

Module 3: Podcasting revolutionizes how we listen

[00:00:03] Last week, we talked about the elements that help us tell powerful stories using audio. Many of those elements are timeless. We're going to take a look at what's changed radically. And that's the technology. And, yes, technological changes can change even the way we tell audio stories.

[00:00:20] A big part of what's driving the renewed interest in audio storytelling is podcasting, something that would not have happened without a big shift in computing platforms. Remember this? It's a chart showing how each decade computing technology has changed radically. And that's brought big changes to the way we tell stories and the way journalism reaches people.

[00:00:42] Podcasting really became a thing. Along with the shift to smartphones. Earbuds became nearly synonymous with podcasts. Prior to that, the main way people heard audio stories was by listening to the radio. And it wasn't as if just anyone could go out and get a radio tower or even a radio show. There were a lot of gatekeepers and it took resources and training to get on air. At one point, on-air people even had to have a radio license issued by the Federal Communications Commission. Podcasting changed all that.

[00:01:14] In its early days, anyone who wanted to start a podcast could. Literally two guys in a garage could start a podcast. It didn't take much money. And you didn't have to have a network deal. Podcasting was hailed as a way of disrupting mass media and democratizing who was able to tell stories. While some podcasts were pretty low tech, again, two guys talking in a garage, others were beautifully produced with amazing sound design, particularly as people trained as public radio producers moved into the space. Over time, podcasting became more and more popular with listeners as more and more big names got into the game. According to Edison Research, fifty five percent of the US population has listened to a podcast, with nearly 40 percent listening in the last month.

[00:02:02] But the US doesn't lead the world in podcast listening, South Korea, Spain and Sweden seem more of their population listening to podcasts than in the US and Australia. And much of this listening is happening on smartphones. In research, the Reuters Institute has done, they found that the proportion of people using podcasts has grown significantly in the last year, though Coronavirus Lockdown's may have temporarily reverse that trend. It does seem to be recovering.

[00:02:30] Across countries, half of all respondents say that podcasts provide more depth and understanding than other types of media. So podcasting clearly has become a big way people are consuming audio and it's an area of media that's evolving fast. Journalism organizations, ranging from the Times to The Wall Street Journal to Axios have launched news podcasts in the last few years. And Spotify, a company that used to be synonymous with music, is now really gone in on podcasts. As the Reuters Institute notes in its report on podcasting, Spotify has become the number one destination for podcasts in a number of countries, overtaking Apple's podcast app.

[00:03:10] So podcasting may have revolutionized audio, but podcasting itself continues to evolve.

[00:03:16] Enough for me this week. Let's get to our conversations with our guests. First Nick Quah will join us. He keeps many of us who work with podcasts in the know. He started Hot Pod, a weekly newsletter about the podcasting industry. And if anyone knows the business, it's Nick. He and I discuss how the podcasting industry has changed and what that's meant for the medium and for audio storytelling.

[00:03:39] And then Samantha Henig joins us. Sam was given a little assignment when she was at The New York Times to figure out if the company should get involved with audio. The work she did paved the way for The Daily. She's now at BuzzFeed News. And she'll talk with us about the rise of news podcasts and how journalism outlets are thinking about podcasting.