

Podcasting for Associations is

Audio programs for associations are nothing new. In fact, some organizations have been doing them for more than ten years. Recently, interest has been on the rise due to the availability of podcasts on mobile devices and the increased accessibility of the technologies used to produce them. To find out more about how associations are embracing podcasts and audio programs, FORUM spoke with several organizations who are at the forefront of the podcasting trend. The production efforts ranged from staff-driven “do-it-yourself” to complete outsourcing from a vendor.

Robin Roy
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 Director, Section of Real Property, Trust and Estate Law
 American Bar Association: Real Property Trust and Estate Section
 Podcast: *ModioLegal*

Kathryn Mulligan
 Editor, Middle Market Growth Association for Corporate Growth
 Podcast: *Middle Market Growth Conversations*

Michael Johnson
 Senior Manager, Digital Communications
 The American Planning Association
 Podcast: *The APA Podcast*

Kathryn Keuneke
 Content Development Director
 Million Dollar Round Table
 Podcast: *The MDRT Podcast*

Peter Finn
 Deputy Executive Director and Chief Learning Officer
 The Society of Women Engineers
 Podcast: *The Diverse Podcast*

By **Dan Pietroske**

EXPLORE!

FORUM: What prompted the interest in adding an audio program/podcast?

APA: We started doing podcasts around 2006. At the time, we were beginning to incorporate recording technology into our office space to capture the audio from in-house events. After our first few events and recordings we determined that we should start a podcast to offer these programs up to our members. All of this seemed to indicate to us that moving into creating podcast content would be a worthwhile endeavor. Since then we've been creating additional programs and episodes trying out various different types of approaches including interviews, news updates, speaking event recordings and more.

ABA: ModioLegal was referred to us by another ABA group. Staff thought it was a great idea that members would appreciate, so they set up a ModioLegal demo with the editors of the section periodicals. The editors liked the service as well, and made a proposal to the section executive committee to have a trial run.

ACG: We felt like having a podcast was a nice addition to the Middle Market Growth suite of media. It's a powerful complement to our other assets; it enables us to feature some of the people that we write about in the magazine, as well as giving our members another way to hear insights from their peers. We saw the podcast as a good way to cover topics that maybe we didn't have room for in print, and to showcase ACG members and their great work building companies and creating jobs.

MDRT: The MDRT Podcast launched in January 2015 as a result of our content strategy. We wanted to provide our members with the topics and ideas that will help them get ahead in the financial services profession but in the format they want. The podcast gave us another medium to present the same kinds of ideas we already offered in our bimonthly magazine.

SWE: Through a variety of member surveys, we found that there was an appetite for this format. Also, there was a good deal of initial interest in the Diverse podcast that has led to a growing list of subscribers.

FORUM: Is there a formula you follow to structure your episodes?

ACG: The formula is really an intro that tees up the conversation, then the edited conversation with our guest ranges from 15 to 25 minutes. We close each episode with an outro

reminding listeners of how to subscribe to the podcast and where they can find other Middle Market Growth content. I like to end each interview by asking our guests what they've been reading lately. It's a topic that everyone is interested in talking about and it's been fun to hear how people approach it differently. It's a humanizing element to help get to know the guest and what makes them tick.

MDRT: Our formula is to simply get three to four members in a room and throw out a few questions. They usually start by answering individually, but as the discussion continues, the conversation is less directed by us and more by them. It's authentic and unscripted.

APA: We usually like to have each episode's length be at least 20 minutes long and about an hour or so maximum. We also consistently pre-record an intro and outro for each series. The intros usually give a brief description of the specific program or series, introduce the host, and provide a quick bio of the guest. The outro for each episode usually consists of some information on where the podcast can be found, as well as providing an email alias where listeners can send feedback or suggestions for future episodes.

FORUM: What types of content do you normally cover? Is the program more formal or casual?

ABA: Each narration is simply a reading of the written article. Our members have the challenge of not always having time to read the print version, so by providing the same content as the print version, the audio format solves their problem.

ACG: The topics we cover all relate in some way to growing companies or the broader business climate, but they're wide ranging. We've had a retail futurist on the podcast to discuss the future of shopping and how the consumer experience is becoming more experiential. We had the former CEO of GE, Jeff Immelt, who talked about his tenure as the company's leader and the criticism he's faced since stepping down. It is important that we keep the interview conversational. We want the content to be informative and succinct, but we also want to showcase the personalities of the guests.

MDRT: The MDRT Podcast showcases MDRT members' tips for increasing business efficiency, appreciating clients and adding value to their practice. It's formal in that we publish an episode on the first of each month, but the content is casual. We go into the interview with a loose idea of where we'll end up, but that's part of the fun.

APA: Our podcast episodes cover a range of topics and people within the urban planning sphere. We run multiple types of programs within the overall podcast structure and break them out into specific sub programs or “series.” For example, our series “The People Behind the Plans” focuses more on the individuals being interviewed and their story. On the other end of the spectrum, some of our podcast content will cover a specific issue or topic. We have also repurposed recordings from events such as our after-hours lecture series called “Tuesdays at APA.”

