

# Five Tips for Creating a Successful Podcast



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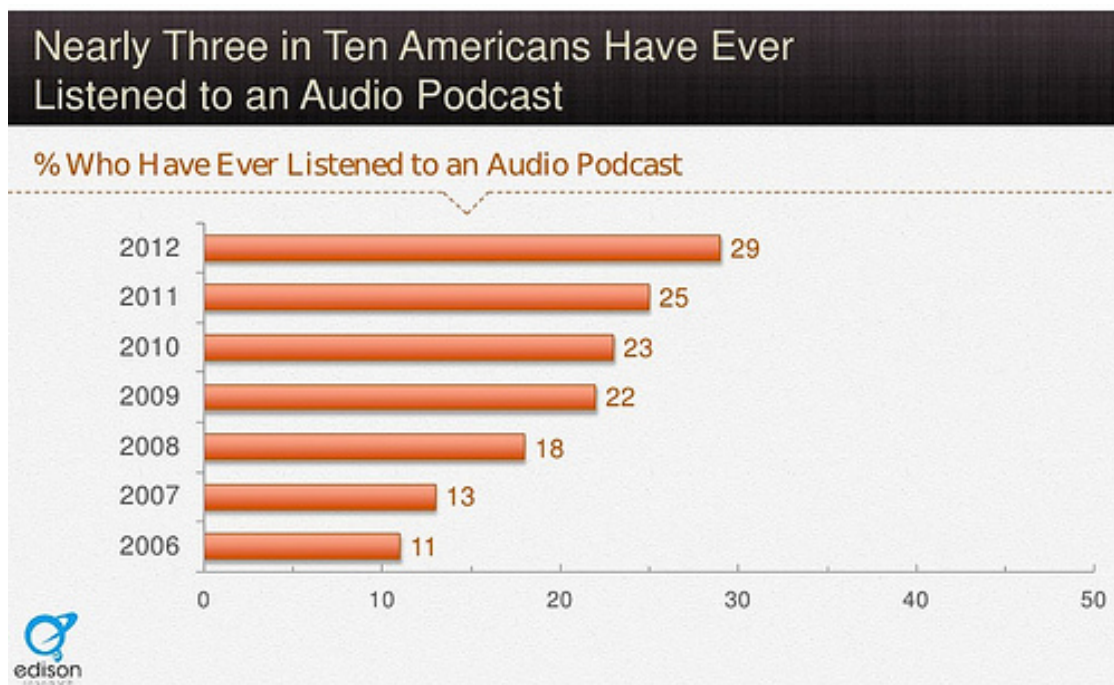
## Introduction

Despite technological advances that have made it easier than ever to stream your favorite TV show, play your favorite video game or carry your entire record collection with you wherever you go without downloading a single megabyte, podcasts and their creation and delivery methods have essentially stayed the same. And unlike the original iPad or the iPhone 3GS, podcasts are currently as popular as ever.

“According to the market intelligence firm Edison Research, the percentage of Americans 12 and older who have listened to a podcast has steadily increased from 10% in 2006 to 26% today, while one in six Americans has listened to a podcast within the past six months,” Christopher Matthews writes in his August 29, 2013, piece, “Despite Being Oh-So 2005, Podcasting Is Drawing Listeners and Advertisers Alike,”<sup>1</sup> for *Time*.

Matthews notes that while podcasts are still drawing listeners, they are now more popular among consumers as a marketing tool rather than as a journalistic tool by large media organizations. However, there are a number of independent podcasters that are able to draw an audience and occasionally able to make a living on entertainment podcasting alone.

The following graph from Edison Research, “the leading provider of consumer exit polling and has conducted face-to-face research in almost every imaginable venue,” according to EdisonResearch.com<sup>2</sup>, gives us a graphic illustration of podcast’s popularity between 2006 and 2012:

