kinds of promotional opportunities you should prioritize getting through your podcast.

In your episode guide, either with your main episode information or on a separate page focusing on guests, note down what you asked them, how they responded and what the results of the promotion were. Make sure that your assistant or social media team knows what is happening when, so they can co-promote!

## Evaluating Success and Failure

Because your podcast is doing multiple jobs in your business, you could look at any promotional opportunities as strictly bonus value, but if you want to be a little more precise and intentional about things, look to the past.

In the last year, before optimizing your podcast in this way, how many opportunities of the type you want did you get? How much effort did you have to put into attaining them?

After you have been actively seeking these opportunities through your podcast for at least six months (but up to a year, these things can take time!), compare your numbers.

If you've gotten more opportunities, your optimization is a success! If you've gotten the same, but it has taken a lot less effort, that is a success, too. If you look at the data and find you were better off not using your podcast to build these kinds of relationships, then pivot and optimize for something else.

## Example Outreach Email

Try to avoid making the swap sound too transactional, and instead, focus on the mutual benefit. An email invitation like that might look like:

*Hi Ted,*

*I heard your recent episode of the Widget Hour about widget manufacturing in North America and loved what you had to say about supply chain issues. I have a podcast about Whatsits called Watching Whatsits, and I think we're talking to similar audiences.*

*Would you be open to a guest/promo swap? I would love to talk to your audience about how Whatsits can make Widgets more effective, and I know mine would love to hear about how Widgets have been evolving over the last few years! / I wanted to see if you'd be open to a promo swap or feed drop – I am sure my audience would love to hear about your podcast – and I think yours might find mine valuable as well.*

*What do you think?*

*[Your signature]*

## Metric: SEO

### Metric Details

There was a time when you could do a little technical work, research a few keywords, get a few backlinks and have a tolerably successful Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategy.

But capitalism ruins everything.

Large Language Models seem hell-bent on destroying search by flooding the internet with low-quality drivel, and the big whale of the industry, Google, seems more interested in advertisers than searchers.

It's never been easy, but it used to feel a lot easier.

Some things will always be true, however. Humans want good, informative content from other humans. Your podcast can help you create it, and optimizing your podcast for SEO can still help them find it.

When someone goes to a search engine, types in a keyword or a question, and finds a list of results, you want your posts and pages of podcast content to be among them.

This means striking a balance between meeting the technical requirements for the search engines to understand that your result is the best, and creating a good reading experience for the actual humans.

This can be a challenge, but ultimately, you do the work once to create a valuable piece of content, and outside of maintenance and updates, it is an evergreen entry point into your work.

And your podcast gives you a chance to create just such an entry point every time you release an episode.

Now, SEO is a huge topic with rules and algorithms that constantly change. There are a whole bunch of technical details, and there are many people and firms that specialize in them. This section is going to talk about the elements of your podcast that can fit into an SEO strategy, but if you have never done any SEO optimization before on your website or with your other content marketing, it would be wise to hire an expert to help you get set up and make sure that you have the technical infrastructure along with the content elements we're discussing here.

### Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for:

Every business wants good SEO results and to be found by the people searching for the kind of work they do, but an SEO-optimized podcast can be the best fit for a business that works with

clients at a really specific time in their lives: When the right person not only needs to find you, but they need to find you at the right time.

Podcast content is great for this because it's evergreen content that is permanently available for people to access when they need it.

This can be great for:

- Legal services providers
- Healthcare providers
- Coaches and consultants
- Highly localized businesses working in a specific region
- Software and technology companies

This list is absolutely not exhaustive. Every business can benefit from more organic traffic. These are just specific types of businesses that stand to get the most value out of having exactly the right content available for a specific person at the time they are having a problem the business can solve.

## Blueprints Fit

### **Perfect Fit:** Content

Content podcasts can be designed to 100% be an SEO strategy, and even with no other benefits, they can be a huge driver of value for your company.

### **Good Fit:** Thought Leadership, Audience Engagement, Relationship Building, Conversion

Every Blueprint can be optimized for SEO which makes it an excellent second or third metric to optimize a show for.

### **Not a Fit:** None

There isn't a Blueprint type you couldn't also optimize for SEO, as long as you're willing to invest the time in making and posting great show notes to your website.

## Example

I won't claim that SEO has been the top focus of my podcast The Company Show, formerly called The Business Podcast Blueprints Show, but I've seen some long-term benefits in that area nonetheless. (And we've started to make it more of a priority once we saw how well it was working!)

An early episode we released and posted to the website in 2022 has been one of our biggest sources of organic traffic for over two years. The episode was *8 Questions You Should Ask a Producer Before Hiring Them* (which we've recently updated to 13 questions... which you'll find in the Hiring Help Section!). It got to a high second-page ranking on Google and has stayed there for a considerable time, and is one of our small-but-consistent sources of traffic.

This one piece of content, that I created because it answered a question I was asked all the time, has become a resource that both helps people and brings absolute strangers over to our website where they can get to know more about One Stone Creative; our podcast, The Company Show; and now, this book.

Looking at the long-term benefits that 12-minute episode created, it was a fabulous investment of time and energy.

## How to Optimize for It

A good SEO-optimized podcast starts with planning.

Shocker, I know.

But for an SEO-optimized podcast, you don't really have the luxury of recording what feels right in the moment. Your content manager would never stand for it, especially if they are also running other website-based content channels like a blog or article series. You want everything to work together and, depending on the overall content marketing strategy, have a sensible and cohesive order of release.

This means you need an SEO plan that includes the keywords and phrases you want to optimize for, and the episodes (particularly the titles!) that are going to go along with each of them.

## Priorities in Episode Workflow

When you are creating your editorial calendar for your podcast, you and the other members of your team involved in production need to know what keyword you are focusing on for each episode, so you will usually have a research step in your workflow.

Many businesses like to organize in months or quarters, where you are creating multiple pieces of content around a single keyword or set of keywords in a short amount of time.

Whether you are doing single episodes or a series on a topic, researching using tools like Google Analytics, Ahrefs, SEMRush, or Moz will help you identify the most promising keywords to include in your titles and show notes – keywords that have a lot of people searching for them and not too many other companies targeting them. Your production team needs this information!

It's also important to make sure that your episode guide is very well-indexed. When you create content in the future, you want it to be easy to find past keywords used and topics addressed so that you can interlink and avoid too much repetition.

Your episode guide should include space for the keywords that each individual episode is focused on, and links to the finished posts so they are easy to interlink.

## **Priorities in Production**

No special requirements for the audio editing team here, but whoever is working on show notes has their work cut out for them.

There are a number of ways to optimize your podcast show notes:

- A thoughtfully chosen title that includes a keyword or phrase and is compelling to a human – the human experience should always come first.
- Robust show notes that go into detail about the content of the episode. It should be possible to get enough information from the notes that listening to the episode is optional.
- The show notes should be divided into sections, and each section should have a subheading.
- Multimedia elements like
  - Your episode player,
  - A video version of the episode. Audiogram style, where the audio is played over an animated graphic is fine for this, and
  - Images that have descriptions in the alt-text. This is an option to fill in when you are uploading an image to your website. This description of the image is both readable by the search engines, and makes your content more accessible to people using screen readers.
- Links to related content both on and off your own website. You want to make sure that it is clear to the search engines that you have a lot of related content – it increases your authority in their eyes. Even more importantly, it makes it easy for the humans reading your content to read more of it.
- Optionally, you might want to include a whole transcript of the episode on your individual episode pages. This provides a lot of content that can be searched!

Every episode should have all of these elements on its own unique webpage. Most website builders (like WordPress or Squarespace) make this easy if you use the blog function to make each episode its own post, but as long as every episode has its own unique URL, you can optimize it on that page.

And, of course, all of the episodes need to go into your stats and tracking system.

## **Priorities in Promotion**

None of this is strictly necessary, but if you really want to double down on the SEO benefit you get from your podcast episodes, then you should make an effort to get other people to link to them and not just share.

Backlinks like these (other sites linking to your episodes on your website) are one of the other elements that search engines consider when assigning rankings within the results. And, of course, humans reading those sites can click the links back to yours!

Building these kinds of links is a whole process and a new set of work and tasks, but here is the quick and dirty version:

- If you have guests, offer to write an article about the episode for their site so they have a fresh piece of content to share with their own audiences.
- Find complementary businesses and see if they would be willing to link to the episode as a resource in one of their own posts, or perhaps in a new one you create for them.
- Reach out to bloggers, journalists and influencers who speak to your audience and share the post, and why you think it would be valuable for them to share.

You can spend as much time and money as you have available on outbound SEO work, so if you're just getting started, focus on your internal processes first. Once you have them working and start to see organic traffic from your episodes, you can direct more promotional effort or budget to the episodes that are already performing the best, to extend their reach.

Finally, consider pitching yourself as a guest on other podcasts. As you are preparing for those interviews, make sure to note down specific episodes you want to feature and mention them directly in the conversation. Most of the time, the host will be happy to link to them so their audience can learn more about the topic you are speaking about.

## Costs

Expect to pay more for the extra effort put into your show notes. It just takes more time to create and edit them, generate the multimedia assets like headers and images, and schedule everything.

If you are sharing the transcripts of your episodes, then you should make sure a human edits them to make sure the spelling, grammar and any people or companies mentioned are correct. I am sure it's not just me who is infuriated by AI-generated transcripts on websites. They're so sloppy!

Outbound SEO, like some of the promotional priorities shared above, will also incur labor costs for your team or the third-party service provider you work with.

If you want to make SEO a priority throughout your whole business, then you should also consider investing in a company that specializes in the setup, research and implementation,

particularly identifying the keywords and phrases with the greatest potential and making sure that all of the technical elements on your website are correct.

## How to Track It

Because you're putting each podcast episode on its own webpage, you can analyze the specific traffic to that page to see how well it is performing. You will need some additional tools to accomplish this:

- **Google Analytics:** Tracks overall website traffic, user behavior, and engagement metrics.
- **Google Search Console:** Provides reports on your website's visibility on Google, including search queries, position, click-through rates and more.
- **Ahrefs, SEMrush, or Moz:** These are purpose-built tools that provide visibility into rankings, backlinks, competitor performance and keyword rankings.

None of these are what I would call simple programs to use, so if any of them look hideously overwhelming, go ahead and call in backup.

You'll be looking for:

- Where your page is in the search results for each keyword or keyword phrase you are trying to rank for: This is your ranking or how high up on the list you are.
- Where the traffic is coming from for each episode: This tells you what sources are providing the new visitors – like social media, emails, search engines, etc.
- How much traffic is coming: The number of people getting to your episode page.
- How those numbers are changing: If your optimization work is effective.

Doing this monthly and recording the most important numbers in your stats document will be the best way to monitor your results.

Keep in mind that you don't have to optimize and track every single episode. If you have a set of say, 7–10 keywords that are most important to you, you can elect to just track the episodes you create on those topics. This can be a way to ease the burden and expense – but make sure you keep your show notes format consistent!

## Evaluating Success and Failure:

You need to look at multiple numbers to really make a success or failure evaluation here. If you make it to #1 for a keyword, but it doesn't net you much new traffic because not many people search for it, then you may want to shift your focus to another keyword... unless that small amount of traffic converts to email subscribers at a really high rate.

It can get complex.

You may want to just start by looking at your rankings and how they change over time. If they improve, you are successfully optimizing your podcast for SEO, and now you can dig into the details, like how much and what type of traffic is actually being generated.

SEO optimization is a long-term strategy, not a short or fast one, so make sure to give yourself plenty of time to see results, at least six months to a year.

# Metric: New Product Creation

## Metric Details

The best part about a piece of content like a podcast episode is that, unless it's extremely topical or time-sensitive commentary (which is its own kettle of fish), it has more than one life within your business.

Your ideas, frameworks, philosophies, models, examples and knowledge will change and evolve over time, of course, but usually not so fast that the episodes containing them will be obsolete in a couple of months, or a couple of years in most cases.

If you're going to all the trouble of clearly presenting your ideas, you might as well get the full use of them. For some businesses, that can mean repurposing the content into new products for different areas of your business.

For our purposes here, a new product could include:

- **A Course:** A do-it-yourself training for your audience to buy so they can learn a skill or achieve a specific outcome.
- **An Opt-In:** A reason for a newer member of your audience or community to sign up for your email list, like guides, PDFs, curated podcast episodes, etc.
- **Pillar Content:** Huge, SEO-rich posts that thoroughly explore a topic or idea, and that can help to generate backlinks.
- **A Book:** A powerful authority-building and lead generation tool for your business.

Which of these is the most critical for you is between you and your marketing manager, but they can all be developed and drafted through your podcast. They can also all be either free or paid, depending on your business model and the specific use case you're developing them for.

## Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

Not every business has an audience-building component, but if yours does, then this is a metric to consider optimizing for – when you've got people paying attention, you might as well prepare useful things for them to buy.

Businesses that require a high volume of email or other community subscribers can benefit from pillar content and opt-ins.

Courses work for businesses trying to scale from 1:1 services to 1:many, or which need to educate existing clients on specific topics.

Books can work for many different types of businesses, but do a particularly good job demonstrating authority for companies with high-ticket offers and long sales cycles.

For example:

### **Books**

- High ticket coaches and consultants
- Professional services providers
- Consulting firms
- Technology startups
- Real estate professionals
- Marketing agencies

### **Opt-Ins and Pillar Content**

- Educational content creators
- Non-profits and charities
- SaaS companies
- News and commentary content creators
- Authors

### **Courses**

My rule of thumb for courses is that if you regularly turn people away from buying your 1:1 services, then a course can be a fantastic way to serve them! Courses are also great onboarding tools for new clients, when what you need to teach them or what they need to do doesn't change from person to person.

- Real estate
- Accounting/bookkeeping
- Personal finance
- Technology and SaaS companies
- Teaching and training businesses

These end-products from a podcast can work well for most businesses that are building an audience and need to provide the same information to many people, so if you don't see your business type or industry listed here, don't worry! It's just to get the creative juices flowing.

## **Blueprints Fit**

**Perfect Fit: Content, Audience Engagement**

Content Shows are wonderful for this kind of optimization. Creating different kinds of products for the business can be its main reason for existing, and anything else you are optimizing for is icing on the cake.

Audience Engagement podcasts also mesh nicely for larger projects like books and courses – not only are you creating content that you know your audience will value, but you have the chance to test it out on them as you’re creating it!

Sometimes people worry about cannibalizing their eventual sales or opt-ins by having content for this kind of project publicly available on the podcast, but it’s not a huge concern. The organization and presentation add more than enough value, making buying or opting in worth it. (A lot of this book started on our podcast!)

### **Good Fit: Thought Leadership**

A Thought Leadership podcast is usually going to be more on the theoretical than the practical side – and it’s practical, applicable information that does best in products like courses, opt-ins, and books. Of these content types, a book is the most likely to be a good fit for a Thought Leadership podcast episode, although it’ll take some editing and making sure you’re not claiming something your guest said as your own ideas. It is possible to edit the conversations into interesting chapters, however, and as a bonus, the guests you have on the show might become great promotional partners if you turn them into a book!

### **Not a Fit: Relationship Building, Conversion\***

Using a Relationship Building podcast to create new products is generally a bad idea. The content you’re sharing is, for the most part, not really yours – even if you have a release that says you own the content of the episode, it would be a pretty dirty trick to turn around and sell it as part of one of your other offerings without getting explicit permission for that use. The value you get is in the relationships and the benefits they provide long-term through referrals, partnerships and general networking goodness, rather than sales of your own products to your own audience.

\*I struggled between making this a Good Fit or Not a Fit for Conversion because I think it *could* be possible to use the creation process itself as a compelling reason for someone to opt-in or buy access, but for the vast majority of businesses, it makes the most sense to keep these activities separate. So, ‘not a fit’ with an asterisk.

## **Example**

Here’s one example of using podcast content for a product that I really love. Many of our clients use podcast episodes with past and current clients to generate case studies they can use as a part of their sales process, but a colleague of mine who works with much larger companies took it to another level entirely.

They took each of the case studies from the podcast episodes – it had been a dozen over the course of a year (they had other episode types too!) – and edited the transcripts into a beautifully designed case study brochure, complete with headshots, logos and results created. This had some use as a sales tool, but where it really shone was demonstrating to the board members and shareholders how effectively the different teams at the company were executing on different products and strategies. Just a brilliant idea.

It took considerable effort to create a really polished written case study, but it put a really human face on the customers and employees of the organization.

## How to Optimize for It

Are you sick of hearing how advance planning is the most important element in optimizing a podcast?

Too bad.

A detailed editorial calendar (what content you're producing and when) is the key to creating podcast content that can be repurposed into other standalone products, but it's not the only one.

Podcast content that is created "to spec," like for a product or book, should be integrated into a show with other goals, or else it's a) often quite dry listening and b) if it's already in its "finished form" in the podcast player, then there's less impetus for someone to buy or opt-in for it. The latter isn't a major concern; it would take a lot of time and effort to have the same content experience as a pillar blog post or opt-in as listening to episodes while you're at the gym, and books and courses have many things that differentiate them from podcast content, but making sure your *podcast* audience is having as good an experience as your *product* audience is important. You particularly want to make sure your episodes don't sound like you're just reading a script. Shake it up!

Finally, you want to make sure that the formats you're creating are setting you up for success. Will you need high-quality transcripts? Video versions of content? Different versions of audio content? Think about the end result you're creating, and make sure you're creating the materials you need *as you record and produce each episode*. Trust me on this one.

## Priorities in Episode Workflow

This is another one of those metrics where you really front-load the effort. The most important factor in optimizing for creating New Products with your podcast is planning in advance, so you make sure that the content you're recording during each episode has its place in the larger product you're creating down the line. Starting with an outline of the content you want to create, whether it's a course, an opt-in, pillar content or a book, means that you can designate certain episodes to cover certain parts of the long-form content.

The other area that requires extra attention is making sure that the content actually gets used as planned! This needs to be on someone's desk, and you and your team should regularly check in about the progress.

## **Priorities in Production**

Make sure that you're capturing the highest quality audio and video materials possible for a New Product optimization. Since you're going to be directly repurposing this into products for sale, unless you're planning to re-record, you want everything to be consistent and high-quality the first time. You might also want to have your team produce multiple versions of each episode. Podcasts usually contain introductions, closing material, and perhaps unrelated segments, or music and sound effects that wouldn't be appropriate in a different context, so making sure you have a plain or 'clean' version can be helpful.

## **Priorities in Promotion**

There aren't specific promotional priorities when optimizing for new products and large-scale projects on the podcast side of things. Normal production is fine! You'll need to promote your new offerings, however.

## **Costs**

Expect to spend a little more time on planning and a little more on production. Often, episodes created to be part of other content projects need to be produced in multiple versions and formats, sometimes with different types of editing (like more aggressive removal of verbal tics and filler words), which will incur additional expenses.

You will also probably want to invest in the repurposing itself, which might mean designing and creating filler or transitional content to cover any missing elements and make the whole product flow.

## **How to Track It**

If you're a content machine that produces masses of podcast episodes every week, you can track the number of new products and assets you create as a standalone metric. Most of us will want to break it down into smaller goals and milestones. These are often projects that take months or a whole year to fully execute, and that means the motivation to stay on top of it can flag a little.

If you have an outline for the product you're creating and a list of corresponding episodes in your content calendar, then every month you can note how many more of the episodes have been completed and how many are still outstanding. If you have a nice dashboarding system, then a progress bar can be a lot of fun!

For shorter projects where the episodes are recorded closely together, it makes the most sense to track the number of new products created quarterly or every six months, and make sure those new products get integrated into your other content marketing results tracking.

## Evaluating Success and Failure

You have a few options for evaluating success or failure here.

The first is, “Did we successfully use podcast content to create other products we can use?” That’s an easy pass-fail.

The other is to look at the performance of the products you’ve created. How many students did you enroll into the course? How many people opted in? What is the Search Engine Results Page ranking of the pillar content? How many people bought the book?

Only you can decide which number represents success or failure here. Because there are so many other marketing and execution elements to the performance of products, it might be wise to use those numbers to help you decide if you want to do it again rather than if the podcast as a whole was successful or not.

Either way – you’ve got a product now!

# Metric: Brand Awareness

## Metric Details

One of the harder parts of marketing is measuring the intangible.

And what is more intangible than brand awareness?

Most people are not psychic, therefore, knowing the exact amount and dimensions of the space you occupy in a potential client's head is unknowable.

But we don't really know what electricity is either and we still measure it, so there's no reason not to try.

First, let's get clear on our definitions: Brand Awareness is how recognizable your brand is – and we can be talking about either your podcast or your business here – to your community of listeners and potential clients.

Because we can't really know that (without massive surveys, which are time-consuming and expensive), a heuristic we can measure is how often we are talked about, mentioned, quoted and invited, as well as finding out how people first heard about us (and hoping it was the podcast!).

Podcasting is powerful for developing this awareness because the data indicates that people pay more attention to podcasts than to other forms of streaming media, and their recall of what they hear is impressive.

In a [2024 survey by Acast](#), they discovered that 64% of respondents pay full attention to podcasts, and 68% agree that podcast ads “stand out” (self-reported).

Neilson looked at brand lift (the rise in consumer perception after a marketing campaign) from podcasts and reported in their [2023 Neilson Brand Impact Norms Database Q1, 2023](#), that together, Brand Awareness and Recall made up more than 50% of brand lift in podcast advertising campaigns.

Remember: You can be the brand advertised on your podcast. I'd argue you *should* be.

## Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

If you're in an industry with a lot of competition, then building awareness and being the example people think of when your area of work is mentioned can pay huge dividends.

Similarly, if you frequently find yourself having to explain what it is you do, building Brand Awareness through a podcast could save you a lot of effort explaining things over and over again.

Some businesses this can work well for are:

- Financial services providers and technology
- Health and wellness product and service providers
- 'Disruptor' businesses (those that want to completely change the way people talk about their industry)
- Food and beverage companies
- Non-profit and mission-driven companies

This metric can be particularly effective for a business that makes people go, "Oh, I need that!" as soon as they hear about it. If you have the data that says, "Once people know about us, they stay connected and start buying things," then investing in developing greater brand awareness is going to pay off sooner rather than later.

## Blueprints Fit

**Perfect Fit:** Thought Leadership, Audience Engagement

Building Brand Awareness means you're taking an active role in creating the conversations that are being had in your industry, making a Thought Leadership show a natural fit.

Audience Engagement also works perfectly for this metric. The effort you are putting into engaging with your audience can exponentially increase your Brand Awareness, and this pairing is particularly good for movement and community building.

**Good Fit:** Relationship Building, Content, Conversion

You can optimize for Brand Awareness with any of the other Blueprints, as well. There aren't any direct conflicts, just a few nuances.

**Relationship Building:** Make sure that your Brand Awareness work doesn't supplant your efforts to build relationships! If you can do both, excellent, but if the key goal is building a relationship, use your promotional and airspace accordingly.

**Conversion:** Because you'll be doing so much work promoting your Conversion podcast anyway, it makes sense to add some Brand Awareness elements, like hashtag usage and specific brand references or imagery.

**Content:** The only possible downside here is whether or not you want to invest in a lot of promotion and brand-building with the show. If the end-use of the Content podcast is for

repurposing, then building Brand Awareness at the same time makes great sense. If the content is for internal use, then it makes less.

**Not a Fit:** None

## Example

I once worked on a podcast created by a non-profit that was dedicated to spreading awareness about a certain kind of brain cancer, its treatments and its impact on family members of sufferers. This host was Gen Z, and deeply in tune with how her community talked and thought about these cancers.

Because of this, she was able to very quickly build a following for the show by aligning her branding, verbiage and hashtag use with what her community was already doing.

When she launched the podcast, she was able to integrate directly into conversations that were already happening, and in short order, she was starting them.

The hashtags that the organization was using to discuss ideas and organize their content on the social media platforms started to take on a life of their own, and their accounts would be tagged into appropriate discussions without needing to directly search for and contribute to them.

The more that happened, the more the news media started to quote the show and reach out directly for quotes and statements, increasing the reach and awareness of the show.

Brand awareness was a key part of both the podcast's success and the success of the organization behind it.

## How to Optimize for It

So, how do you know if someone is thinking about you?

You can't.

But thanks to the horrifying panopticon we live in, it's not too hard to find out if someone is *talking* about you. So that's what we'll optimize for and measure.

This means:

**Backlinks:** The number of times your podcast is linked to by another website.

**Hashtag Usage:** You and your community using a specific #hashtag to identify your episodes, topics, or offers. Once you decide on a hashtag or set of them, make sure they are included wherever appropriate in your sharing materials.

**Tags and Mentions:** This is being tagged on a social media platform without you asking for it.

**Citations:** Anytime you're quoted or mentioned in a publication.

As you get going and start building Brand Awareness, you'll have to do a lot of legwork to get any and all of these, but over time, you will hopefully start to see more and more of them happening without you directly asking. This is how you'll know it's working.

Something else to keep in mind is your overall branding and the alignment between your podcast and your company. It would kind of defeat the purpose if you put a whole bunch of effort into creating a look, sound and shared vocabulary for your show... that no one associates with your business. So, the branding for your podcast should be aligned with the branding in the rest of your company and everywhere you exist online. The same or similar colors and fonts, imagery and tone that you use in your main company branding should all be included with your podcast branding.

## **Priorities in Episode Workflow**

There is a significant lift that needs to be made in the episode planning to optimize for Brand Awareness, and it all comes down to two words:

Who cares?

This isn't rhetorical. For every episode you produce, you should literally ask yourself that question, and come up with multiple answers.

I like the following process:

If I have a guest, I ask, "Who cares about this guest?" Maybe their alma mater, or the organizers of a conference they're speaking at, or the hosts of other podcasts they've been on.

If I have a specific topic or idea, I ask, "Who cares about this idea?" Maybe it's a journalist or influencer talking about it, maybe it's an author who recently wrote about it, or a previous guest on my show who would be interested.

This can become the beginning of your outreach strategy for that specific episode. You don't necessarily need to do this yourself at the planning stage. You can have your promotional team do it when they promote the episode. They just need a good understanding of your goals and target market.

I like having a page in the episode guide to do this exact type of work – and to track the results!

## **Priorities in Production**

There are no special tasks for the audio/video editing team unless specific audiograms are being made.

Your written and graphics materials team, and whoever is doing your scheduling, will need to be aware of “who cares” so they can create materials that will resonate with that audience. This might involve tagging people or companies directly, writing specific promotional emails and using the hashtags you’ve chosen for your business, as well as any other industry-relevant ones.

## **Priorities in Promotion**

This is where the real work begins when optimizing for Brand Awareness. Mentions and backlinks don’t exactly grow on trees, although it could be argued that if you plant enough seeds, some will eventually bear fruit.

Planting those seeds means intentionally creating content with your podcast that you know people will want to talk about and sharing that content with those people.

I would consider Brand Awareness one of the more challenging metrics to optimize for simply because this kind of consistent manual effort is hard to stick to, and the rewards, while great, come well down the road.

## **Costs**

As you begin optimizing for Brand Awareness, you’ll have to invest some labor hours in direct outreach to get the ball rolling, and manual, human-done work is the best way to do it. Over time, that investment should become less and less, as the people who are most closely aligned with your content know where you are and how to find you, and the influencers who create content in your space know you’re a resource – and how to get your attention.

You might also want to consider paid traffic campaigns or advertising campaigns on other podcasts to help establish your place in the industry and generate initial awareness among new listeners.

## **How to Track It**

You’re probably going to need a little extra software to effectively track when and how people are talking about your brand on social media.

Social listening software like Hubspot lets you create lists of keywords, handles and hashtags to monitor. Website traffic tracking software like Moz, Google Analytics and Ahrefs let you know where your backlinks are coming from. You can also set a Google Alert for your podcast name,

company name or any specific or proprietary terms you're using. You'll get an email when the term is used so you can check out and evaluate the source.

This work should be done at least monthly. It can become unwieldy quickly if you don't keep up with it.

There is another Brand Awareness step you should be taking, whether or not it's one of your key metrics.

If you don't already have one, add a "How did you hear about us" question to your booking and contact forms, and make it a mandatory field. This is precious data about how people first become aware of you and your work.

Note: If Brand Awareness is a key goal for your business and your main reason for podcasting above all others, then I highly recommend you look up and start using the [PESO model](#), developed by Gini Dietrich, the CEO of Arment Dietrich, an integrated digital communications agency that serves B2B brands, and founder of *Spin Sucks*, which includes the Spin Sucks Blog, Podcast and Community. In it, she goes into deep detail and actionable advice about Paid, Earned, Shared and Owned Media – and how to track it all. According to this model, your podcast is part of your Owned Media, and the Brand Awareness metrics we're talking about here also draw on Earned and/or Shared Media elements. (*One Stone Creative produces the Spin Sucks Podcast, but this is not a paid placement. I just think it's a great model.*)

## Evaluating Success and Failure

This is going to be a pretty personal evaluation, and you should always make sure to judge your results by your own previous performance rather than other companies or some kind of industry benchmark.

Always start with your baseline. Before you begin to optimize your podcast for Brand Awareness, how many backlinks, hashtag uses, mentions, and citations do you tend to get each month? If you're not completely sure, then just start tracking the first month you start optimizing – you'll still be able to see your growth over time.

The other thing you can look at is what percentage of these you had to go out and get yourself – and how many you received without asking. Unasked for mentions, backlinks, hashtag uses and tags will be the real sign that your brand is becoming fixed in the mind of your audience, and your brand is being treated as an authority.

Finally, if more and more people are citing your podcast as how they heard about your company, then you can be reasonably sure that it's contributing highly to your Brand Awareness and the project is successful.

Putting a dollar value on any of these numbers you're tracking other than the number of people who heard about you (which you can tie directly to your close rate) is challenging, so evaluate success or failure against your own past performance.

# Metric: Social Media Engagement

## Metric Details

There are those who love social media.

There are those who despise it.

And there are those who acknowledge that while social media is one of the forces actively destroying civilization, having a presence and connecting with community on the various platforms is a critical, if time-consuming, business function that someone on the team should be doing regularly.

I'll let you guess what camp I fall in.

Now, surface level, of course you can hope to drive social media engagement by sharing links to your episodes or clips from them in audio or videogram format and hope that people comment on it.

If you've ever tried that without an audience in the tens of thousands (many of whom will respond to anything of yours that they happen to see) you'll know how well that works out.

But you can use your podcast as a driver of engagement by building opportunities for your audience to contribute and respond right into the show.

This usually takes the form of specific segments within a podcast that are drawn from your community, or that are specifically designed to encourage direct, individual responses from the people who hear it.

Think: Q&A, call-in lines, commentary on the news, sharing listener reviews and stories, challenges like sharing specific types of content and getting guest suggestions and episode ideas from your audience.

## Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

The question of whether or not you need an engaged social media audience is the same as whether or not you need a podcast: What's the business case for it?

If you have a direct line in your balance sheet from social media engagement to sales (or anything else that is measurably useful to your business) then you should optimize for more of it and your podcast can be a good way to do it.

But getting more engagement just for the sake of more engagement doesn't make any sense.

Some types of companies that might find it particularly useful are:

- Marketing
- Training and consulting
- Personal development
- Education
- Real estate
- Sales

If you're currently looking at an Instagram following of 19, six of whom are blood relatives, then you might find the strategies here a little challenging, and possibly a waste of your time.

An argument can be made that you can use a podcast to build a social media audience from the ground up, and make sure they're engaged from the get go, but that is a difficult prospect and is going to require a lot of your time. It's basically a whole other business area. That is beyond the scope of this book, so for our purposes here, we're going to assume you have some kind of audience on social media and look at how a podcast can specifically engage them with your show.

## Blueprints Fit

### **Perfect Fit:** Audience Engagement

If your audience is on social media, then an Audience Engagement podcast is a wonderful way to connect with them more deeply. Your entire podcast can be structured to engage with your audience in different ways, with different segments.

### **Good fit:** Thought Leadership, Relationship Building, Content

Thought Leadership, Relationship Building, and Content podcasts can all include elements designed for audience engagement, but they're more likely to be segments, or parts of conversation that you have with people, than the main thrust of an episode.

### **Not a Fit:** Conversion

Because conversion shows are so focused on getting listeners to go do something after or while listening, investing a lot of time and energy in podcast-related engagement can detract from your efforts.

## Example

One of my favorite episode types to produce is Q&A shows. They're so much fun for hosts, audiences tend to love them and don't even get me started on how great the content is to repurpose and reuse throughout your business.

