

Be Heard! A Guide to Starting Your Own Podcast
HKS Communications Program
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What is a podcast?

A podcast is an audio recording, usually consisting of spoken words but occasionally including music, and distributed via the Internet. A podcast is typically available as a series, with new episodes being released regularly. Podcasts are not “live” and can be listened to at any time.

How do I listen to a podcast?

With your ears! And with a “podcatcher”, which is a program used to subscribe to a podcast, meaning you’ll automatically get new episodes as they are released. Popular podcatchers include Apple Music, Pocket Casts, and Overcast, available for Mac, Windows, Linux, Android, and iOS. Despite the name, you do not need an iPod to listen to a podcast.

What about recording a podcast — do I need any special equipment?

Yes, but it doesn’t have to be expensive:

- For hardware, I recommend a Logitech USB H530 headset (\$70–120), a Blue Yeti USB microphone (\$129), or the Zoom H4n PRO (\$220).
- For recording software, use the free online services **Riverside.FM** or **StreamYard**, which works in Chrome. It creates a private link that you send to your guest; once you’ve both clicked the link, you’ll be able to talk to each other through your browser. Zencastr will record the conversation, and you can download MP3s to edit. When you first sign up, you’ll get a free two-week trial of Zencastr’s premium features, which normally cost \$/18month; after that, you’ll be limited to two hours of recording a month.
- Finally, to edit, use **Audacity** and **Levelator**. Both are free for Mac and Windows. Learn more about podcaster Kay Savetz’s editing taking technique at 59:00 into this video: <https://kgagne.com/kfest2016-podcast>

What should I podcast about?

Anything! If you have an opinion to voice, a story to tell, or a cause to promote, then you have a podcast. I’ve hosted six podcasts on the subjects of old Apple computers, online publishing, living with multiple sclerosis, making your own video games, diversity in the tech industry, and *Star Trek*. I happen to like interviewing people, so most of my podcasts feature a different guest each week, sharing their stories and experiences.

It helps to have a co-host — someone with whom you have a good rapport, to whom you feel committed, and who will help you stick to a publication schedule. (Guests can also bring new perspectives to your show!) Try to choose the same time to record every week (such as Saturday at 10 AM); otherwise, you’ll spend time and energy coordinating schedules.

How often should I publish new episodes? How long should a podcast be?

I’ve seen all sorts of podcast schedules: daily, weekly, monthly, even annually. The more regularly you release new episodes, the more easily you’ll attract new listeners and retain existing ones. And the more often you release new episodes, the shorter they should be. For example, *Scientific American* has a daily podcast called *60-Second Science*; each episode is —

you guessed it — only one minute long... but they also have a weekly show that's a half-hour long. Most podcasts average 20–40 minutes per episode every 8–14 days.

Where do I publish my podcast?

Good question! After all, it's not a podcast until listeners can find and download it. You'll need a host — that is, your own website. If you're not tech-savvy and are on a limited budget, I recommend **WordPress.com**, which starts at \$4/month, or **Blubrry.com**, which also uses WordPress but costs \$12/month. I've also heard good things about **Libsyn.com**, which is \$5/month, and others use **Simplecast**, which is \$15/month. And some people swear by **Anchor.fm** and **SoundCloud**, which are free. All these services offer RSS, which is necessary for your listeners to subscribe to your show and automatically get new episodes.

How do listeners find my podcast?

Most podcatchers draw their catalogs from podcast directories — so you need to submit your podcast to those directories, which is a free, one-time process. Here are instructions for getting your podcast included in the six biggest directories:

- **Apple Music:** <https://podcasters.apple.com/>
- **Spotify:** <https://podcasters.spotify.com/submit>
- **Google Play:** <https://podcastsmanager.google.com/>
- **Pocket Casts:** <https://pocketcasts.com/submit/>
- **Amazon:** <https://podcasters.amazon.com/>
- **Pandora:** <https://www.amplaybook.com/podcasts>

After that, start getting the word out via social media: tell your friends, post on Facebook and reddit, and share on X/Mastodon/Threads/Discord. If there are niche communities or non-profits who may be interested in your topic, email them. This is all free — but it takes time!

Can I monetize my podcast?

Yes, but it is neither easy nor lucrative. Your best bets are to get recruited by a podcast network, such as **Relay FM**. Or you can sign up for affiliate programs, such as **Audible** and **Amazon**. Finally, you can run an ongoing crowdfunding campaign on **Patreon**. None of these opportunities should be pursued until after you've been podcasting for a while, have demonstrated a consistent quality, and have attracted an audience. (One of my favorite podcasts released 52 weekly episodes in its first year before launching their Patreon; their three hosts now make a combined total of \$1,282, which they've used to buy new equipment, launch a YouTube channel, and speak at events.)

Where do I go for more advice?

- Podcast host Blubrry (which develops the PowerPress plugin for WordPress that powers all my shows) has a podcasting manual that includes advice for content, format, logos, and more: <https://blubrry.com/manual/>
- Jason Snell, formerly the editorial director of *Macworld*, has an excellent blog called Six Colors where he discusses, among other topics, podcasting: <https://sixcolors.com/tag/podcasting/>
- *The Podcast Method* is a podcast about... podcasting! <https://danbenjamin.com/podcastmethod/>