

It's All in How you Say It: Preparing to Host an Interview
HKS Communications Program
Monday, September 12, 2022

Finding Guests

Podcasts are often best when there's more than one voice, allowing for rapport, synergy, and unexpected turns of conversation. A co-host is one way to establish this dialogue, but another is to have guests on your show. Guests bring a unique perspective and introduce you and your audience to new topics and ideas!

Guests can be found in many places:

- **Twitter:** Social media gives everyone a platform, but few Twitter users have ever been on a podcast and would jump at the chance. After following a potential guest for a while, send them a Direct Message (DM) if you can, or else scope out their profile and find a way to contact them. Tweeting at them publicly works, too!
- **Press Releases & Products:** When an event is happening or a book, movie, game, or toy is being released, there's someone who wants to promote it — and a podcast is a great way to do so. Reaching out to someone who has something they want to publicize is likely to get you an affirmative response... though the timeline may be tight!
- **Crowdfunding:** If you can afford it, backing a Kickstarter or Patreon campaign gives you an instant “in”. You'll have early access to the final product and a direct line to its creator. But these leads can take months, if not years, to pay off, and they produce potential conflicts of interest that you should always disclose.
- **Features:** Subject-matter experts (SMEs) are often interviewed for feature articles, but few of their quotes make it into the final cut. If someone says something provocative, there's likely more where that came from. Reach out to them and offer them a dedicated platform to share more of their insights.
- **Introductions:** If you find someone you want to interview, check LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter to see if you know someone in common. Once you do interview someone, ask them who you should interview next — and if they can make an introduction!

Preparing for the Interview

Once a guest has accepted your invitation to appear on your show you need to research the guest thoroughly and come to the show prepared. Visit their social media profiles, including LinkedIn, which can be a gold mine: discover precisely what their experiences, passions, and specialties are. Read and listen to their previous interviews and ask yourself: What questions could've been more in-depth? What questions weren't asked? What's changed since this interview was originally conducted? Those are your launch points for a follow-up interview.

Depending on the sensitivity of the guest or your topic, you may wish to share your questions with them ahead of time — sometimes known as a “pre-interview”. This gives them the opportunity to come to the conversation prepared, veto topics they're uncomfortable with, or add topics that you may not be aware of. You can always hold back a particularly surprising question until you're on the air.

It's All in How you Say It: Preparing to Host an Interview
HKS Communications Program
Monday, September 12, 2022

Learn more about this practice in this episode of the *Jason Scott Talks His Way Out Of It* podcast: <http://textfiles.libsyn.com/the-technical-interview-episode>

Recording the Interview

Although it can be convenient and intimate to sit down with your guest, I recommend recording over the Internet. This is the cheapest, easiest way to record each person's audio to a separate track, which will make for better editing and a better-sounding final product. Zencastr is a free tool for talking online and recording the conversation. It requires no software installation and works on both Mac and Windows: <https://zencastr.com>

Zoom also enables recording to separate audio tracks, but it requires account creation and software installation for each person. We're also all experiencing Zoom fatigue; your guests may find an audio-only interview in their pajamas to be a refreshing change!

Before You Start the Show

Before you start recording, ask the guest:

- Do I have your name and title correct?
- How do I pronounce your name?
- What are your pronouns?
- Do you have a hard stop?

And let your guest know:

- Is explicit language allowed?
- Will the show be edited before it goes live?
- When will the show air?
- Is it okay to promote the show before it airs?
- Do they have any questions for you?

Asking Questions

You're now on the air! It's your job to facilitate the conversation. Your guest will bring up unexpected topics: if they're relevant, feel free to deviate from your script; otherwise, try to keep them on track. Don't ask the guest something you should already know, unless it's important for the audience to hear it, especially in the guest's own words. How you frame the question will convey whether you did your homework. Write down new questions as they occur to you; cross out questions as they are answered or become irrelevant.

While recording, make liberal use of Zencastr's "Footnotes" feature to mark potential edit points, pullquotes, or shownotes. Learn more about podcaster Kay Savetz's note-taking technique at 59:00 into this video: <https://kgagne.com/kfest2016-podcast>