A few years ago we were working on a popular show in the product marketing space that used an alternating episode format, switching between in-depth interviews and Q&A episodes where the host would answer 3 or 4 related questions sourced from her large social media audience.

This was a brilliant ‘best of both worlds’ scenario. The host was able to give personal, direct answers to questions from community members on the social media platforms they were connected on – which the whole community could access and talk about. And the alternating in-depth episodes provided additional insight and increased her professional network.

Those questions and answers also made popular audiograms!

## How to Optimize for It

It’s easy to forget that the followers and connections and fans that we have on social media are... people.

And the people who listen to you also like you – and, if given the chance, would probably love to connect on a more personal level.

But you have to make it compelling. Not because you need to win them over, but because inertia means that doing anything new or different is hard. You need to provide a really good reason for someone to engage and reward them with your attention when they do.

I remember the first time I ever engaged with a podcast. I was listening to what I am pretty sure was an episode of *Happier* with Gretchen Rubin (forgive my memory, it’s been years!) where she asked her audience to post a certain type of picture and tag her on social media with it. I didn’t share one myself, but I did make a point of going to her Instagram to see what other people were sharing, because I was invested in the story and what she was sharing, and I wanted to be a part of it – at least as a viewer.

So, what can you create with your podcast that would be compelling enough for a listener to actually go and do something about it?

On the other hand, what can you draw from your audience that you can use in your podcast that will encourage them to listen, and then engage further when they hear their contribution?

## Priorities in Episode Workflow

This is another optimization type that will benefit from advance planning, especially because it’s likely that different members of your team are going to be involved in executing all of the different moving parts.

When you’re planning out your podcast editorial calendar, pay attention to:

- The high-level themes you want to cover over a year. Multiple episodes in a row on a similar theme are effectively you hosting a long, multi-part conversation with your audience.
- What other promotions like events and launches do you and your key promotional partners have over the year? If you know your social media is going to be filled with launch content on a given week, then your episode content should either complement it, or not take center stage while it's going on.

Make sure you have adequate posting and responding time either on your calendar or assigned to someone who will put it on their calendar. There also needs to be someone in charge of tracking the data on a regular basis because it can spiral out of control really quickly (more on that in the How to Track It section).

## Priorities in Production

Engagement-driven elements of the show are often going to be created separately from the main body, unless your whole premise is a Q&A or call-In style. Your editing team and the asset creation team will both have a role here.

Segments can be denoted with a specific sound (often called a stinger) or have some music laid under them (music bed) to differentiate them from other parts – this is optional, but it can be a nice touch!

Depending on the type of segment, you might also want your production team to separate a copy of it out, so it can be produced as an independent media file and used elsewhere.

If you are including user-generated content, it will need to be produced and inserted into your main audio.

Within your episode you should have specific calls to action for your community to follow.

Engagement-driving show segments include:

**Q&A Segment or Show:** Q&A segments or shows involve the host reading or playing a community-generated question and answering it on the episode. You can also make up your own, but then it's not really audience engagement.

**Call-In Segment or Show:** This can be done either live, having people join you on a call while you are recording it (often done for livestreams just like calling into a radio station), or produced in advance where you have audience members record their own content for you and send it to you to be produced and added to the show. It can also be more involved, with audience members as guests sharing specific situations they are in and getting different kinds of advice – you can be really creative with this format!

**Comments from the community:** Does your audience leave you comments and reviews? Read them on air, then tag the person who left it (if you have that information!) on the social

media promotions for the episode where you did so. This can be a beautiful conversation starter. Any place where you have members of your audience talking to you can be a potential source of content for the show, and if you treat it as the opening of a conversation, then you're optimizing for audience engagement.

**Commenting on the news/your industry:** Everyone has an opinion and after sharing yours, asking your audience to share theirs is a great way to spark discussions with your show. Make it clear how you want that engagement: on a specific post, via call-in or comment form, or by using a particular hashtag.

**Asking for stories, examples, case studies and general fun stuff:** Pictures, recipes, unbelievable customer service experiences – people have stories to share, and if they can share them publicly with you and other listeners of your show, then you're building real community as well as improving your performance in the algorithm.

**Engagement Requests:** You want to go above and beyond “tell us what you think!” Come on – that's lazy. Make. It. Interesting. Send us a picture of your pet ruining your home office. Record a video of your best breakfast and an audience-selected winner will get Starbucks for a year. Depending on the overall tone of your show, and whether or not it is considered appropriate in your industry, you can step out of the box a little. People engage with *people*, so show them that you are one, and invite them to do the same.

On the asset creation side, you should include:

- Promoting upcoming episodes and topics, especially if you need user-generated content for them.
- Clips or any segments you want engagement on. It is less of an ask to require someone to play and respond to a 60-second clip than a 40-minute episode.
- Social media posts specifically asking for the type of engagement you want.

Prepare to repeat yourself. No one sees everything you post, so make sure to repeat your requests regularly. Doing so with different text and imagery is a nice touch.

## Priorities in Promotion

This is where the magic happens when you're optimizing for Social Media Engagement.

You, or your dedicated social media team member, will be spending time responding to people who engage with you. This is important, and if you know that you're not going to have time to individually respond to people who engage with your content, this isn't the metric for you.

The biggest priority here is responding to any engagement that you get for each episode. Not only is it kind to take the time to respond to people who make the effort, but it teaches the rest of your community what they can expect from you when they engage.

There is nothing wrong with using a social media scheduler to take the posting off of your desk, but the responding should be done personally by a human.

## Costs

Expect to spend more time creating assets, and more time engaging with people on social (remember it's a two-way street!).

If you are using a specific tool to collect user content, like Speakepipe for voice messages, it may come with a subscription fee. The same is true for advanced tracking software you might be using to monitor what is happening on your channels.

## How to Track It

There are a couple of ways to track your social media engagement:

**Platform Level:** You can look at overall trends on each platform. This is if you're running a small operation and can't devote the time to more discrete analysis. I understand; I've been there. Add a page to your tracking document that includes each of the platforms you are promoting on and the engagement actions you're tracking. Start with your level of engagement now, and update it monthly with the new data.

**Episode Level:** You can look at all of the different posts on all of the different platforms for each episode collectively. This is a little more complicated, because you will be making multiple posts on multiple platforms for each episode, and if you can organize your posts in a monitoring software by creating lists or categories, that will be the most helpful – it can also be done manually, however. To ease the burden (and it will be a bit of a burden), make sure to have a page in your tracking document where you link directly to every single post. This will make it easier for the team member pulling the data to find what they need. For the most clarity, make it a point to look at the results at the same interval after each episode releases and the posts go live.

For example, I might want to look at my engagement results 7 or 10 days after release – and I'll do that for every episode so I am always using the same parameters and getting true comparisons. (It would not be a clear comparison if I looked at one episode's engagement after 5 days, and the other after 2 weeks!)

You want to be looking at the engagement metrics for each platform:

- Comments/Responses
- Likes/Hearts/Thumbs Ups
- Shares/Reposts/Saves

If you are including user-generated content, like call-ins, examples and questions you should also keep track of the submissions you receive and the channel you receive them on. If you post calls for new questions or submissions to your call-in line on your LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook, but 90% of the responses come through Facebook, then you can basically stop posting them on the other platforms and experiment with other content that might perform better there. You can find out where responses come from by either asking people what platform they heard the request on, using a tool like Google Analytics which shows you behavior, or by using a unique collection form for each platform so you can easily see the differences between them.

You will probably want some kind of social media monitoring software so you can have visibility on who is responding to what, when and how.

## Evaluating Success and Failure

If you are collecting data at the platform level then it's the percent change over time that will let you know if your strategy is working. As long as the number is going up, you can fairly confidently say that the podcast is helping you create more Social Media Engagement. (Whether that is helping your business is another kettle of fish!)

At the post level, you're looking more closely at individual episodes and how much engagement they generated. Of course, you also want the number to be going up, but you also want to look for patterns around what kinds of topics get the most engagement. This can be really powerful information that drives your future content strategy.

# Metric: List Growth

## Metric Details

The as-of-yet unseated king of profitable content is email.

Nothing else quite replicates the power of a well-cleaned and segmented email list. Like your podcast, it's direct communication, and while it doesn't have the connectivity and emotion-building capabilities you see with multimedia content, the ease of conversions like click-throughs, replies, shares and sales is unmatched.

So, when you use your podcast as a list-building tool, you're essentially doubling down on the value for your business: getting the all-important permission to send messages and creating intimacy with your voice.

Optimizing for List Growth involves planning your content and calls to action, setting up some back-end infrastructure to make sure you're collecting the emails you need, and possibly gating some or all of your show behind an email opt-in.

## Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

Taking someone from stranger to email subscriber involves a lot of friction, so multiple touchpoints, like through social media platforms and advertisements, is going to make it easier for someone to trust you enough to take the plunge. A podcast with list-growth as a production focus is going to be best for companies selling virtual products and memberships, who devote a lot of their content marketing to teaching-style content to educate their audiences, with a client base comfortable and familiar with technology, and that have invested in other kinds of online marketing funnels with robust social media presences.

Some examples are:

- Personal finance
- Cryptocurrency experts and advisors
- SaaS companies
- Information-selling businesses (courses)
- Authors and speakers
- Coaches and consultants with lower-ticket offerings

In other words, if:

- your business requires volume,
- your business gets a lot of traffic from different sources,

- you've devoted time crafting offers for clients at different levels of trust and knowledge, and
- you have enough online presence to be creating brand awareness,

then optimizing for list-building can make your podcast an important step in your funnel.

## Blueprints Fit

**Perfect Fit:** Conversion, Content, Audience Engagement

If your Blueprint is Conversion or Content, then this is a no-brainer metric to optimize for.

Email list opt-ins are a powerful type of Conversion that can have a major impact on your sales and profitability, and for Content shows, you're making it for content purposes anyway, might as well get some subscribers out of it – and no harm no foul if the strategy succeeds or fails.

Audience Engagement shows are built to connect you more closely with your listeners and having them opt-in to a different type of communication with you is a great step in that process, although not a strictly necessary one.

**Good Fit:** Thought Leadership, Relationship Building,

For Thought Leadership and Relationship Building, this focus can also work very nicely.

Thought Leadership shows will often have you talking to people who are known within your community, and so making "extra" time with those guests available via free opt-in for extended episodes, for example, can be very compelling. Likewise with a Relationship Building show, if your audience is as interested in your guest as you are, then the optimization can work.

**Not a Fit:** None

A list-building focus in your show isn't likely to seriously damage any of the high-level Blueprint's goals because 1) it is largely about repackaging regular episodes or parts of episodes, and 2) the ask you're making of your listener isn't huge. It's still free content. It's also not usually a standalone strategy, unless you're making a limited release season expressly for the purpose of being an opt-in.

## Example

One of the Top 100 Business podcasts we analyzed at the end of 2023 has an amazing opt-in offer involving his podcast at the very top of his website.

One of the benefits of joining is that you'll get access to a *searchable by topic* archive of more than a decade's worth of content.

I'm sure that setting this up took some work: podcast tagging, categorizing, search and sorting is not well-handled by most of the podcast platforms out there, but it's a huge potential value to a new listener who wants more... but not '10 years all at once' more.

This show's opt-in involves a lot more than just the podcast archive, of course – it has supplemental information, training, notes and extra emails all included – but you can build out something similar over time.

One of the nicest things about optimizing for this metric is that the amount of content you have to woo people with is going to grow over time, and what might start out as an okay-but-not-earth-shattering opt-in offer can become something really grand and compelling after a few years.

## How to Optimize for It

To optimize your podcast for List Growth, you need to figure out how to make some of your podcast content compelling enough to trade an email address for.

This could work a number of different ways.

You might organize your episodes into a specific order and curate a listening experience for subscribers – this could be presented as a mini-course. Or, bingeable playlists on a particular topic, maybe with some supplemental content like PDFs or graphics to help tie the episodes together into a cohesive 'product.' These can all be episodes that were released on your main feed – the opt-in worthy value is in the curation and presentation.

You might have 'public' and 'opt-in' versions of your podcast. This can also be a sales optimization strategy (offering a version without ads for paying subscribers, for example), but for email opt-ins it could be as simple as asking your guests an extra question that is only available to email subscribers.

You might have a specific episode type that you only release to your subscribers, like book or product reviews, certain exclusive interviews, teaching and training content or smaller bite-sized episodes that, while interesting, didn't make the cut for a whole episode.

Finally, you can have an entire podcast that IS your opt-in. This can be a fun use for a limited release season. If you have a large following on social media, or great traffic sources like paid traffic campaigns, a new book and the attendant marketing, a packed podcast guesting schedule or many speaking engagements, then a podcast season that thoroughly covers a single topic can be a great opt-in to start building a relationship with these new contacts.

## Priorities in Episode Workflow

Planning is the top priority for list-building with your podcast. You need to create episodes that will work within your overall podcast and serve your listening audience, but that can also be either altered to make an opt-in version, or that can be added to collections worth signing up for.

It's best to pick one of the ideas I mentioned above and stick with it for at least 6 months or a year to really see if it's working. And the earlier you are in your podcasting journey, the more time you'll need to devote to testing.

The extra effort for this type of strategy is going to come as or after the episode is being released. It's not as simple as uploading to the host and scheduling the date. You need to make sure the right episode, or parts of the episode, are in the right places, whether that means on password protected areas of your site, shared in an email sequence, or on a membership platform like Circle or a private Facebook group.

## **Priorities in Production**

This will vary depending on the type of list-building you're doing.

If you are separating out parts of episodes or require multiple versions of episodes for different purposes, you need to make sure your producer is in the loop, and whoever is project managing your show has clarity about the production requirements (so they can check) and follow-up steps (so they can execute on them).

For a whole-show-as-opt-in strategy, then you don't need to take any special pains other than putting it behind the email gate.

You'll want to make sure that the right information like intros, CTAs and closing materials is in the right version of the episode.

I cannot emphasize enough how helpful good nomenclature is here. Which of these filenames do you think will be easier to parse in 6 months or to train a new hire on?

Podcast\_224\_A.wav and Podcast\_224\_B.wav, or

Podcast\_224\_PrivateMetricsOptIn.wav and Podcast\_224\_PublicRSS.wav

Your assistant will thank you later if you enforce this now.

## **Priorities in Promotion**

If you want people to opt in, you have to tell them to. A lot. All the time. You will want to direct people to where they can opt in and why it's such a good idea for them to do so as much as possible. The direction should be in the calls to action within your podcast, in your show notes, on your website, in some of your social media posts, and part of your bio when you're guesting or speaking.

The only place you don't really need to mention it is in your email list because... they're already subscribed. It can be a *fantastic* method to segment a large and disorganized list, however.

## Costs

Expect to spend a little more on production and on admin when you are optimizing for list building. A more complex editing job will just take a little more time, and when there are multiple moving parts, you need to invest the time in making sure they are all being attended to at a high level of quality.

You also need to make sure everything is tested.

You may also need a specific landing page to direct people to – one with a very simple and easy-to-remember URL. You'll need an Email Service Provider to collect email addresses and deliver content, and it will have to integrate with your website so that you can deliver the extra or repackaged content to your new subscribers.

If you don't have these systems set up already, it can be a heavy lift. Having an email list will be well worth it, however.

## How to Track It

You'll be able to get the conversion data from your email service provider. Most of them will let you know how often a particular opt-in form was viewed, and how many people subscribed.

Views here are a heuristic for how many people were interested enough to check it out.

Conversions are how many people went from checking it out to actually subscribing.

Some email service providers are better than others at identifying where specific views or conversions came from – it can be a little challenging to isolate which came from a social media post vs. someone listening to an episode and typing in the URL, for example.

Now, you might really only care about how many people are ultimately opting in to this podcast-related content. That can be plenty of information for many businesses, but if you want to know whether your social media posts or your on-air mentions are more effective, you'll need to add a few steps to the process.

If you have a team member who is a whiz at Google Analytics and other traffic management software, give them this project, they'll know how to set it up.

If you don't, then the easiest way to get this level of clarity is to have duplicate landing pages you direct people to that have different URLs.

You can use:

[mybusiness.com/metrics](https://mybusiness.com/metrics) for your on-air read, and

[mybusiness.com/showmetrics](https://mybusiness.com/showmetrics) for your social media posts.

Then you will be able to compare the number of views and conversion rates for those different traffic sources.

The most important thing is collecting enough information that you can see the change over time. As you create more episodes and have more content available and refine the ways you tell people about your podcast-related opt-in, you will be able to see how that conversion rate changes with the different episodes you produce.

## Evaluating Success and Failure

List-building should be tracked on a monthly basis.

You can usually export the data directly from your Email Service Provider, or you can have a team member pull the data and update your spreadsheet once a month.

Success for this metric is subjective. If you started the project getting 2 or 3 subscribers a week, and you're getting 25 or 30 with your new podcast opt-in strategy, that's incredible from a growth standpoint. But if you started with 50–60 a week and increased to 65–70, well, that's a lot of work for a rather modest reward.

The only way to find out is to try, track the data and see how it compares to your other marketing activities. You don't want to decide this was a failure (or a success!) too quickly. Just like with podcast downloads, growth over time can tell you more than immediate results.

Because this focus for a show is (usually) predicated on the opt-in being a repackaging of existing content, or alterations from a main, public version, even if you don't achieve your opt-in dreams, you'll still be generating value for your business with the other metrics you're optimizing for. Spend a couple of hours every quarter or every 6 months to compare your podcast-related opt-ins to your other opt-ins, if you have them, and see how they stack up. If you don't have other opt-in paths, then look at the behavior of people after they have signed up. If you're only getting 10 opt-ins a week, but every month two of them are buying a product or service, that can more than justify your investment!

## Metric: Sales Qualified Leads

### Metric Details

Of all the metrics described here, this is the one most likely to make your accountant go, “Mmm, sexy baby, tell me more.”

Assuming you have that kind of relationship with your accountant.

Using your podcast as a direct lead generation channel is not for the faint of heart – it needs to be approached with some delicacy because it’s really easy to try this and end up looking (And feeling. And being) sleazy.

But you can use your podcast to increase your Sales Qualified Leads (SQL) ethically to the delight of your finance department and sales team.

The idea is to use the podcast as a step in your sales process, and so your guests will be composed primarily of people with whom you would like to do business.

You’ll do this by demonstrating the type of value you can provide and problems you can solve during, or soon after recording the episode with your guest/lead. This might mean taking them through your process as a kind of live coaching, or sending them a sample of your work after the call, like a report, or set of graphics, or action steps. This is step 1: the demonstration.

After you have provided the example of what you do, you can deploy step 2: make them an offer to explore working together more closely.

Please, don’t do this on the recording call itself. Nothing makes that not tacky. If your guest says, “Please, please can I hire you immediately?” Fine, go for it. But if they don’t you should wait a respectable interval before making an offer, and then, make it with a gift of service.

### Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

This works best for higher-ticket, service-based businesses that have an expertise, product or service they can easily demonstrate over the course of, or immediately after, a podcast interview.

For example:

- Coaches and consultants (fitness, finance, writing, business strategy, marketing, career)
- Multi-media content producers
- Writers and designers
- Financial services providers

What really makes this optimization work is knowing that people buy from you when they get a chance to see how good you are at what you do, and using the podcast as a chance to showcase that skill to people you have vetted as great potential clients, whether it's a live coaching or audit session, or something you create after the episode as a result of the conversation like videos, a written report or set of action steps, or feedback and support on the issue you discussed.

## Blueprints Fit

**Perfect Fit:** Conversion, Relationship Building

This type of optimization is great for both Conversion podcasts and Relationship Building ones.

A Conversion podcast is always going to be geared towards moving someone's relationship with you from one state to another, and that change can easily be from guest to client.

Relationship Building podcasts are also perfect for this strategy – it's just another kind of relationship-building, and there is no rule that says the type of relationship you're building can't be a client-provider one. Unlike when optimizing for Referrals, however, you're going to be taking steps more quickly, and providing more value sooner in the relationship with the aim of taking the next step more quickly.

**Good Fit:** Content

A Content podcast can be optimized for Sales Qualified Leads fairly well – especially if having a large archive of demonstrative or case study episodes is a good benefit for your company. You'll want to have a structure that you can use and re-use easily, and it will work best if your services are more consultative in nature. (As opposed to something you can demonstrate, like repurposed content or visual work.)

**Not a Fit:** Audience Engagement, Thought Leadership

This is a podcast optimization that doesn't typically mesh well with the Audience Engagement Blueprint – not because you won't have an audience that is interested, but because the point is really about the guests and the different kinds of ways *you can work with them* rather than how *they can help you serve your audience*.

Likewise, a Thought Leadership Podcast is less likely to work well for Sales Qualified Leads optimization because you'll be seeking guests who will be contributing ideas and discussing a topic with you, not that you will be demonstrating your expertise too.

## Example

I was a guest on a podcast last year with a host who had multiple businesses and service offerings, one of which was content repurposing from podcast interviews. Now, this particular podcast wasn't *about* content repurposing – it had a related business theme, and the host never sold me on anything directly – but after our episode together I was given a delightful pile of repurposed assets that I could use – and that I got to see them sharing on their own social media channels. They were excellent. It was a fantastic demonstration of the type and quality of work that the company does. They cleverly, also sent me a price sheet for both retail and reseller pricing. If we ever want to move that type of creation to a third party rather than doing it in-house, I know who to call – and I'll be happy to do so.

I have another example for you – one where this was done very, very badly.

I was invited to be a guest on a short, live, daily podcast interviewing business owners. I said yes, as I usually do to podcast invitations, and it was a pretty quick and efficient affair.

But then I got pulled into a hideous sales funnel. A few hours after the interview I received a call from an “analyst” who told me how great my episode was – it got amazing feedback and engagement – one of the best they'd ever seen, they said!

Goodness gracious, how nice to hear.

It was **so** popular, they said, that they wanted to offer me a 10-episode series with one of their celebrity hosts!

Bless my boots, that's just lovely.

They would do a full marketing campaign and syndicate it to AM radio, heck, they'd get me a billboard in Times Square.

Why, it almost sounds too good to be true.

It would normally cost fifteen thousand dollars, but I was just so smart and talented, they'd be happy to do it for ten!

There it is.

It was a scummy strategy designed to prey on business owners without much knowledge of the industry. Just gross. And sadly – not uncommon. Watch out for this kind of funnel – and for the love of Mike, don't create one like it.

## How to Optimize for It:

There are three important things to get right when you're optimizing for Sales Qualified Leads:

- You need the right guests who are at the right stage in the buying journey,

- You need to be able to demonstrate your expertise clearly – ideally with a gift of services, and
- You need to make it easy to see how much *more* value you can provide, and make it easy for them to access that additional value.

## Priorities in Episode Workflow

There is a good deal of work involved in optimizing for this metric.

Here are some of the things you'll need to decide, and probably experiment with, before you get this running like clockwork:

- Which of your offers (if you have more than one) is the best fit for this strategy, and how can you make it a natural extension of the podcast episodes you record about it?
- How do you demonstrate the value of it during or soon after the episode recording? For example, will your podcast be live coaching sessions, and you send action steps afterwards, or will you write a brilliant article based on the call to send along? Consider your normal sales process, and what you can systematize into your podcast workflow.
- Which of your client avatars (if you have more than one) is the best fit for the project AND is likely to want to discuss their situation publicly?
- What is the next step your guest will be likely to want to take, and how are you going to communicate it with them? They might be ready to buy after talking to you and only need a purchase link, or you might want to invite them to a more dedicated sales call after you've given them the deliverables.

For all of these, you may need to try a few different things out to see what sticks and what doesn't, and of course, you must always focus on being a good host. Provide real value, invest time and attention in your guests, and create content that your listening audience can enjoy and benefit from as well.

## Priorities in Production

If the service that you are selling is something you can materially demonstrate as a result of podcast work – like in the example I shared – then you want to make sure that all of the assets that will prove your value and quality are a part of the production process.

This can be as simple as making sure to send a copy of the audio/video you recorded for your guest's reference, or as intense as creating a set of assets or a whole new work product based on the episode.

Because of your unique subject matter expertise, you will probably need to do at least some of this work in-house, even if you work with a third-party service provider, but your sales team will probably be quite happy to work with such warm leads.

If the service you're selling is not related in any way to the podcast assets itself, then there is an entirely different production step, probably for another member of your team, in creating the report, demonstration or other deliverable you'll be providing.

## Priorities in Promotion

Not much extra work to do here, unless there is additional benefit to be gained from publicizing the gift of service you'll be making – for example, graphics and videos you created for the guest.

## Costs

For some businesses, where you are going to be providing a physical (or virtual!) asset for your guest as the next step in the sales process, you'll need to build that labor and production cost into your budget.

The higher your deal value is, the more you can spend on this type of optimization, and you should plan for several months of experimentation with different episode formats, deliverables and types of guests before you start to see it working.

## How to Track It

Just like with a Referral optimized podcast, you're going to track the specific guests you speak to and what results from that relationship.

Keep a running log of who you talk to, what you offer them, when you offer it, and if and when they accept. This is particularly important when you're in the experimentation phase and testing out different variables – but of course, you'll always want to know what your return on investment of time and airspace is.

## Evaluating Success and Failure

I spoke with someone for *The Company Show* who very lightly uses her podcast as a lead generation tool. She has several goals for the podcast, but one of them is generating enough new business to cover the costs of the show. For her that means 1 or 2 new clients a year who come directly as a result of the podcast – if she gets those, that is successful.

You'll probably have a different conversion rate or dollar amount per month, quarter or year that will indicate success after you get through your testing phase, which will probably take at least 3 months.

A good benchmark will be your existing conversion rate on sales and discovery calls – is the rate higher or lower than your usual one?

If it is equal or higher, it's a success.

If it's lower, use your podcast for something else.

# Metric: Product Sales

## Metric Details

This is the other finance department knee-weakener on the list. Using a podcast as a selling tool for products.

I'm sure we've all had the dream of creating a paid resource that your audience can't wait to buy and loves so much that they immediately tell all their friends about it.

I know. I've tried to make them. And again and again, for products, for services – anything that feels like it should be a no-brainer offer... it takes a lot of work to get people to learn about and buy it.

That's the game. But a podcast can help you direct attention to what you want to sell and consistently demonstrate its value over time.

I've differentiated Product Sales from Sales Qualified Leads because how a podcast needs to be structured to achieve each is slightly different. Optimizing for a new lead is all about building the relationship. Optimizing for selling a product is all about showcasing the value, overcoming objections and providing the CTA.

Products can include books, software, courses, physical goods and lower ticket/off-the-shelf services. Basically, if someone can find it and buy it without needing to talk to you or a member of your team, we're calling it a product. If there is a longer sales process or any kind of custom quoting, you should optimize for Sales Qualified Leads instead.

Now, of course, you can promote your products and services in the ad spaces within your podcast or by just mentioning them, and there's no reason not to do that, but for this type of optimization, we're taking it a couple of steps deeper and really integrating the sales process into the content.

## Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

Obviously, your business has to be selling some kind of product to even entertain the idea of optimizing for this metric. (Although, if you're feeling extra productive, you can first optimize your show for New Product Creation, then come back to this one once you've built it...)

- Ecommerce
- Designers and copywriters that sell templates or small packages
- Authors, particularly those sharing a model or framework in their book
- Food and beverage companies
- Health and wellness practitioners

- Personal services (fitness, finance, organization, food preparation, handiwork, gardening, etc.)

A product-optimized podcast gives you a chance to do a few things: Demonstrate the value of what you sell and the different ways it can be used, share the stories of people benefiting from it (or the costs of not using it!), and generally make your audience aware of what you sell and who it's for.

## Blueprints Fit

### **Perfect Fit:** Conversion

You can design a whole show entirely around the concept of using it to sell products you have available.

### **Good Fit:** Thought Leadership, Audience Engagement, Content

In a Thought Leadership Show, you can have elements of Product Sale conversions, but the main 'meat' of your episodes should be your own ideas and abilities. Sometimes, that will naturally lend itself to the products you've created, but other times, what you really need to communicate is more theoretical.

Similarly, in an Audience Engagement podcast, the best and most helpful kind of engagement might be buying your product, but just as often, the goal will be to educate, inform and entertain your audience in advance of a larger sale.

Content shows can also work for this optimization, but as Product Sales is focused on one single goal, you might want to alternate different episode types and topics to round things out and avoid being a one-trick pony.

### **Not a Fit:** Relationship Building

Typically, the goals of Relationship Building and Product Sales aren't well aligned simply because the types of sales that can happen through a Conversion podcasting strategy like this one are at a very different price point than you will make as a result of deep and lasting relationships with guests.

## Example

There's a video-first podcast that I've gotten absolutely addicted to over the last year where the host audits, critiques and then corrects people's budgets. I was an early watcher of the show and have been delighted to see it develop quickly into a powerful product sales tool. The host and his team have created a personal finance course that they give to guests but also make available to the general public. Every episode is a demonstration of how important the concepts

explained in the course are. When a guest is on the show, they have their finances audited by the host using the framework available in the course. It's easy to see the value of the product when it is regularly being applied in this way.

This particular model would work well with any kind of personal service where many people have the same problem that your solution can fix. People also love to watch other people get critiqued on the internet. Human nature.

## How to Optimize for It

There are two ways to approach optimizing for product sales:

1. As a whole-show concept where every episode is primarily focused on demonstrating the value of your product. This is best when that product makes up the bulk of your sales or is a proven entry point into higher-level services. The example above is a whole-show concept.
2. As one of the multiple optimizations within a show where product-selling elements make up some but not all of the content. This is best when selling more products is great, but you have other things in your business that the podcast can support that are as or more important than product sales. In this case, using a specific segment to focus on your product will probably work best. This will allow you the opportunity to optimize for other things, like content for New Products or Labor Cost Savings.

## Priorities in Episode Workflow

The biggest lift in optimizing for Product Sales is developing the value demonstration method, whether it's the whole show or a segment.

The last thing you want is to come across like an infomercial, so you need to make sure you're providing real education and value that is interesting enough to watch while making clear that the solution is easily available should the viewer or listener choose.

To help you work through this, think about the product you want to sell and note down:

1. The problem it solves.
2. How it solves the problem (I'm talking about the mechanism – does it teach a new skill or framework they can use, is it a service you provide, is it a physical item they can use?)
3. What happens to the person (or people, if you have multiple customer avatars) once the problem is solved? What has changed in their life?

That is the journey you want to share in your podcast episodes or segments. Less, "This is a great product," and more, "Here is a person like you dealing with an issue you currently have, that we are solving in real time." If you can do this live with customers, potential customers or people who are just like your customers, so much the better! If you can't, follow the same

process with other people and in your outro content draw any necessary parallels and conclusions to help your ideal clients understand how it will apply to them.

## Priorities in Production

Once you have your format determined, there are no special additional audio or video editing requirements outside of adding any stingers (sounds added for emphasis or to indicate a change of segment) or music beds (underlying music) if it is a segment in a larger show.

In your show notes, you might want to consider an expanded or blog post-style format that takes readers on the same journey your viewers and listeners go on. If the goal is product sales, then whether someone decides to buy after watching, listening or reading is immaterial, as long as they can see that the product can help them and buy it easily.

Of course, make sure you have clear links and instructions for how people can buy the product, and add the same information to at least some of your social media shares, and you're good to go.

## Priorities in Promotion

Your promotions should be focused more on the stories you're telling and the transformation that is occurring because of the use of your product, than the product itself. The idea is to create content that does the selling for you, not just talk about the products and ask people to buy them. Product Sales optimized podcasts should, therefore, be promoted like any other podcast, perhaps with the addition of paid traffic strategies. More on that below.

## Costs

Depending on what exactly you're selling, investing in a well-produced video version of your show might be well worth it. Anything that needs to be *shown* should be in video (like providing feedback on website design, or social media posts) and if you know your audience are heavy video users, meet them where they are.

Similarly, if you decided to create those in-depth blog-style show notes, they will take longer and cost more to produce. This is worth testing independently to see if it makes a difference.

Because there is a direct line between listeners and sales, this is a podcasting goal that can warrant paying for traffic and spending real effort growing the listenership of the show. Hiring a promoter, using paid traffic campaigns, guesting on other shows and generally investing in growth and reach can help you make more of the sales you're seeking.

## How to Track It

The first thing to track is the number of product sales you make each month and how that number changes now that you're optimizing your podcast for more sales. Add a page or section to your metrics tracking document and input your product sales each month.

That's useful. But we can do better.

If you're releasing multiple versions of your podcast, e.g. audio, video and written, consider having a different landing page for each of them so you can easily track which sales come from each source – this will let you know which medium converts best for your business. Input the data from each medium monthly.

