How to Start a Successful Podcast (For Under $100)

Podcast listenership continues to grow tremendously every year. According to Edison Research, 40% of Americans aged 12+ say they have ever listened to a podcast, while 24% say they have listened to one in the past month, up from 21% one year ago.

What this means for you as a business owner is that podcasting is a content format you should start considering to reach this growing audience to help grow your business.

You do not need to be a very technical person nor do you require a lot of money to start a podcast. This guide will be an A-Z, step-by-step walkthrough on how to get started with audio podcasting, why you should start a podcast, and cover everything from the very technical to the abstract podcasting concepts.

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Starting a Podcast: How Podcasting Works

To start a podcast, as a bare minimum, you only need to:

1. Come up with a concept (a topic, name, format, and target length for each episode).
2. Design artwork and write a description to "brand" your podcast.
3. Record and edit your audio files (such as .MP3s). A microphone is recommended.
4. Find a place to host them (such as a file host that specializes in podcast hosting, like Libsyn).

5. Syndicate these audio files into what's called an "RSS feed" so that it can be distributed through iTunes as well as downloaded or streamed on any device on-demand.

This guide will cover this in a lot more detail later but for now, if you're confused, don't be.

Podcasts can be played one of two ways. The first is to simply stream or download the podcast from the RSS feed either in a feed reader like Feedly or on the blog/website itself where the podcast is hosted or embedded. Here's an example of an embedded podcast that is hosted on Simplecast for the Shopify Masters podcast.

The other way is to use a player, such as iTunes or Pocket Casts, load up the RSS feed into the player and play any of the episodes in the feed on a device, such as a smartphone or tablet. These are sometimes called "podcatchers". Podcast players sync the data from RSS feeds of the podcast's website to give a listing of episodes, show data (such as episode name and shownotes), artwork and a link to the show file (usually an .MP3).

Why Start a Podcast

If you understand the value of creating content for your business and brand, such as with a blog, then creating content with a podcast can arguably be as equally important. A podcast allows you to reach a brand new audience: a group of people that might otherwise never find or consume your long-form content because they prefer the more portable audio format.

You also don't need to be an established content creator or need a blog to start a podcast. A podcast is an excellent way to build an audience from scratch and position yourself as an authority in your industry. In addition, podcasts also provide the potential to drive traffic back to your website or store. Every podcast directory gives you a link back to your website and since it's your podcast, you can direct listeners to your website at the end of each show.

Podcasting is huge. Looking at this pie chart, courtesy of Edison Research, 30% of time spent listening to audio sources are podcasts. This is impressive when compared to AM/FM radio's 21% and owned music's 23%.

Podcasting, as mentioned earlier, is also a content platform that is still growing. With over 21.1 million hours of listening per day and growing according to MacRumors, there's a lot of opportunity in various niches for a successful podcast. If your industry is underserved, you have the chance to be an early adopter and a trailblazer.

Speaking of industries, there are many topics and interests just waiting to be filled with your content on iTunes. There are dozens of categories and subcategories where listeners actively seek new content. This means your content and podcast will be highly targeted. People who are interested in your topic will seek you out and find you on places like iTunes.

Podcasts also have a balanced demographic with the listeners being equally male and female adults between the ages of 18-44.

Lastly, a podcast allows you to position yourself as an authority on your topic. Not only does this help build your audience but it also makes it easier for you to sell your product or service since you're the credible source. Being seen as an authority can help influence customers to purchase your products.

Why Podcasting, as a Content Platform, Just Works

Podcasts are a popular content platform because they are easy to consume. Podcasts can be listened to on the go, while in the car and even while working. It's not a content medium that requires all of your audience's attention like a blog post or a video.

Another reason podcasts are easy to consume is they can be listened to on any device. Your listeners don't need a radio or need to be sitting in their car to listen. They can listen on their smartphone, desktop computer or tablet. Unlike radio, podcasts are on-demand, which means your audience can listen to what they want and when they want it.

Compared to other content platforms, podcasts allow you to create an intimate connection with your audience. Imagine being in your target listener's ears for 30 minutes or more. They are hearing you talking to them, one on one. This is your opportunity to form that relationship with your audience, that your blog posts can't. Because of this level of engagement, people also listen to the ads. Whether you're looking to start a podcast to promote your business or you're looking to monetize your podcasts with ads, Midroll found that 63% of its listeners purchased a product or service after hearing it advertised on a podcast.

Lastly, podcasts are free. They're free to create and they're free to listen to.

