

Podcasting Checklist for Extension Professionals

Podcast – promising – but how start?

Podcasts are a great way to extend information and have a low barrier for entry. However, getting started can seem intimidating. If you are interested in podcasting do not be intimidated. The barriers to entry in podcasting are actually low. Once you have a podcast up and running, churning out episodes can be easier than sitting down to write a substantial blog post.



Use these tips to decide – Is podcasting for me? If so, then use the tips to get you started.

Podcast – The interview format

We use an interview format where one of the hosts interviews an expert about a basic extension or research topic (e.g., management of a specific insect in pistachios or a research project (almond variety trial). This format offers a fairly simply produced podcast (meaning minimal editing and sound engineering).

Note: Podcasts are only one of the extension tools that we use, and so we can only devote limited time to each episode.

Is podcasting a good fit for your program?

- **Are your Clientele likely to listen to podcasts?** Podcasts require internet access and the vast majority are consumed on smart phones. If your clientele is on the low end of technological savviness, podcasting may not be a good way to reach them.
- **Is the Information easily digested aurally?** Topics that require visual aids (insect ID or scouting methods, e.g.) may not be appropriate for a podcast.

Digital tools¹

- **Pick a hosting platform.** Podcast listening services (Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, PocketCasts) do not host audio files, they allow listeners to access audio files. There are services available that will host podcasts for you, or you can create a website that **can generate an appropriate RSS feed that you provide to podcast listening services.** Not all RSS feeds work for this, so ensure that the service you choose can generate a podcast feed. We went with a commercially available website builder because 1) our current institute website builder could not host podcasts, and 2) we wanted a website design that was beyond our current design options. One drawback to this approach is that we have a .com website and not an .edu domain.

¹ Mention of products or services in this article are solely the authors' opinions and do not reflect the views of the University of California.

- **Does your website look good?** We're veering into opinion territory here, but we do think this is important. Think about websites that you don't mind visiting, and those that you hate visiting. The ones you probably like are easy to navigate, have a modern design (image heavy and minimal text are popular now), and slick features. If people struggle to access the information, they won't use your site. There are services that range from minimal and cheap to more expensive but provide more options. We went with a more expensive website builder that was user friendly for website creators, provided a wide variety of website designs, and supports image heavy displays for eye candy to draw people in. Phoebe created the podcast website in less than a day (check out growingthevalleypodcast.com).
- **Pick your Video conferencing software.** The best audio quality is recorded in person (discussed below). However, if you do not have the capability of doing that, particularly in the COVID-19 era, use video conferencing software that can record audio files separately from video. We use Zoom, but we have not investigated other options. Your recording setup matters; simply speaking into your phone or laptop microphone likely will not provide excellent quality audio, and if your internet connection is unstable it **will** show up in the audio. Remember: your audience will only be using their ears to consume the podcast. Glitchy audio and poor sound quality will detract from the information you are sharing.
- **What about Editing software?** We use the free version of Audacity, there are others available. There are a lot of online resources to help you learn to use Audacity, which is one of the reasons why we like it. We 'vanity edit' our episodes to remove 'ums' and 'uhs' to make it easier to listen to, as well as remove errors or misspoken statements.

Physical hardware

- **Microphones.** We each went with different recording setups. Phoebe prefers a Zoom H4N Pro, a handheld recorder that can store audio files, and two Lavalier microphones. It is moderately expensive in terms of recording equipment, but lightweight, and can be taken into the field. Luke uses microphones that plug into his laptop. When he's in his at-home recording studio (a spare closet), he uses the Rode Podcaster USB Microphone. It does not travel well, and when he is recording while traveling, he uses the Samson Q2U Handheld Dynamic Microphone. There are a lot of resources available to help you pick your own microphones.
- **A place to store audio files.** Podcast audio files quickly take up large portions of hard drive space. Larger audio files can also be too large to share with collaborators via e-mail attachment. Cloud-based storage services are great ways to overcome both problems, we use both services.
- **Recording setup.** While Growing the Valley is an agriculture podcast, we do the vast majority of our recording indoors. Most of our episodes are recorded at internal meetings when we are face to face with colleagues. Because our episodes are short, we can often record the raw audio for two separate episodes in a single sitting with our very patient colleagues.
- **A cohost.** There are certainly podcasts out there that have only one host, however we have found that having a cohost splits the burden, making this effort easier, and provides different viewpoints and experiences. In addition, a cohost adds accountability and may help to keep you invested in your podcast project. We think having diverse voices hosting simplifies the listening experience, since podcasts with hosts that have similar pitches and speech patterns can make it difficult to determine the identity of each host. Additionally, we separated by over 200 miles in California's Central Valley, and there are cultural and climactic differences that result in small, but appreciable approaches to farming orchard crops. This adds nuance to our '1 Minute Challenge' episodes, where we discuss monthly tasks in the orchard.

Podcasting tips

- **Put interviewees at ease.** We have found that even among our colleagues, who are used to giving talks before large crowds of people, being interviewed for a podcast can be intimidating. Be ready to provide an outline or list of questions to the interviewee. Some of our interviewees are gifted speakers and can churn out recordings off the top of their head that require little to no editing, but the majority of people do not. Interview people where and when they are most comfortable: in their offices when they can reference a presentation or interview them on a talk they gave very recently. It is important to reassure the interviewee that mistakes are no problem at all. If you can eventually get an interviewee to deliver an unflawed statement, you can later drop their flawed attempts to the editing floor.
- **Record silence.** Always record 20-30 seconds of silence before an interview. This will allow you to remove background noise through the magic of editing software.
- **Be aware of copyright laws.** Podcasts almost always have music support for their intros and outros, and we wanted that as well. We will not delve into music permissions here as neither of us are copyright lawyers, but we are aware that you cannot use any music you desire. There is music available under the Creative Commons. Check what sort of copyright the music you are interested in is under, artists choose from a range of controls over how their music is used. We decided to generate unique music to sidestep copyright issues. If in doubt, talk to your university's legal team.
- **Getting permission?** We've gotten questions as to whether we needed permission to start a podcast. We did not ask for permission, episodes do not go through any approvals other than our own and the approval of the person we interviewed. We are not required to get preapproval for blog posts, trade articles, or talks, and a podcast is no different from these other extension methods. **One exception to this is when we discuss specific pesticides.** In general we try to keep discussions to chemical classes and avoid discussing rates. In episodes where specific products or rates are mentioned because we are discussing a research trial, we've cleared the episode through our Office of Pesticide Information and Coordination, who confirms that what is mentioned is on the label. We have not (yet) discussed experimental uses of pesticides, and may never do so. We also are careful to include disclaimers that are standard within UC Cooperative Extension: "Mention of a trade name is not an endorsement or recommendation. Always check the label before applying." This statement is based on specific pesticide use laws in California, such as the requirement for a site specific recommendation that is generated by a licensed individual who is up to date on continuing education requirements. Laws regarding fertilizer applications are less strict in California, however we typically avoid using specific rates for fertilizers as well.

For More

Visit the UC ANR Learning & Development Site. Or visit the podcast site: GrowingtheValleyPodcast.com