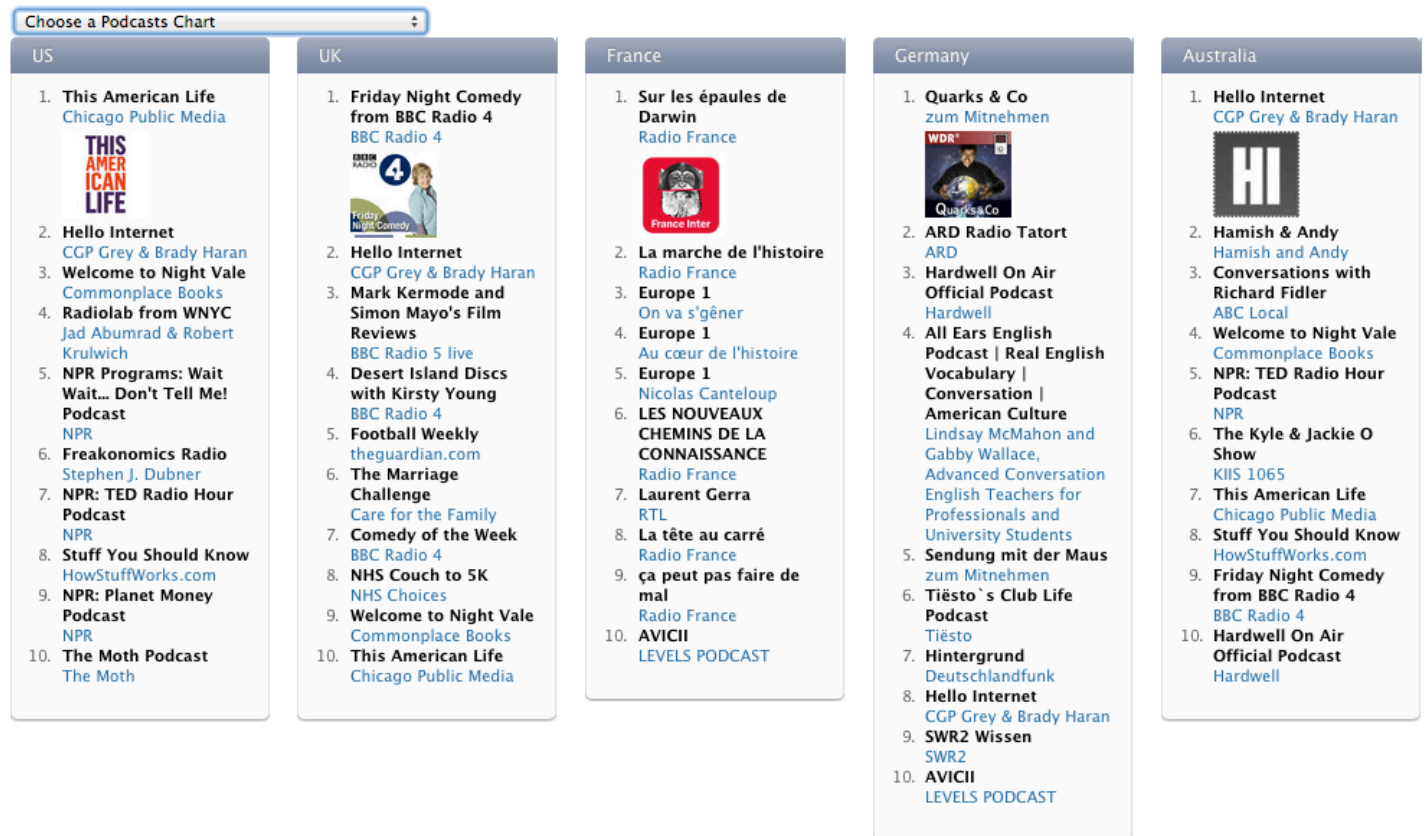


<sup>1</sup> “Despite Being Oh-So 2005, Podcasting Is Drawing Listeners and Advertisers Alike”

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.edisonresearch.com/about-us>

## What Makes a Podcast Successful?

### iTunes Store Top 10 Podcasts



The screenshot above shows iTunes' Top 10 podcast rankings as of February 2014. A quick glance at the US chart, and you'll notice that NPR is clearly one of the top producers of popular podcasts with their programs, "This American Life," "Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me" and more.

For those unfamiliar with the two aforementioned shows, "This American Life,"<sup>3</sup> is a weekly radio show that features true stories of everyday people packaged in an audio format and hosted by Ira Glass, and "Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me"<sup>4</sup> is an hour-long quiz show in which well-known names from the news and entertainment industry are contestants.

These two shows as well as the other NPR podcasts are broadcast live on NPR stations around the country, but only made available in podcast form after their initial airing. This is important because NPR can build an audience around their shows by making them available at anytime on their website in podcast form, so fans who cannot be near a radio to listen live are still able to keep up.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/about>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.npr.org/2010/12/10/110997427/about-wait-wait-don-t-tell-me>

Charts and rankings are one way of judging a successful podcast, while another is critical acclaim.

Every year, the more serious-minded Onion-spinoff entertainment publication, The A.V. Club, presents their best podcasts of the year. In the publication's December 2013 article, "The best podcasts of 2013,"<sup>5</sup> they list podcasts are far more comedy-based than the storytelling nature of "This American Life" or the quirky quiz show approach of "Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me."