Getting Started

What will your podcast's topic be? For some, it will be obvious. For others, in unique industries and niches, they will need to get creative about their topic. For example, if your business sells sunglasses, you might not want to start a podcast all about sunglasses. However, if your customers are world travelers, then maybe a podcast about traveling is a better topic.

Your topic will also come down to what you're either an expert on or passionate about. Sometimes, if you're lucky, you'll be both an expert and extremely passionate about your topic.

Before committing to a topic, check to see if there's enough for you to talk about. The first test I would recommend is coming up with a list of at least 10-15 episodes. I would then look for similar podcasts on iTunes and look at their popularity, such as number of reviews and number of followers on social media. Competition is a good thing! It can tell you whether or not the topic is viable.

The next important component to your podcast is the episode format. What will your podcast be like and what will be the structure of the content? Here's some ideas:

- Interview

- Solo
- More than one host
- Narrative/story-telling
- Hybrid (combination of above types)
- Other

Lastly, how long will each of your episodes be? It's a good idea to have a consistent episode length so that your listeners know what to expect. If your podcast is 20 minutes every episode, and your listeners are used to that, it will be easy for them to time their listening with their daily commute or around listening to other podcasts.

What You'll Need

Podcast Listing Information

- **Artwork (minimum 1400x1400, maximum 2048x2048)** - Your podcast artwork needs to be *beautiful*. Don't neglect this aspect of your podcast as Apple and iTunes seem to only want to feature podcasts (more on this later) if they have professional looking artwork. Invest some money if you have to into getting a great looking podcast cover done. Use words and images that are large enough to be clearly legible at almost any size. Take a look at the artwork that sticks out for you on iTunes and model your artwork

for your podcast after that. I'd recommend trying <u>Fiverr</u> or better yet, hire a graphic designer from <u>Upwork</u> to create you a beautiful podcast cover.

- **Podcast name** - Your podcast name should speak to you and your audience. Ideally, listeners should know what the podcast is all about from just the name alone. Having a very descriptive name can help. However, this isn't entirely necessary since most podcasts include a "hook" or short description along with the podcast name. This helps with optimizing your podcast's searchability on platforms such as iTunes. For example, "Grub Podcast - All about healthy eating and helping you cook better" or "Xtreme - interviews with famous skateboarders such as Tony Hawk, Chad Muska and Rick Howard".
- **Podcast category/subcategory** - There are dozens of different categories and subcategories on iTunes. Everything from arts and politics to comedy and religion. Choose the category that best suits your podcast's topic. It doesn't need to be the exact topic. If you're struggling to decide on a category, look at other podcasts on iTunes that are similar to yours and take a look at what category and subcategory they use.
- **Podcast description** - You don't want to skimp out on the description of your podcast. You will want to include as many keywords and phrases as possible that describe your podcast best. This is going to help with the SEO of your podcast listing on websites such as iTunes. iTunes is a search engine and most people that find your podcast, will likely find it through a search, at least initially when your podcast is new.
As your podcast grows, it's also a good idea to eventually include the names of big guests you've had on and the topics of your most popular episodes. This way, new listeners know immediately which podcast episodes to check out, making new listeners more likely to become fans.
- **Podcast rating** - Will your podcast be clean? Considering your rating is important as you want to be consistent with it. Ideally, every episode should either be clean or not.

What Equipment and Software You Need

In this section, I will briefly go over all the equipment and software you'll need to get started. The good news is, the only monetary investment required, is a microphone, which isn't very expensive. This guide will also go through the most basic setup for recording a podcast. You may choose to use an XLR microphone that plugs into a mixer, which might give you better sound quality for you podcast. However, the audio quality you can achieve with a really good USB microphone, is more than enough for most people. Many popular podcasts today have some of the most simple setups and use USB microphones.

USB Microphone

The most important thing you need is a microphone. Virtually every desktop and laptop computer has at least one USB port allowing you to connect a device like a microphone to it. These devices are plug-and-play which means no drivers and installation is required.

Your computer or laptop might come with a built-in microphone but *I forbid you* to use that for your podcast. The audio quality will be abysmal, I promise. Those built-in microphones were not designed for podcasts. You'll need at least a decent microphone if you're serious about starting a podcast.

- **Samson Q1U Dynamic USB Microphone** $49.99 USD - This is a very basic, plug and play, microphone that comes with a mic stand and USB cable. The audio quality is very good for the price and a great bang-for-buck microphone if you don't want to spend a lot of money on your microphone.

- **Blue Yeti USB Microphone** $129.99 USD - The audio quality on the Blue Yeti microphone makes it worth the price. I've used the Blue Yeti microphone for a long time for my own podcasts and it's produced very high quality voice recordings.