To take it a step further, having unique links for each episode (made with something like Bitly or PrettyLinks) will give you visibility on which particular episodes have the highest conversions. You will be able to see patterns in terms of guest types, topics or any new variations you include.

If you are using paid traffic or promotional strategies, include your monthly expenditure. This will be important when you're evaluating success or failure.

## Evaluating Success and Failure

Success occurs when you're earning more in product sales than you're spending in production and promotion to get them. After that, you get to decide how much success is worthwhile.

Something you might discover is that one medium, like audio, video or writing, converts at a much higher rate for you than the others. This is a wonderful thing to learn because you can stop or pare down any of the formats that don't convert as highly, and reallocate your production and promotional budget to more of what works. That in itself is a success.

It can take some time (as always!) to build traction and accumulate enough data to see if it's working, but about 4-6 months is a good length of time releasing weekly episodes to see if you're on the right track. As long as the number of sales is moving up, there is an argument to be made for continuing to optimize. If after a year you're not breaking even (and this is assuming that your product sales don't lead to higher ticket sales – that changes the equation), then you can safely assume this is not the product sales method for you.

# Metric: Monthly Recurring Revenue

## Metric Details

The golden egg of online businesses is Monthly Recurring Revenue, or MRR.

We all want it. But to get a golden egg, you need a golden goose.

A lot of people hope their podcast will take on that avian role.

And when you have all of the elements in place, it can.

In this context, I'm talking specifically about MRR relating to your podcast itself: people paying for access to the show, different versions of it, specific additional content relating to it or joining a community of listeners. (For all other low-ticket sales, see the previous section: Product Sales.)

There are a few main ways podcasts can help you generate MRR:

- Fully-paid or private podcasts
- Paid or premium versions of the show
- Paid community membership associated with the show

Fully private podcasts are only available to paying subscribers (And can also be an awesome List Growth strategy if email subscribers are more important to your business than the monthly subscription fee.)

A paid or premium version of the show is when you have a version of the show for paying subscribers that is in some way different than your main public offering, such as being ad-free, or providing early or extended episodes. Think about Patreon levels or paid Apple, Spotify or Substack subscriptions.

A paid community membership is when paying subscribers get some kind of extra access to you, your guests or each other, but still related directly to the podcast, as opposed to a paid community that has no direct tie to the show. For example, paid subscribers may have the right to submit questions for guests, or access to a community where they can discuss the content with you and each other.

## Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

If you've ever said to yourself or the rest of your team, "Goodness, we've got a huge and highly engaged audience that loves our content but no low-cost or entry-level products or services to offer them!" then you're perfectly positioned for an MRR-optimized podcast.

Folks in other types of situations can also employ this strategy, of course, but when you think about the effort involved in winning any sale, you have to decide if it is worthwhile to invest the effort. Sometimes, you can spend a similar amount of effort on a \$40 sale as on a \$5,000 one. But if you look at your stack of offerings and feel like there really is something missing at the lower end, MRR driven by your podcast can fill that gap.

Some industries this might work well in are:

- Professional athletes/athletics
- Personal fitness and wellness practitioners
- Coaches and consultants
- Business growth, marketing and entrepreneurship
- Personal and professional development
- Personal finance

When you can easily add an element of content or access that people will value enough to pay for, and the more personal recognition you have in your industry, the better it will work.

It is important to remember that this is an optimization that requires a large audience to be viable. Otherwise, you're looking at a lot of effort for little reward. You should have an email or social media following numbering in at least the thousands.

## Blueprints Fit

### **Perfect Fit:** Conversion

This is very much a Conversion type of podcast! When you are optimizing for MRR, the whole purpose of the show can be driving people into the paid option for your podcast. One of the key goals will be encouraging people to take the leap and become paying members, and much of your promotional effort and a respectable amount of airtime can be devoted to it.

### **Good Fit:** Audience Engagement, Thought Leadership, Content

Audience Engagement podcasts can be optimized for MRR because the audience you're prioritizing might be very happy to support you or get extra benefits from a premium membership or community. Make sure that the premium podcast is the best use of their attention, however. You don't want to cannibalize your sales of other products or services.

A Thought Leadership podcast can accommodate this metric as well. If your guests are as interesting to your audience as you are, then extra access to them in the form of extended interviews or Q&A can be compelling. If it's a solo show and you have that kind of relationship with your audience, this can be a great way to provide a little more time and attention to them at scale.

Content may or may not work here. I'm including it in the Good Fit category because a Content podcast can really be anything. If you have the audience size to generate enough recurring revenue through paid access, then there is no reason not to subsidize your content creation in this way. Keep a careful eye on the cost-benefit ratio for this type of show.

### **Not a Fit:** Relationship Building

The reason this isn't a great fit for a Relationship Building podcast is simply that if you're selling access to your guest in some manner, that is enough to ask them for. You may find that you can collaborate in other ways in the future, but if someone is volunteering their time to help you create something you are selling, immediately asking for more is a little *déclassé*.

## **Example**

When researching for the State of Business Podcasting Report last year, one show we looked at used a strategy that I thought was a brilliant for using a podcast as a source of recurring revenue: the entire podcast model was focused around selling access to the guests while creating the content.

It was a video podcast in the entrepreneurship space, and the hosts had a monthly membership of about \$100. Members were invited to attend the virtual recordings live and stay for a Q&A with the guests after the interview. Because the guests were well-known and highly regarded experts, and getting access to them was usually not easy, the argument for becoming a member and getting that kind of access was huge. Just brilliant.

I could see this type of model working well in any industry where there are understood 'tiers' of fame and well-known experts who can't be widely available to the general public. Fashion, entertainment, entrepreneurship, sports – heck, any industry they make reality television about could fit.

## **How to Optimize for It**

First things first, you have to decide what kind of MRR you're looking for. Our options, again, are:

- Fully paid or private podcasts
- Paid or premium versions of the show
- Paid community membership associated with the show

Paid or Private podcasts are the easiest. You simply use a podcast host that allows you to create a private podcast feed and only release that feed to paying members. (Substack and Apple have that functionality built into their platforms. For Spotify, at the time of this writing, you'll need to make sure you're working with a host that can make a feed private.)

For Premium versions of the show, you'll also be looking at your podcast host for the solution. The specific functionality you are looking for is being able to upload different versions of your episodes for different categories of listeners, paid or free.

If you're creating a paid community associated with your podcast, tools like Patreon and Substack have community elements built into them, but you can also use another community platform that is purpose-built like Circle, or even Facebook if that's where your people are!

To keep it very simple, and if it fits with what you're offering as a community, you can also use your existing email service to segment a specific group of paying members and make sure they get access to the content they are entitled to.

The tech for this kind of optimization can be a little challenging, but the options are getting better every year.

## Priorities in Episode Workflow

When you're planning your episodes, you (and your guests if you have them!) need clarity about any extra or extended content that is going to be included in the episode. You probably don't need any extra communication with the guest if you are simply offering an ad-free or early version of the podcast for a fee, but if you are selling extended content or access, then letting them know what you expect in advance is a critical step.

In your episode guide or other tracking document, make sure you have entries for different versions of podcasts so that it's easy for your team to find the right one to upload to the different locations you're using.

If you are uploading content to different locations, e.g. different RSS feeds for public and private consumption, and you don't already have one, add a quality assurance step to your post-production workflow. You want a human listening to each version of the episode to confirm the right content is included in each one and making sure the right version goes to the right place.

## Priorities in Production

**Fully paid / private:** No additional production work is required.

**Paid or premium version:** You'll usually need a different version of the audio file that has your extra content, or is formatted to be presented without ads. (Using the same version with gaps for ads and transitions sounds sloppy.) If you have an in-house editor, or work with a firm that provides you a dedicated one, you can rely on them to make the right choices without much extra communication, but otherwise, providing detailed timestamps and instructions can be useful.

**Paid community associated with the show:** There probably won't be any extra audio work needed, but there will be specific assets you create for members of the community relating to

each show. Those need to be created and distributed by the team member in charge. They might be extra audiograms, discussion questions, prompts about upcoming guests or emails alerting the community to new content.

Your show notes should always have a CTA for the paid option in your free version, explaining what the benefits are.

## **Priorities in Promotion**

You're going to have to put some effort into promotion when you're optimizing for MRR. A paid version that no one knows about won't do you much good.

Make sure you mention your paid level at least twice in each episode: once towards the beginning and once towards the end. Emphasize the benefits of membership, and if you have an audience participation element, like questions submitted for your guests, then make sure to always state that these questions are sourced from your community, which can be found at URL.

You should also regularly promote the paid offering on your social media, your website and to your email list. In your emails, make sure you're segmenting out people who are already paying for it! It can get annoying otherwise.

Ultimately, you're selling something, and you need to promote it accordingly.

## **Costs**

There will be a little additional production time needed to produce multiple versions of podcasts, and do the QA listen and review to make sure everything is where it needs to be.

You may need to invest in more expensive podcast hosting because many of the lower-cost options don't have functionality for private feeds.

Keep in mind that most platforms that allow for subscription payments for your podcast are going to take a cut off the top, and that cut can range from 2–3% all the way up to 10%.

Finally, there is more of an initial outlay for this kind of podcast. It takes some time to plan and organize the content, make sure your impacted team members understand what is happening and why, and get up to speed on any new tech. It is a little more intense than a standard podcast that doesn't involve different versions, but things will even out and get a little less expensive over time.

## **How to Track It**

The most important thing to track for MRR is your overall monthly revenue from the podcast or associated community, which you can get from your payment processor.

You should also track the ratio of downloads to subscribers and see how that number changes over time. If your data shows that for every 500 unique listens you can expect to get 1 new paid subscriber, then you can make informed decisions about how much to invest in promotion.

You should also pay attention to what impact, if any, specific topics make to your conversion rate. If, for example, you get a pile of new premium members every time you talk about sourcing high-quality alpaca wool, then that is powerful information about what is most valuable to your listeners.

## **Evaluating Success and Failure**

As I'm sure you're sick to death of reading by now, success or failure is going to depend on your goals and expectations.

When you first launch an MRR-focused offer through your podcast, there will, hopefully, be a big rush of buyers all at once and then a gradual climb in your number of paying subscribers. Plateaus happen, but if you're tracking that ratio of downloads to subscribers, you should be able to identify what it takes to change them. (This will take at least six months of data!)

If you're earning more than it costs to do the extra work for this kind of podcast, then anything else is a bonus, but remember to consider your opportunity cost and the next step in the buying journey you hope your paying subscribers will take.

## Metric: Labor Cost Savings

### Metric Details

I love answering questions. I could do it all day.

I even love answering the same question over and over again for different people.

This is not common, and sadly, it is also neither efficient nor cost-effective.

Customer service is a huge line-item expense for a lot of businesses, and if it's possible to save time and money there – without compromising quality! – then it's what we all want to do.

Your podcast can be optimized to do exactly that, and not only save you and your team time and money but also create a better experience for your clients.

### Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

Making Labor Cost Savings a focus of your podcast is going to be the best choice for businesses that often have to show or explain things to their audiences. If you are selling something the average consumer isn't super familiar with or that could be done wrong, and if you find yourself answering the same types of questions again and again, then this is a metric you should consider.

Some examples are:

- Online course creators
- SaaS and other technology companies
- Body workers (physical and occupational therapists, personal trainers, massage therapists, etc.)
- E-commerce and retail
- Done-with-you service providers

Often, the businesses that do the best optimizing for these metrics are high-volume at a low-to-medium price point. At truly premium prices, many clients will want personal attention regardless of how great your self-serve materials are.

### Blueprints Fit

**Perfect fit:** Audience Engagement, Content

A podcast that directly answers audience and community questions, provides instruction, demonstrates examples and use cases, heads off objections and codifies the stuff you find yourself saying all the time is going to be intensely valuable to your audience. This is true of both Audience Engagement and Content podcasts.

An Audience Engagement podcast will probably have more additional elements, such as interviews, call-in segments, and commentary about your industry, as well as different priorities in promotion compared to a Content show, but from a Labor Cost Savings standpoint, they are the same.

### **Good Fit:** Conversion

Conversion podcasts can have some Labor Cost Savings elements built into them, especially case studies and answers to questions, but because their main purpose is to get someone to DO something rather than providing everything a listener needs upfront, it's not always as easy to make sure you're sharing vs. holding back the right amounts of information.

### **Not a Fit:** Relationship Building, Thought Leadership

Relationship Building shows tend not to be great for this type of optimization (unless it's within a specific, separate segment of the show), because the focus of each episode is on your guest and their expertise which may or may not be valuable for your own repurposing.

With Thought Leadership podcasts, the themes and topics tend to be at a higher level and less about practical application of ideas and skills.

## **Example**

In One Stone Creative's very first podcast iteration back in 2018 (don't look for it; it's lost to the sands of time), we specifically set out to create a content podcast that we could repurpose, the main goal being to answer the questions we knew our clients were or should be asking.

Every short, solo episode was either a demonstration of a concept, an explanation of a topic or answers to questions we were regularly asked.

We scripted these episodes in advance and kept links to the finished media and episode scripts in our episode guide, along with links to audiograms (short-form videos with 1–3 minutes of content with captions) so that my team and I could use them on social media – and to send people via email or during calls.

The podcast didn't continue – it was well produced (naturally) but daily (bad choice), and we had the happy problem of getting too busy with client work to maintain it. We're still using some of those scripts today, however. In fact, some of them made it into this very book. The *Three Cs of Podcasting* section first appeared there, and while we've updated it a little to reflect more

recent work we've done and changes in the industry, the bones are the same. I didn't have to write that section from scratch.

When you strategically create content that you know you're going to be able to use elsewhere, and make sure that you're leaving out really topical references that will become obsolete, the work you put into a podcast episode now can be saving you time and effort for years to come.

## How to Optimize for It

The key to optimizing for Labor Cost Savings is having a clear picture of the type of information you have to share all of the time, and developing an episode format that lets you include it in a way that flows within the context of an episode, but can also be broken out and re-used as distinct pieces of content.

What does that mean?

Well, not every podcast is going to perform well as a straight Q&A show, although that can be a valid strategy! For most businesses, you'll be optimizing for multiple metrics and that means choosing a format that can accommodate this kind of practical information with more conversational, entertaining and theoretical elements.

This is a great use case for having segments like Question of the Week or alternating longer, more narrative episodes and interviews with shorter, more functional ones.

## Priorities in Episode Workflow

The big lift when optimizing for Labor Cost Savings comes in the planning.

Before you start recording, you will want to create as big a list as you can of the specific pieces of information you never want to have to repeat again. Look at your customer service logs, dive into your inbox history, scan your social media channels, and find the:

- Questions
- Examples
- Objections
- Case studies
- Demonstrations

...that you're regularly repeating. Then you need to either update your episode format, or design a new one, to accommodate them while you are still meeting your other podcast objectives.

This is something you may want to do as segments within an episode, or as whole episodes themselves. It's important to make sure that each episode still flows as an episode and doesn't feel like a mishmash of different instructional content with an intro and outro slapped on.

## Priorities in Production

Your post-production team needs to be aware of what the ultimate use for the Labor Cost Savings content is. They need to know what parts need to be transcribed or broken into clips, so they can do it along with the normal episode production. This step includes updating your episode guide or other tracking document!

If you are using a specific segment within your podcast to include your Labor Cost Saving elements, then having an audio cue of some kind, like a specific sound or underlying music, can help alert your listeners, “This is something different and important! Take note!”

If you go with a music bed, make sure to export a version of the segment with and without it so you have maximum repurposing flexibility.

## Priorities in Promotion

This isn't a priority so much as it is an extra benefit. Unless you're restricting access to paying customers (which is a legitimate choice!), each of these elements you repurpose to save your team's time can also go into your promotional calendar. Short form videos, Q&As, examples, demonstrations... these can all do very well on your blog, as email content, on social media and on your website as a self-serve library of content that can serve your audience without any additional involvement from you.

## Costs

The extra cost here is mostly going to be in the repurposing, with an honorable mention for the research and planning time. Make sure to plan for:

- Extra editing time
- Extra graphics and short-form videos
- Transcription
- Admin time for organization
- Training the team on how to use the growing library

## How to Track It

You can track a few different things as you're optimizing for this metric:

- Time spend per customer interaction (sales, service or support)
- Playtime/number of shares of repurposed media
- Visits to self-serve pages

Let's look at each of these.

To track changes in your **time spend**, you'll need to know what that number is initially. If you know that your team member in charge of customer service is spending about five hours a week answering questions and supporting your clients, then you can make that your baseline, and track changes from there as you increase your content library.

Tracking the **playtime** of various assets is another way to go about it. If your video materials, like audio and videograms are hosted on a platform like YouTube or Vimeo, you'll be able to get data on how many times it was viewed and how much time was spent on each video. This isn't a perfect heuristic for time saved, but it's good enough to measure your progress, especially along with time spend.

Likewise, if you are arranging all of your Labor Cost Saving content on a self-serve page or company wiki, you can look at the **visits** to that page and can reasonably consider every use of it a time someone didn't have to reach out to you.

It would be best to track the time spend per customer or time spend on customer service activities AND at least one of the playtime/number of plays or visits to self-serve pages. This will tell you not only how much time you're saving, but which topics you've saved the most time on, as well as where your community has needed the most help, so you can increase the resources you create on those topics.

## Evaluating Success and Failure

If the overall trend is that your time spent on customer service is going down, then I would call the project successful. It will hopefully go down further as you create more and more content and build out an increasingly robust library for you and your team to direct people to.

Give it at least six months for a weekly podcast (bi-weekly shows will need a year), and look at the specific measurement type you chose. If the trend is going in the right direction, keep at it. If it isn't, then 1) make sure everyone on your team is actually doing what they are supposed to with the content, and 2) try to get some customer feedback on the materials. Either of these could point you to a way to improve performance or give you information about why it's not going to work for your business.

Be warned: This is a project that is very easy to put on the backburner. The feeling of, "it's all there, we can organize it later!" is strong and compelling. That feeling is a liar. Resist.

# Metric: Affiliate Sales

## Metric Details

Affiliate sales are a powerful driver of dollars on the internet. You've probably seen disclaimers on blogs like, "Clicking links in this post mean I may make a small commission."

You've probably never seen a recipe blog without one.

Affiliate Sales are when you promote someone else's products or services and get a payment for doing so, usually a percentage of the total sale, and sometimes a flat rate. While most common in blogs and in webinars, they can be part of audio and video media as well.

Your podcast is one of the places where you have the attention of your audience, and the relationship that you've built with them means that they are more likely to trust you and your recommendations for other products or services.

Affiliate Sales are different than sponsorships, although they tend to occupy the same space in an episode. Where a sponsor will pay outright for a certain length of time or a certain number of downloads, with an affiliate arrangement, there is no upfront payment, but you receive a commission or percentage of sales from anyone who used your specific link to purchase the product or service you are advertising.

## Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

For a lot of businesses, using valuable airspace to promote other people's products isn't the best idea. You're doing all of this work and investing all of these resources, so if a sale is going to be made, it should be for *your* products and services.

But for some businesses, it can make sense. If your audience genuinely needs products and services you don't provide, then pointing them in the right direction can be helpful – and even make them better customers. If you can be paid for making that recommendation, why not?

Well, there is one potential reason, other than the attention could be directed to your own products. Sometimes knowing that you will receive a payment for making a recommendation, people are a little less likely to trust it, believing your incentives are more about money than about being helpful. This isn't always a reason not to do it – but it is something to keep in mind.

Affiliate Sales will work best for businesses that have large audiences in sectors where there are lots of technology, SaaS, education and consulting companies eager to have access to those listeners.

For example:

- Legal and financial services
- Marketing and human resources
- Professional development and training
- Wellness practitioners
- Apparel and personal care

Because there is limited opportunity to really nurture your audience for these kinds of sales, look for affiliate offers that have very high consumer demand and lower price points so it's an easy decision for your audience. You can find an affiliate program for just about anything, and pretty much all of Amazon can be promoted on an affiliate basis. It's wise to focus on very popular, lower cost options for your affiliate ads, unless it's a perfect topical fit (like your human resources podcast partnering with a payroll services provider, for example.)

If you eventually want to have sponsors for your podcasts, starting with an Affiliate Sales strategy can help you get valuable data about your click-through and conversion rates so that when it comes time to negotiate a more traditional sponsorship, you have the kind of information sponsors need.

## Blueprints Fit

### Perfect Fit: Audience Engagement

Audience Engagement Podcasts are going to be the best fit for Affiliate Sales, hands down. When your entire focus is on cultivating a relationship with your audience, and making sure they are getting the information and education they need from you, there is nothing wrong with some of those things being other products and services you think they will benefit from.

This kind of optimization can be particularly valuable when your clients and community regularly ask you things like, "What tool should I use for...?" and "Can you recommend a training in....?" Not only are you answering the question, you're getting a little compensation for it.

Be mindful to always disclose that you are being paid for a recommendation. You won't be doing your reputation any favors if people start to perceive you as schilling. I like to say, "This is an affiliate link, and if you use it to buy, I will receive a commission. If you would rather I didn't, here is a non-affiliate link. I think it's worth it either way."

### Good Fit: Relationship Building, Content, Conversion

You can also sometimes see some real success in Affiliate Sales with a Relationship Building podcast, *if* your guest has an affiliate or referral payment program, and they are interested in you sharing it during their episode. Just make sure that the URL you share on the air and in the show notes is the one tracked to you. It's not a perfect fit, however, because it might come off as a little odd if you are promoting a different guest's link during your current guest's show, and sometimes you can get more value in the relationship building if you share the resource without expectation of payment.

Conversion shows can work well with Affiliate Sales because someone remembering and typing in, or clicking an affiliate link is a form of conversion. If your whole show is optimized for conversions, however, then you'll probably make a lot more money having people convert to your own products or services than someone else's. If you don't have an easy-to-buy product or level of service however, there's no harm in adding some affiliate links for products and services you believe in.

Content shows, as you're probably getting familiar with, will work just fine with Affiliate Sales. Pay some attention to making sure that what you're promoting matches the theme of what you're talking about, and make sure that you're not overdoing it on ads. Otherwise, go to town.

### **Not a Fit: Thought Leadership**

Affiliate Sales are rarely going to mesh well with a Thought Leadership style podcast. It's not to say you can't if you don't want to, but you will really be running the risk of having your unique IP, thoughtful commentary, and innovative opinions perceived like they are advertisements. It's just not the best look for this type of show, so if your Blueprint is Thought Leadership, make affiliate offers sparingly, if at all.

## **Example**

A guest I had on my podcast, The Company Show, uses Affiliate Sales as one of the ways she monetizes the podcast. She started simply by looking at the products she used already and seeing if they had affiliate programs. She promoted the products based on her own experience of them as host-read ads and producing her own commercials that went into ad spots within the show. It was a good, and easy, way to do a few things:

- Generate some income,
- Establish a baseline conversion rate for listeners – an understanding of how many people would be likely to follow a link in the show notes or read on the air, and
- Support other companies in her industry.

Most companies that offer commissions to affiliates make it easy for their users to sign up – look for a link in the footer of the website that says 'affiliate program,' or something similar. These pages will give you the details about the program (how much commission they will pay, for example) and instructions on how to sign up. Usually, you just have to provide your name, company and PayPal information and then you receive a custom link that will track any users who use it. If they purchase a product or service, you will receive a portion of the payment. Sometimes it's a one-time fee, and sometimes it's an ongoing percentage, like for memberships.

## **How to Optimize for It**

Optimizing for Affiliate Sales takes more work than for a lot of other metrics. There is just a lot of backend and infrastructure work that needs to be done on the technical side, and then there is the whole matter of finding the products and/or partners you want to promote.

It's not for the faint of heart, and it's definitely not for every podcast.

## Priorities in Episode Workflow

Most of the preparation for Affiliate Sales is going to be happening outside of your normal production, but there are some things you should consider:

1. What kind of **ad spaces** you'd like to make available
2. How well a particular affiliate offer works with specific **themes or topics** you are covering

Let's look at both.

### 1. *Ad Spaces*

You have two options: Baked-In, or Dynamic Ad Insertion.

Baked-In ad reads means that you record the affiliate promotion like it's a regular part of the body of an episode. It's a permanent part of the show. This can be fine if you know the affiliate links that you're sharing will be good forever.

Dynamic Ad Insertion (DAI) means that you leave a space – often with transitional verbiage before and after it like, “We'll be right back!” and “We're back!” – and use your podcast host to add promotions or advertisements for a specific amount of time or for a specific type of listener.

All things being equal, if your host allows dynamic ads, that is what you should go with. It means you'll have a great deal of power over what you are promoting, when you're promoting it and to whom, and you can change the ads globally to make room for new promotions when you want to.

The way most podcast hosts work is that, when you upload your audio, you can place a “marker” that tells the host, “This is where I want a dynamic ad to play.”

Most hosts that offer DAI have pre-roll (plays before any episode content) and post-roll (plays at the end of all content) functionality but look for a host that also offers Dynamic Mid-rolls (which can be placed where you want it within the body of the audio.) Mid-roll ads are more likely to be listened to than post-roll ads, and are significantly less annoying than pre-rolls.

Check out the section on Show Parts for more details about how to construct the space for dynamic mid-rolls in your episodes.

### 2. *Topic and Theme Planning*

You don't need to worry about having specific episodes match specific affiliate ads if you're doing DAI, unless you want to get really complex with what ad plays on which episodes, and some hosts do allow that kind of granularity. If you want to keep things simple, just make sure that all of your offers are a reasonably good match for your audience, and just do one at a time.

If you're doing baked-in ads, on the other hand, it becomes much more important to make sure that what you are promoting in a specific episode is contextually appropriate with the topic of that episode. You'll have better results because there won't be any disconnect between the learning and the 'next logical step' of following that link or URL to the product.

This is, of course, where your episode guide comes into play. Adding a column for what affiliate offer you want to promote in each episode will help you stay organized and maximize your chances of success.

## **Priorities in Production**

The most important production consideration for an Affiliate Sales optimization is making sure that your editors know what kind of ad spaces need to be included in the body of episodes for dynamic mid-rolls. (For baked-in ads, you'll be doing it yourself while recording the episode.)

Pre-and post-rolls can be produced independently, uploaded to the host and added as you need them to your episodes as you upload them.

Baked-in ads don't require anything except the ad being included in your recording or shared with the production team.

Mid-rolls can be a little more finicky. They need to be produced separately from the audio, but space for them (a few seconds of silence) must be added to the episode. How much space depends on how the dynamic ad insertion works with your hosting provider (they will be able to guide you on the specifics.) You need to communicate with your editors if a space needs to be made, how long it should be and where in the episode.

Transition verbiage like, "We'll be back right after this" and "Now we're back!" can be baked-in to the episode if you record it as a part of your interview or solo recording, or it can be produced with the ad itself and inserted as a 'sandwich' of transition-ad-transition.

The best thing you can do for yourself and your team is get clear on the vocabulary you're using to talk about things. When you tell your editor, "One post-intro and one sandwich at minute 20, after the hot dogs joke," they need to know what that means. It's worth having a meeting about what they and you each understand specific terms to mean. After that meeting, create a Standard Operating Procedure that you always use. This is critical because different providers and technology companies use different words to describe the same thing. It's infuriating, and it's never going to change.

## **Priorities in Promotion**

If you're going to the considerable trouble of arranging or signing up for affiliate offers, it makes sense to promote them along with the rest of your podcast. You don't want to go too heavy on this, since too much advertising is annoying, but make sure to include a link in some of your episode promotions, and definitely include the links in your show notes!

Affiliate Sales is a numbers game in more ways than one. No matter what the commission rate is, you'll make more money the more people hear the ad, and that means that if you want to develop affiliate income as a revenue stream, then you'll need to invest in show growth, getting more and more downloads so that more people are hearing the ads and clicking through.

## Costs

There will be some extra admin time to plan for with affiliate links. You need clarity on what links you are promoting when, and the payments you receive as a result of them.

You might also have to upgrade your podcast hosting service or package. Not every podcast host allows for DAI, or DAI where you want it. Some hosts let you choose an exact location for a midroll, others will plunk it down where they see fit.

Naturally, the hosts that have really good dynamic ad management are more expensive than those that don't.

## How to Track It

There are two main things you want to track when you're optimizing for Affiliate Sales:

- How many people use your link for each product/service you are promoting
- How many people buy after using your link

Getting this data can be really easy, if you're using an affiliate marketplace, or signed up for a link on your own and have an affiliate dashboard. All of the information will be in that dashboard, and probably more! Make it a habit to export the data from the dashboard once a month and add it to your stats tracking spreadsheet or database.

Getting the data can be bit of a bugbear if you were given a link directly by a colleague or representative from the company. When that happens all of the data is in *their* internal systems and you'll have to ask for it if you want to track it. They'll let you know when you've made a sale of course, because they have to pay you, but getting more information can be a bit of a hassle. This isn't nearly as common as having a dashboard however, so don't worry about it unless it comes up.

If it does, make sure to set the expectation that you would like to track the results of your promotions, and that you'll need the traffic and conversion data for your records monthly, if they can share it.

In some cases, you'll want to get a lot more granular with this tracking, and have visibility on your traffic referral sources. This means knowing how many people: remembered the URL you said on the podcast and typed it in on their own, clicked a link from your show notes (and whether they were clicking the show notes from a player like Spotify, or from your website), clicked through from an email you sent about the episode, or clicked through from a link on social media. This is getting into advanced territory, so if you are not currently tracking that kind of data about your own links, don't worry about it. If you are, hand this task to the team member in charge, or see if your third-party service provider can take it on.

You should have a place in your episode guide to track: the offers you are an affiliate for, when your link is being promoted, the visitors to that link over time, and the income generated from that link over time.

## Evaluating Success and Failure

Whether you succeed or fail with affiliate promotions depends on what you decide success is going to mean. If Affiliate Sales are a nice to have rather than a critical issue, then set a modest financial goal, like covering half the costs of production, and give yourself 6 months to a year to achieve it. (If your show is smaller, e.g. getting fewer than around 5,000 downloads per month, you might find it difficult to achieve any affiliate sales. Feel free to experiment but moderate your expectations.)

If optimizing for Affiliate Sales is a critical part of whether or not the podcast itself is a success or failure, then I recommend optimizing and evaluating in graduated phases, as there are a lot of moving parts to get in line, and lots of variables like ad placement, promotional strategy and topic-promotion alignment.

Here is an example of how you might set small targets:

**Phase 1:** Traffic to Landing Page. The first pass/fail question is: are people following the links at all? I would give this one about 4 episodes worth of trials. If no one is following your links/URLS at all after 4 episodes where you are promoting them, you need to change one of the variables.

**Phase 2:** Any Sales at All. The second pass/fail question is anyone following the links buying from them? Once you know a certain percentage of listeners will follow the link, you want to get that initial purchase. Your first sale is the first success here, and you'll want to see it within 3 months of your successful Phase 1.

**Phase 3:** Increase your affiliate sales. Once you have the machine working, then you want to get more people following the URLs and buying from them. After you've had your first sale, focus on making small changes to your ads, where you place them, how often you release them, etc., to get more people following and more of those people buying. This is a learning phase where you find out how to get the most money out of the project. Plan to test variables and optimize for either 6 months, or until you hit a plateau. That is the level you can expect from

your audience with your podcast at its given size. If you're happy with that amount of revenue, it's a pass. If you're not, it's a fail.

Does all of this sound like a lot of work?

It is.

That's why many businesses prefer to do it for their own products and services.

# Metric: Sponsorship Dollars

## Metric Details

I want to start this section with a potentially controversial statement:

The vast, vast majority of company podcasts will not benefit from sponsors.

Picture this:

You invest a significant amount of time and money in a recording setup and content development plan...

You shake your network tree for high-quality guests you'll be able to have amazing conversations with...

You get your social media team to promote your episodes hard, really focusing on getting listeners and engaging with them...

Over months you build a loyal listenership and start connecting with them on an ever more personal level. They respect you, pay attention when you release new episodes, and even advocate for you to their own friends and communities...

So, you sell that audience to a mattress company for \$45 a month.

Sound good?

Didn't think so.

It's not that sponsorship is a bad way to fund a podcast, it's a good one, and why so many podcasts are started as new businesses that will get a significant portion of their revenue from sponsorships.

But you have a whole business already.

You sell things to people. If you're creating a podcast designed to showcase appealing and valuable advertisements, *advertise your own products and services*. The investment you make in creating content, cultivating authority and connecting with your audience should benefit your company, not someone else's.