The A.V. Club's top three podcasts of 2013 were "The Best Show On WFMU,"<sup>6</sup> which is a music and comedy radio show based out of the New Jersey radio station WFMU and hosted by Tom Scharpling, "WTF,"<sup>7</sup> a talk show podcast hosted by comedian Marc Maron, and, "Comedy Bang! Bang!"<sup>8</sup> which is another talk show and conversation-based podcast hosted by Scott Aukerman that features up-and-coming comedians.

When examining the podcasts discussed above, it's easy to see why they're so successful being that they're either backed and funded by NPR or have a celebrity host who can bring in celebrity guests. Unfortunately, not all podcasters have the backing of a major news organization or can draw big name celebrities.

Therefore, for the purpose of this white paper, we have to stretch our definition of a "successful" podcast a bit. When looking at success in terms of independent podcast and podcasters, it's better to examine the podcast's longevity, niche and presence.

By looking at these three items, it's safe to say that a far greater number of podcasts can be deemed "successful" than the top 10 on the iTunes chart or even named as the "best podcast" by a media publication.

So, we're going to focus our attention to two podcasts that may not exactly be moneymakers, but are considered successful and popular Chicago-based podcasts. They are Dynasty Podcasts<sup>9</sup> and Notes and Bolts' Podcast Series<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> "The best podcasts of 2013," <http://www.avclub.com/article/the-best-podcasts-of-2013-106168>

<sup>6</sup> <http://wfmuplaylists.com/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.wtfpod.com/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.earwolf.com/show/comedy-bang-bang/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://dynastypodcasts.com/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://notesandbolts.podomatic.com/>





Dynasty Podcasts was launched in 2005, and, according to the “About” section of their website, is, “Chicago’s first ever and longest-running music podcast.” Jaime Black, who was a former producer for Chicago’s alternative rock station Q101, hosts the podcast. Black produced Q101’s Chicago-focused music program Local 101 for nearly a decade. The podcast’s co-host is Chicago composer and cellist Leyla I. Royale. As of today, Dynasty Podcasts has produced more than 200 episodes and has over 33,000 Soundcloud<sup>11</sup> followers worldwide. **Note:** Soundcloud.com is a popular online podcast publishing platform.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://soundcloud.com>

**Notes And Bolts' Podcast**

Play **196: The Wet**

[Send to Friends](#) | [Leave a Comment](#) | [Download](#) | [Permalink](#)

February 13, 2014 10:00 PM PST

S2EP196, featuring The Wet

- 1.) The Wet - I Miss You
- 2.) Daily Void - Surprise Surprise
- 3.) CocoComa - She Gets Heavy (live at Gonerfest)
- 4.) Shellac - Prayer To God

**Podcast Summary**

Each week, we speak with a local Chicago creative - from bookstore and comics shop owners to beer brewers to writers to artists to underground publishers and zine writers to musicians to chefs and foodies and beyond, Notes and Bolts is a must on yr podcast queue for the raddest playlists and interviews of underground Chicago culture!

**About Notes And Bolts**

[View Profile](#)

Notes And Bolts' podcast is another that is music-focused but built a niche by being hyperlocal and featuring underground artists and musicians. Podcast host, curator and producer Kriss Stress uses his podcast to interview local bands or musicians that wouldn't normally get the publicity or press that a popular national act would. When the podcast started gaining an audience, Stress took the idea one step further and created a record label of the same name, which was named, "Best New Label With a Fixation on Charmingly Absurd Formats,"<sup>12</sup> by the Chicago Reader in 2013.

<sup>12</sup> "Best New Label With a Fixation on Charmingly Absurd Formats" <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/best-new-label-with-a-fixation-on-charmingly-absurd-formats/BestOf?oid=10031488>

Now that more background has been established for these two Chicago-based podcasts, we'll next look at the five tips for creating a successful podcast.

But first a brief note: A piece we'll be looking at a lot in this white paper is Brian Casel's March 2011 Mashable.com article, "7 Tips for Launching a Successful Podcast."<sup>13</sup> The titles may be similar, but the aim of this white paper is more about the bigger picture of a creating a successful podcast than the details Brian also includes about recording, editing and publishing a podcast. Additionally, much has changed in the podcast world since 2011, so updating may be necessary on a few of his points.

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<sup>13</sup> "7 Tips for Launching a Successful Podcast" <http://mashable.com/2011/03/25/podcasting-tips/>



## Five Tips for Creating a Successful Podcast

### 1. Chose a large-scale theme or topic that you are knowledgeable about.

“Find a large scale theme and topics you can speak to, and speak passionately about. So, for myself and Dynasty Podcasts, it’s local music, digital and social media, the intersection of digital and music, etc. Those are topics I can speak about, that I don’t feel like it’s work to talk about or research, so it’s easy for me to continually produce content,” Jaime Black writes in an email to me regarding this white paper.