Audio Recording Software

The software recommended in this section will allow you to record the audio from your microphone and save it as an MP3 file. The following software will also allow you to edit your recordings, which I'll go over in more detail later in this guide.

- **Adobe Audition** (PC/Mac) $19.99 USD per month - If you want really powerful audio editing software with all the bells and whistles possible, Adobe has it with Audition. It might be a little more than what you'll need to edit just a podcast, but if you're using a mixer and high-end equipment, it might be a good idea to look at Adobe Audition as well.

- **Audacity** (PC/Mac) Free - Audacity is a great alternative to paid, premium audio editing software. It's easy to use and there are a lot of tutorials available online to help you learn how to use it.

- **GarageBand** (Mac) Free - GarageBand comes packaged with all MacBooks and is good enough for most of your audio editing needs. GarageBand allows you to record the audio from your microphone and save it as an MP3.

Skype Recording Software

If you plan on conducting interviews for your podcast, you might want to use software that records Skype calls. If you're using a mixer that records all sound from your computer, this software will not be required. However, if you're using a basic setup, and are using Skype to conduct interviews, here are some recommended Skype call recording software:

- **Ecamm Call Recorder** (Mac) $29.95 USD - Record Skype calls on your Mac.
- **Pamela** (PC) $21.25 USD - PC alternative, there is a free trial to test the software before buying.

Equipment to Improve Quality (But Not Required)

- **Pop filter** $5.57 USD - Pop filters help keep out the clicking noises your mouth makes when speaking close to the microphone, from being recorded.

- **Neewer Broadcast Studio Mic Boom Arm** $23.24 USD - Boom arms help keep your microphone in front of you, hands-free. They also allow you to easily adjust the height and distance from your mouth, on the fly, so that you can move around while you podcast or to simply keep it out of sight when you're not recording. This is handy if you're recording at your home office desk.

- **Sony ZX Series Stereo Headphones** $15.15 USD - A good pair of headphones are important if you're interviewing guests. You don't want to have your guest's speech come through your speakers and get picked up by your microphone, which would cause echoing.

- **Zoom H1 Handy Portable Digital Recorder** $99.99 USD - You might want to record your audio to an external device first, before importing the recording to your computer for editing. The reason for this, is to protect yourself from losing all your data if your computer crashes or loses power mid-recording. Recorders are usually portable, meaning you don't need to have a computer if you're recording while traveling.

How to Record Your Podcast

This is by far the simplest way to record a podcast that I know of, and all you're required to have is a USB microphone plugged into your computer and recording software, such as Audacity, installed and opened.

Ensure your microphone is plugged in and on, and ensure your recording software is using your microphone as the default input device. Simply click the record button in your software, and talk away! There's no need to stop or pause the recording, even if there are mistakes along the way. You can always edit the recording later using the same software.

To record your first episode in GarageBand, here's a nice and short four minute video that will easily walk you through the process.

Once you finish recording, you'll want to save your podcast. Ideally, MP3s are the best format for your podcast files since they compress well (low file size) and they can be played on most devices.

You'll want to save your MP3 as a fixed bitrate and not a variable (VBR) one. Most recording software will ask you for this information upon saving. A **good bitrate to use is 128kbps**. This bitrate keeps the file size low while maintaining good audio quality. For the sample rate, I

recommend **44.1Mhz**, which is CD quality.

Recording Your First Episode

Now that you know how to record an episode, it's time to do it.

What do you talk about in this first episode? Talk about yourself! Introduce yourself and the podcast to the world. This can be your "episode zero". This is your opportunity to let everyone know what your podcast is all about and where you envision your podcast going.

It's okay to be a little nervous when recording your very first episode, especially if you've never sat down and talked into a mic for 20-30 minutes straight.

The first thing to help combat this nervousness is to not be self-conscious about your voice. You don't need a professional radio voice to have people listening to you and your podcast. Speak naturally and don't put on a "radio voice". When you listen back, don't cringe. Everyone hates the sound of their voice at first and eventually, you'll get used to hearing it and the way it sounds.

If your voice sounds shaky or you sound nervous, just realize that improving your confidence on the mic takes a lot of practice. When I listen back to my very first few podcasts, and compare them to today's, I can see how much I've improved in such a short amount of time.

Also, remember that you can always clean up and edit the audio after you're done recording. If you lose your spot or forget your next point, don't be afraid to sit in silence until you regain your composure and continue. You can always edit out those gaps and mistakes out later.

