Mobile Podcast Production: How to Educate and Engage through Online Audio

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Mobile Podcast Production: How to Educate and Engage through Online Audio

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Abstract. The use of podcasts in Cooperative Extension programs continues to grow. Ongoing research shows the benefits of podcasting for formal education, non-formal education, connecting with distance learning, and reaching a broader audience. This article will provide readers with steps to create an educational podcast. This article will be of interest for Extension agents and Extension programs that are moving to, or can be complemented by, a digital platform. Extension professionals can consider using podcasts and podcast analytics to complement existing programming, impact reporting, and promotion.

INTRODUCTION

Podcasts are a widely used form of media and are projected to continue growing in popularity (Edison Research and Triton Digital, 2021; Statista, 2020). In the United States, it is estimated that almost 140 million people on average listened to podcasts every month in 2022 (Edison Research and Triton Digital, 2021; Götting, 2022). Audiences engage in podcast content to learn new information (74%) and to be entertained (71%; Statista, 2020). Listeners access podcast content during a variety of times, including while they are cooking, exercising, or driving (Hennig, 2017). Previous research has indicated that podcasts have the potential to share content with a vast number of audiences, including the general public, students, and Extension clientele (Guy & Marquis, 2016; Harris & Park, 2008; Williams, 2020). Notably for Extension professionals, minimal resources are required to create and stream a podcast. This article provides a framework for Extension professionals to develop cost-effective mobile-produced podcasts for outreach, education, and engagement.

STEPS TO CREATE A BUDGET-FRIENDLY PODCAST BY USING MOBILE DEVICES

These steps are applicable to launching educational, personal, or organizational podcasts (Beattie et al., 2020). You should follow a production cycle to identify a topic, choose a format, select equipment, conduct interviews, distribute, and engage with your audience (see Figure 1).

The following steps can be used to create podcasts within various contexts (O'Connell, 2017; Weldon, 2021) or to facilitate in leading others through the podcast production process, with a few additional considerations outlined below.
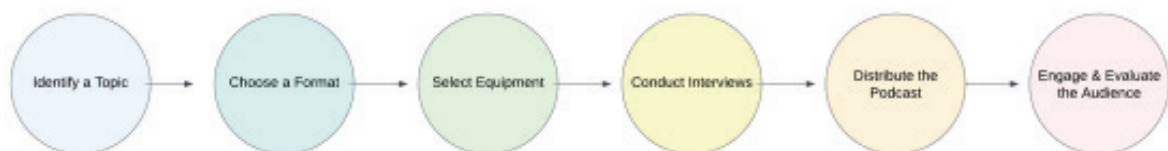

Figure 1. Steps to creating a budget-friendly podcast.

IDENTIFY A TOPIC AND STRUCTURE FOR THE PODCAST

Begin by brainstorming topics of interest to your stakeholders, whether that be a specific audience or a general community. Consider podcasts you currently listen to as inspiration for introductions, formats, phrasing, and gaps in topic areas. Once you have your target audience identified, you can request their feedback on content they would like to hear in episodes.

CHOOSE A FORMAT FOR YOUR PODCAST

Consider whether your episodes will consist of one or more hosts speaking in a narrative format, conducting interviews, or facilitating a conversation.

DETERMINE THE TONE YOU WILL TAKE FOR YOUR PODCAST (E.G., EDUCATIONAL, INFORMAL, COMICAL)

The podcast tracks should be approximately 15 to 20 minutes in length. The length of the podcast could increase as you gain more subscribers (O'Connell, 2017).

SELECT THE MOBILE PODCAST EQUIPMENT YOU WILL USE TO RECORD YOUR AUDIO

Audio can be freely recorded by using software and mobile applications, such as Audacity, Anchor, Zoom, or Voice Memos for in-person interviews and hosting. Microphones are a must-have for professional audio quality. Consider using lavalier microphones, Sony omnidirectional USB microphones, or Blue Yeti USB microphones. If you are recording audio remotely, consider using such programs as Zoom, Skype, Riverside.fm, or Zencaster. If funds are available for editing software, you could use Adobe Audition or Studio One, both of which require a paid subscription. Free user-friendly editing software includes Audacity, GarageBand, Anchor, and iMovie. For royalty-free music, you can look to Pixabay and Free Music Archive; if you are using Adobe, music tracks are available within the program.