You're doing the work, you should reap the rewards.

And if, at this point in the book, you don't see how, "I need sponsors to cover the costs of the show" is usually a flawed premise, I don't know what else to tell you. Go to town.

All of this said... the world is vast and complicated, so there absolutely are types of companies and organizations who can probably benefit from optimizing for Sponsorship Dollars.

Here's how to do it.

## Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

Sponsorships are going to work the best for highly niched businesses in industries with high consumer demand, that have large and engaged existing audiences, and that probably do not sell their own products or services.

For example:

- Content creators and networks
- Independent journalists and researchers
- News and media companies
- Charities and non-profits

If your content and research is presented in a format sponsored by an outside or third-party company, you may run into an issue of credibility, particularly if you deal with potentially controversial topics. No matter what your content development process is, there can be a belief that he who pays the piper calls the tune, and for some (but by no means all!) companies or organizations, this can be a negative.

## Blueprints Fit

### **Perfect Fit:** Audience Engagement

If you're going for Sponsorship, then Audience Engagement is your best bet for a Blueprint. What you're effectively doing is building a new product (your audience) that you can sell to a new customer (your sponsors), so focusing on the audience and designing a show accordingly is the best way forward.

### **Good Fit:** Relationship Building, Content, Thought Leadership

A Relationship Building show can have sponsors that don't detract from the connections you're making with the guests. It's a good idea to let your guests know the show is sponsored, and to include any particular verbiage about sponsors while you're recording the episode, just to avoid any potential confusion. If possible, let your guest know in advance that you're going to call for the sponsor break at a 'cliffhanger' moment, after you've teased that you're going to share something big, but before sharing it, or right before the resolution to a conflict or dramatic moment in the conversation.

Content shows, because they are so flexible, can also include sponsors. No special considerations one way or another here, other than you will have to make sure you do enough promotion and audience cultivation work that sponsors will have an interest in getting in front of your people!

Thought Leadership shows don't often work well for sponsorship because it's sharing valuable airspace that should go to your brand and ideas rather than a sponsor's. This isn't a hard and fast rule, however. For example, if there are lots of complementary (not competing!) businesses in your industry that you'd be happy to recommend anyway, that can be a win-win situation.

For any of these, remember that every listener who follows a sponsor CTA is probably *not* following one of yours.

### **Not a Fit: Conversion**

A Conversion show should never have sponsors. You are going to be working hard to get every conversion possible into your email list, community, customer list or whatever you are trying to convert people to, and you do not want any of those precious CTA's to be devoted to an unrelated company or offering.

## **Example**

Charities and non-profits have one of the strongest use-cases for sponsorship, in my opinion. This is a business model where having the costs of production covered by sponsors is a legitimately important aim. It preserves working capital for the mission of the organization, sponsors get a great deal of good-will along with their airtime, and it might even be a deductible expense depending on how the organization is set up.

One show we've looked at has a really cool sponsorship model. It's a podcast about philanthropy by an academic journal, and a significant number of individual episodes are sponsored by different companies. From the outside, it looks like a Thought Leadership podcast, and representatives of the sponsoring companies are the featured guests. The episodes are produced to the same level of quality as non-sponsored episodes and have the same format. In the sponsored episodes, it's made very clear what the relationship is, and there are clear directions for next steps to engage with the sponsors in the show notes.

This model, of featuring sponsors as guests, can be a great way to create high-quality content and earn Sponsorship Dollars, especially for an organization like the one in this example where the listening audience has probably already bought what they're going to buy (a journal subscription) but there is a strong niche topic keeping people interested in listening to more.

## How to Optimize for It

If you're optimizing for Sponsorship Dollars, you've got to find sponsors, negotiate with them and integrate their ads into your show.

There are two types of sponsor ads you can include: pre-produced and host-read, and there are two different ways they can be integrated into your podcast: embedded and DAI (dynamically inserted advertisements).

Host-read ads, where you as the host personally read an advertisement for your sponsor, are more valuable and fetch a higher price than pre-produced ads, but both can be either dynamically inserted or embedded into the episode itself.

Unless you are selling private sponsorships on an exclusivity basis (you'll be the only sponsor of this episode forever!), dynamically inserting your ads is the way to go. You'll be able to retroactively change the ads in your episodes for new sponsors as time goes on, and all of your episodes can contribute to the number of downloads each ad gets.

### Priorities in Episode Workflow:

*(The first priorities in the Episode Workflow are the same as those in Affiliate Sales, so if you've just read that, you can skim or skip until you hit '3. Finding Sponsors')*

Most of the preparation for Sponsorship Dollars is going to be happening outside of your normal production, but there are some things you should consider:

1. What kind of **ad spaces** you'd like to make available
2. How well a particular sponsorship ad works with specific **themes or topics** you are covering
- 3. Finding sponsors**

Let's look at all three.

#### 1. **Ad Spaces**

You have two options: Baked-In, or Dynamic Ad Insertion.

Baked-In ad reads means that you record the sponsor advertisement promotion like it's a regular part of the body of an episode. It's a permanent part of the show. This can be fine if you know the ad you're sharing will be relevant forever.

Dynamic Ad Insertion (DAI) means that you leave a space – often with transitional verbiage before and after it like “we'll be right back!” and “we're back!” – and use your podcast host to add marketplace sponsorship ads, ads provided to you by your sponsor, or ads you produced independently for a specific amount of time or for a specific type of listener.

All things being equal, if your host allows dynamic ads, that is what you should go with. It means you'll have a great deal of power over what you are promoting, when and to whom, and you can change the ads globally to make room for new promotions when you want to.

The way most podcast hosts work is that, when you upload your audio, you can place a 'marker' that tells the host "this is where I want a dynamic ad to play."

Most hosts that offer DAI have pre-roll (plays before any episode content) and post-roll (Plays at the end of all content) functionality, but look for a host that also offers Dynamic Mid-rolls (can be placed where you want it within the body of the audio.) Mid-roll ads are more likely to be listened to than post-roll ads and are significantly less annoying than pre-rolls.

## **2. *Topic and Theme Planning***

You don't need to worry about having specific episodes match specific sponsor ads if you're doing DAI unless you want to get really complex with what ad plays on which episodes, and some hosts do allow specific targeting like location or even demographic details like income or gender, at the highest levels of service. If you want to keep things simple, just make sure that all of your offers are a reasonably good match for your audience, and just do one at a time. (If you want to get super granular, see me after class. Any contact form on [PodcastingForBusiness.com](http://PodcastingForBusiness.com))

If you're doing baked-in ads, on the other hand, it becomes much more important to make sure that what you are promoting in a specific episode is contextually appropriate with the topic of that episode. You'll have better results because there won't be any disconnect between the learning and the 'next logical step' of following that link or URL to the product.

This is, of course, where your episode guide comes into play. Adding a column for what sponsor you're baking-in for each episode will help you stay organized and maximize your chances of success.

## **3. *Finding Sponsors***

When you optimize for sponsors, there is a whole new category added to your podcast workflow: Sponsorship management. This can be done the easy way or the hard way.

The easy way is to work with a podcast hosting company that has access to a sponsor marketplace. In that situation all you need to do is add the 'markers' within the episode for where you want the ads to appear, and register with the marketplace to populate the spots with ads.

Each hosting company marketplace is going to be a little different in how they match ads and sponsors, and there will be different audience size or technical requirements, so at the outset of the project, I would recommend getting on a call with sales or support for your podcast host to get a clear run through of the requirements (sometimes you will need a certain number of downloads to qualify) and how to manage your ads.

The hard way is to personally negotiate sponsorship deals, and while this takes more time, it can often result in a better deal. When you negotiate a private sponsorship, you'll still need to make sure that there are appropriate places within your episodes to run ads, but you can also include things like logo placements, different kinds of links in show notes and on your website, and in your social media shares and emails. This means that your team needs to be fully on board, and aware of what assets each sponsor is entitled to and who is responsible for making sure they are being rolled out according to plan.

## **Priorities in Production**

*(These are the same priorities as were in the Affiliate Sales section, so if you've just read them, feel free to skip on down to Priorities in Promotion!)*

The most important production consideration for an Affiliate Sales optimization is making sure that your editors know what kind of ad spaces need to be included in the body of episodes for dynamic mid-rolls. (For baked-in ads, you'll be doing it yourself while recording the episode.)

Pre-and post-rolls can be produced independently, uploaded to the host and added as you need them to your episodes as you upload them.

Baked-in ads don't require anything except the ad being included in your recording or shared with the production team.

Mid-rolls can be a little more finicky. They need to be produced separately from the audio, but space for them (a few seconds of silence) must be added to the episode. How much space depends on how the dynamic ad insertion works with your hosting provider (they will be able to guide you on the specifics.) You need to communicate with your editors if a space needs to be made, how long it should be and where in the episode.

Transition verbiage like, "We'll be back right after this" and "Now we're back!" can be baked-in to the episode if you record it as a part of your interview or solo recording, or it can be produced with the ad itself and inserted as a 'sandwich' of transition-ad-transition.

The best thing you can do for yourself and your team is get clear on the vocabulary you're using to talk about things. When you tell your editor, "One post-intro, and one sandwich at minute 20, after the hot dogs joke," they need to know what that means. It's worth having a meeting about what they and you each understand specific terms to mean. After that meeting, create a Standard Operating Procedure that you always use. This is critical because different providers and technology companies use different words to describe the same thing. It's infuriating, and it's never going to change.

## **Priorities in Promotion**

Depending on the type of sponsorship relationship you have, you might need to include different kinds of announcements, links and branding for your sponsors in different areas.

When we look at the top 100 podcasts, most sponsors get their produced or host-read ads in the show itself, and many get a link in the show notes.

If you have negotiated a more expansive, and therefore more lucrative deal, however, then you might include things like:

- Specific social media posts
- A longer blurb in the show notes
- A mention of the sponsor in one of more emails you send about the episode
- Logo placement on your website podcast page

This is a lot of ad-space, but if sponsorship is a key goal of the podcast, and especially if downloads aren't yet in the tens of thousands a month, it can be a way to make it financially feasible.

## Costs

Other than a little extra production time to make sure there are appropriate spaces for ads within your podcast, the big costs here are going to be associated with making sure you have the audience and attention to get sponsors at all. If your listening audience isn't large enough to warrant sponsors out of the gate, then you'll need to build it, which means either organic marketing or paid traffic and promotions.

## How to Track It

This is a pretty easy number to track: The revenue you get from your sponsors. You should have a page on your stats tracking document that shows the revenue you get from sponsors every month. If it's possible to associate the revenue earned with each episode as well (which you can do with baked-in ads more easily than dynamic ones) you'll also be able to track which episode topics and/or guests are the most lucrative.

## Evaluating Success and Failure

Evaluating the success or failure is a little more challenging, because the dollars you earn aren't the only consideration. You need to look at your *net* revenue for Sponsorship Dollars and you might also want to consider the opportunity costs of earning them.

If your income from sponsorship exceeds your costs of production (time, team and technology!), that's a success.

If your income from sponsorship does not exceed your costs of production, but other metrics you are also optimizing for do, then that is a tentative success, but it might be worth experimenting with using ad spots for your own content, or making affiliate offers instead of

traditional sponsorships to see if you can create more revenue. This will help you accurately assess the opportunity cost.

If your costs exceed sponsorship income, and you're not making up and exceeding the expense in other ways like networking, SEO, backlinks or whichever other metrics you're optimizing for, then you are essentially subsidizing the ads of your sponsors and the experiment has failed.

## **Something to Consider**

If you design a show that has space for different kinds of advertisements, you don't have to sell them to other companies. You can run your own ads for your own products and services, offer ads to your guests as a thank you for joining you on the show, share affiliate offers, highlight other content creators you like as an opening move to build a relationship, and even use them to support charities and organizations you care about.

The podcast is your sandbox. You can play!

# Metric: Downloads

## Metric Details

Okay, so one of the key ideas of this book is that Downloads aren't that important for most businesses. I stand by this statement entirely, but it doesn't mean Downloads are never a worthwhile metric to track and optimize for. Just don't make this the *only* way you measure success.

I'll even go so far as to say that every business should at least keep an eye on their download numbers, and the way those numbers change over time. It can help you learn what topics are the most interesting to your audience, and if you're tracking on a per-episode basis, give you visibility on how well your other promotional activities, like social media shares, impact your show growth.

A download (or listen, or play depending on the platform) is when your podcast is accessed and played by a person, or their device. There is a little inconsistency within the podcasting industry about exactly what that means – and there is a whole host of jargon associated with it – but at the heart, it means the number of times an episode of your podcast was listened to.

## Types of Businesses It Can Work Well for

When it comes to what types of businesses should consider optimizing for Downloads, it's less about the specific industry, and more about the business model and market size. This strategy will work best for companies working in industries with large markets and high levels of consumer interest.

For example:

- Entertainment and media – any influencer-led company
- Content, news and commentary companies
- Personal development and entrepreneurship training
- Sports and athletics commentary, both training and marketing
- Technology and innovation companies, especially those that focus on consumer products
- Health and wellness practitioners

Businesses focusing on downloads as a strategy should have a clear plan for how to translate downloads into other kinds of value – this often means through email or payment-gated content, sales of low-ticket items, or sponsorship deals.

## Blueprints Fit

### **Perfect Fit:** Conversion

Conversion podcasts have a direct line between listeners and other metrics – so in most cases, more downloads = more conversions = more success. This means that optimizing for downloads in a conversion podcast has a clear and measurable purpose as part of your marketing funnel.

### **Good Fit:** Thought Leadership, Relationship Building

Thought Leadership podcasts tend to have goals that are closely aligned with download numbers: getting you and your brand, your ideas and your intellectual property in front of more people. Note however, that downloads only tell you how many people listened, and how much of each episode they listened to – they don't really give you other usable data, so make sure to pair this metric with another like Brand Awareness, SEO or Promotional Opportunities to make sure you're collecting information you can use.

For Relationship Building, an argument could be made that the more podcast downloads you have, the higher-caliber guests you can attract. While it's a strong relationship-building move to be able to expose your guest to a wide and engaged audience, it (hopefully!) isn't the main reason they are interested in talking to you.

### **Not a Fit:** Content, Audience Engagement

If your goal is Content and the different ways you can use it throughout your business, then the downloads are truly irrelevant when you have more critical things to track.

An Audience Engagement podcast is designed on the basis that you already have a source of audience and traffic – the podcast itself is nurturing, not acquiring them. Because of this, optimizing for downloads doesn't actually make an impact on the experience your listeners have. You can do it if you like, but it's not really aligned with the Blueprint.

## Example

In our Annual State of Business Podcasting Report, we get a lot of close exposure to companies that are getting huge numbers of downloads for their shows. While we don't have insider knowledge on the exact strategic decisions being made, we get to see a lot of interesting examples and use cases.

One of the shows we looked at is clearly using a conversion strategy to bring listeners into a paid membership community. The premise of the show is interviews with well-known figures in the space, providing access to the live recordings of these episodes and the experts being interviewed, along with additional content and different kinds of support and interaction.

For this podcast, the public release is effectively teaser content for the wealth of goodies available to paying subscribers. We can assume, from the outside looking in, that a certain percentage of people who watch or listen to each episode or a certain number of episodes are going to make the upgrade to the more premium content and community. This means that scaling up this revenue stream is a function of getting more new listeners, or in other words – more downloads.

## How to Optimize for It

Optimizing for Downloads means having a promotional plan from the get-go, because if you want downloads, you're going to have to work for them.

A lot.

It can be a challenge.

And it can feel unfair, because you can invest in amazing production quality, meticulously craft your content and create something that is spectacular, but unless you already have a large audience, lots of popular friends excited to advocate for your show, or a pretty significant ad budget, it's not going to be easy to get anyone to listen to it.

That said, it can absolutely be done, and if there is a good business case for it for your company, here's what you need to know:

### Priorities in Episode Workflow

When you're optimizing for Downloads, you want to regularly evaluate your show's performance on a per-episode basis to see what topics, formats and guests, if you have them, get the most downloads within 7 days of release so you can make sure you are creating more content like the best content. More on this in the tracking section, but other than adding a monthly (at least!) analysis to your workflow, there are no special additional tasks at the workflow level.

### Priorities in Production

Your production value has to be *high* if you're going to see that downloads number go up and to the right. One of the most common ways for people to find new podcasts to listen to is through personal recommendations – and no one recommends a podcast that sounds like it was recorded in a tin can.

Your recording space should be sound-treated to make sure you're getting the best possible sound (see the section on Recording Environment for some tips).

Make sure to use a quality mic, and if you're not recording in a physical podcasting studio, use a virtual one like Riverside or Squadcast that has dual-ended recording capabilities. This means it

will record your audio on your computer and your guest's audio on their computer and combine them afterwards. It results in much higher quality, and your producer will appreciate that you can download multiple tracks!

It is also a good idea to include a request to share, subscribe and leave a review at least once in each episode.

## Priorities in Promotion

Podcast promotion is a whole industry in and of itself. There are lots of experts offering services in this area, and if a high-growth strategy is one you want to employ, working with an expert in podcast growth specifically is a good idea.

Unless you are starting with a really large audience of people who already listen to podcasts and will be delighted to add yours to their listening schedule, then you should plan to spend as much or more time and money promoting your podcast as you do creating it. Here is a non-comprehensive list of strategies you might want to experiment with:

- **Being a guest on other people's podcasts:** This means exposure to new audiences that already listen to podcasts, and if they like what they hear you say, they might head right over to subscribe.
- **Paid traffic:** Social media and search engine ads can be a good way to get more listeners. The ability to target by specific keywords and topics means you can get quite precise about directing the right people to the right content.
- **Add your podcast to your email signature:** Make sure everyone you correspond with knows you have a podcast – and have your other client-facing team members do the same.
- **Promote your episodes on social media:** Share clips, comments, previews of what's coming and discussion questions.
- **Submit your podcast to different podcast directories** that list shows of a particular type or industry.
- **Share your podcast and specific episodes** with bloggers, influencers, journalists and other content creators who work in your industry.

Consistency and careful tracking are going to be the key to success.

## Costs

A Downloads-focused show will cost more to produce than many other types. The production quality has to be top-tier, as I mentioned above, and you might want to invest in studio time, better equipment and high quality post-production.

You might also see expenses relating to advertising and promotion, whether you hire third-party services to promote the show by running ads, or doing more traditional PR work and social

media marketing. You can also do these tasks in-house, but it would be wise to invest in training for the team member you put in charge of it.

## How to Track It

Downloads are among the hardest metrics to get, but the easiest to track!

Go to your podcast host, click on “Analytics” and export the data in the range and format of your choice, then transfer to your Episode Guide or other tracking system.

When you do this, you’re probably going to see a lot of different variables – let’s go through them so you can decide what makes the most sense to track for your business:

- **Downloads:** The number of times an episode has been saved to a device
- **Listens or plays:** The number of times someone has pressed play on an episode
- **Unique Listens:** The number of unique IP addresses that pressed play on an episode
- **7- or 30-day trailing:** The number of downloads within 7 or 30 days of release
- **Playthrough Rate:** How much of the episode was listened to

Not every host has every metric available, but most will let you look at different ranges of time, and the details for specific episodes.

I recommend exporting this data and adding it to your episode guide so you can see it in the context of everything else you’re tracking. If there is a direct link between the number of people who listen to an episode and the next engagement step like subscribing to your email list or community, downloads become part of the calculation, so having it all together is going to be efficient.

## Evaluating Success and Failure

Evaluating the success or failure of downloads as a metric is less about numbers and more about rate of change, and what a successful rate is will evolve over time.

A new show starting with 0 downloads a month might see 100, 200, 300% growth a month or more, but that will level out and slow down over time. As your show grows, 10–30% growth every quarter would be pretty good until you start getting into really big numbers each month – then you can expect the rate to be lower. The time and money you put into promotion are going to have a major impact on this, so keep an eye on your expenditures and how they impact your growth rate.

Always remember: downloads are nice – but if they’re not making a difference to your **business** that you can measure, then they don’t mean much.

## Blueprints + Metrics = Podcasting Success

So far, we've looked at high-level business goals and chosen a Business Podcast Blueprint to fit.

Then, we looked at the individual metrics that will measure the type of value your podcast should create for your business.

It's all highly effective.

It's also a tad theoretical.

So, getting down to the brass tacks, how do you create a podcast that makes a measurable difference in your business?

1. Choose your Blueprint (your highest-level goal)
2. Select 1–3 metrics you want to optimize for
3. Check for Conflicts

Let's look at each step.

### Choosing the Blueprint

Choosing the Blueprint should be pretty easy. Does your business mostly need: more relationships; a closer connection to an audience you already have; authority and reputation in your industry; conversions; or content?

If the answer doesn't jump out to you immediately, start with the metrics – what individual metric would make the biggest impact on your business? Choose it, and whatever Blueprint is in the "Perfect Fit" category is your Blueprint, which you can then use as a filter for other strategic decisions.

Don't stress about this at this stage. You can go through steps 1–3 as many times as you want until you find the specific Blueprints + Metrics mix you feel excited about.

### Selecting 1–3 Metrics

It can be tempting to create a podcast that does everything. Believe me, I know. Been there, bought the T-shirt, wrote the book. (Ha!)

But that way lies frustration.

And wasted time and effort.

And disgust with the whole medium.

Starting with just a few metrics is smart for a few reasons:

1. **The Learning Curve:** If you're a new podcaster, you've got a lot to learn. Keep your focus tight, get good at the basics, and pick your most important metrics. You can always add more later.
2. **The Listener Experience:** As much as we're diligently designing podcasts to achieve specific business goals, we don't want it to *sound* like that's what we're doing to the end user. The business benefits should be elegantly accruing in the background, and your listening audience should have no idea it's happening because they're so delighted with the excellent content you're delivering to them. The more metrics you shoehorn into one podcast, the harder that is going to be to achieve.
3. **Data Purity:** When you run a scientific experiment, you have to control for variables so you can clearly see if what you're testing is doing the thing you expect it to. Optimizing for too many metrics at one time adds noise; it makes it harder to parse exactly what is working. Not impossible, but harder.
4. **Time Scarcity:** If you're going to follow this book to the letter, then I've just given you or a team member a huge pile of homework to do for each episode. If you're not already aggressively tracking success metrics in your podcast, starting with your most important goals and metrics means you'll minimize the time you spend on tracking, which is important for most businesses. (If you are already obsessively tracking everything in your business, I salute you, friend! Adding all of this should be no trouble.)

"But wait, Megan!" You might be saying right now. "I have a friend whose podcast is succeeding on 7 of these metrics!" Or "But my show is optimized for all of this stuff now! What gives? Why should I choose 1, 2 or 3?"

First, if you or your friends have a show that's bringing value, you can track it. If you're happy with the results you're seeing – congratulations – you've done everything right! Don't fix something that isn't broken just because I said so. Take from this book what works and leave what doesn't.

Second, as I said towards the beginning – these are best practices as I've seen them played out in our work and research, but they're not commandments. You're the boss of your podcast and can do whatever you want to with your show.

One, two or three metrics will be faster to deploy, you'll see results sooner, and you will be able to either continue or pivot as needed once you have the data. This keeps you agile and moving quickly, able to see results and make adjustments quickly. Once you have a few metrics consistently indicating value for your business, you can add more.

## Check for Conflicts

Not every metric works well with every other metric.

What you're looking for before you commit to a whole podcast or redesign is a gut check for "Will it work?"

Don't worry about the nitty-gritty details; that comes next. Just make sure there isn't any serious conflict between your metrics and that you'll be able to work the necessary optimization elements into one show without it feeling like Frankenstein's monster.

For example, Referrals and Labor Cost Savings are in conflict: When you have a Relationship Building podcast optimized for Referrals, your priority is going to be highlighting your guest, making them the star and creating assets you can give them to share. This will make it more difficult to include content where you are directly teaching specific things your audience needs to know (Labor Cost Savings).

Now, of course you could separately record a Labor Cost Saving segment and add it to your show after your interview – but that means adding time, cost and planning to your production. Not impossible, but maybe not the best way to optimize your show.

On the other hand, Referrals and Brand Awareness can work together quite nicely. If you're promoting brand awareness using particular hashtags, for example, they can be included in the swipe file you give guests, which they may choose to promote. This would not likely detract from their willingness to refer new clients to you.

Below, you'll find each Blueprint, with the individual metrics and their fits.

Multiple Perfect Fits can be optimized for in the same show, and so can Perfect Fits and Good Fits.

If one of the metrics you want to optimize for is Not a Fit for your Blueprint, proceed with caution. It's not guaranteed to fail, but you might find that competing priorities make your work more difficult and reduce the chances of success.

Look for your Blueprint below and double-check where the metrics you want to optimize for land. (There is a chart at the end of this chapter for your convenience!)

## **Relationship Building**

*Relationship Building shows exist to help you, as the host, connect with other people. These might be potential clients, referral or promotional partners, colleagues – anyone who could be an important part of your professional network.*

**Perfect Fit Metrics:** Referrals, Promotional Opportunities, Sales Qualified Leads

**Good Fit Metrics:** SEO, New Product Creation, Brand Awareness, Social Media Engagement, List Growth, Product Sales, Affiliate Sales, Sponsorship Dollars, Downloads

**Not a Fit Metrics:** Sales Cycle Length, Monthly Recurring Revenue, Labor Cost Savings

## **Audience Engagement**

*Audience Engagement shows exist to let you connect with, nurture and engage an audience you already have or people who become aware of you through other marketing channels. They might be an email list, on social, members of a community or just general fans.*

**Perfect Fit Metrics:** Referrals, Sales Cycle Length, New Product Creation, Brand Awareness, Social Media Engagement, List Growth, Labor Cost Savings, Affiliate Sales, Sponsorship Dollars

**Good Fit Metrics:** Promotional Opportunities, SEO, Product Sales, Monthly Recurring Revenue

**Not a Fit Metrics:** Sales Qualified Leads, Downloads

## **Thought Leadership**

*Thought Leadership shows exist primarily to increase the influence, authority and reputation of the host and company that creates them. These are shows where you are bringing IP to the table, engaging in high-level conversations with colleagues and generally setting the tone and topics for what your industry is talking about*

**Perfect Fit Metrics:** Sales Cycle Length, Brand Awareness

**Good Fit Metrics:** Referrals, Promotional Opportunities, SEO, New Product Creation, Social Media Engagement, List Growth, Product Sales, Monthly Recurring Revenue, Affiliate Sales, Sponsorship Dollars, Downloads

**Not a Fit Metrics:** Sales Qualified Leads, Labor Cost Savings

## **Conversion**

*Conversion shows exist as part of, or leading directly to, sales or opt-in funnels, usually with some kind of gated or privileged content level.*

**Perfect Fit Metrics:** List Growth, Sales Qualified Leads, Product Sales, Monthly Recurring Revenue, Downloads

**Good Fit Metrics:** SEO, Brand Awareness, Labor Cost Savings, Affiliate Sales

**Not a Fit Metrics:** Referrals, Sales Cycle Length, Promotional Opportunities, New Product Creation, Social Media Engagement, Sponsorship Dollars

## **Content**

*Content shows exist first and foremost as a way to consistently create new content for your business that can be distributed and repurposed.*

**Perfect Fit Metrics:** SEO, New Product Creation, Labor Cost Savings

**Good Fit Metrics:** Referrals, Sales Cycle Length, Promotional Opportunities, Brand Awareness, Social Media Engagement, List Growth, Sales Qualified Leads, Product Sales, Monthly Recurring Revenue, Affiliate Sales, Sponsorship Dollars

**Not a Fit Metrics:** Downloads

Here is a quick example.

Let's say I'm going to start a new podcast and Thought Leadership is my most important goal.

I want to optimize for Sales Cycle Length, SEO and Social Media Engagement .

So, I look at the Thought Leadership section:

**Perfect Fit Metrics:** *Sales Cycle Length*, Brand Awareness

**Good Fit Metrics:** Referrals, Promotional Opportunities, *SEO*, New Product Creation, *Social Media Engagement*, List Growth, Product Sales, Monthly Recurring Revenue, Affiliate Sales, Sponsorship Dollars, Downloads

**Not a Fit Metrics:** Sales Qualified Leads, Labor Cost Savings

No conflicts – I'm good to go!

On the other hand, if I wanted to optimize for Sales Cycle Length, SEO and Sales Qualified Leads, I would run into a conflict:

**Perfect Fit Metrics:** *Sales Cycle Length*, Brand Awareness

**Good Fit Metrics:** Referrals, Promotional Opportunities, *SEO*, New Product Creation, Social Media Engagement, List Growth, Product Sales, Monthly Recurring Revenue, Affiliate Sales, Sponsorship Dollars, Downloads

**Not a Fit Metrics:** *Sales Qualified Leads*, Labor Cost Savings

The approach needed to make a Thought Leadership show good for Sales Qualified Leads could cause difficulties in my optimization and the overall effectiveness of the podcast.

I would like to emphasize again: if you are already doing or want to experiment with something I'm not recommending – go for it! If it works, I'm a fan, and I'd love to hear about your success.

Once you've got a Blueprint and Metrics mix that you're happy with, and you've done a quick check to make sure it will work functionally, you're ready to go.

| <b>Blueprint</b>             | <b>Perfect Fit</b>                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Good Fit</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Not a Fit</b>                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Relationship Building</b> | Referrals, Promotional Opportunities, Sales Qualified Leads                                                                                                          | SEO, New Product Creation, Brand Awareness, Social Media Engagement, List Growth, Product Sales, Affiliate Sales, Sponsorship Dollars, Downloads                                                                       | Sales Qualified Leads, Labor Cost Savings                                                                                    |
| <b>Audience Engagement</b>   | Referrals, Sales Cycle Length, New Product Creation, Brand Awareness, Social Media Engagement, List Growth, Labor Cost Savings, Affiliate Sales, Sponsorship Dollars | Promotional Opportunities, SEO, Product Sales, Monthly Recurring Revenue                                                                                                                                               | Sales Qualified Leads, Downloads                                                                                             |
| <b>Thought Leadership</b>    | Sales Cycle Length, Brand Awareness                                                                                                                                  | Referrals, Promotional Opportunities, SEO, New Product Creation, Social Media Engagement, List Growth, Product Sales, Monthly Recurring Revenue, Affiliate Sales, Sponsorship Dollars, Downloads                       | Sales Qualified Leads, Labor Cost Savings                                                                                    |
| <b>Conversion</b>            | List Growth, Sales Qualified Leads, Product Sales, Monthly Recurring Revenue, Downloads                                                                              | SEO, Brand Awareness, Labor Cost Savings, Affiliate Sales                                                                                                                                                              | Referrals, Sales Cycle Length, Promotional Opportunities, New Product Creation, Social Media Engagement, Sponsorship Dollars |
| <b>Content</b>               | SEO, New Product Creation, Labor Cost Savings                                                                                                                        | Referrals, Sales Cycle Length, Promotional Opportunities, Brand Awareness, Social Media Engagement, List Growth, Sales Qualified Leads, Product Sales, Monthly Recurring Revenue, Affiliate Sales, Sponsorship Dollars | Downloads                                                                                                                    |

# How to Podcast

## Let's Get to Work

So, are you ready to get to work?

Let's take stock quickly:

- We've stopped looking at podcasting as a project that has its own objective criteria for success or failure, because its value is what it brings to your business, and that will be unique to you.
- We've looked at the Business Podcast Blueprints, and how having a 'prime directive' for your podcast helps you make any and all strategic decisions for your show.
- We've covered 15 individual metrics, or specific business outcomes, that you can optimize your podcast for in a way you can measure, so you have clarity on the value the podcast is bringing to your business.
- We've looked at how to combine the Blueprints and Metrics into a podcast specifically optimized for your own business goals.

This last section of the book is the 'how to podcast' part. It has everything you need to go from "I should have a podcast" to "I'm ready to submit to Spotify."

Except, you'll note, instructions on how to edit your audio. There are a couple of reasons for this:

1. It's *much* better shown than described. By several orders of magnitude, and,
2. If you're planning to podcast for your business, you should not be editing your own audio. You have a business to run. If you can't outsource all elements of strategy, production and promotion, just outsource the audio editing to a skilled pro.

Each of the following chapters has specific actions to take if you are starting a new show from scratch, and if you're refining and optimizing a show that already exists.

They're in the order you should proceed if you don't have a show at all. If you already have one that you want to optimize, I'd still advise starting at the top and working your way down, but you're the boss of your podcast.