That comes to my last point: don't read off of a script. Your podcast should sound natural. People that listen to podcasts don't want to listen to an audiobook. They're listening to the dynamic conversations and discussions that happen on podcasts. It's okay to have a few bullet points to work off of, but practice speaking about topics off the top of your head.

Getting an Intro and Outro

Having an intro and outro for each episode of your podcast adds that flair and personality. Usually, intros and outros are short voiceovers with music that introduce the podcast, episode number, the host(s) and the "hook" or tagline of the podcast. These intros/outros are also sometimes called bumpers.

If you've got the chops, you can record these yourself or you can hire someone with a great voice to do your intro and outro for you. I've used <u>Fiverr</u> in the past to create the intro and outro for my podcast. I would recommend listening to other podcasts in your niche to get some inspiration for the intro and outro.

Editing Your Podcasts

Editing your podcasts allows you to add in your intro and outro, stabilize the volume, as well as remove gaps of dead air or any mistakes you might have made during your recording. Again, any of the software recommended above, such as Adobe Audition, Audacity or GarageBand, should do the trick.

Some good settings you might want to explore or look for in your audio editor, are settings that stabilize the volume automatically, so that there aren't spikes of high volume (headphone listeners will thank you for that), and a setting that removes or eliminates background noise and pops.

If you struggle to learn the software or simply find the process too time-consuming, you can choose to hire someone to edit your episodes for you. There are freelancers on Fiverr or Upwork that you can hire to edit your podcast episodes for you. It's a good idea to stick with someone after you find the right person since they will know your style and editing preferences.

There are also post-production services, such as Auphonic, which will do the leveling, volume normalization and a few other things for you. Whatever you use, it's important to normalize the volume of each episode to be the same. You don't want one episode to be significantly louder or quieter than the others.

Once you finish editing your recording, save it as an MP3, as recommended earlier, with a 128kbps bitrate and 44.1 Mhz sample rate.

Once your MP3 is saved, I suggest editing the ID3 tags of the file. The ID3 tags are your way to tell MP3 players and devices more information about that file, such as the name of the episode and name of the "artist" (podcast). This way, MP3 players have track information to display.

In Mac and Windows, using Audacity and using Open Metadata Editor allows you to add ID3 tags such as artwork, episode name and podcast name. In Mac and Windows, this can also be done in iTunes. There's also ID3 Editor ($15 USD) which makes the process of editing this tags on Mac a lot easier.

Editing ID3 tags is not a required step and it doesn't affect or help your podcast's listing on iTunes. However, it is a nice touch, especially for those that download your podcast episodes to play them later on different devices.

Podcast Hosting

You'll need a separate host just for your audio files. Even if you have a web host already and a website, you don't want to host your MP3s on the same server. Those shared web hosts don't have the bandwidth or speed for the demand that downloading and streaming MP3s creates. Fortunately, media hosts are affordable. Here are the ones I use and recommend:

- **LibSyn** - Podcast hosting starting at $5 a month for 50mb of space a month with unlimited bandwidth.
- **Blubrry** - Podcast hosting starting at $12 a month for 100mb of space a month with unlimited bandwidth.

Think about how many episodes you'll be publishing per month. For example, let's say you're releasing a new episode every week. That's roughly 4 episodes a month. If your episodes are an hour long each, every episode might be around 50mb. This means you'll likely need over 200mb per month. This is just an example, you'll need to figure out what plan is best for your needs and proceed from there. Generally, you're better off paying for the option that allows for a little more space than you need, just in case.

Syndicating Your Podcast RSS Feed

Once you have your media host setup, and at least one episode uploaded, you'll be provided with an RSS feed by your media host. This feed contains all of your episodes and the data readers and players require such as each episode's title, the artwork, episode descriptions and location of the MP3 file. Fortunately, your media host handles all of this for you, so if this sounds complicated, it's not.

This RSS feed is what you'll be submitting to podcast directories such as iTunes. You only need to submit this feed once. Every time you upload a new episode to your media host, the feed is automatically updated on iTunes and other directories you've submitted the podcast to. I will go over this in more detail in the next section.

Submitting Your Podcast to the Right Channels

There are many different directories you can put your podcast in. I'm going to recommend the most popular but feel free to distribute your podcast across as many channels as you can. Now's the time to have all that information ready that I said you would be required to have, at the beginning of this guide. You're going to be asked for your podcast's name, description, category, artwork, and a few other things.