Black’s sentiment is one that is echoed throughout a number of websites or guides on creating podcasts. Before even starting production on a podcast, it’s imperative to determine what your podcast should be about. Have a topic or subject matter that separates your podcast from others. In Black’s case, his podcast’s topic or theme is music, and most of it is even Chicago-based music, so his niche is even more defined, which helps separate his podcast from others even more.

In his, “7 Tips for Launching a Successful Podcast,” Cassel writes regarding a topic, “Can you fill 30 to 60 minutes just talking about your topic off the top of your head and make it interesting? Good! You found your topic.”

### 2. Chose a format that works best for your podcast’s topic or theme.

When talking format, Casel discusses whether the podcast should be an audio or video podcast. However, for the purposes of this white paper, we’re only talking about audio podcasts as video podcasts are a whole different animal.

But when speaking of format these days, it’s best to focus on the format in which you record your podcast. For example, will you be recording it live in front of an audience or in private?

Podcasts like the previously mentioned NPR game show, “Wait...Wait...Don’t Tell Me,” or The Paper Machete<sup>14</sup>, a weekly live storyteller show recorded in Chicago and available in podcast form, are recorded in front of a live audience, which works for those shows because live audience reactions fit their topic and theme.

However, in Black’s case, his podcast is recorded in private and offers a more personal and intimate feel that works best for his artist interviews.

For Kriss Stress of Notes And Bolts’ podcast, format was a matter of determining his podcast’s length.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://thepapermacheteshow.com/>

“At first, they were each over an hour long, but I started to realize that there was a lot of fluff in there; a lot of filler. So I eventually distilled it down to where each guest gives their history and thoughts in a 20 minute window while playing about 20 minutes of music. This allows for a concise 45 minute or less episode that's listenable while also comprehensive,” Stress writes in an email to me regarding this white paper.

### 3. Content is key.

“I try to create content that will be interesting and useful to other people, but first and foremost, I make sure it's interesting to me - not for selfish reasons, but because if I don't think it's interesting, it's doubtful anyone else will,” Black writes.

Like your podcast's topic or theme, content is key to its success. Once you have chosen your topic, you'll next need to use that topic to produce unique and interesting content. This means information, stories or, in Black's case, interviews that can't be found anywhere else.

Trying to hold back as a host was an important part in developing content for Stress' podcast.

“Over time I've learned that as the host, people aren't tuning in to listen to ME; they're tuning in to listen to the stories being told by the guest. As a result, I've certainly disciplined myself progressively to not inject as much of myself into things,” Stress writes.

But content isn't necessarily only the information your podcast is trying to convey. Being that a podcast is an audible medium, content means much more than that according to Cassel.

“Your topics, conversation flow, personality, and overall engagement are what will ultimately determine the success of your podcast,” Cassel writes.

Cassel also suggests writing a script of some kind for your show, but it depends on the person. Some may need everything completely written out, while others may only need a few notes to work off.

### 4. Promote your podcast on social media.

“As with any web content, social media integration is a must for your podcast to help your audience spread the word faster,” Cassel writes.

Cassel's quote may rung truer than ever in 2014. Social media is the most important promotion tool for promoting your podcast. A Facebook page and a Twitter account for your podcast are musts if you truly want to attract an audience, but a LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube wouldn't hurt.

More importantly, use those accounts to engage listeners and potential listeners. Don't only post when your podcast is published – likely once a week or a few times a month – but use the social

media space to post news stories or items related to your podcasts topic to keep your listeners engaged and interested even when your still brainstorming or producing your next episode.

### **5. Learn to adapt.**

“I’m always looking to adapt, to either be in line with, or ideally, ahead of, where trends/technology/peoples’ interests and consumption habits are or are going to be. So it’s a constant reinvention process - sometimes more evident than others, but it’s always malleable, because otherwise, it’s too easy to get left behind,” Black writes.

Black sums the importance of adaptability quite nicely. As mentioned earlier in this white paper, Soundcloud.com is currently one of the most popular online sound publishing tools and is very popular for hosting podcasts. But it’s possible that in a year, a brand new platform for hosting and publishing podcasts takes over.

It’s not quite sink or swim, but being able to adapt not only to technology but also to people’s ever-changing interests when it comes to your podcast’s topic or content is extremely important when it comes to your podcast’s success.

## Conclusion

These tips are not all there is to creating a successful podcast. Obviously much more goes into creating a podcast than this white paper touches including the actual recording, editing and publishing of your podcast. But regardless of how perfectly recorded or pristinely edited a podcast is, and it bears repeating, content is key. And along with content, these other four tips should at least give those that want to create a quality product some ideas on how to lead their podcast down the road to success.

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