Here's what you can expect:

**Launching or Re-launching a Podcast:** This will take you through all of the different decisions to make and things to get ready in order to launch a show, or to re-launch if you decide that your show needs more substantive changes than a few tweaks.

**The 3 Cs of Podcasting:** This is the underlying principle of good podcast performance and will make sure that you are creating a show people want to listen to, whatever your goals for the show are.

**Release Cadence:** This will go over the different options you have for how frequently to release, and whether you should have an ongoing show, a limited season or something in-between.

**Audio-Video or Audio Only:** Whether or not you should have a live-action video version of your podcast is a topic of hot debate. This section will help you make the choice about starting with video, or adding it to an existing show.

**Episode Formats:** There are a lot of ways you can arrange an episode, and this section covers the most common styles, as well as giving some pointers about which formats work best with which Blueprints.

**Show Parts:** Podcast episodes are composed of many different parts. This section will teach you what they are, and how to use them to achieve specific goals.

**Audio / Visual Branding:** Your podcast has a distinct look and feel that's composed of the art, the music, any sounds you use and the assets you create for it. This section will help you make the choices that best reflect you and your brand, and cover some of the different templates you will need to develop.

**Recording Environment:** Even the best editor in the world can't do much about poor-quality audio. Making sure your recording environment is optimized to capture the best possible sound is critical.

**Finding and Inviting Guests:** If your show features guests, you'll need to find them and invite them – and it's a process that can get a little unwieldy. This section will help you make your guest selections, prepare your invitations and make sure the process is amazing on their end.

**Podcasting Workflow:** Once you've got your audio, a whole lot of other things need to happen. This section is all about the workflows associated with your podcast: Where information is stored, how you communicate, and how you generally manage the process.

**Show Notes:** The written materials that go along with your podcast can play a large or a small part in your strategy, depending on your goals. In this section, we'll cover different show notes types and when each might be the most appropriate.

**Hiring Help:** It might be that you look at all of these different tasks and elements and say, "Awesome, can't wait to get started!" It might also be that you look at them and say, "Oh, absolutely not." If you want to hire third-party support for your show, this is what you should ask them before signing a contract.

If this kind of planning and decision-making, or optimizing an existing show is something you'd like support with, my team and I would be delighted to assist! Head over to [OneStoneCreative.net](https://www.onestonecreative.net) to learn about full-service production, custom strategy and action plans, and Business Podcast Sprints

## Launching or Re-Launching a Podcast

One of the first things we talk about with clients is their podcast launch. It's an important time in the life of a new podcast – many decisions need to be made, and depending on your goals, lots of time needs to be spent making it happen.

A podcast launch can be as simple as you want, or as complex as you have time and resources for.

Fundamentally, what you absolutely need to have – 100%, with no exceptions – is a key goal for your podcast, specific metrics you can track that will tell you if it's working or not, an audio recording of your show, a show description, cover art and a podcast host. And a name. Your podcast will definitely need a name.

- The goal and the metrics are the first two sections of this book.
- The name of your podcast should clearly explain who it is for and what the show is about. You can see how your business's name 'feels' as a podcast name – or your own, if you are well-known in your industry. Single words and short phrases can also work well. The main quality you want is "stickiness," which means it's easy to say and remember. Be warned: if you're starting a new show, you will likely choose a perfect name that you're wildly excited about...only to find it's taken. Also, as tempting as it is to hem and haw until you find something perfect, try not to stress too much about the name. If it's clear, memorable and aligned with your brand, you're good to go.
- The audio recording is simply an edited (ALWAYS edited) recording of you reading your script or talking with your guest, put together with your intro and outro and any other sound design elements you are using.
- A show description is a quick 100–250-word description of what your show is about and why people should listen.
- Cover art is the visual that is going to appear in podcast hosts – it should be 3000 × 3000 pixels, very easy to read, and reflective of your brand.
- The podcast host is the software you'll be using to upload your episodes, which creates the RSS feed used by different podcast players like Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and so on.
  - After doing an initial configuration where you submit your first piece of audio (often a teaser or trailer episode), and connecting your host to your accounts on Apple, Spotify, Amazon and other podcast players, you upload each episode's audio, show notes and any episode-specific art you have to the host, and set a time you would like it to be released. At the release time, your podcast host will distribute the episode to all of the different players – you will not need to manually add each episode to each player. After that one-time set up, the host does it for you.

That is the most bare-bones list of what you need that I could come up with.

Of course, what you *really* need to launch a podcast that meets your business goals tends to be a little more extensive.

What you invest in a launch is going to be different, depending on whether you want to create an intimate, story-driven, connection-heavy show for an existing audience of adoring fans; an informational, professional, teaching-heavy internal podcast for members of your company; a groundbreaking, thought-leadership style of podcast with big-name guests and ambitions of fame; or a reliable networking channel to help you connect with interesting people to grow your business and sell more services.

Below are some elements that can be included in podcast launches. You can think about them and pick and choose what works for your goals and your budget.

- **Show Structure Planning:** This is a long discussion (or long quiet think if you're a soloist!) about what elements you need within each episode to make sure it is optimized for your goals and will allow you to track your progress.
- **An Audio Brand:** Covers all of your show's sound elements, including the intro and outro, theme music and any music or sounds included in your episodes.
- **A Visual Brand:** Includes your cover art and templates for any social media shares, YouTube videos and blog post headers. It should be aligned with your company's existing branding.
- **An Episode Runway:** No matter how many shows you want to launch with initially (we recommend three!), it is very, very wise to record at least a few weeks' worth of episodes before you launch. These can be episodes you intend to run in order, or they can be 'evergreen' episodes you can hold in reserve in case things get busy – or you want to do something wild, like take a vacation at some point.
- **A Trailer Episode:** This is a very short episode that is basically an expansion of your show description. It expands on what you're going to be talking about, what you want people to get out of listening to it, why it matters to you, why it should matter to other people – anything that will give people a good understanding of what it is you're doing and why you're doing it.
- **Launch Team:** An email list or segment of people who have committed to helping promote the show when it launches.
- **Email Launch Campaign:** Emails to your main email list announcing the upcoming podcast and encouraging subscribing and sharing on the launch date. You should include at least three emails in this campaign: One announcing that something is coming and asking if people would like to join your launch team; one announcing that the podcast is live, and people should listen and share it if they like it; and one a few days after you launch, thanking people for their support and asking them to please leave a rating and a review. You can include more emails, like previews of content, great quotes from guests, and reviews from people who got to listen in advance. If you are going to be optimizing for downloads, then you should absolutely galvanize your existing audience with an email and social media campaign.

- **Social Media Sharing Campaign:** Images and text shares for different social media platforms that contain links to the show and teaser content. These are for you to share yourself and for your launch team.
- **Promotional Partners:** These are other content creators in your space who you have relationships with, and who are willing and able to help you promote your new show. Often, they'll also be the guests of your first couple of episodes!
- **Swipe Kits:** Swipe is pre-written content you create for your guests, launch team and promotional partners so that all they have to do is copy, paste and post to make sharing easy. You can include graphics, emails and copy for different social platforms – even videos.
- **Podcast Tour:** It's usually easier to get someone who already listens to podcasts to add a new show to their roster than to teach someone what a podcast is and how to listen to one. For this reason, many hosts like to get themselves booked on other podcasts around the time of their launch or re-launch for a burst of exposure to new audiences. This is a strategy that can work at any time.

There is a lot of flexibility here – and there isn't a right or a wrong way to launch your podcast. The larger your audience and the loftier your goals, the more elements you should include in your launch. If you're newer in your business or have hyper-specific goals for your show, you won't need nearly this much!

## Action Steps

### *If you're starting a new show:*

Ahh, you're going to have fun.

Once you have your Blueprint and Metrics selected, go through each of the chapters in this section to flesh out all of the elements of your show, then come back here and choose what you want to include in your launch.

### *If you already have a show:*

Look at the goal and metrics that you want to optimize your podcast for, and then audit your show.

1. Is the show structure optimized to provide the value you need?
2. Do you have tracking infrastructure to make sure you have visibility on your show's impact?
3. Now that you have clear and specific goals and metrics, does your show's branding still fit? Do you need to alter the name, art, templates, repurposing or promotional activities?

If you are making substantial changes, consider a re-launch campaign using the list here!

# The 3 Cs of Podcasting

I've just spent tens of thousands of words talking about optimizing your podcast for your own business benefit.

And I stand by every word.

But it doesn't mean you don't have to pay attention to creating good content that people want to listen to.

In podcasting and video podcasting, that means getting solid on what Audra Casino, audio content expert and co-founder of One Stone Creative, identifies as the most critical factors in podcast performance quality. (She comes from radio. She knows.)

They are the three Cs of great podcasts and videos: Content, Charisma, and Connection.

- **Content** is what your show is about and how it's presented.
- **Charisma** is the magnetism of the people in it.
- **Connection** is the emotional attachment formed between you and your audience.

Together, they're going to make your show worth listening to.

## Content

Let's start with content because no matter what your business goals for the podcast are, you have to make something *listenable*. Each episode needs to have a reason for existing relating to you and your business goals – but also one for the people who are going to hear it.

There is no shortage of competition for people's attention out there in the world, which means your show needs to be high-quality, engaging, and consistent. To do that, you need to ask yourself a few questions about every episode you produce.

- Why are you creating this episode?
- Does it connect to previous episodes?
- Does it connect to your products and services?
- Does it serve a particular need that you know your clients or community have?
- What do you hope someone will know after the episode that they didn't know before?
- Will it help you achieve the key goal of your Business Podcast Blueprint?

Once you've answered those questions and are satisfied with the answers, you need to ask one more:

### ***Will your listening audience truly enjoy the content of this episode?***

To know that, of course, you need to know who you're talking to.

Everyone talks about the importance of niche, and many of those people truly overcomplicate it. If you can't answer the question of "Who is this podcast for?" off the top of your head, a great place to start is to find a successful business owner in a complementary business with an engaged audience (ideally for a podcast) and say to yourself, "There. That's my niche." Then, spend time being an engaged audience member so you can see how the content creator does her thing. Over time, you'll refine your niche, but this is a great starting point and more than enough to make sure your content is consistently valuable to your listeners.

The FINAL question you need to ask yourself is this: What goals does my audience have that this episode will help them achieve? These goals should be somewhat related to the products and services your business offers. When you connect your own goals with your audience's goals relating to the work you do, you're setting yourself up for a win.

For example, if I'm recording an episode with a guest about getting sponsorship for company podcasts, I will answer the three questions:

1. Why am I creating this episode? Because I get asked all the time about getting sponsors. I need more robust, definitive content on the topic, even though I know most businesses shouldn't have sponsors on their show.
2. My audience of agency, firm and practice owners will probably end up deciding not to have sponsors, but they like making decisions with all of the information. They will appreciate a comprehensive deep dive so they are confident in their ultimate choice.
3. My audience wants a show that helps them get more and better clients for their business with a minimum of hassle and oversight. By giving them information about the different choices they need to make (like sponsors or no sponsors) they can quickly decide to go for it, forget it or experiment, and when we discuss sponsors on strategy calls, we have a shared language and groundwork of information to start from.

When you identify these three things – your purpose (ie: Your Blueprint and the Metrics you're optimizing for), your audience and the information your audience needs to help them help you achieve your goals – then coming up with episode ideas becomes a simple matter of combining those three elements. Or, if you have more ideas than you know what to do with, these three questions can help you filter to just the best ones.

## **Charisma**

Let's move on to the second C. Have you noticed how some people have a natural magnetism that draws others in? That is Charisma, and there are two types: natural and learned. If you aren't born with it, you can learn enough of it to make an awesome show.

We call those born with charisma Rockstars, and those who have earned charisma Wingmen. But charisma is fluid: you can start as one and become the other, and exist anywhere on the beautiful spectrum in between.

Each charisma type has strengths which you can play to within your podcast.

Rockstars are the main draw of the podcast. You listen to a rockstar podcaster for the same reason you'd go to see a concert. Them just being themselves is enough. Rockstars will find it easy to achieve Thought Leadership, Audience Engagement and Conversion goals with their shows. (But Wingmen can, too!)

Wingmen are the quiet heroes who excel at making other people look like Rockstars. For example, in an interview the guest becomes the center of attention, and if it's a solo episode, then the Wingman makes sure every piece of content lifts up the audience and helps them to achieve their goals – it's almost an act of service more than anything else. Wingmen do particularly well with Relationship Building, Audience Engagement, and Content shows. (But Rockstars can, too!)

You want to know your charisma type so you know what to pay extra attention to, based on your podcast goals. If you're a Rockstar and are using a Rockstar Blueprint or a Wingman using a Wingman Blueprint, you're golden.

But if your most important goal isn't the one typically associated with your charisma type, you just need to make sure that you're aware of what your natural inclination is going to be (taking up the spotlight or directing it away from yourself) and compensate for it.

A Wingman hosting a conversational Thought Leadership-style podcast will need to make sure they're taking up equal talking time and probably spend more time preparing to do so – and listening to episodes after the fact to make sure they did.

A Rockstar with a Relationship Building podcast is going to have to do the reverse, making sure they're giving their guest the star treatment.

Knowledge is power, and knowing your charisma type will direct you towards what you need to work on.

## Connection

The final C is Connection.

Most of the podcasting industry is focused on the external markers of success for shows – downloads, ratings, reviews, sponsorships, etc. Many of the specific bottom-line success metrics I discuss here are about hard, unemotional data.

But the genuine, human connection you can develop with your audience (and your guests, of course, but I'm talking about your listeners here) should not be scorned or forgotten. This is where fans can become evangelists (or clients!) and begin to do the work of marketing for you.

They may or may not be the top-level reason you are podcasting but they are real, they are people, and they deserve your consideration. And even if their numbers are few, when people listen to a podcast they are forming a relationship with you as the host.

The last time I checked – and it's been a while – my little podcast, The Company Show, was getting around 150 downloads per episode. Pipsqueak numbers in the industry.

But each of those people has made the choice to give me their time and attention. That is not a small thing. Each and every one of them deserves my and my team's best efforts with every episode.

There's a reason that when a host who usually does interviews shakes things up with a solo, that solo performs better.

Your listeners listen to you because they like you. They want more of you. The host-to-listener relationship can feel one-sided, but it's real, and it's intimate. You're their Tuesday morning drive-to-work buddy or Thursday night cooking date.

You owe them good quality, consistency and your full attention when they make the HUGE leap and reach out to you for any reason on any platform.

And even if you have a very professionally-focused show, share a little bit about who you are and what you care about, and give your listeners a clear and simple way to get in touch if they so choose.

The 3 Cs are what is going to make your podcast as good for the people listening to it as it is for your business. Your listeners deserve no less.

## **Action Steps**

### ***If you're starting a new show:***

You can and should ask those episode-level content questions (Why am I creating it, who am I creating it for, how is it helping them achieve goals related to my work?) for your show as a whole.

You should also identify your charisma type, and make sure that if your Blueprint isn't a 'natural' fit, you're prepared to compensate with planning and practice.

Set yourself up to create a real connection with your listener by investing in quality recording equipment and production, committing to a regular release schedule and giving people a way to connect with you that you will monitor.

***If you already have a show:***

Get in the habit of asking the content questions for each episode. For bonus points, look at your most popular episode from the past year and ask the content questions about it. You have probably done it a few times without even thinking about it.

Do a quick check of your charisma type. Are you playing to your strengths, or do you need to make some adjustments based on your own charisma and your goals?

Honestly review (or get someone else to review!) your podcast for quality and consistency. You're looking for clean, professional audio, smooth transitions, clear calls to action and on-time-every-time releases. If you don't have them, make the necessary changes.

## Release Cadence

After “Should we have a podcast?” one of the first decisions you’re going to have to make is how often you want to release, and how long you’re going to podcast for.

You’ve got options, and options within options.

And it’s an important choice.

Once you commit to a release cadence in your podcast, you should stick to it.

Tom Fox, The Compliance Evangelist and creator of the Compliance Podcast Network, says, “Your podcast is a promise to your audience.” And he’s absolutely right. If you commit to and communicate that you’re going to start a weekly podcast – you should deliver a weekly podcast. It’s not just because it’s important to do what you say you’re going to do, but inconsistent releases or a series of stops and starts just isn’t a great look for most brands.

Consistency is professional, and it should be table stakes.

Which often means not biting off more than you can chew when it comes to your podcast.

And that is its own challenge, because the reality is that more frequent releases mean more and faster progress toward key business goals.

So, you’ve got to find the balance that works best for you, your team and your business goals.

There are two main categories of release cadence – ongoing and seasonal.

With an Ongoing Podcast, you pick a release cadence and stick to it until you’ve achieved all your goals, retired, started to really hate podcasting – or feel the show has run its course, and it’s time to invest in other things.

Podcast Seasons have a planned beginning and end from the get-go. They are created with a specific number of episodes in mind, and may be followed by additional seasons or may be one-and-done.

## Ongoing Podcasts

### Daily

Daily releases are the most challenging release cadence – when you say the word to most company podcasters, they look at you like you’ve sprouted a third ear in the middle of your forehead. They are getting more popular among the top 100 podcasts, probably because they’re such an efficient way to grow reach and downloads, but most of them are very short. One good

use case for them is daily news commentary: if you're in a field with constant changes, like the law, politics, technology or entertainment, and growing downloads and reach are your highest priority, daily might be something to consider.

### **Multiple Weekly Releases**

Next up is multiple weekly releases – this might be something like Monday, Wednesday, Friday, or Tuesday and Sunday, or whatever days make sense for your workflow. This is still a very heavy lift for you as the host and for all team members, internal or otherwise. But it will help you get a lot of content out very quickly. A twice-weekly cadence is often used by businesses using two different episode formats, like a solo and an interview, or a Q&A episode and a teaching piece.

### **Weekly Releases**

A weekly release cadence is the most common frequency, and for many companies, it strikes a good balance between the amount of work involved for you and your team members (or the price, if you're working with a producer) and the benefits you'll be getting from the show. All things being equal, if you can manage a weekly cadence, this should be the option you consider the most seriously. Podcast listeners are loyal but have short memories.

### **Bi-Weekly Releases**

If weekly is off the table, maybe because you just don't have room on your calendar for more recording, then bi-weekly or twice a month can be a good compromise, or a good way to start your podcast if you want to start slow and ramp up. Not having to make a major production and promotional lift every week can make it easier to get used to creating a show, and while you won't build traction or make progress as quickly as with a more frequent cadence, episodes won't be so far apart that things get stale. It's also much easier to add episodes than remove them, so starting bi-weekly with the intent to become weekly later is a popular strategy.

### **Monthly Releases**

I hesitated to even include this option here because, with a monthly release, it takes so long to make any meaningful progress toward your goals that I'd almost say it makes more sense to invest your time and money elsewhere. It can be done, but this cadence makes each episode almost a standalone project rather than part of a cohesive body of work. If you have a hyper-specific goal, like having case study conversations with your best clients and growing a library of them over the years, this can be a good way to do it.

## **Podcast Seasons**

If you don't want or can't commit to an ongoing show, you have the option of seasons.

Seasons are great.

If you've never podcasted and aren't sure you'll like it, they can be an amazing way to test the waters, and if you have a highly specific goal that has a clear endpoint, you can podcast exactly as much as you need to and no more. The content can be evergreen and serve your business forever.

## Recurring Seasons

If you know that over the course of a year, you have particularly busy and light periods, then organizing your production calendar into seasons can be a great way to batch your effort. For example, if you know that you're going to be nose-down, no breaks, can't-stop busy around year end and tax time, but you have a more open schedule in the late spring and early fall, you might want to run a 12- or 15-episode season twice a year when you have more time to create content. This can let you take advantage of weekly releases or deeply explore a topic with related episodes without committing to every single week forever.

## Limited Release Seasons

An option I often recommend that people consider is a limited-release season.

Unlike an ongoing podcast (even one that is divided into multiple, recurring seasons for organization or convenience), a limited-release season has a pre-planned beginning and end. Each season could stand alone and be complete in and of itself. They are typically between 6 and 12 episodes, are focused around a specific theme, and have specific goals.

Some popular season goals or topics we see are:

- **Book, Product and Event Launch:** These seasons work with your launch strategy to build up some excitement, get the word out and keep your community engaged.
- **Lead Nurturing Podcasts:** These are seasons strategically created to educate potential clients about you and your company so that they are excited to work with you.
- **SEO and Content Development:** This kind of season is designed to fill any gaps in your body of work and be a resource your audience can use again and again.
- **Training and Onboarding:** These seasons can be gated and work as opt-ins to drive list-building and community growth or be completely internal and used to train and onboard new clients or team members.
- **Case Study Seasons:** This type of season is a deep dive into your unique process or methodology, ideally with a client or two, that you can use in your marketing to demonstrate your services.

Ultimately, making the decision should come down to your goals. If you can accomplish everything you want to in a closed timeframe – go for it! If you want a show that is going to be a part of your marketing on a permanent basis, then it's got to be ongoing. There's no single right answer, only what's right for your business.

## Action Steps

### ***If you're starting a new show:***

Are your Blueprints and Metrics geared toward generating ongoing value for months or years, or are the goals you most want to achieve specific and time-limited? That should tell you if you should go with an ongoing show or a season. (But as always, you're the boss of your podcast; you can do what you want!)

Next, open up your calendar and take a good, hard look at your available time. As a rule of thumb, if you have production and promotion help from a team member or a third-party service provider, you can estimate that for every hour of finished audio, you'll spend about an hour on prep and admin – more if you're scripting things out entirely. (This is just a guideline; your mileage may vary.)

Choose the most frequent release that you can commit to.

### ***If you already have a show:***

Is your podcast cadence giving you the results you want? If you are making progress towards your goals at a rate you are happy with, no need to make any changes.

If you're so overwhelmed with contacts, leads and content that you can't effectively manage it all, consider scaling back or shifting your format to seasons rather than permanently ongoing.

If you aren't seeing progress towards your goals quickly enough, increase your release cadence, either by increasing the number of your regular episodes, or consider an alternate episode type that is easy to produce (like Q&A, or commentary and review), and add that to your schedule.

## Audio-Video or Audio-Only?

Let me tell you a little story.

Back in the halcyon days of 2019, I had a strong belief. I believed that video was video and podcasts were podcasts and never the twain should meet. And podcasts *certainly* did not belong on YouTube. I would have died on that hill.

Then, in 2020, I conducted the first State of Business Podcasting Report and learned that the vast majority of the top 100 podcasts had YouTube channels, and most of them put episodes there. Now we make MP4 versions of all the podcasts we produce so they can go on YouTube.

When I'm wrong, I'm wrong.

In the last few years, video podcasting has gotten even more popular.

Looking at podcasts as a whole, about 30% of weekly podcast listeners use YouTube as their main podcast-consuming platform. ([Cumulus Podcast Network Podcast Download Report](#), Fall 2023) It should be noted that those viewers tend to be younger and male, so make your strategic choices accordingly.

In the [State of Business Podcasting Report](#) in 2023, we found that 83 of the top 100 business podcasts had YouTube channels, and nearly all (94%) put full episodes on them – 60% of which were live-action video. (The other types were still image with audio overlay, audiogram style with animated soundwaves, or a mix of multiple formats.) 43% were what we call video-first shows – designed to be seen as much or more than just listened to.

So, it's tempting to think that you need to create a video podcast if you want to get any traction at all.

And that might send you screaming for the hills.

Don't worry – video in podcasting is still optional.

Anecdotally, I'm seeing a different interpretation of the numbers. Most of the shows that we produce for business owners that are fulfilling specific functions aren't seeing huge traction on YouTube. The vast majority of plays happen on the traditional podcast platforms.

There are absolutely more podcasts that are created using video, but from what I have been able to determine, the data around video in podcasting is somewhat skewed by a handful of truly massive video podcast channels in each industry. These are shows, often in a talk show format, that draw millions of views for each episode. They are almost all run as businesses (as opposed to in support of businesses) or conversion strategies, and the audio versions are an afterthought. Since they are delivered by RSS as well as on YouTube, they are making it seem like video is more universally critical than we see 'on the ground' in production.

Which isn't to say you shouldn't upload a version of your audio podcast to YouTube – you should! – but it does raise the question of whether you should go to the considerable trouble and expense of having a live-action version of your episodes produced.

There are good arguments on both sides.

## Why You Should Make a Video Podcast

1. **Better Discoverability:** YouTube is huge, and its search functionality is better than any existing audio-only podcast platform. They have a discoverability engine and an algorithm designed to show people content that will interest them, and having your content in a live-action format makes it much more likely that your episodes will be put into that system.
2. **Video Converts and Connects better than Audio:**\* I'll say this for video – adding another sense, the visual, to your content makes it easier for people to connect with you. Audio creates a deep and intimate connection, but video can make the process faster. Video also has a higher conversion potential than audio. When people listen to podcasts, they're usually also doing something else: walking, cooking, driving or working out; it's not easy for them to click a link. They have to remember to do it later, which they usually don't. A video that someone is watching means they can immediately take action on what you want them to do.

\* As long as your production quality and performance are both high. If they aren't, you're as likely to turn people away as pull them in.

If your podcast goals are directly related to people consuming your content and taking action because of it, like for Affiliate Sales, Product Sales or Monthly Recurring Revenue, that strengthens the case for video.

## Why You Shouldn't Make a Video Podcast

1. **Recording Complexity:** Video is considerably more difficult to record than audio. When you record audio you have to make sure you have a good mic, you're using it correctly and your environment isn't too noisy or echoey. To record a video, you need to do all of that, plus make sure your lighting is right and your clothes, hair and makeup present what you want them to. Same goes for your guests, who may not be comfortable on video. There can be more friction in getting someone to agree to be on video than in just having the audio recorded.
2. **More Time and Money:** Video takes longer to produce and costs more than audio. Like recording video content, editing video content requires different skills and processes than audio-only editing. While it can give you a lot of flexibility in terms of adding elements to your show, like slides, overlays, etc., it is highly skilled work that takes time

to get out the door. The costs can be double, triple or even more than an audio-only show.

This could all be worth it for your business! It might be important to you to create the most highly polished, impressive content possible. The benefits of search and discoverability or an existing audience of other video content you have produced might make the extra complexity and expense justifiable. The call comes down to what your business goals are and the current resources you have to work with.

## Making the Choice

High level, you need to answer the question: Are the benefits of video podcasting (better discoverability, more conversion/connection) worth the problems (more difficult and expensive)?

Looking at the Blueprints, any of them could be in video and fulfill their function – with some nuances.

**Conversion** podcasts are most likely to give a return on the extra investment from video. That extra discoverability and the ease of converting from one channel to another, as well as the greater connection of adding a visual element mean you'll be increasing your chances for conversions with every episode.

**Thought Leadership** podcasts could easily be video, as long as you, the host, and any guests you have are comfortable on video, and you're willing to make the extra investment in post-production. It can be a great way to be found more easily and more often, which is an important Thought Leadership goal.

For **Audience Engagement** podcasts, I'm going to take the coward's way out and say you should look at your audience and how they consume content. If your audience gets most of their information from YouTube, then lights, camera, action! If they don't, however, or seem to consume content in a variety of different media, you can use other criteria, like the time you want to spend or the type of content you're most comfortable creating, to make your choice.

In **Relationship Building** podcasts you need to think long and hard about whether or not you want to ask your guests to make the extra effort of getting "video ready." As video podcasts become more common, there is less and less friction here – but it still exists and remember that it is a bigger ask. Some will be totally fine with it, others will find it either too much to ask, or enough of an irritation that they will be less amenable to other requests.

**Content** podcasts are about the content. It can be video if you want.

All things being equal, I recommend new podcasters start with an audio-only or audio-first show. Learning to make good audio content takes time and effort. Adding all of the extra elements of video right at the outset is a lot – and is often more than a business really needs.

If you're an experienced podcaster and want to add polish and more reach to your show, then start experimenting with video! You might want to start with a video season or series before committing to video forever to make sure you like it, can manage all elements of the process, and are creating content in a way your listeners, clients, customers and community like.

## Whatever You Choose...

You should upload a version of your podcast to YouTube so that you can build your content library there, take advantage of the search algorithm and easily have links to your podcast to share with people who don't listen to podcasts using podcast players. It doesn't need to be live-action, however. It can be audiogram style, where you lay the audio over an image, maybe with an animated soundwave if you're feeling fancy.

There are a few reasons for this:

1. If an active YouTube channel is part of your future strategy, you need to accumulate a certain number of viewing hours before you gain access to certain features – might as well start collecting those hours and as much audience as you can now!
2. YouTube has a playlist functionality you can use to organize your episodes into very user-friendly categories (Spotify has this function too, for the record), which can be great for letting your audience binge your content and get all of your related episodes together in one place.

You should also always record video when you are conducting interviews, even if you're not producing a full video. The video is great for promotional content, and short-form videos that are live-action are more compelling and engaging than audio and caption only. It can be a good middle ground: Getting some promotional content with live-action video without having to commit to a wholly video show.

Video podcasting, the best practices associated with it, and the podcast-related functionality of YouTube and the podcast platforms that accommodate video shows are changing rapidly. Unless the thought of video is radically unpleasant to you, it makes sense to revisit the idea once or twice a year to see what your data says and what has changed in the industry to make it easier!

## Action Steps

### *If you're starting a new show:*

Evaluate your goals, choose your most important metrics and then think about whether your unique goals and objectives will be best served with video or if you can achieve everything you need to without it.

### *If you have an existing show:*

If your show is currently audio-only, can you make a business case for adding video? Will the extra conversion and discoverability help your organizational goals? If so, consider starting a video experiment – a couple of bonus episodes, or a special series to see what adding it permanently to your process might look like. On the other hand, if nothing's broke, no need to fix it.

If you currently have a video show, get clear on the actual benefit that having it in video is providing you. How much engagement or how many conversions do you get on a video version of your show compared to an audio one? Is that rate worth the investment? Add this kind of analysis to your process at least twice a year.

## Episode Formats

Podcasts can come in a lot of different shapes and sizes, and there are no real hard and fast rules as to what makes a podcast a podcast.

If it's an audio recording accessible via RSS feed – it's a podcast.

That leaves you a lot of room for creativity, and that much freedom can be overwhelming.

The episode format is one of the biggest early stumbling blocks company podcasters can run into, and the consequences of making the wrong choice can be severe when it comes to actually getting any value out of the project.

Often, when people think "podcast" they think: "interview," but it's not that clear cut. Depending on which of the Blueprints you're using, and which specific success metrics matter the most to you – not to mention your specific needs around time and budget – there are styles of show that make more or less sense for your business.

Why is it so important to make a format decision based on your business objectives? Isn't just creating great content for your audience enough?

It is if you're in it for the love of the game – but not if you've got KPIs to meet, and you want to get the MOST value out of your investment.

Here's an example. Let's say that Company A started a podcast because they want to establish their company as a Thought Leader in the industry. Their goal is being seen as an authority and making sure their ideas and IP get out there into the world.

So they start a podcast, and they get the highest-profile guests they can find to join the host who, naturally, wants them to feel comfortable and highlight their expertise! So the host crafts questions that will let their guests shine and share their knowledge and expertise, and they promote the episodes saying, "Look at this awesome conversation we had with this amazing person in the space!"

The Thought Leadership of the guests increases, and the Thought Leadership of the host company does not exist at all – the podcast is a vehicle for OTHER expert opinions.

And that can be an amazing podcast – but it doesn't match the goals that Company A has of establishing themselves as thinkers and innovators in their space, since they are, instead, investing a lot of time, energy and money promoting the ideas of outside experts.

They would be much better served by creating solo episodes with their own content and ideas, answering questions from the community about their space – or, if they do want an interview style show, focusing on complementary experts with whom they can have an equal

conversation about topics of mutual interest where the host can contribute to as much as their guests do. (Still with some solo episodes for good measure!)

Let's look at another example, this one a little more nuanced.

Company B knows that the most important thing a podcast can do for them is help them increase their professional network. They need more referral and collaboration partners, so they, very sensibly, decide to do a Relationship Building podcast. Since both time and money are at a premium, they decide they'll host panel discussions with ideal referral partners from different industries and create some content that will be of real use to their audience.

Again, this can be an excellent show, but because there is so little one-on-one time between the host and each of the guests, the relationship isn't that strong – probably not strong enough that anyone feels comfortable making a referral for new business. This can be somewhat mitigated by investing a lot of time in prep calls and follow-up... but then any savings in time spent and cost are eaten up by the extra labor.

Instead, it would be a wiser course of action to settle on a weekly or bi-weekly interview show where the host can spend some real time with each guest, talk to them, get to know them and plant the seeds of an ongoing relationship. Ultimately, distributing time and resources that way is going to have a better return on the goal of getting more referrals.