- **iTunes** - iTunes is the largest podcast directory and it should certainly be your focus. If you're only going to submit your podcast to one directory, this one should be it. Click here to submit your podcast and RSS feed to iTunes.
- **Stitcher** - Stitcher is the second largest podcast directory and another way for people to discover your podcast. Click here to submit your podcast and RSS feed to Stitcher.
- You might want to also put your podcast up on SoundCloud and YouTube to reach more people.

Launching Your Podcast

There's an opportunity for you to be featured in the "New and Noteworthy" on iTunes. The New

and Noteworthy section is where iTunes will feature new podcasts for 8 weeks. Just imagine how much this can grow your podcast in such a short amount of time. This would give your new podcast a lot of traction since it's free advertising on the iTunes podcast home page, which receives millions of visitors every month.

To get noticed by iTunes and increase your chances of being featured, you'll want to launch your podcast so that you receive some listens and reviews immediately. This is going to put you in the position to be featured. While this isn't guaranteed, launching your podcast this way will help you grow your podcast organically, too.

To do this, you'll want to make the launch of your podcast an event. You want to start generating buzz around the launch of your podcast. Create a landing page for your podcast, letting people know what's to come and what you have planned. This landing page should also give people the chance to opt-in to a mailing list, to announce to your email list, the day you launch your podcast. Building up a small audience before you launch is critical since this will give you an audience to launch to immediately and hopefully create a snowball effect.

The idea is that the day you launch, launch your podcast with a few episodes, ideally three. This is a good number of episodes to have your audience listen to immediately without overwhelming them. Alternatively, if you launch with just one episode, you won't get the listen numbers you need to get noticed. You also need to show your listeners that you'll be putting out content and that there's something to subscribe to. Having more than one episode at launch (showing episode #1, episode #2, etc) implies that there's more to come.

Announce the launch to your email list and ask them to subscribe to the podcast as well as leave a review after listening. It's really important that you encourage your subscribers to leave a review as having reviews (and subscribers) the first day can help get you noticed by iTunes and increase the odds of getting featured.

The last tip is you need to ensure that your podcast artwork is beautiful. If you noticed, the new and noteworthy podcasts all have great looking artwork. If it doesn't look beautiful, it's unlikely iTunes will feature the podcast.

Growth and Beyond

Yay, you've launched your podcast! What's next?

Well, the growth of your podcast.

The first thing you need to start getting into the habit of doing is always asking your listeners to leave a review on iTunes and to subscribe to the podcast. Having more subscribers and more reviews can help get you more listeners. Give your listeners a call to action at the end of every episode and ask them to leave a review and subscribe.

Encourage this on your website and social media as well because most people listening to your podcast might not be near a computer or able to leave a review when you ask them. Remind them on social media to take these actions.

A strategy that I like to use to encourage reviews and engagement is to reward the listeners that do leave reviews. For my podcast, I encourage listeners to leave a review on iTunes and every week, I read a random review on the show and give a free Kindle book to that listener. It gives my listeners more incentive to actually leave a review since they have a chance to get something for free.

Another important key to your success is to be consistent. If you plan on releasing a new episode every week, do it the same time and day every week and stick to it. You need to have patience and you need to put out regular content to show your audience that you're serious. Nobody wants to listen to or follow a podcast that promises to put out content regularly but doesn't follow through.

I will also suggest building a mailing list and encouraging your listeners to subscribe to your email list so that you can communicate with them. Simply having your listeners only subscribe to your podcast is not good enough. When you need to promote something or tell your audience something, email will be more effective than simply using your podcast or social media.

Monetization

There are different ways to monetize your blog. Your focus first should be to build your audience and the trust of your audience before you begin to try to monetize your podcast.

One of the more popular ways to monetize your podcast, is to take on sponsors and do "reads" promoting products and services. If you've listened to other popular podcasts, you've likely heard these advertisements where the host reads ad copy and directs listeners to a specific link.

The other way is to simply use your podcast to help promote your own products and services. Just like a sponsored read, you can direct your listeners to a product or service at the beginning and end of your podcast. If you want to track this, give your listeners a unique link or discount code.

Start Today

You can start your podcast today. Start coming up with the podcast listing information you need for your podcast and start looking on iTunes for podcasts that are already doing what you want to do. If you already have an external microphone, record a short episode today talking about yourself or your idea for the podcast. Begin to get comfortable talking into a microphone for a long period of time and begin to get comfortable listening to yourself after a recording. You don't have to upload the episode you record today, just get some practice and comfortable with the process.

If you have any questions about podcasting or any comments about this guide, please be sure to leave a comment below, they are always appreciated. I engage and respond with them all.

About the Author

Corey Ferreira is a passionate entrepreneur and content creator at Shopify.