PREPARE FOR AND CONDUCT AN INTERVIEW

Provide interviewees with a list of topics that will be covered during the interview. You can also ask interviewees to provide their own topic suggestions and background resources that support the topic of the podcast episode. Before or immediately following the interview, it is recommended that interviewees sign a release waiver giving the host or hosting organization permission to use the audio and any other materials that were provided.

DISTRIBUTE THE PODCAST

Before distributing your podcast, develop a schedule for recording and posting (e.g., weekly, biweekly, monthly). When your podcast is ready to be published, the next step is to create a name, description, and cover art for the podcast. The description of your podcast should include the overall goal or mission of the program, the name of the host or hosting organization, and a link to the organization's website or hosting site with more information and contact information. You could use such design software as Canva (free and paid options) or Adobe InDesign (a paid subscription is required) to create cover art.

The next step is to upload the track and artwork to your preferred hosting application (e.g., Anchor, Apple, Spotify, Google Play, SoundCloud, Buzzsprout). Streaming platforms, such as Anchor and Buzzsprout, will facilitate the distribution of your podcast tracks to a variety of larger streaming services (e.g., Spotify and iTunes). The services may also provide Web coding you can use to embed your playlists in your program's main website.

CONSIDER POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS FOR PROMOTION, ENGAGEMENT, MEASURING IMPACT, ACCESSIBILITY, AND HOW YOU WILL TROUBLESHOOT PROBLEMS THAT ARISE DURING THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

Promote the podcast through social media and other digital platforms (e.g., Instagram, a custom website, Facebook). Using online platforms can increase engagement with the podcast by allowing listeners to contribute comments and questions (O'Connell, 2017). Social media platforms can also provide users with audience insights.

Podcast recordings can be transcribed and used as blog material, creating educational and informational content for social media audiences. These transcriptions can support potential audience members who may have a disability.

To troubleshoot common production challenges, carry spare batteries for your equipment, provide additional time when traveling to and leading interviews, inspect the space prior to recording, and save important files to

Microsoft OneDrive, Dropbox, or an equivalent server. If unexpected background noise is present when recording, capture 10 seconds of the noise to use later to selectively edit it out by using audio correction effects.

There are several potential methods to evaluate and measure the impact of your podcast, including tracking podcast metrics, engaging on social media, and sharing a short satisfaction survey with listeners. Many hosting sites automatically provide metrics, including the number of plays, the length of episode listened to, and the number of subscribers.

CONCLUSION

Although podcasting is not a new communication technology, it is rapidly growing and expected to increase in popularity (Edison Research and Triton Digital, 2020, 2021; Fannin, 2006; Goldberg, 2019; Statista, 2020; Strickland et al., 2021). Podcasting is an opportunity for Extension professionals to adjust programs to meet a diverse set of learners based on their skills, preferred learning styles, and environment (Xie & Gu, 2007). Podcasts are a successful communication medium for Extension and policymakers to connect with farmers (Chivers et al., 2021). Supplemental funding through partnerships or grants could increase the quality, reach, and overall impact of a podcast. Podcasts could assist with Extension branding efforts to promote local organizations and communities.

Extension is already using podcasts in some areas (see University of Minnesota Extension Youth Development Podcast Series). Additionally, podcasts could be used in 4-H to promote experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) with new technologies. For instance, 4-H youth could help create a podcast to share their experiences as well as learning to produce an episode.

Cooperative Extension programs at various universities, including Mississippi State University, Purdue University, and the University of Florida, have used podcasts as blended-learning approaches for undergraduate courses or to reach a broader audience (Strickland et al., 2021).

Extension professionals could also use podcasts for internal communications and tasks, such as onboarding and ongoing training programs. Podcasts continue to hold relevance in Extension settings, including 4-H, courses, and stakeholder engagement. Extension services should consider recognizing its educators' multimedia efforts for audience engagement within its impact reports and promotional packets to better incentivize educators to engage in this type of innovative effort.

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