With all of this in mind, here are the different episode types and which Blueprints they tend to be most appropriate for.

## Interviews

Interviews are a hugely popular podcasting format, and with good reason! They're dynamic, let you network and help you bring fresh new ideas to your audience. But there are different kinds of interviews. They come in two broad types: informational and conversational.

Informational interviews are about *sharing another person's expertise* with your audience, which are the Relationship Building, Content, and Audience Engagement plays.

Conversational interviews are 'interviews' that are really *conversations between equals* when you are using the Thought Leadership Blueprint. They each have their place.

Interviews, both informational and conversational, can also be part of a Conversion style podcast where you're looking to move people directly from one part of the buyer journey to another, perhaps as part of a sales process, and there are good and bad ways to go about it. Using the podcast to try and sell your services to guests is... a tactic some people do choose to use, and let's leave it at that. There are better ways to use a podcast for conversions, like in demonstrative shows, which can be interviews as well, or by using the podcast and your recording process as an engagement tool itself – but that's a topic for another day.

## Informational

Generally, unless we're talking about Thought Leadership, podcast interviews are usually, although not always, Informational in nature.

In an informational-style interview, the focus is really on the guest and not so much on the host. The host is shining the spotlight on the guest rather than sharing it, because the purpose of the show is to bring valuable information to an audience.

These interviews work the best when you know that your audience (or you yourself!) could benefit from information that you don't necessarily possess yourself or within your company, and when your key goal for podcasting is expanding your own professional network of experts who serve similar audiences.

## Conversational

In a conversational-style podcast, you want to make sure that you and your guest are talking to each other, digging into ideas as they come up and each contributing your own experience and expertise to the topic at hand. You are not just going to run down a list of prepared questions, and you're not going to spend the whole conversation getting your guest to talk about what they're great at – that's an informational interview.

Conversational interviews are a little tricky. It takes practice to have equal conversations with strangers, but they are brilliant for enhancing your own thought leadership, because when you're talking to another expert it conveys that you have *access* to experts and are on the same professional level that they are. Of course, this means you need to really curate who you are talking to. This is not the style of show where you're going to have a list of questions you want to cover, but rather a subject you and your guest are going to discuss together.

Having conversations with fellow professionals also gives you the chance to build and nurture relationships with them and explore aspects of your own subject matter in new and interesting ways.

## Solo Episodes

Solo episodes are a popular podcast format for Thought Leadership and Audience Engagement podcasts, as well as being a massive boon to the Content-motivated among us. They can also contribute to Conversion goals, depending on how they are deployed within a buying journey.

Solo shows can either be scripted or off-the-cuff. Scripted means you plan in advance what you're going to say and in what order, either with a detailed outline or a full script.

Off-the-cuff is when you have a key topic or a brief outline, and you just go to town on it.

What you need to watch out for is that reading a script often sounds like... reading, which is unendurably boring to listen to. On the other hand, an off-the-cuff show can be so scattered that it's hard to follow. You'll also be at risk of pressing publish and realizing you've left out important details.

Try out a few different methods to see what strikes the best balance for you.

Another issue that people sometimes run into with solo episodes is that when it's just you and the mic, building the momentum and excitement can be a little challenging. Not to put too fine a point on it, but it's weird to sit alone and talk to no one. There is a dynamism to having a conversation with another person that keeps the energy going, and for some hosts, that's a necessity, not a nice-to-have. It really comes down to your own skills, style and preferences.

The most common types of solo podcasts are monologues and Q&A.

## Monologues

A monologue-style show can be viewed like an audio essay or blog post. You have your topic, the different points about it that you want to cover – hopefully a few stories and opinions to keep things interesting – and off you go! These are great when you want to talk about things that are going on in your industry, share the results of research or experiments (these are also demonstrative podcasts, in many cases!), provide actionable information, theory and strategy to your listeners, and generally teach. The key idea is information transfer from you, the host, to the listener in an efficient, portable way.

## Q&A

Another very popular style of solo show is the Q&A format, where the host answers questions that were either submitted by listeners (sometimes audio clips of people asking their questions are included, but not always), or pulled from inboxes and social media. These are great for a lot of reasons, too.

First and foremost, if one person drums up the courage to actually **ask** a question, you can be reasonably certain a lot of people are wondering about it, so providing a direct answer is a real service to your community. Secondly, it's so, so, so repurposable. Massive Q&A lists, multi-media resources for the sales team to distribute, content to put on social – you can use these all over your online presence.

These shows can also be quite quick to put together. Pick a theme, find a few questions you've been asked, read and answer them, and send to production.

## Co-Host Conversations

A co-hosted conversational podcast is exactly what it says on the tin – two hosts talking to each other and sharing information with the audience. These kinds of shows are often, but not always, really about education – taking subject matter and conveying it to the listener in an organized and enjoyable format.

These shows can be a lot of fun, especially for Audience Engagement and Thought Leadership podcasts, where you have a crowd of engaged audience members hungry for more content from your organization. You can fill that need for them and provide a huge amount of content without the considerable trouble and expense of a guest management process.

Sometimes you will have guests join the co-hosts on a show like this, but from a production standpoint, that can get a little chaotic, not to mention be a little rough on a guest! Two interviewers and one interviewee isn't the most comfortable situation for most people.

## **Demonstrative Podcasts**

Now, let's talk about demonstrative podcasts – these are shows that are primarily used to show that you can walk what you talk. Think case studies, live coaching, analysis of events, reviews and commentary in your industry. These are generally for Audience Engagement or Conversion style shows, and they can be a little more difficult to arrange than a straight interview or solo episode, but they can be enormously valuable for both your audience and your business.

Coaches and consultants can find a lot of value in this style of show – if they have clients willing to be coached on the air, it can be a fabulous way to demonstrate the methodology that the coach uses, and the kinds of breakthroughs their clients can see. Again, this helps the listener, by giving them an example to relate to and proof that the service or coaching works, and gives the business a chance to demonstrate the value of the services.

You can also have an interview-style podcast where the host primarily talks to current or past clients about what they achieved together, building a library of very powerful sales tools.

Not every demonstrative podcast needs a direct case study, of course. The goal with these types of podcasts is to show in a very real way that the company knows what it's talking about, so providing reviews of products, services, books and other content creators can accomplish the same goal. Likewise, researching, analyzing and communicating news and developments in the industry can have the same impact.

What we've covered so far are the main, high-level options for weekly or bi-weekly release schedules. Once you get into the swing of things, episodes are fairly quick to create, and you can build a solid workflow that meshes seamlessly with the rest of your week. There are a whole bunch of other show formats, of course, that take a little more arrangement on the front end, or more of an investment in post-production, and so aren't typically great for businesses to do

every week, but that can be amazing for a special series, event or milestone (like the 100th episode), or book and product launches.

## Documentaries

A documentary-style podcast is one that tells a story with a beginning, middle and end, either within a single episode or from the beginning of a season or series to the end. Very often these will be more highly produced, with more sound elements than a standard interview or solo show, and as such, they can be a little more challenging and expensive to produce. But the results can be astounding – and generally evergreen!

Documentary podcasts work really well for Audience Engagement and Thought Leadership podcasts. They can also be designed as Content podcasts to deeply explore an idea, and can also be used as a Conversion podcast strategy, if access to some or all of it is gated.

Sometimes, a single host will provide all of the narrative and information, or there will be a combination of a host providing the framing and context, supplemented by other speakers with personal anecdotes, specialized information or additional context. There is going to be a lot more planning on the front end for this type of show, which is why you will see it more frequently as a special or a standalone than something that is created every week.

Some business use cases for a documentary style show could be the origin story of your organization, a series following a client or customer using your product or services, an industry event, or a product, service or book launch. In fact, my book coach and I recorded a documentary podcast about the process of writing this very book. (I know, I know; a podcast about writing a book about podcasting.) Check it out at [PodcastingforBusiness.com/UZIA](https://PodcastingforBusiness.com/UZIA).

## Clip Show

A clip show is an episode composed of selections from other episodes – for example, the top 10 lessons from 100 episodes, or the 10 most important insights from a year of podcasting. Individual clips from previous episodes will be selected on a particular theme, then re-edited into a new episode with the host “framing” the clips being presented, providing the context for them, the reason why the clips are important, and what connects them. This means the production process can get a little ungainly, but it can be well, well worth it.

We often create clip shows for milestone episodes like the big 100 – they’re a lovely celebration of the work that has come before.

Another benefit of a clip show is being able to amp up promotion! Every guest who is featured in the show can be contacted to say something along the lines of, “Hey! Your insight about XYZ was so good we included it in this super special clip show. Here’s a link!” As always, not everyone will share, but it’s a very nice email to be able to send from a relationship-building standpoint.

Any Blueprint can benefit from the occasional clip show.

## Panel Discussions

A panel discussion show is one where you gather multiple experts on a topic and moderate a conversation between them. You've seen these at conferences, I'm sure! A moderator, the host in this case, will pose questions and then get insights from each of the guests. Typically, this format will work best for Thought Leadership and Audience Engagement podcasts, but it can work as a Relationship Building one as well, if you dedicate time to connecting with each panelist individually.

These can be fascinating podcast episodes, if a lot of work. They're enough work that I would not recommend them as a weekly, or even a monthly part of your schedule. Just getting that many people on a call at the same time can be a bit of a headache, but they can be fantastic as a capstone to a season, a special to promote a major launch or release, a bonus episode or a quarterly event that features largely in your promotions. As with any panel, make sure that you're giving each guest a chance to speak and be heard, and there isn't anyone taking up more airtime than is their honest due.

## Lives

Lives come with a big, fat asterisk as far as podcasting is concerned. There is a dynamic sort of engagement on a live event that doesn't translate perfectly into an audio recording, and that can make them alienating for people listening after the fact. That said, sometimes they are appropriate, and can be a great way to add a little variety and get double duty out of something you're already creating.

Live shows are amazing for Conversion podcasts, making attendance a part of your funnel, and they can be a great Audience Engagement strategy, as well.

Within all of the above there is plenty of room to move around and experiment, but a podcast should be consistent so your listeners know what to expect when they press play. Choose an episode type, and stick to it, or at most two different types to alternate between. Bonus and milestone episodes are where you can really play with format.

## Action Steps

### *If you are starting a new show:*

You get the fun of picking a show format! From all you've read about today, what sounds like it's the best match for your business goals and your workflow? Consider the time you'll have to spend coordinating with other people, and the amount you'll need to invest in post-production. You aren't bound to this decision until the end of time, and you can make changes and

experiment with special episodes as you go on. If in doubt, plan to have an interview-style show that is either conversational for Thought Leadership or informational for Relationship Building and Audience Engagement.

***If you have an existing show:***

Honesty time: Is your show's format aligned with your business goals? If you're conducting interviews, are they conversational or informational, and is that appropriate to what you're trying to achieve? If all is in perfect alignment – congratulations! No action to take. If your show isn't perfectly aligned for what you want to be achieving, then it's time to update your format. If you don't want to make any abrupt changes, you can plan to make the switch next month, quarter, season or year.

## Show Parts

Now that you've got an idea of the high-level episode formats, we need to get into the nitty-gritty of the specific parts that make up an episode.

There are a lot of them, some optional and some not.

The ones that you will usually hear in most podcast episodes are the Standard Elements – some of them are necessary and others are just nice to have. If you have all or most of these elements in your show, whether it's a solo, interviews or a repurposed livestream, then your podcast is going to sound like a podcast. Everything else is an Optional Element, though you may want to include one or more of them to help you optimize your show for your particular goals.

Keep in mind, however, that the more distinct elements you have in your show, the more complex the editing is going to be – and the higher the chance for human error to creep in somewhere.

## Standard Podcast Episode Elements

### Hook, Sizzle Clip, Cold Open

This is what plays before a produced intro. This can be a clip from the audio that comes later, or you can write and record something yourself to open the show, maybe asking the question the episode will answer, or giving your own strong take that will be backed up by later content. This isn't strictly required in a podcast, but it is good practice – there is a lot of competition for podcasts out there, and it's really easy for someone to click over to the next one if the first 30 seconds aren't that interesting, unless they already really know you and like you (which, to be fair, your loyal listeners will!).

***Your hook/sizzle clip/cold open should be:*** 45 seconds or shorter.

### Produced Intro

Your Produced Intro is a piece of audio branding that usually has theme music and a voice over – it will be the same for every episode. It should also be short, and explain briefly what the show is, why it's valuable and who it's for. You might also want to introduce yourself as the host – or have your voice actor do so! (Alternatively, your personal introduction can go in your Welcome, below.) A lot of shows choose to have the music slowly fade out during the welcome to the episode, which sounds lovely. Some hosts also choose to forgo the pre-produced element and have the same basic intro format they do live when recording their calls and laying the music underneath it. This gives them a little flexibility to shake up the verbiage while maintaining consistency in the format and branding. It's your choice! The key

reason to have a produced intro is to sound professional while creating a clear, repeatable signal that "the show is beginning now! The good stuff is almost here!"

**Your produced intro should be:** 30 seconds or shorter, set to background music and give a clear message: This podcast is going to do XYZ, and it's for this type of person.

## Welcome

After the produced intro it's time for you to personally welcome your listeners, and your guest, if you have one, to the show. This can be a good opportunity to greet your audience, introduce yourself and the show if you forgo the produced intro, provide any news or updates your community might be interested in, banter a little if you have a co-host – anything that isn't technically the main body content. This is also when you should introduce your guest, if you prefer to handle the "who this person is and why they matter" bit by yourself, which can often be better than having guests share their own bios.

**Your welcome should be:** About 45-75 seconds long, clear and warm. You don't want to go on and on with who you are and what you're doing, but you do want to keep in mind that some listeners will be new, and they need a little information about what they're in for. It can be an extension of the produced intro, but a little more personal.

Sometimes the question: "Do I need to introduce myself and the show every episode?" comes up. The answer is yes – new listeners need an orientation to what is going on. It should be short however, so it's not boring for regular listeners.

Everything I've talked about so far makes up the **top** of your show – and you have plenty of wiggle room! If you want your intro and welcome to take the place of the hook, then just transition with a little music – go for it! If you want to start with a sizzle clip, then have music play over your welcome and save the VO for the end right before you start the body content – you can do that too! You're the boss of your show intro. A key thing to remember, however, is that you do want to let your listener go from pressing play to hearing interesting, meaty content within about 45 to 90 seconds, two minutes on the outside.

## Main Body Content

This is the meat of your show. It can be an interview, it can be a solo, it can be a panel discussion – it can be whatever you want, but it's going to take up most of the time, and it's going to deliver most of the value. There are segments you can add to main body content, and you might want to include advertisements in it, which I'll be getting to in the Optional Elements section.

**Your main body content should be:** As long as it needs to be, but no longer.

If you want to go by the data, in the [State of Business Podcasting Report](#) over the last 4 years, we've found that the average business podcast is about 44 minutes long, and that

result has been very consistent over time – but that isn't a hard and fast rule. Many popular shows are longer or shorter.

Something to keep in mind is that sometimes, having more time means it takes you longer to get to the good stuff. You add more fluff. Putting a time restriction in place (like capping interviews at 35 minutes) can light just enough of a fire under you and your guests, if you have them, that you get to the good stuff quickly.

You may want to experiment with different lengths to see what works best with your style and for your goals.

## **Closing, Goodbye, Soft Call to Action**

A closing, goodbye, or soft call to action is the last thing you say before going to your produced outro. Some shows go from the main body of the content directly into a produced outro without a specific closing statement (where they thank the guest, say goodbye and the music plays) but best practice is to thank your guest and your audience! If you have things that you generally like to do, like ask your audience to engage with you a certain way, or provide some final thoughts of your own, then this is the place to do it. It can also be fun to use this space to tease upcoming episodes, to give people an idea of what's coming down the pipe. You can record it separately or at the same time as your body content.

***Your closing/goodbye/soft call to action should be:*** Up to a few minutes, depending on how much content you are including. If you are using a produced intro as well, it should have unique content and contain different information than your produced outro.

## **Produced Outro**

Just like a produced intro, this is a standard pre-produced piece that you include at the very end of each episode. This is often where you'll hear "Leave a rating and a review!" or "Like, Share and Subscribe!" If you have a catchphrase or slogan that you regularly use, it can be included as well. The content is up to you, just make sure it is different than what you include in your closing, if you are using one.

***Your produced outro should be:*** About 30 seconds long, set to music, and the last thing people hear in your show.

So those are your bones – the frame that you can alter and enhance to meet your specific goals. If the Standard Elements meet all of your needs, there's no need to mess around with them!

From a strategic perspective, however, you might want to consider adding other elements to your show to give you more content to easily repurpose, meet specific audience or networking objectives, or just because it's fun.

## Optional Podcast Episode Elements

### Ads

Lots and lots of podcasts have ads. They can be for your own products and services, for sponsors, swaps or promotional exchanges with other podcasters or even in support of causes and charities you're involved with.

Whatever the content of the ad is, you must make a few decisions about it: Do you want ads to be 'baked-in' as a permanent part of the episode, or do you want them to be dynamically inserted and subject to change later? (Dynamic ads are more popular – and on balance, better for you as the podcast owner. Your podcast host should let you know if they have that capability!)

For both baked-in and dynamic ads, you can have them either be produced, or be host-read. Produced means the ad is recorded separately, often by the person purchasing the ad, with its own music and voicing. Host-read means you, as the host, are reading the ad. Because of the relationship you have with your audience, host reads are more valuable.

The three main places ads tend to go are:

- Pre-roll: before the episode,
- Mid-roll: within the content (there can be multiple mid-roll placements), or
- Post-roll: after the episode.

Pre-rolls and mid-rolls tend to be heard the most – it's easy to just stop listening to an episode when an ad starts a minute before the end.

You also need to plan your transitions to and from ads for both baked-in and dynamic placements. That might mean including a note in your main body content that 'you'll be right back!' and then 'back to the show!' or some equivalent. Some people like to use transitional sounds, called stingers, instead or in addition to a verbal note.

**Your ads should be:** Used sparingly, and taking up less than 15% of the total airtime of your episode.

### Topical Segments

These are segments that will add some important benefit to your show, either strategic or aesthetic – and these are where you can get really, really creative. You might place them at the top of your show, immediately before or after an ad transition, or before the closing of the episode. You should try to be consistent from week to week, however.

Here are some ideas:

**News:** What is going on in your industry? If there is often something juicy to talk about, but your main show format isn't all news all the time, having a "what's happening" segment can be very valuable to your regular listeners, and can help you establish your place as a source for news and commentary.

**Q&A:** This is a particularly strong strategy for Audience Engagement shows, but all show types can make use of them. They can be either the host reading a question and then answering it, or going a little fancier and getting people to record questions that you add to the show, followed by your answer. Some entire podcasts are Q&A shows, or it's one of two alternating formats. They are also extremely easy and effective to repurpose on your site or on social media – do them long enough and you'll have a veritable library of questions that you don't have to answer via email anymore.

**Standard Question/Speed Round:** I've heard these on a lot of shows, and they can be really fun – possibly as ice-breakers, or maybe towards the end of the main body content. A fun strategy is to have a standard question you ask every guest so that, over time, you compile an amazing list of different takes on a key issue. Repurposing gold.

**Action Steps:** Provide a specific action your listeners can take. This is one of my favorites as a listener, especially when I'm listening-with-intent-to-learn as opposed to listening-with-intent-to-be-entertained. Something clear and specific that your listener can do to either get some of the benefits they have just heard about, or really solidify the learning that just happened

**Reviews/Recommendations:** Use a little of your airtime to promote others: podcasts you like, books you're reading – and it certainly doesn't hurt to tell them you've done so!

Now, with the exception of ads that are going to be dynamic (changing over time) you don't have to record all of these bits separately! They can all be recorded **as** the body content of your episode – the main reason to think about them and plan them is to provide yourself the editorial structure and consistency to record high-quality shows quickly. It also makes it easy to extract parts of episodes for repurposing and reusing later on.

The only thing to really keep in mind is that the more disparate pieces you have, the more effort you are going to expend fitting them all together. It can be worthwhile, but there is a strong argument to be made for a simple show that you can create and have produced quickly.

**Your topical segments should be:** No more than a few minutes in length, and should provide a clear value to your audience, or to the optimization of your show for specific metrics. It's too much work to include them just for the sake of inclusion, so make sure you go into them with a plan.

## Action Steps

### *If you are starting a new show:*

Go through the different show parts found in this section, and choose what you would like to include in your podcast that will help you meet your goals and optimize for the metrics you've selected. Create a script template that you can re-use for every episode, that has headings for each of the different elements you're going to include. This can become your episode script, and a communication document that helps your production team get things sounding the way you want them to.

All things being equal: If you're newer to podcasting, keep it simpler!

### *If you have an existing show:*

Go through this section again, and evaluate each element that your show includes. Are they all optimized to help and impress your audience, and be valuable to your business? Are there any areas you can clean up or improve? Particularly, look at your top of show and end of show content, and any ads. Often, they can be polished or updated to give your show a fresh feeling. If you're not currently including any topical segments, is there one you can add to help fuel your other content marketing efforts?

## Audio and Visual Branding

You're not supposed to judge a book by its cover, but we all do it anyway.

And your podcast's audio-visual brand is going to be judged, quickly and decisively, by everyone who comes across it.

There is no shortage of podcasts to listen to, and if yours looks or sounds boring or low-effort, another will easily take its place.

This is an absolutely critical element if you're looking for Conversion or Thought Leadership benefits, especially if you're optimizing for Downloads or Sponsorship Dollars – anything that involves strangers choosing your podcast over others in great numbers.

And if your goals are closer to home, like Relationship Building and Audience Engagement, you still need to make a good showing. You might not be directly competing with other podcasts, but you are competing with everything else your listener has to do.

So put some effort into creating an attractive, compelling and cohesive set of audio and visual assets for your podcast.

Here's what you'll need to consider.

### Visual Branding

Visual branding for your podcast is anything that is going to be seen. This includes your cover art, any promotional assets like your social media shares and your YouTube thumbnails (and channel art, if you're only using your YouTube channel for your podcast).

#### Cover Art

This is what you see when you go to Apple Podcasts and search for your show – it's the cover of the magazine that is your podcast, and you want to make sure it's a good one.

In our annual research report, we analyze the cover art of the top 100 podcasts, and the most recent data shows that 50% use a headshot or image of the host, 32% use some kind of graphic art or focus on a logo, and 18% are strictly typographic.

Personally, I use typographic cover art. It's enough to have to stare myself down on Riverside every time I record an interview episode. That said, most people do like to look at people, so if you can stand to have your mug front and center, you should do it.

For colors, the most important thing is that it blends in with the rest of your branding; it should look like a part of your body of work. (If you're interested, blue is the most popular dominant color among the top 100, at 25%.)

Go light on the text, even if you choose a typographic style. It needs to be legible at a tiny size, like when someone is scrolling a list of podcasts on their phone!

## Promotional Assets

These are the assets that you may want to include with each episode. You can create a template that has the basic design, and copy or duplicate it to make changes for each individual episode. Depending on how often you post on your different social media channels, you may want to consider having a few versions of each type of asset to keep things visually interesting. Though if you're regularly posting non-podcast related content, I wouldn't worry about that too much.

**Title Cards:** A title card is a unique piece of art that you make for each episode, and upload to the podcast host. It is the same shape (square!) and size as your cover art, and often has a similar style. It includes the episode title and a guest name and headshot if applicable. If you have different episode types (for example Q&A and Interviews), then using different colors or styles of unique episode art can be a nice way to differentiate those episodes in the podcast players.

**Quote Graphics:** A quote graphic is a static image that has an interesting quotation from the episode. It can be a question, or a statement, up to a sentence or two long. The idea is to share something that will stop the scroll and make someone want to read a little more to get the answer, or hear more about the idea. Giving your guest quote graphics also makes a good impression, whether or not they share them.

**Coming Up! Graphics:** If you've got a reasonably long runway, then you can share teasers about the topics, titles and guests of upcoming episodes. This is optional but it can be a nice touch. One fun strategy is to post about an upcoming interview once a guest has booked with you – this is a strong relationship building play!

**YouTube Thumbnails:** Whether your show is audio or audio-video, you should be uploading to YouTube and creating a unique thumbnail (the image that people will see before they press play) that includes the title, episode number (optional), guest name and headshot, perhaps with an additional image (optional). This will be in landscape format to display on YouTube.

**Blog Headers:** If you're posting each episode on your website as its own page or post (which you should) then having a unique header image (or featured image, depending on the type of website you have) that has the episode title, guest name and headshot, and some kind of image looks polished and professional. You can use the YouTube thumbnail for this if you like.

**Audiograms:** Audiograms are short clips of your audio, usually about 60 seconds (but different platforms can accommodate different lengths) that are put together with a still image and usually an animated soundwave and captions. They may also include: the podcast name, the speaker's name, the episode title, a headshot and the episode number – but there are no hard and fast rules! The video element can either be square or landscape, or a tall rectangle, depending on where they will be distributed.

**Shorts/Reels:** Shorts or reels are like audiograms, but with live-action video instead. They will usually be in the taller rectangle format, and tend to have fewer design elements, focusing on the speaker(s) and captions. It is possible to have more highly designed shorts and reels – it depends on your style, branding and of course, the results of your rigorous testing and tracking.

For all of your graphics, except for cover art and title cards which won't be impacted, keep in mind that most people will be seeing them on their phones, and different app infrastructure like account usernames, engagement functions like liking and sharing buttons, etc. can cover up some of your design. Always test your shorts and reels "in the wild" before committing!

I have not included the size specifications for social media assets here because the people that run social media platforms have zero consideration for podcasters with template sets, and the specs can change. You'll find a current list at [PodcastingForBusiness.com/BookResources](https://PodcastingForBusiness.com/BookResources).

If you have a graphic designer you regularly work with or who has done other assets for your business, or a team member who creates your social assets, this can be something great to task them with.

We have a library of sample art and promotional templates you can see at the URL above if you need a little inspiration.

## Audio Branding

Audio branding is far more than what music you choose. It's the mood you create for your audience at the beginning of your show. Here are the pieces you need to make it happen.

### Theme Music

Theme music should reflect the types of music your audience enjoys, while also matching your show's personality. Take inspiration from your customer avatar, or any theme music your company already uses for brand consistency. But don't be afraid to pick fresh, new music for your podcast.

If you have a producer, they might already have access to a stock music library, but there are also many libraries of royalty-free music you can create an account with (usually paid) and get a license for your music from. The key words there are *royalty-free*, in that you don't need

to pay a fee every time it's played, and *license*, which gives you the right to use the music. If you use copyrighted music without a license you can get a takedown notice, and you'll deserve it.

A note about music: Don't let it play without any voice for longer than a few seconds. Unless the music is especially compelling, it's just boring. It's not like a television theme song where you have visuals to go along with it. So, keep the music to a minimum unless there is a very good reason not to. If you have a cool intro video with lots of fascinating imagery and animations for the video version, this doesn't apply!

## Sound Design Elements

When you're listening to the shows you like, you might hear sounds or music at certain points. When continuous music is played while people are speaking, it's called a music bed. When it's a short sound or tone that indicates a change of some kind (like a transition between segments or an ad break), it's called a stinger.

If you decide to use these, you'll want them to be aligned with your intro and outro music. It would be incredibly jarring if your show opens with gentle piano sounds, and you transition to an ad break with a goose honk.

Music beds don't always have to be the same; one client we produce for has a short music intro and outro that are the same every time. But during the episode, a different piece of music plays alongside the guest speaking at a specific point, and that music changes every episode. It gives the episode flavor while providing familiarity.

## Podcast Intro

Another part of your audio brand is the language you use to introduce your podcast – the produced intro and/or the welcome from the last section.

Create your podcast statement – it's a declaration of who the podcast is for and what the podcast provides for them. If you've ever had to come up with an elevator pitch, this is essentially that, but for your podcast.

The important thing is, it's about them, not you. The statement should be short enough to be communicated in 20 seconds or so, 30 at the absolute most.

For example:

*"This is Marmot Hour, the Podcast for Marmot enthusiasts and aficionados, I'm your host Jane Doe, and every week I share unbelievable Marmot Stories. Now, let's talk rodents."*

As we covered in the last section, you might do your own intro, or a different intro for every episode and lay your theme music alongside all or part of it. You might also have a fully

produced intro that is inserted into every episode. Either way, you want to make sure to include your podcast statement in each episode – new listeners need to know who you are and what they're in for. You can get away with a longer intro statement if you start your episodes with a unique hook – but even then, don't make it longer than 45 seconds on the outside.

The mental steps your listener should go through are: “Hey, I like that kind of music, or that statement/question has piqued my interest. Cool, this podcast is created for people like me!” – this is where they identify with your brand, and then: “Oh wow – they've got a great topic today!” Ideally, this will happen in less than a minute.

After you do your standard ‘welcome to the podcast,’ you can either continue a unique welcome, or move into your body content.

## **Your Outro**

For outros, you can use your theme music again – having the same music open and close the show can be a very elegant bookending, but if you want to choose something different, you're welcome to! Just make sure it has the same general feeling and genre as your intro.

And always make sure you have a CTA in your outro. Some common ones are to leave a rating and a review, to share and subscribe, to leave a comment or engage on a particular social media platform, or to consult a website for more resources or further connection.

## **Action Steps**

### ***If you're starting a new show:***

Then it's time to get branding.

Or get an expert to get branding for you.

Whether you are creating your AV branding assets in-house or are working with a production team, you'll have to make the final decisions about how things look, feel and sound. Your own opinions are important, but not as important as meeting your business goals, so feel free to consult with current clients, followers, team members and other interested parties and get their thoughts about your selections as well.

Don't stress too much about your AV brand. Of course, you want it to be good and compelling and reflect well on your business, and that is more important for some Blueprints than others, but no one is going to lose a leg if you pick weird music or a less-than flattering headshot and change it in a month or so. Don't let it hold up your whole show.

***If you already have a show:***

Take a look at your audio and visual brand elements. Do they create the right tone and feeling? Do you have templates for everything you create on a regular basis? Have you updated, or reviewed how they perform and look in the wild lately? Does your intro verbiage accurately describe the new ways you want to optimize? Review all of your podcast-related branding and if you want to make changes, start with the cover art and work your way through this section, step by step.

## Getting Great Sound

If you want to make your editor truly miserable, record your podcast episodes in a conference room.

A good editor can do wonders, but even the best can't work miracles.

And echoey audio takes a miracle to fix.

If you want professional-sounding audio, but don't want to or can't record in a professional studio, there are four factors you need to optimize in your home or office recording environment:

- Your mic and headphones
- Your recording habits
- Your recording software
- The room you're recording in

As podcasting gets more and more popular, the basic quality of the sound is more and more important. Sounding professional is table-stakes, and it's worth the time it takes to get it right.

Let's go, and start protecting your producer's blood pressure.

## Recording Technology

### Choosing a Mic

Your mic is going to make a big impact on your sound, and you should invest in the best one that is feasible for you, but *how you use* your mic is always going to trump how many dollars you spend on it.

Some solid brands are Shure, Blue, Audio Technica and Rode.

Most mid-range podcast mics come in two different types: USB and XLR.

A USB mic will plug directly into your computer and an XLR will, without getting too technical, need a converter to plug into that will then connect it to your computer via USB. XLR mics *technically* have better sound, but the difference is so minor that for the vast, vast majority of company podcasters it's not worth the extra hassle and expense. If you do buy an XLR mic, remember you will need to buy a converter, too, if you want to actually use it.

All things being equal, choose a *dynamic* mic, and not a condenser.

Dynamic mics are better at picking up your voice and not your neighbor's leaf blower (although there is only so much that can be done about a neighbor's leaf blower).

If you know you will always be recording in a beautifully-treated studio designed for acoustic recording, get a condenser, but otherwise, dynamic mics are better for less-than-perfect environments.

And none of this is more important than proper mic technique! A medium-quality mic used properly will produce better sound than the best mic money can buy that is used incorrectly.

The first thing you should do when you get your new mic is head over to YouTube and type in: "How to use [my new mic]." Enter the brand name and model specifically, and dollars to donuts you will find multiple videos of delightful gearheads explaining how to configure the settings and get the best sound out of the machine.

I'm not going to go into any more specifics about that because the recommendations for each mic are different and those gearheads are truly, down-to-their-bones passionate about them and will have the best advice.

In a pinch, you can record a podcast episode using a standard headset and mic combo – the kind you can get at any electronics store that says it's for video conferencing. It won't sound amazing, but it will be better than nothing, or your computer audio.

