

Virtual Connections Are Here To Stay:

How Podcasts Get More Referrals and Clients



By Dr. Jeremy Weisz

The novel coronavirus has done nothing if not show us the power of making connections virtually and doing so successfully. Working at home, most of us now reach out electronically in place of face-to-face meetings, conferences, sales calls, and even tradeshows.

It's no wonder, then, that podcasts, which have been around conceptually for nearly two decades, have moved so easily toward maturity in our current media environment. Yet why have A/E/C firms been slow to adopt podcasting?

Long before the coronavirus outbreak—and certainly since—we became entrenched in a digital, virtual world, where podcasts live now among legitimate, mainstream “infotainment” options. In fact, some 104 million listeners now tune into podcasts each month (up from 90 million in 2019), according to Nielsen research. If that doesn't convince you this is a powerful vehicle, here are a few other standout statistics:

- The Internet Advertising Bureau and PricewaterhouseCoopers predict ad revenue for podcasts will total \$863 million for this year and over \$1 billion in 2021



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- As of 2019, 51% of the U.S. population had listened to a podcast, according to Podcasting Insights
- The term “podcasting” is familiar to 75% of the U.S. population, up from 70% in 2019, say Edison Research and Triton Digital

In short, podcasts have become big business. And the beauty is that, contrary to popular belief, podcasts don't necessarily have to engage a big audience to be successful, just a targeted one. It's quality over quantity. In fact, being topical by nature and design, podcasts enjoy opt-in exposures that lie comfortably along an extremely wide continuum, from miniscule to in the millions. Given the niche industries most A/E/C firms participate in, perhaps it's time to explore this addition to current marketing efforts.

Audience Size Is All Relative

On one extreme, consider the case of comedian, television host/actor, and mixed-martial-arts commentator Joe Rogan. A pioneer of podcasts, Rogan's fan base—seeded when he was an announcer and interviewer for the Ultimate Fighting Championship—is among the largest of the genre. Fans will likely follow him as 11 years' worth of content for his show, *The Joe Rogan Experience*, moves from multiple platforms to an exclusive position on Spotify. This, after Spotify concocted a \$100 million, multiyear licensing deal with the podcast personality. Think about that—\$100 million for exclusive rights to a podcast.

On the other hand, podcasts started out as and remain an ideal way for smaller businesses and even sole proprietors to share thoughts, best practices, philosophy, and general information. In other words, they're a fully legitimate and potent medium to use for marketing purposes.

Like an every-person's radio show, podcasts provide access to a listening audience that appreciates the convenience of being able to multitask to the conversation emanating from any number of distribution channels: social media, websites, YouTube, etc. The honest back-and-forth presents like a radio broadcast of familiar voices; listeners are in the same room, virtually, with the participants. That's especially true, of course, if there's video to accompany a good podcast—body language and facial expressions add to the interaction.

Another benefit of podcasts: They're inexpensive and simple to create. For about \$100, you can purchase a USB microphone to plug into your computer. Hook up with already-available recording software or apps and, if you can push a button and speak, you can produce a podcast. Editing, whether done in-house or outsourced, enhances the quality of a podcast, turning a homemade production into a quality feed.

The New Frontier of Business-Building

So, what does it take to create a podcast people will want to hear? If you have a good hook—a point of distinction—you'll need to spend less time and energy than if you haven't yet established a niche. You build on the content creation you already do around your firm, its projects, and subject matter experts, then follow the steps for distributing and publishing your podcast based on where your listening audience will most readily find you. This can include



your website, YouTube channel, or any number of available podcasting directories to which you link all your many social-media outlets (LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.). If you're new to podcasting, success will require developing compelling stories and quality content, then following the same formula for distribution.

If the idea of developing a podcast is to build your business—to gain clients and referrals for more clients—you'll have to market your podcasts, right? Well, here's where things get interesting.

Remember, the size of your audience isn't as important as the quality of your content and the quality of your audience. Your goal is to build relationships and influence those to whom you or your firm's services matter most. Start, then, by 1) using the guest-interview platform for your podcast (say, a 30-minute conversation), and 2) carefully curating your podcast guest list. That's because the real marketing traction comes from the proper use of relationships—particularly strategically selected podcast guests. And we know that in the A/E/C industries, it's all about relationships.

By strategically choosing the featured guest, you organically create good content that's relevant to your business. After all, if you're interested in that guest, your industry and business associates

likely will be, too. In this way, you also provide a service to your listeners, and, more important, you make critical connections—referral partners—who add value to your business growth. As a bonus, in reaching out to them, you show these guests that they're top-of-mind because you value them enough to have them on your podcast.

Choose these industry influencers you'll engage with by tapping into networks, trade organizations, existing clients, business partners, word-of-mouth, or past guests. Forge these relationships with the opportunity (a chance for more exposure, particularly when your podcast reaches mass appeal), and you create more opportunities to collaborate with their connections, too, which creates new business. Thus, the business-building lies in the multiplier effect of relationships—the outreach you do developing your podcasts—and the journey itself becomes your reward. ■



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