FORUM: Who is your intended audience?

MDRT: We launched in January 2015. We ended that year with 7,685 total listens of the 12 episodes we had at the time. In 2016, that number climbed to 16,674, and in 2017, we ended with 29,551. We’re on track to surpass that this year.

APA: The overall response has been relatively positive. We’ll get a few emails every week or so saying how much they like the podcast as well as suggestions for future guests or topics. On average, the podcast has between 2,000 to 3,000 subscribers with an average of a little more than 1,000 episode downloads a week.

SWE: The response has been very positive from our members and noted in the member surveying we conduct. Since we launched two years ago we have had over 12,000 downloads.

FORUM: How much effort and staff time is required to get one podcast produced?

ABA: Not much on the ABA’s end. We send the text files to ModioLegal at the same time as they go to the printer. They produce and distribute the audio edition by the time we release the text version to our members.

ACG: It really varies. The time involved includes making the ask and setting up the interview. Often, we’ll have an introductory call to discuss topics with the guest in advance, which provides talking points for the interview. Editing the audio takes several hours and can involve reordering content and making cuts, as well as adjusting audio quality.

MDRT: I would estimate that 10 hours of staff time is spent per episode to identify participants, determine the initial questions, use the transcripts to determine distinct episodes, and write the headline and intro.

APA: Each APA podcast episode probably takes around three to four hours of staff time. Both the recording and editing portions of the process seem to take up a bulk of that time.

SWE: The podcast production is pretty quick. Once we have the interview questions and a brief discussion of the format with the interviewee, the production time is limited to an hour.

FORUM: Who does the voice narration or conducts the interviews?

ABA: One of the interesting elements of ModioLegal’s patented business process is that they use students from the area of specialty to perform the narrations; in our case law students.

ACG: The Middle Market Growth editorial staff conducts the interviews. For the intro and outro, I typically record those segments with a colleague from our communications team so that there are two of our voices to tee up the conversation.

APA: The voice narration for each episode is either an APA member who’s the dedicated person interviewing or hosting or someone on our staff.

FORUM: How are you getting the word out about this program?

ABA: We sent an email to our members letting them know about the benefit. We will have a sticker on the cover of the first magazine issue with audio files as well as a more detailed article explaining the program in this issue. We are also posting information on social media.

ACG: We publish the podcast through Soundcloud and iTunes, so listeners can find the show through those platforms. We also embed audio for each episode on our website. We’ll then share it via the association and the magazine’s respective social media channels. Each issue of our print magazine features a blurb that promotes an episode of the podcast. Finally, in the outro of each recording, we ask listeners to rate and review the podcast on iTunes. That’s an effective way to help like-minded listeners find out about us.

MDRT: We promote our podcast to our members through social media and our e-newsletter. We also cross-promote it in our magazine, which sometimes features articles written from the same interviews that result in podcast episodes. We also use the MDRT Blog to promote the podcast.

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FORUM: Tell me about the general cost of this program and how you cover this cost.

APA: The primary cost associated with our podcast is related to staff time. There are also some minor equipment costs for microphones, stands, audio mixers, cables, etc. Currently our costs are just rolled into overhead for a larger communications budget.

MDRT: We consider the MDRT Podcast a member benefit. As is true with all of our content—print and digital—we don’t accept advertising, so the cost is primarily covered by member dues.

SWE: The cost of the program is really staff time and the cost of the software. The production is pretty efficient and the software is not terribly expensive, so I would say in the grand scheme, the costs are fairly nominal. We’ll likely never charge for access—since it is a great way to promote SWE to non-members or past members and let them know what great stuff we’re up to.

FORUM: Can you generate revenue from this program? How does that work?

ACG: We definitely see revenue potential, and we’ve had a number of inquiries from potential advertisers. It’s important for us that the content remain editorially driven, but we’re exploring packages to offer advertisers an opportunity to underwrite the interviews.

SWE: The primary way in which you can generate revenue is from advertising. Audio-based ads can be read by your host and the beginning (pre-roll) or middle (mid-roll) of the podcast episode. Podcast ads are usually sold as 10, 30, or 60 second spots. There are also options to partner with organizations or businesses to create sponsored content for your podcast. This basically means the content of the podcast or the subject matter is provided by the advertiser or sponsor. There are also podcast advertising networks that work specifically in this space that help podcast creators link up with advertisers.

FORUM: What advice would you give to an association who is interested in starting a podcast?

ACG: Make sure the audio quality is as good as you can make it within your equipment budget constraints. There are so many other podcasts to choose from that if the audio quality is poor, a listener is going to turn off your podcast, and they likely won’t come back.

MDRT: I would recommend not scripting your podcasts. We’ve found our audience loves that they’re listening in on an authentic conversation among other MDRT-level producers. Their personalities come through, and it becomes an extension of our in-person meetings. They feel like they’re right there with them.

APA: Really have a plan. Once you start you need to be committed to a schedule and content. Before starting, be sure you have completed two or three episodes as practice.

SWE: The strategy part is very important. Look carefully at your content strategy. Make it complementary to other sources of content. Be sure you know what message you want to be communicating. 

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