Under no circumstances should you ever, EVER record using webcam or computer microphones. If it came with your laptop, don't use it to record audio.

## **Headphones**

It is best to use headphones of some kind while you are recording audio for your podcast, if at all possible. You don't want to pick up any sounds from your speakers in your mic; the resultant noise is... bad. Very bad. And unfixable.

If you're recording in video for publication, and hate the look of headphones/earbuds, you can sometimes get away with a good quality mic, and a recording platform that has a "no headphones" setting.

If possible, headphones are your best bet. For recording purposes, it doesn't really matter what kind of headphones you use; they can be a big fancy over the ears set, or they can be earbuds. As long as the sound coming out of your computer is going directly into your ears and not into your recording room, you're golden.

## **Recording Software**

When you're recording solo, you can use a free tool like Audacity or GarageBand to get quite good-quality audio. They are programs designed to capture sound from microphone inputs and after getting used to the basic settings, which do take a couple of YouTube tutorials, they're easy to use.

The most important thing is to make sure you have the right mic selected, and that your 'levels' are good. Almost all audio capture software has a little bar that lights up from green to yellow to red. Make sure it stays mostly in the green, and never gets too far into yellow, and you're good to go. If you ever get told "you're coming in too hot," it's because your levels got into the yellow-red zone. (If you are either too loud or too quiet and you can't, for the life of you, find a reason with your mic, software or volume settings, you'll want to go into your computer's device manager, find "audio input" or the equivalent on your system, and change the volume there.)

When you're recording with others, you have plenty of options.

Riverside, Squadcast, Zencast, and many others (there are more coming out all the time!) are purpose-built podcast recording platforms.

What makes them great for podcasts is that they are dual-ended recorders. That means they capture your audio on your computer, and your guest's audio on their computer, and the files are combined after the recording. It makes for much better audio than something like Zoom, which I'll be getting to shortly. These platforms tend to be browser-based and you'll be given a "virtual studio" link you can share with guests – they can join you there, and many also have the ability to include a "producer" who can be on hand to help but won't get recorded. Free trials are common, so test a few out and pick one you like!

If at all possible, use a purpose-built recording platform for your episodes with guests. You'll have maximum flexibility with what you can download (individual tracks, combined tracks, audio only, video, etc.) and the overall sound is going to be of a much higher quality than you can get with a VOIP system (that's Voice Over IP) – digital conference-calling software, basically, where the speakers are all recorded in one place, rather than in each individual location.

Now, let's talk about Zoom. You can record using Zoom if that makes the difference between having a podcast and not having a podcast, or it is what you and your guests are most comfortable with and using anything else would make you or your guests cry.

Otherwise, use a purpose-built tool.

On Zoom, there is going to be some audio-quality loss; it was designed for video calls, not for pristine audio-capture and it just doesn't capture the whole spectrum of sound. You won't really sound exactly like yourself and there isn't a way to repair or improve what wasn't captured. If you are going to use Zoom, make sure that you have your room set to record each speaker on a separate track – that is going to give your team more wiggle room in editing! (You'll find a video with instructions for how to do this at [PodcastingforBusiness.com/BookResources](https://PodcastingforBusiness.com/BookResources).)

Do not record on your phone, GoogleMeet, GoToMeeting, or Microsoft Teams unless you have absolutely no other options.

Any recording platform will take a little practice to get comfortable with, but as an investment in the quality of your podcast, the time is very worthwhile.

So, those are the basics of getting a good mic and recording it using the proper software.

And you can follow every piece of advice with an awesome quality mic and premium podcast recording software and still sound like you're recording from your bathtub.

Sorry.

But your recording habits and environment matter too.

## Your Recording Habits

Good recording means good behavior while you're recording and making sure your recording space is as optimized as possible for capturing high-quality sound.

Behavior is all about how you set yourself up to create good audio – and how you advise and encourage your guests to do so.

There is a little bit of pre-recording 'hygiene' you'll want to do before you press play.

### Pre-Recording Checklist

- Make sure your chair does not squeak
- Turn off any fans, heating or AC that you can control
- Ensure pets, children and spouses are quiet
- Make sure your clothes, jewelry and hair do not rustle, or bump the mic
- Avoid bumping the mic
- Do not type while recording
- Do not rustle papers while recording
- Remember that if you can hear it, your mic probably can too
- When the delivery person inevitably rings your doorbell during a recording, pause, and pick up where you left off once you've collected your parcel
- Close windows *and* blinds
- Stay hydrated. Dehydration makes you mucousy. It's as gross as it sounds
- Drink lemon water! Lemon is great for clearing out your throat
- Always confirm your recording platform has the right mic selected
- Always test your sound to make sure

When you have a guest, you'll want to have them do as much of the same as is reasonable. No one expects you to ask a high-profile stranger to shut their blinds and take a shot of lemon juice, but it is absolutely acceptable to provide advice in advance about how to record, especially if they are not regular podcast guests, and to give feedback while you are on the call. Most people want to sound as good as possible and won't mind a little direction like, "Can you turn off the

fan? We're picking it up on the recording," or "You're a little quiet, can you turn up the volume on your mic?"

You're the boss of your podcast, and you get to have a say in the quality of your guest's audio. If they are not in an appropriate recording environment, you can ask to reschedule.

You're not really going to be able to fix their room if they aren't in a great one – but you can probably alter your own, so let's talk about how to optimize it.

## Your Recording Environment

Let's talk about sound waves.

Picture a pool table and the way a ball bounces around the various angles and corners. That ball represents sound, and the table is the room you're recording in. To get great audio, you need to keep the ball from bouncing as much as possible. If you place pillows in strategic areas on the pool table, the ball ceases to bounce!

It's the same with sound. When sound waves hit something soft or rough, like acoustic foam – or curtains, or a blanket, or a pillow – they cannot bounce like they would off a flat surface, which prevents those weird reverb-heavy and echoey recordings you can often get in an office.

This is the basis for acoustic treatment.

Here are some common problem areas:

- Hard flooring
- Untreated glass windows
- Large, empty walls
- Naked corners
- Noisy neighbors

Of course, if you look around most modern offices, and many tastefully decorated home environments, you might just see a lot of hard flooring, glass windows, large minimalist walls and naked corners. Whether you have noisy neighbors or not is pure luck of the draw.

So, how do you choose a great room?

The higher-quality acoustics you can start with, the better off you'll be in the long run. You won't just cut down on the work it takes to be recording-ready, you'll also save money on the supplies to do it. If you have the option of choosing your recording space, look for an isolated area away from people, machines and ambient noise. A surprising number of podcasters record in their closets. You can't do that if you have a video show, of course, but the sound quality is great. With your choice of recording room, you want to eliminate noise sources that you have no control over: printers, plumbing, birds, traffic, construction, that teenager next door with the

questionable taste in very. Loud. Music... If you can hear it, your microphone often will, too. (Although the newer mid- and higher-range ones are pretty good at getting mostly your voice!)

Next, consider the permanent aspects of the room, which include flooring and windows. The biggest problem area is flooring. If you have carpet, all is well. If you can put a rug on the floor to cover most of the hardwood or tile, that works, too. In a pinch, grab a blanket and spread it out while you're recording. If the windows are large, and especially if they're facing you, or right beside you, then curtains can keep sound from bouncing off them.

A very large room with a very high ceiling is also going to be a challenge. But sometimes you've got what you've got. A desktop podcast recording setup that includes a little foam cubby can be a good solution in this case.

For a little spot test, close any curtains or blinds, toss down a blanket or rug, and walk around the room you want to record in, clapping your hands loudly. If you hear a lot of echo, or a harsh ringing, your vocals probably won't sound very good if you record in there. If you hear a gentler, more pleasant reverb – great! Your voice won't be as loud as your clapping, so you will be able to capture a nice, natural sound.

If you're not wholly satisfied with how your room sounds right now, then you need some acoustic treatment – or to moderate your expectations about the finished result you can expect.

## **Acoustic Treatment**

Many rooms are square, which means the first problem area you need to address are naked tri-corners. Tri-corners are where three walls converge, including ceiling and floor. This is the single biggest, and most often overlooked issue. The solution is bass traps.

Bass traps are large, foam wedges that fit neatly in 90-degree room corners. Without getting too technical, bass traps do what the name implies: They absorb low bass frequencies, in addition to middle and high frequencies. Typically, these are glued to the walls using specialized spray-on glue, or picture hanging adhesive strips.

From there, you want to focus on bi-corners (where two walls meet) with priority on what is close to and level with your head. Often, room furnishings and decorations block the bottom tri- and bi-corners of a room. If this is the case, there's no need for a bass trap there. I like to use potted plants.

Next, big empty walls. Acoustic panels are used to break up large, empty spaces on walls. Here's a good rule of thumb for installation: The closer the wall is to you, the more coverage you want.

For example, if the wall is very close to your microphone, then you'll want to create a seamless barrier of panels, one right next to the other. On the other hand, for a wall that is a few yards behind you, you can create a pattern with gaps between panels.

For a less permanent alteration to the space, that can do double duty for both audio and video: Get the kind of muslin backdrop that photographers and videographers use. Muslin is often used for greenscreen footage, and when you have multiple layers of it, it offers quite good sound absorption if it's not directly against a wall. This is a fantastic addition if you also want a backdrop for videos or calls.

An extra layer of protection for your microphone is always a good idea. A reflection filter is a small shield that goes right behind your microphone, usually less than a foot tall and a few feet wide. It can be mounted on a stand or set on a desk, depending on your setup. The reflection filter will shield the back of the microphone while your body shields the front.

All of this can mean that you have to do a little setup and takedown when it's time to record, and that can be a bit of a hassle – sometimes enough to make you avoid recording. You'll have to decide if the hassle is worth the improved audio quality, or if you would rather add more permanent treatments to your space.

Of course, you can also decide that “What I have is good enough for the show I’m recording and the purposes I am using it for,” and just let the matter lie without worrying about it anymore.

## Studios

If you want top-tier sound, but not a home renovation project or to evict your offspring, think about renting studio space for your recordings. There are podcast studios in most major cities, and many smaller ones!

Not only will the sound be good, but many podcasters find that having a dedicated time when they must record (or lose their rental fee) is an excellent cure for procrastination.

Some studios just provide the space and let you rent by the hour or day. In this case you'll need to bring your own mic and/or camera and computer, and do your own audio-capture. Others provide more services and will have a producer available to help you. They will usually send you the audio to download after the fact.

## Action Steps

### *If you're starting a new show:*

First things first: If you don't already have a good mic, get one and learn how to use it by watching YouTube tutorials.

Next, choose your recording environment, optimize it by adding “fluff” like blankets, plants, laundry and curtains to any large flat surfaces and test it using the hand-clapping method I described here. If it sounds really echoey, you need more fluff. Consider acoustic panels, bass traps, a backdrop or desktop podcast setup.

Finally, do a recording test using your chosen recording platforms! You're going to need practice anyway, so grab a friend and chat for a few minutes, then listen to the sound you captured.

Your production team should be happy to listen to your test recording and make any additional recommendations.

***If you already have a show:***

Listen to a recent episode of your podcast. Then listen to an episode of a comparable podcast in your industry. Do you sound about the same, better or worse?

If you sound better, you're probably fine. If you are happy with the sound and how it reflects on you and your brand, no action to take, keep doing what you're doing.

If you sound about the same – are you happy with the sound? If you are, no action to take.

If you sound worse, or if you're not happy with the sound quality, then you need to audit your recording habits and environment and find the problem.

Start small and work your way up.

Are you using your mic correctly? Are there different settings you can try? Is the right one selected? (That's the problem more often than you would believe.)

If you're not using headphones, add them.

Next, how is your environment? Is it echoey, is there background noise, are the ceilings really high and are your corners naked? These are all potential causes for bad audio.

Your producer should be happy to help you troubleshoot this!

## Finding and Inviting Guests

For many people, the chance to sit down and have a chat with someone for a podcast episode is hands-down the best part of podcasting.

For others, it can be a little anxiety-inducing.

It is a key factor for many podcasts, so whether you relish the chance to talk to people, or find it draining, it's important to do it well.

'Well' means with preparation, sincerity and intention. Even if you don't consider yourself much of a talker, or you don't have a lot of experience with interviews, being prepared with research and a plan for what you want to get out of the conversation, sincerity in your desire to be a good host and make your guest welcome, and intention for what role the interview will have in your podcast and business means you'll be creating the highest possible quality content for your audience and your business.

## Who Should You Have As Your Guests?

Guests play different roles depending on your business goals and the Blueprint you're using for your podcast.

What follows are some general guidelines for selecting your guests for each of them.

### Relationship Building Podcasts

To build relationships, you need guests. A perfect guest for this kind of podcast depends on the type of relationships you need for your business, but will usually be someone who:

- Would make a good client
- Are a colleague you would like to know better
- Works in a complementary industry or have an audience that is similar to yours
- You would like to make referrals to (ie: they are great at something your clients also need)
- Is a thought leader in your space
- Is popular with your audience
- You think deserves more interest and attention

Always remember your business goals, and the types of new connections who will help you meet them.

### Audience Engagement Podcasts

Audience Engagement podcasts help you connect with your audience and build your knowing-liking-trusting. This is a podcast type where you're not always going to have a guest; sometimes your audience just needs **you**. If you do have guests, you will want someone who:

- Has information your audience needs that you can't provide
- Is in a complementary business likely to be valuable to your audience
- You have a collaborative relationship with (you help them, they help you!)

Consider how you can become the vehicle through which your audience gains access to outside knowledge!

## **Thought Leadership Podcasts**

Thought Leadership podcasts establish you as a source of new ideas. So, like with Audience Engagement podcasts, you don't always need guests! If you do have them they should be:

- At your professional level or higher
- Someone with whom you can have an equal conversation
- Someone who can provide new insight and nuance to your shared topic area.

Remember that any guest conversation you have on your Thought Leadership podcast should be a conversation, more than an interview.

## **Conversion Podcasts**

Conversion podcasts move people from one place in a funnel of some kind to another. They do not always need guests, but will often have them, especially when the conversion you're after is guest to client, or the expertise of other people is part of the value you're offering post-conversion – like extended conversations, exclusive content, bonus products or services, or even access to them. Your guests might be:

- Potential clients
- Experts in complementary businesses
- Well-known figures in your industry

Strategic guest selection, and great communication with them about the purpose of the podcast are important for these shows.

## **Content Podcasts**

Content podcasts are really and truly any podcast, but if content is your primary goal, you can speak to anyone you think will be interesting and help you create the materials you need in other areas of your business.

Now that you know who you should be talking to – you’ve got to find them.

## Identifying Your Guests

If you don’t already have a mental list of guests who suit your Blueprint and goals, figuring out how to find people who meet your criteria can be a little challenging. Here are a few strategies you can try:

- Shake your network tree! Ask your colleagues, friends, family, everyone who might be a good guest for your podcast
- Ask your audience who they would like to hear from
- Listen to other podcasts in your niche and mine their guest lists for people who would be a good fit for yours
- Check out your bookshelf. Authors are often enthusiastic podcast guests and a book that is valuable to your audience almost certainly has an author that will be
- Look at your social media feeds. Who is creating content you like and find valuable?
- Ask your guests if they can recommend someone else who they think should be on the show – and for an introduction
- For Audience Engagement shows, interviewing your clients can be an amazing strategy
- There are services that can find and book guests for you

As your show runs for longer and longer, you’ll also start to get pitched. Some of them will be low-quality and obviously sent to every podcaster whose email they could find – but some will be genuine, and can be the start of something great.

## How Do You Find Them?

Now that you have a general idea of who you want to talk to, and ideally a starter list of potential guests, it’s time to get in touch!

The first and most important thing you need to remember is that there is never any harm in asking. Dream big! Sure, you’ll run into the occasional famous person’s About page that says some variation of: “don’t bother even breathing near me if you don’t have at least 250 reviews on Apple.” I’m sure those people have their reasons, but you don’t need to trouble yourself with them.

The vast majority of people are delighted to receive an invitation to be on a podcast. Even a new, or small one, and even if they have to decline. It’s always nice to be asked, and it’s never rude or an imposition. If someone can’t or doesn’t want to, they can just say so.

So, when you’ve got a list of people to invite to your show, you need to determine the best way to reach out to them. The easiest people to contact will be anyone you’ve met before. If you already have a connection, even if it’s a brief meeting from the last conference you were both at,

then you can just go ahead and send an email, reminding them of when you met, and asking them if they'd like to join you for a conversation.

If you haven't met your ideal guest in person, try to find out if you have any mutual connections who could make an introduction for you. After your personal connections, that is the easiest way to get a guest to say yes.

If you can't get a personal introduction, never fear. The first place you should look is their website to see if they have any specific instructions on how they prefer to be reached out to. If those instructions exist: Follow them. There might be a specific contact form or email address they like to use for this kind of communication.

If there aren't podcast-invitation-specific instructions on their website, then you have some options:

- You can always use the standard contact form on someone's website – that's what they're there for! If you're sending your invitation to a contact form, keep in mind that the person you're contacting might not be the human answering email, so you might want to make note of that in your greeting
- Some people share an email address on their About pages as well, so that is worth a look
- Some people are most active on social media, and you can very easily open up a conversation in their direct messages
- If you are feeling a little brave, and someone's DMs are not open, then a message to them publicly on social media, through a comment or reply can start the conversation. "Hi! This is a great concept, I would love to have you on my podcast!" is a nice opener, and fairly low stakes. If they ignore it, they ignore it, no harm no foul, but if they respond, they'll usually tell you how to get in touch, or you can ask what the best way is
- Similarly, you can also leave a comment on a blog post they have created, or on an episode of their own podcast on their website if they have that option available

Finally, some people have gatekeepers – admins, assistants and managers – whose primary objective is to make the potential guest's life easier by making yours more difficult.

Kidding, of course.

Busy people delegate, and folks get into that gatekeeper position by making good decisions for the company and the expert. If you run into a gatekeeper, treat them the same way you would the guest themselves, and provide them with all the information they need to do their jobs.

## The Invitation

So, what goes into an invitation email or direct message? You want to be short and to the point. Explain:

- Who you are (and how they know you, or how you found them)
- What your show is and who listens to it
- Why you want them on your show
- What to do next

Here is an example of how that might sound:

*Hi, I'm Megan Dougherty, and I host The Company Show. I loved your recent article about how widgets can be used to enhance and extend the reach of your whatzits, and I think my audience would find it valuable as well. Would you be interested in joining me for a conversation about widgets and how you recommend people get the most out of them? If so, please let me know and I will send over a booking link!*

*Best,*

*Megan Dougherty*

Quick, simple and to the point. If you have a connection in common, or you've met before make sure to mention that at the outset. For example:

*I'm Megan Dougherty, and we met briefly at the last Widget convention in Winnipeg...*

Or

*I'm Megan Dougherty, host of The Company Show, where I talk to widget users about widget maintenance. I was chatting with my friend Luke Skywalker and he mentioned you were an expert in widget manufacturing – I'd love to invite you...*

Basically, you want to very quickly give your potential guest context for who you are, why they should connect with you and how to move forward.

If someone doesn't reply to your message within a few days, one follow-up is perfectly appropriate, but if they don't respond after that, it is probably best to assume they are either too busy, or not interested.

I think you'll find that many people are extremely interested in being interviewed, however!

## **Being a Good Host**

The steps you take after someone says yes are important ones. This is where you take on the mantle of 'host' and need to start acting like one. This means making things easy, clear and efficient.

## **Booking The Call**

Most of us are familiar with calendar software nowadays, and you should have a specific booking link for your podcast that collects more than just a name and email address.

There is information you will need from your guest in order to properly introduce and promote them, and you want to collect this material in as few steps with as little manual oversight as possible. The best way to do this is in your booking system.

Many calendars allow you to request additional information at the time of booking, like bio, links, social media handles, logos, headshots and any information your guest wants to share with your audience. If your calendar has this functionality, use it!

If it doesn't, but you can direct someone to a specific page after booking, you can point them to a form that collects the information you need. As much as possible, try to get that information before the call – it's a hassle afterwards.

Some systems let you easily set up confirmation emails and have 'add to calendar' functionality which you can customize, so that your guest gets all of the same information you have about when you're meeting.

## **Sending the Questions**

Sending questions or talking points in advance tends to bring up strong feelings in the podcast world. Some people love it, and it lets them feel more confident and speak more fluently. Others think it makes them stiff and formal, and it distracts from a 'real' conversation.

There isn't a right answer.

I personally like sending (and receiving!) the topics and questions in advance. It gives both me and the guest time to reflect on what we want to share in the conversation.

Try both and see how it feels, or go ahead and ask your guest what they prefer!

## **Prep Calls**

In some cases, you will want to have a prep call. It can be useful to have a pre-conversation to make sure that you and your guest are on the same page, to hash out topics that will be the best for all involved, and to make sure everyone's technology is working as planned. This is an optional step, but for some podcasts, especially Relationship Building and Thought Leadership ones, it can give you a chance to get to know each other and really clarify what you want to talk about. Also, if you want to verify the guest's recording setup, and they haven't been on other podcasts you can listen to, a prep call is a great way to verify the quality.

## **After the Conversation**

Hosting doesn't stop when you end the recording. Someone just gave their time and knowledge to help you, your audience and your business.

Send a thank-you note.

It's also a good idea to connect with them on social media, if you haven't already. This will make engaging with their content and tagging them when the episode is live much easier.

And critically – *absolutely critically* – tell them when the episode is live!

One of my biggest pet peeves as a podcast guest is not getting any kind of notification when the episode is live. I want to hear it! I might even want to tell people about it!

Notify your guest, send them sharing materials they can use to promote it if it's a fit (more on that below) and thank them again.

There might be extra steps here if you have a Relationship Building podcast, like booking a next call to discuss the next collaboration or making a request of some kind.

## **Will My Guest Share Their Episode?**

Since we're talking about following up with your guest, we should address an elephant in the room.

Above almost everything else, one of the biggest complaints I hear from podcasters is that their guests don't share the episode they appear in.

I get it. You put a lot of time and effort into hosting an interesting and well-researched interview, turning that into a well-produced episode, promoting your show as a whole and providing interesting and attractive swipe materials for them to use. (If you're not doing that, there's your first problem.)

So why isn't anyone sharing?

There are a lot of reasons; some you can control, and some you can't.

You CAN make sure you provide lots of good quality swipe content, tag them in posts, do really good post-production so they sound like a million bucks and send a personal note on release day.

But you can't control what someone decides is interesting and valuable for their own audience.

"Wait just one second!" you might be thinking. "My content is interesting and fresh! I'm not a boring, boilerplate interviewer who just runs down the same list of questions they've been asked a dozen times. My content is excellent and them sharing it would be a win-win!"

It might be. But it doesn't matter.

Here's the thing. An expert is an expert for a reason. They TALK about their area of expertise. A lot. They might blog, or have a newsletter, or books, or their own podcast, or a YouTube channel, or a webinar series or literally any one of dozens of ways they communicate their message to their own audience.

So why would they share an interview that talks about the same things they've been publicly saying for years already, to an audience that has heard it dozens of times, probably in formats or with an angle that are more aligned with their interests?

What's new and interesting to *your* audience could well be old news to *theirs*, so it might make no sense for them to share it, and it makes no sense to be upset about it. You got a great conversation with someone you can build a relationship with that you can deliver to the audience you are growing and nurturing.

That's amazing. And unless your podcast is popular enough that you're regularly beating back celebrities desperate to be interviewed by you, it is enough of a give on the guest's part.

They might share – if it's good quality and a good fit, or they're as interested in building a relationship with you as you are with them. That's lovely.

It's a bonus.

*Hoping guests will share isn't a marketing strategy.* Having guests can be valuable to your podcast in so many ways, but counting on them to help you grow the show isn't something you can rely on. It will happen sometimes, but not always, and it pales in comparison to all the other kinds of value you'll get from the episode.

Do your research and hone your interview technique to make the most compelling audio possible. Produce to the highest level you can. Make it as easy as possible for people to share, by tagging them, by giving them swipe materials and by letting them know when their episode is live.

But after that, let it go.

## Action Steps

### *If you're starting a new show:*

Having a good (long) list of potential guests is a great way to start a new podcast.

- Create a list of potential guests who will help you meet your goals

- Determine how you're going to approach them (do you know them, can you get an introduction, do they have instructions you can follow, a contact form or social media outreach)
- Write your invitation emails (or have a team member do it!)
- Make sure your guest booking workflow is working
- Send the invitations

Of course, if you're creating a solo show, no action has to be taken!

***If you already have a show (that has guests):***

Take a good hard look at your guest booking workflow. Do you:

- Always have all of the guest's details in advance of recording?
- Feel knowledgeable and prepared for conversation you have?
- Know your guest is going to show up ready to record in a quiet environment with decent equipment?
- Know that your guest will be notified when the episode is live?
- Know what kind of relationship you want with your guest in the future?
- Have a specific plan for the next follow-up after sharing their episode assets and release notice with them?

If you said yes to every question, woohoo! Go get yourself a beverage and relax for half an hour.

If not, improve that process.

# Podcasting Workflow

All right, I know this is what you've been waiting for.

Are you ready? Excited? Practically frothing at the mouth?

It's time to talk about workflows and the dozens of individual action items that need to happen correctly and in the right order for every podcast episode.

Delicious.

If you already have one, then you know that a podcast has a lot of moving parts, starting with research and wrangling guests, to the quality assurance listen and episode promotion, and everything in between. If you're getting ready to start your first show, prepare yourself.

Keeping track of all of those moving parts can be a challenge at the best of times. Process optimization and automation make it a lot easier, but those are big tasks that often get sent to the backburner when there is so much going on.

A weekly, or even bi-weekly podcast production schedule can be intense, keeping to an editorial schedule can be a lot of pressure, and even with the best of intentions you can find yourself scrambling at the last minute. But the show must go on, and you must release when you said you were going to.

When you invest the energy in optimizing and then automating your internal processes for your show, then your life and the life of everyone involved in the project gets a lot easier.

So let's get going!

## Steps In Your Workflow

This will vary a little bit from company to company, but the general order of work we can assume is:

1. Book the guest (optional)
2. Record the interview
3. Edit and produce the audio
4. Create the show notes and other assets
5. Schedule and release the episode
6. Promote the episode
7. Repurpose the episode

There can be additional steps in this process, like content planning or SEO research, a pre-call with a guest, writing a script or researching the guest or topic, and so on. If you have additional steps like this, add them to your own list.

Each high-level task (or sometimes 2 or 3 that happen consecutively) is a Bucket. These can contain different numbers of subtasks, but the most important thing about a bucket is that one person carries it. Each high-level category of podcast activity should have someone who is in charge of it.

So let's look into a bucket: **Editing and producing the audio.**

This bucket could involve:

- the host uploading the raw audio to your file storage system
- an assistant sending a link to your producer
- the producer uploading finished audio to the storage system and letting the assistant know it's ready
- the host reviewing for quality control

Ultimately, in this case the assistant is in charge of the bucket and making sure the high-level task "Edit and produce the audio" is getting done on time. The process could look totally different at another company, however, and someone else could be responsible.

The same bucket elsewhere might be:

- the host listening back to the episode for key points and noting the edits they want
- an assistant submitting the audio and notes to a third-party producer
- reviewing edited audio and completed show notes
- waiting to be notified the episode is scheduled in the podcast host

Because it can vary so much from company to company, it's important to identify *your* process get the individual steps for each category of task written down somewhere.

You want to be thinking in absolutely *excruciating* detail.

Trust me, it's worth it.

And you can probably start to see why getting things down on paper or in a project management system is a good idea. Depending on the complexity of your show and the number of humans you have working on it, things can get a little unwieldy, and it's easy to make mistakes.

When it's all clearly laid out, it's also much easier to see where you can add efficiencies and automations to make things faster and simpler. It's also going to save you a whole bunch of time when you're writing your standard operating procedures. Half the job will be done already!

There are a few places that are almost always low-hanging fruit for improving a podcast workflow: Anytime things change hands from one person to another, tasks that are similar each time they're done, and buckets of tasks that can be delegated entirely.

We have some specific ways we like to do that, and I'm going to share them with you now, but you'll get the most out of it if you first make sure your process is written out. Really written out. Extremely, profoundly and staggeringly written out.

If a human or a machine does anything at any point, it should be in your starting document. In order, preferably. No detail is too tiny.

Now, because of the magic of the written word, you can put down the book and do that now or come back and re-read this bit again later.

[Optional pause for list-making.]

Now that you've got it or are firmly committed to making a team member do it, I'm going to share the methods we've developed over several thousand podcast episodes to make weekly or bi-weekly production run smoothly within your team.

(If you're working with a third-party service provider already, then you won't need all of this. They will have systems in place to do all of this on the back end, and if your episodes are released on time every time, and you always know what your next action is, they're doing a fine job. If you don't currently have one, you should ask for or create your own episode guide, however.)

Here's what will be involved:

- An episode guide
- A project management system
- Templates
- Standard operating procedures (SOPs)
- Automation

Let's look at each of them in detail.

## Your Podcast Episode Guide

Your episode guide is the single source of truth as it relates to your podcast.

It's the central brain where every answer to every podcast-related question should live.

If anyone ever has a question about the podcast, what's happened, what's next, what you've talked about, what you will talk about, and is there a shortlink for episode 47?

It's in the episode guide.

We strongly recommend Google Sheets for this, because it can be integrated with multiple other systems very easily, and allows you to organize different types of information on different pages within it, like stats and guest information. A database system like Notion or Airtable could work in very much the same way!

Some of the pages you might want to have include:

- **General Show Information and Links:** This is just your basic info – your show name and tagline, links to your pages on different platforms like Apple and Spotify, a link to your music assets, your podcast host, and who to contact in what kind of podcast-related emergency! If you have any hard or standing deadlines, or policies those should be noted as well.
- **Episodes:** This should have at a minimum the title, guest name, release date, embed code, any shortlink you're using, your full URL and a link to finished assets. You might also want to include things like keywords, guest social media information, calls to action, and/or YouTube links. Anything you might want to reference later should be included.
- **Stats:** This will include tracking information for the metrics you're optimizing the podcast for. If you want a sample, you can consult the demo copy that includes tracking infrastructure for each metric described in the book. Get it at: [PodcastingforBusiness.com/BookResources](https://PodcastingforBusiness.com/BookResources).

Those are the absolute basics I would expect to see in any episode guide, but you can add whatever else you want and is useful to you. Some people like to use a page for planning future episodes, tracking guest invitations and follow up, and even the different promotional activities they're using to drive traffic to the show and how they're performing.

Some people prefer to use database systems instead of spreadsheets, and if that's your speed – awesome! The only thing you need to be sure of with your episode guide is that it contains all of the information people might want about your podcast episodes in the future in one place, and that everyone knows where to find it and how to use it.

Why do you want this for your podcast workflow? Because at no point, ever, should a member of your team have to ask **you** something like “where is the link to last week's episode?”

And you shouldn't have to post a Slack message asking for the upcoming guest name – it should all be in a single place that everyone can access, and most importantly, that *everyone knows to consult first*.

Having it in a Google Sheet or a database system also means that you can generally automate some of the communication steps in your exhaustive list. You can set automations to send notifications when deadlines are reached, when new content is added etc. This can represent a huge time-savings, **and** there is a “single point of truth.” So if you think you've already done an episode with an elephant training expert, and you don't need another one – you can check!

## Project Management for Your Podcast

A project management system is technically optional, and if your team is already comfortable with something like Monday, Trello, Teamwork, Notion, Asana or another system, there's no reason not to have your podcast plugged into it.

The key thing is to make sure that all of the steps in your workflow are represented in your project management system, the most important being who is in charge of what step.

This is especially true when you're working with a third-party service provider who almost certainly has their own system or organizing things on their end. You want to be fully aware of when your systems are going to bump up against theirs, and who is in charge of making sure the necessary communication happens.

In a perfect world, your project management software is also going to integrate neatly with other things like your email, your social media accounts, your podcast host and your communication channel like Slack, Microsoft Teams, etc.

If it doesn't integrate natively: That's why we have Zapier, which I'll be getting to shortly.

## Podcast Asset Templates

Templates are your best friend. They are ready-to-customize versions of the different assets you need to create for each episode.

You can have templates for:

- Episode scripts
- Invitations to be a guest
- Guest swipes or sharing materials
- Emails to your list
- Blog posts
- Graphics
- Audiograms/reels

Anything that you make more than once should have a template that can be altered to suit each episode. For graphics and videos you can create "shell" versions which contain the basic format and can be copied or duplicated every time you want to make a new version of them. Many designers can create templates for you in programs like Canva or Photoshop that you can then modify yourself, or assign to a team member to handle, if you don't have in-house graphic support.

For the text-based templates, it's good practice to have a file or folder with all of your templates in one place, so you know where to find whatever it is you need to create. Then you just make a copy, rename it and start editing. Easy-peasy.

If you're not currently using templates, make a list of everything you make for each episode, and see if you have a template for it – if not, add it to your list!

## Standard Operating Procedures for Your Podcast

Now, let's talk about Standard Operating Procedures, or SOPs. These are to-do lists with instructions for what needs to happen when and ideally, how.

If a person has to do a thing, you should have an SOP for it, so that if the human responsible ever goes away, or wants to do something wild like take a vacation, any other human can jump in and complete the task perfectly by following the instructions.

When you wrote out that excruciatingly massive list of podcast-related tasks, you wrote the first draft of your SOPs. Now, we just need to flesh them out, and include updating the episode guide and project management system!

SOPs should include:

- The steps to take, in the order they need to be done
- Links to any software, platforms or file storage areas that are going to be used
- Credentials for any systems that need to be logged into (unless you have an existing password sharing software, in which case, indicate the password is saved there and under what name)
- Screenshots or videos (to go along with, not replace, text) of any complex tasks
- Information about how you want files to be named, stored and saved
- Instructions for what and who needs to be updated at all stages, and how they should be contacted
- A clear description of what “finished perfectly” looks like

Your first version of your SOPs will be insufficient. Mine were.

Write, or have them written to the best of your ability, then give them to a team member completely uninvolved in the process and try to get them to break it. They probably will, then you can improve it and eventually you'll have a document that anyone can follow to get the job done correctly.

This is a big task, and one that often gets put on the back burner. If everyone on your team is hardworking and reliable, it's easy to say you'll 'get to it later'. But later becomes never and then when something DOES happen (which it will), you'll find yourself in a very unpleasant situation of not knowing how to do what your colleagues or team members do, or them not knowing what YOU do, and scrambling to keep the train on the rails.

Take it process by process and test the procedures as you go. It can be great to have team members that aren't normally involved in the podcast run through the SOPs a couple of times; a little redundancy in key marketing operations can go a long way to making sure you're consistent, and consistency is the most important thing in podcasting.

## Automation

Now that you have a giant list of things to do, let's stop doing some of them.

I like to figure out automations after creating the SOPs so that you have clarity on the entire process. After you add an automation, update the SOPs with the new process and the tool being used to perform the function. If anything ever goes wrong, this can be very helpful for troubleshooting!

Some software and systems will have built in integrations with each other that can trigger an action after another action is completed. If there isn't one, then a third-party tool like Zapier can often do the job.

If you're not familiar with it already, Zapier is basically a little internet robot that makes different software programs talk to each other. It's slightly fiddly, but really cool.

Depending on your own tech and setup the possibilities will be different from show to show.

Some examples might be:

- When raw audio is uploaded to a certain folder, an email is sent to the next person in the chain
- When a blog post is published, a tweet is automatically sent
- When a new calendar booking is made, a new entry in the episode guide is created

Zapier and all of its possibilities can make you a little drunk on tech-based excitement. Yes, I'm talking from experience. So, the best way to decide what to automate is to look at your SOP and see if there is an integration or automation that can combine two steps that are next to each other.

First check the platforms involved (for example your recording software and your email) to see if they have any built-in automations or integrations that you can use. If not, open up Zapier or an equivalent software, and type in the software/platform names to see if it can make them talk to each other.

For example, if one of my workflow steps is "upload raw audio to Google Drive" and the next one is "send a Slack message to the editor" I can search Zapier for Google Drive and Slack, and see if Zapier has a function I can use to automate that step. (It does.)

Do this for as many steps as you can to minimize the time you and your team have to spend on alerting people and moving things from one place to another.

If you're working with an outside producer, the same principle applies to anything that is on your company's desk – your guest communication, recordings, team communications, asset creation (if it isn't included) and promotional activities.

There are plenty of other automation tools out there as well, so if there's one you already like, go for it!

## **Action Steps**

### ***If you're starting a new show:***

You're in a fantastic position to design your podcast project management from the ground up. Create an episode guide, start exploring the tech you're going to be using (your podcast host, recording software, calendar) and connect and automate what can be connected and automated. As you start getting into production, document every step of the process and start formalizing your SOPs.

### ***If you already have a show:***

If you have a perfectly well-oiled podcasting machine, that runs smoothly without your direct involvement or oversight (except for the talking), you're off the hook! Otherwise, you might be able to optimize. Start with creating your big list of tasks, organized into buckets so you can begin to formalize the steps in your process, and look for opportunities to automate steps.

## Show Notes

When people spend a lot of time doing a thing, they end up having strong opinions about all the different elements **of** that thing. Think about a chef having Capital-F Feelings about shallots vs. spring onions, or a writer ready to die on the hill of the Oxford comma.

Podcast People have many such passions, and one of them is show notes. There are a wide range of show notes styles, and every now and then you find a podcaster who is really 'ride or die' about their particular format. But there really aren't any bad show notes styles – just styles that are better or worse for certain goals.

Show notes are the written text that goes with a podcast episode. You'll find them on websites, and in podcast players. They'll usually contain links to resources mentioned in the episode.

They might also contain quotations and timestamps, interesting teasers about the content, a transcription of the audio or expanded thoughts on the topic being discussed.

There are 3 main types of show notes: Minimal, Bullet and Blog-Style, with plenty of variations on each.

You'll find an example of each of these styles at [PodcastingforBusiness.com/BookResources](https://PodcastingforBusiness.com/BookResources) so you can see them and hear the episode they are connected with.

### Minimal Show Notes

Minimal show notes will usually have a short description of the content of the show, links to any resources mentioned and information about the guest being interviewed, if there was one.

If they're around or under 200 words, they're minimal show notes.

Sometimes these show notes are a single sentence about an episode that shares the key idea being discussed, and sometimes they're a few sentences about the guest and different topics.

These show notes are the quickest to put together, and you'll often see them where a show is being produced by a solopreneur doing their production in-house, or in shows using the Relationship Building Blueprint.

In the first case, there are only so many hours in a day, and a host needs to prioritize relationship building and promotion with their podcast-dedicated hours. In the second, if you are mainly seeing value from the relationships you're creating and aren't trying to optimize for anything content-related, then saving your budget and energy for more communication with your guest can be a sensible choice. (Make sure you link to their sites and offers, however!)

There is also a case to be made for using this style in a Conversion Podcast. Have minimal show notes on the public version of your show and put more extensive resources, transcripts and instructions behind an email or payment gate. That can be a good enough reason for someone to opt-in. That may come across as a little mercenary, though, so proceed with caution.

If you are running a Thought Leadership, Audience Engagement or Content show, this style of notes won't likely be appropriate.

## **Bullet Show Notes**

Bullet Show notes are probably the most common, and they are designed to get people to listen to the episode.

They usually start with one or two paragraphs of description, followed by a list of key ideas, questions, highlights or quotations (or combinations of all of these!) from the episode in a bulleted list, followed by links to resources and to the guest's website and social media accounts. The goal of each bullet is to give a compelling reason to listen and encourage people to engage with the content.

For example, if we had a bullet point that said "Then Guest X mentioned a strategy for podcast promotion that absolutely knocked my socks off. I can't wait to try it. It's going to be a GAME CHANGER" – odds are that you'll want to listen to the show and find out what that strategy is.

This style can work pretty well for all of the Blueprints and strikes a good balance between efficiency in production and having written content that is worth reading.

## **Blog-Style Show Notes**

Finally, blog-style show notes. This is when you'll have either a near transcription of the episode, divided into sections with headers for easy reading, or paragraphs of content about the show and what it contains. What makes blog-style notes blog-style, is that someone could get essentially the same value out of reading it as they could from listening to the episode.

You can use a script if you write them in advance, or a transcript of the recording that's been edited to read well visually. Some people write whole blog posts based on the episode that are standalone pieces of content.

Some people take it a step further and write a totally unique blog post expanding on one or more ideas from the episode; a totally unique piece of content that complements the episode.

Blog-style show notes are far and away the best for enhancing your SEO – you can optimize for keywords, link to other content and drive traffic to your opt-ins.

Any Blueprint style can use blog-style notes, but Audience Engagement and Content shows should consider them the most seriously. Your audience is composed of people who have a variety of learning styles and who prefer to consume content in different ways. Shoehorning them into audio-only might not serve your *business* goals. Content shows are meant to create content, so having it in different formats will add value.

Ultimately, if you don't really care how someone gets the information, then making it thoroughly available in as many formats as possible will maximize your results from it.

## Considerations

### AI Show Notes

At the time of this writing, the podcasting industry is obsessed with AI-generated show notes and other written content, and some of the providers are doing a decent job of it, as long as you have a real human diligently reviewing and correcting the content.

The problem with AI notes and assets is that they can be pretty good. So good that the many errors they do make are hard to identify, and the kinds of errors they make can be embarrassing, like misspelled names or companies, and misattributed quotations.

I have found it takes about the same amount of time, or more, to verify that AI notes are accurate as it does just to write them from scratch, although they can provide a usable first draft, if you find editing easier than starting with nothing.

### Destinations

You might want different versions of your show notes for different destinations. A blog-style is going to be amazing on your website and for SEO but might be overkill when someone is scrolling Spotify. (There is also a 4000 character limit on some of the podcast hosts and players – they don't display, or even let you upload more than that.)

If you are doing extensive show notes, then writing a short summary or description with a link to your full blog post for uploading to the host is a good way to get the best of both worlds.

### Timestamps

Often you'll see a list of topics or keywords with timestamps, or have timestamps associated with different bullets from an episode. The idea here is to let people quickly navigate to the part of the content that is the most useful for them.

Some people love them, and some people hate them, and when you're deciding whether to include them or not, remember that static (not-clickable) timestamps cannot take into account dynamic ads. If I put in my notes that I share the meaning of life at minute 37, but I have pre-rolls and midrolls that come before it of varying lengths (that change every week!), that

timestamp will not be accurate a lot of the time unless I verify and update it every time I change my ads.

That won't make anyone happy.

It's also really hard to validate if people actually use them or not. Getting feedback from your audience about if and when they use show notes can help you decide whether or not you should go to the trouble of adding timestamps.

Some alternatives are to create a video version of your show (audiogram style is fine!) and add "chapters" that can be identified in the player itself and directly linked to. This lets people find and access content easily, and the chapter headings will always be correct.

## **Transcripts**

Transcripts can be a valuable addition to your podcast: they make it accessible to people who do not or cannot listen to content, and some people just prefer reading! They also increase your potential for SEO and make it easier to search your own content for research and repurposing.

AI transcripts are getting better and better, so the cost of creating them is going down. You can even ask an AI to correct the spelling and grammar in an automatically generated transcript! It will still need a human to read and review, but it is a major time-saver.

Avoid publishing an unedited transcript if you can. A little polish makes a big difference in terms of the reader experience and will reflect better on your brand.

## **Action Steps**

### ***If you're starting a new show:***

The most important question you need to ask yourself is what notes style will most effectively and efficiently help you reach your business goals. If you know that you're going to be focused almost entirely on the relationship-building aspects of podcasting, you might only need minimal notes. If you also know that you need content for social media, SEO and other projects, and want to make sure your podcast content is available to people who consume content in different ways, you will want bullets or blog style.

Speaking frankly, you want the easiest and cheapest option that will get the job done well. Most of the time this will be some kind of bullet notes. I use blog-style for my own podcast: it's been great for our SEO, my guests find it impressive, and I love being able to give our audience the same experience reading as listening. Your priorities for your show and your notes will probably be different. Remember the Blueprints question formula:

Will [Type of Notes] help me achieve [Blueprint]?

***If you have an existing show:***

Is your current notes style aligned with your Blueprint?

If they are, how are they working for you?

It's good practice to review all of your podcast assets, including your notes, once or twice a year to make sure that you're investing your time and money well. It's easy to decide to invest in expansive show notes so that you can optimize your site for SEO and repurpose your episodes up the wazoo, only to find those projects got sidelined when things got busy.

Make sure the notes you're creating provide value to your business commensurate with the expense.

## Hiring Help

Unless you're overburdened with both free time and a desire to learn a variety of new, highly specific and not particularly transferable skills, or have a team member with the time, interest and aptitude, starting a podcast for your company usually means hiring a third-party service provider.

You've got a lot of options for what that relationship can look like.

There are solo providers like editors and promoters, podcast coaches and consultants, full-service production agencies, training companies, niche-specific agencies and recording studios with in-house production, all with their own spectrums of price, quality and capacity.

And as you probably know, hiring a third-party provider can be such a *thing*. When hiring for a podcast, it's also fairly high-risk. Your show needs to reflect well on your company and help you achieve important goals, so the provider you choose to work with needs to be reliable and produce high-quality work.

When you work with a great one, then creating your podcast is going to be an extremely pleasant part of your workflow you'll get to focus on creating interesting and valuable content and won't have to do much else, while the benefits to your business stack up. But if you end up with a less than satisfactory one, it can vary from a lackluster experience with middling results all the way to an expensive, time-sucking nightmare.

### ***Action Steps for New and Existing Shows***

When you're ready to take the plunge into third-party podcast service providers – or less happily, if you took the plunge, sank and need to try again – then you should plan to talk to at least two or three different providers. The types of services and prices for production can vary widely.

If you have friends or colleagues who podcast, then asking for recommendations is a fantastic way to get a starter list of companies to speak with, and if you don't know anyone, then you can join literally any podcast group on Facebook, post that you're looking for an editor and be prepared to receive dozens and dozens of messages with people wanting to sell you their services.

You will almost certainly find a decent fit within that horde of eager humans.

Once you've got your discovery calls booked, here's what you should ask:

*(Note: I'm including my company, One Stone Creative's, answers to these questions here. You know. For science. They'll be in italics.)*

## **What does a successful podcast look like for your company?**

As a producer, this is one of my favorite questions to be asked, because it means that someone is thinking seriously about how to evaluate the podcast as a marketing channel. Success can mean all sorts of things, from particular download numbers to on-time releases, and the length of time a podcast lasts, to much more nebulous things like getting invited to speak at more conferences or shortening your sales cycle.

What they say isn't as important as the fact that they have an answer to this question. The answer can be "it depends" – but they need to be able to tell you what it depends on and how the determination of what successful means for YOUR podcast is going to be made. What you don't want to hear is something like "downloads" or "there's no way to evaluate success" or "whatever you want!" That's not really helpful for a business show.

If their vision of success matches your vision of success, they pass!

*One Stone Creative Answer: A successful podcast is one that is regularly making measurable progress towards one or more business goals. Identifying those goals and designing a show optimized to achieve them is how we begin all production relationships, and we track results monthly. Success depends on how well we achieve the goals that are important for your business.*

## **Do you require a contract? What are your terms?**

Any provider is going to have a contract or services agreement that you need to sign in order to do business together – that's just practical. A lot of what goes into those contracts is boilerplate: you own your content, we do A, B and C tasks for each episode, here is how we handle liability and emergencies, when does audio need to be submitted, what are the feedback processes, etc.

One of the things you should take a close look at is the length of the term of service.

There are providers who work month-to-month and allow a variable number of episodes, those that work on a per-episode basis, those with specific packages for a certain number of episodes and deliverables, and those that require commitments of up to a year. There are still others that let you cancel at any time, or with a certain amount of notice. Make sure you end up working with a company who offers you the level of flexibility or stability that works best for your firm.

*One Stone Creative Answer: Our services agreement covers who owns what copyrights to the work (all IP belongs to our clients!), details funding and payment terms, and has clauses for what happens in case of major emergencies like fire, flood and zombies. It also goes into where content information will be stored and who will have access to it, and how that information will be handled at the end of the service. We also detail client and producer responsibilities, like turnaround time and deadlines, and list in detail exactly what deliverables go along with each episode.*

*For ongoing production, the agreement is in place for 30 days, and renews monthly unless cancelled, which can be done at any time with 30 days' notice, so that we can accurately plan each month's production work. Our reasoning is that if it's not a fit, it's not a fit, and everyone will be happier moving on in that case!*

## **Who owns the life of an episode?**

There are a lot of moving parts in every podcast episode: finding and inviting guests, preparing for the call, recording, audio editing, asset creation, scheduling and promotion, etc., so it is extremely important to get clear on who owns (i.e. is in charge of) the high-level process. Who is going to make sure everything is done at the right time, and in the right way? This is basically like asking whose desk is the project management for the podcast on.

Different companies are going to take responsibility for different elements, and some are more proactive about things like making sure you get your audio recorded on time, getting reviews and feedback organized, and scheduling episodes than others, so you want to make sure you've got clarity on exactly what you can expect in terms of who is going to be "owning" the podcast.

*One Stone Creative Answer: We do! Outside of recording the content and arranging guest interviews (which we can help with) we project manage the entire podcast, from receiving raw audio, to the content being scheduled on all platforms, including notifying the guest, if there is one, that their episode is live.*

## **What are the handover points in the process and where/how is information and content shared?**

There are going to be points where you need to get content and audio to your producer, and they need to get information and content back to you. What are the points in the workflow for each episode where that happens, and what is the method it happens by? Do they have a dashboard or portal they need you to use to send them raw audio? Do they upload finished content to your Dropbox? Is email the best and fastest way to submit your feedback on an episode, or is there a shared project management system where you can tag someone into a conversation?

There are no right or wrong answers here. But you need to make sure that you're going to be able to integrate your workflows effectively, and sometimes when you get into the nitty-gritty you find a dealbreaker. It's good to fully explore in advance.

*One Stone Creative Answer: At the time of this writing, our key handover points are when we receive raw audio from our clients, and that audio can be uploaded to our shared Google Drive via direct upload with an accompanying email, or through a form we provide.*

*The next one is when we submit finished content back to the client for review. We upload content to the shared workspace and send an email that it is ready.*

*We send a final email when the episode has been fully scheduled, and populate a stats tracking document monthly, which is reviewed during monthly or quarterly strategy calls.*

## **Is there any kind of coaching/feedback strategic help provided?**

If you want to improve your skills as a podcast host or need support around leveraging the show in different areas of your business, then you probably want a provider that offers some kind of coaching, feedback and/or strategic consulting. This isn't needed for every show, but if it's something you're interested in, you will want to know in advance!

Ask about what type of feedback is provided. You might hear answers like: "we provide detailed feedback on sound capture and your recording setup." Which is great if that is your need, but if what you're looking for is interviewing and performance critiques, you'll want to work with someone else.

Similarly, you may want to work with someone who can keep an eye on your stats and progress towards podcast-adjacent goals, and you can learn through a discovery call if a provider is more focused on downloads and social shares, or more holistic metrics.

*One Stone Creative Answer: We offer content feedback for each episode (if desired!) on whatever is the current area of focus for improvement within a show, like welcomes, closings or transitions, interviewing style and general performance, as well as sound and recording. We also track all monthly stats and have monthly or quarterly strategy calls to evaluate progress and make plans.*

## **What is your turnaround from raw audio to finished episode?**

This can vary wildly from company to company. Some editors and agencies can turn an episode around in a few days or even hours. Others take longer, up to a week or more. There isn't a right or wrong amount of time, but you can usually expect that the more assets provided, like show notes and sharing materials, and the more complex the editing, the longer it will take. The most important consideration here isn't finding the fastest turnaround, it's establishing that you can make YOUR workflow match THEIR workflow. If the answer to "what is your turnaround time?" isn't clear, or can't be easily explained to you, I would consider that a red flag. When thinking about the turnaround time, one thing to consider is how topical your content is. If you want a daily news commentary show, you'll need a hyper-fast turnaround time. If you're doing interviews that are generally evergreen, or can be produced well in advance of release, then it's not as critical.

*One Stone Creative Answer: We work on a 7-day production schedule for podcasts that require notes, sharing assets and scheduling. If it is an audio-only project, it can be closer to 3 days.*

## **Is your company utilizing AI? If so, how?**

Whatever kind of producer or production company you end up working with, they will probably be integrating AI one way or another. There are dozens of AI-powered services (at least!) to write show notes, clip videos, enhance audio and even develop scripts and episode titles. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it's a very good idea to understand exactly what the company you work with is using AI for, and what kind of quality assurance mechanisms they have in place, so that you don't wind up with misspelled guest names, choppy, degraded audio or generic social media posts.

Ask what tools they're using at what point in the process, and exactly how humans are reviewing the work the AI tools produce before the content comes back to you or goes live to the rest of the world.

*One Stone Creative Answer: We have experimented with a lot of different AI programs, and test new ones as they come out. We have at various times used a writing-assistance tool to develop the first draft of show notes and social media shares, which were then reviewed and edited (heavily) for accuracy and tone. Similarly, if there is a wide variance in quality between the host and guest's audio, we use an audio-improvement AI to slightly balance out the sound. At the time of this writing, we are phasing out AI-assistance for show notes and written assets. It's just not as good as what a human can do.*

## **What assets do you provide?**

Common assets that go along with podcasts are show notes and descriptions, different kinds of social media shares (text and graphics, audiograms and shortform videos like reels or shorts), emails, video versions of the show, sharing materials for your guests and even things like opt-in content and blog posts. Admin tasks like guest research, scheduling episodes on podcast hosts and blogs, and scheduling social media posts and announcement emails can also be included.

Depending on how much support you need with the show, and how much bandwidth and skill there is on your own team, you might need more or less from a production company in terms of deliverables that go with each episode. If you have an amazing social media team and the best admin ever, you don't need those services from a provider and can focus on getting a service or package that includes just what you don't have available in-house.

Something I would like to mention here is that you are much less likely to find a single individual who is going to be able to do high-quality, complex podcast editing AND cool graphic design AND fluent social media post writing. Those are a lot of different skill sets, and while I am sure such humans do exist, they are rare and expensive – as they should be – which often makes agencies the best choice for a podcast with high content and support needs. Agencies have different people and departments that are experts in each production area. If, on the other hand, you've got great writers and designers and admin support in-house, let them do what they're great at, and find an individual provider who can give you awesome audio without worrying about the rest.

*One Stone Creative Answer: We're flexible in this regard. We can include everything mentioned above, including scheduling of all assets, but let our clients customize their production package to include exactly what they need and none of what they don't.*

## **Who is providing the service and who are your points of contact?**

Podcast production companies and agencies come in all shapes and sizes, and organize the work in different ways. As a potential client, it's important to know who your points of contact are, and what, if any, contact you will have with other members of the team. Will you have a dedicated account manager who is familiar with your show? When you have a question, who do you ask, and what is the best way to get in touch with them? Will you have a dedicated producer who will get to know you and your show and your editing preferences, or are there standard edits that get applied to all shows? If getting feedback is part of the service, who provides it, and is it a two-way dialogue? Basically, you want to be very clear about who is handling your content, and how you make sure you all have the information that you need as the production relationship evolves.

*One Stone Creative Answer: We assign dedicated people to each podcast we produce so that the same person is always handling the audio/video editing, feedback, strategy, notes and admin. This lets us become familiar with the style and direction of each podcast. We do believe in vacations, however, so we develop detailed standard operating procedures for each show so we can help each other when needed. The account manager in charge of each show is the primary point of contact and liaises between different members of our team, and whatever members of the client's team are involved.*

## **If you're starting a new show: What is included in a launch, and how long will it take?**

Podcast launches provided by a podcast production company can be as simple as creating the first episode and pointing you at Apple Podcasts Connect, or as complex as orchestrating a multi-channel, multi-media content extravaganza complete with a launch team and a listener contest.

The provider you're talking to should be able to tell you the linear steps in their launch process: what has to be done in what order, and how long it usually takes. You'll want to know what kind of show development support they provide. Will they be really hands-on in helping you design the different elements of your show, like the branding and the episode format, or will they just take what you send and produce it?

It's the same thing for the rest of the elements of launch. Ask if they have different packages, what is the most popular and how much time it's all going to take. It's also a good idea to ask about how customized the launch is going to be. If they have a standard launch they provide for all shows, that can be a good thing; it will likely be a smooth process that runs efficiently. But sometimes you want something more personalized that takes advantage of your existing

audience and community, or the channels you're currently using. Ask about how much collaboration and differentiation for your launch is going to be possible.

It's typical for there to be a launch/setup fee for new podcasts and for podcast takeovers, so ask about those as well.

*One Stone Creative Answer: We have a standard launch package for a new podcast (both audio and video versions) that includes show development, audio-visual branding, template and tracking infrastructure creation, a trailer episode, the first full episode and support around tech submission. It includes everything needed to go from "I have an idea!" to "we're on Spotify!" We can also add promotional assets like email and social media campaigns as needed.*

*For existing shows, we have a lower 'takeover' rate that simply covers getting the show integrated into our systems for a seamless transition.*

## **What type of editing does the firm do?**

There are many different kinds of podcast editing, and it's reasonable to expect that different service providers will use different terms to describe them.

The person you are speaking with should be able to describe their editing style or styles clearly, explain what kind of sound improvements they do – like minimizing background noise, balancing the levels of the speakers, "sweetening" the overall sound – and explain any terms you're not familiar with. They should also be able to tell you what kind of content editing they will do: removing filler words, cutting trailing questions out, making editorial decisions about what should be included, etc. The range can be big!

Sometimes, companies might be able to follow content edits you provide, like "remove the question and answer about balloons." Other times they can make editorial decisions on their own.

Ideally, they can give you examples of shows they produce, so you can listen to the finished product. (Do remember as you are reviewing shows that even the world's best audio editor can't work magic – if source audio is terrible, there is a hard limit to how much it can be improved. The host should always sound acceptable but be forgiving of weird or wonky guest audio. Sometimes, you just get what you get.)

The key thing to figure out with this question is what *you* are going to be responsible for providing in terms of editing decisions, and what *they* are going to do. There might even be a process where you collaboratively establish content standards, and that's awesome! Just know what you're getting into, so you don't find yourself expecting something they can't provide.

*One Stone Creative Answer: For most shows, we do what we call 'hygiene' editing. This means improving the quality of the sound by lowering background noise (where possible), balancing the volume between the speakers and improving the overall tone and quality of the audio*

*(sweetening). We remove any obvious errors and re-starts and take editorial comments from clients when they have specific requests. The goal is to make the editing “invisible” and leave the host and guest, if there is one, sounding just a little more polished than they do in real life. For some shows, we can do more intensive editing and include content edits like re-arranging the parts of an episode and more music design. It depends on the needs of the show.*

## **How long do their clients keep podcasting?**

Many shows fizzle out after a few weeks or months in a sad process called podfading, where the project just loses steam and stops releasing. If you can avoid it, you should. It's not like anyone will lose a leg if you don't, but what a waste of time and resources – and not a great look if you announced it publicly.

Ideally, the provider you work with will have clients who have been podcasting for a long time. It's a good indication that they're providing quality service. This is FAR from a hard and fast rule, of course, since brand new providers can provide fantastic service, and sometimes companies specialize in podcasts that have limited lifespans by design. This should just be one of the many elements you consider when choosing a provider.

Something else you should ask about is if it's possible to create a podcast season instead of a permanently ongoing show. For a lot of businesses, this is an amazing fit, either to test the waters, or to serve a specific business function, and then move on from.

*One Stone Creative Answer: At the time of writing, our longest-running show has been going since 2018, and average tenure is over two years. (Not counting seasons, which are planned to have a beginning and end!)*

## **What do you do when there are problems?**

This is kind of a tricky one, because everyone sells based on things being great. But there will be problems. Humans make mistakes. You will, your provider will. It happens.

So, you want to know in advance what the provider's approach will be to things like you submitting late audio, or a recording being too bad to release, or confusing instructions. Similarly, what if the producer makes an error in production like missing a requested edit, adding the wrong intro or misspelling a guest's name?

It could be that they don't have prepared answers to these kinds of questions; maybe you're foreseeing problems they haven't experienced before. But a willingness to collaborate with you to establish standards and best practices – for example, “if raw audio is not submitted by X date, the editor will prepare a replay,” or “any mistakes in editing will be fixed and re-uploaded free of charge” – means you're going to have consistency, and ultimately, trust. And that is the foundation of any good working relationship.

*One Stone Creative Answer: While we try to avoid mistakes, it happens from time to time! We will always fix any error we make in the audio or assets as soon as we are made aware of it, and at no additional charge. In the case of a client error, we are also happy to make after-release edits, although we prefer a pre-release review stage to avoid them. We guarantee on-time releases when we receive raw audio in time, and if we miss one for a reason within our control, we will discount the next month's production by the amount of a full episode.*

At the end of the day, the most important consideration in your choice of producer or editor is that you trust them with your content. You might only need someone to clean up your episodes and add the intro and outro. You might be looking for someone to take your hand and walk you through the process long-term. It could be something in between. Or, and I say this with all seriousness, it might come down to vibes.

The producer-host relationship can be an intimate one. You're going to be trusting someone with your unedited audio and that can be a vulnerable thing. Liking the person or people you're working with goes a long way to making the relationship a good one.

There isn't a wrong thing to want from a third-party provider. The trick is to find someone who is happy and excited to provide what you're looking for, and who is clear about what they can, can't or won't do.

## What Kind of Podcaster Are You?

There are many different types of podcasters.

There are those who live and breathe podcasting, who love the medium for the craft of it.

There are people who see it as a steppingstone to recognition, fame, riches and glory.

And there are those who see it as an effective method to support the other things they do.

So, I have just one more thing to share before you go off and create a new metrics tracking spreadsheet or call up your best clients for interviews.

You can create a great podcast that makes a measurable difference in your business without making being a **PODCASTER** a core part of your identity.

You can, of course, if you like.

But a podcast for your business can also just be something that you do for a particular purpose, to achieve particular goals. Like doing your bookkeeping or keeping up to date with the news in your industry. It doesn't need to spark unfathomable joy. It's functional.

The podcast industry is full of "*Rah! Rah! Rah! Podcasting is the best!*" and the expectation seems to be that you're going to be over-the-moon/can't wait/omg-so-excited to start one, and you'll add **PODCASTER** to your LinkedIn bio and your About page and maybe your business cards.

If you're podcasting to achieve a specific outcome and not because it's the single most important way you're going to make a mark on the world, then that attitude can be a little overwhelming, and even a little distasteful.

That's one of the reasons I delayed having my own show for so long, even while I was producing for others. I had and have no desire to be a **PODCASTER**.

I call myself a Reluctant Podcaster, because my show is an effective means to an end rather than my reason to get up in the morning. It's just part of the workweek. A nice part! An enjoyable part! But not like, writing-a-Standard-Operating-Procedure nice. Maybe you're one too. Or maybe you are passionate about it – as long as it works!

Passion is optional. Practicality isn't.

It's why I focus so much on the value: the measurable, repeatable impact a podcast can deliver to the bottom line of your business.

If that is what matters most to you as well, then taking the relentlessly practical approach to podcasting might be right for you.

I think it's a good thing, because we're not in this (only) for the love of the game.

The podcasts we create need to pull their weight in our businesses, and if they don't, or we can't identify where and how they're providing a return – the project has got to go, and there doesn't need to be an emotional element to that decision. We have data.

So, I hope that what you're feeling now, at the end of a rather long and fairly technical book about counting, is inspired.

About your business and what a podcast can do for it.

About bringing more efficiency to your operation.

About seeing different kinds of value from a single work product.

About experimenting with something new and iterating until it works.

Because when you're podcasting for business, your podcast isn't really a podcast.

It's a tool you're using to create different kinds of value for your company, and you get to decide what that value is when the *format follows the function*.

Using the Business Podcast Blueprints method, you'll get to decide how much of that value there is going to be.

And that is the most important thing.

Because, remember:

Podcasting is just *part* of your job.

## About the Author



Megan Dougherty is a digital marketing strategist with a background in online business development. She has had the opportunity over the years to work with hundreds of business owners in a huge variety of industries. In 2017 she co-founded [One Stone Creative](#) a podcast production agency specializing in leveraging podcasts as marketing channels for small businesses. In 2020 One Stone Creative developed the Business Podcast Blueprints to help companies and executives dial into the specific ways they can leverage a podcast for their content marketing and business development goals. Megan is also the creator of the [Podcasting for Business Conference](#).

She currently lives in Western Quebec with her spouse, 2 cats, 5 chickens and over 65 thriving houseplants. She loves to read historical fiction and watch Star Trek, and her favorite hobbies are all about painstakingly making from scratch items that are cheaply and easily available in many stores.

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