

Library Podcasting: A Planning Guide

Developed by Jill Hames for the James L. Hamner Public Library

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What do you want to achieve with a podcast?

- Is this a marketing tool, a programming tool, or something else?
- Is the podcast to educate people about your particular library's services or libraries in general?
- Is the podcast even about libraries?
- Is the podcast to tell people about books?
- Is the podcast to try to convince people to read more?
- Is the podcast to show that the library is more than books and reading?
- Something else?

Example:

Our podcast is primarily a public relations tool, closely tied to marketing.

- The first goal is to help users get to know staff as humans rather than rule-enforcers.
- The second goal is to educate users and non-users about how and why a public library operates.
- The third goal is to promote our library's services, particularly those not related to books and reading. An emphasis will be on learning in general, so nearly any topic fits into the podcast's scope.

What kind of audience do you want?

- Where do they live?
- What is their age?
- What is their education level?
- What kinds of things do they already do or don't do?
- How do they feel about the community?
- Are they library users?
- What motivates them?

Example:

Our podcast is for adults, primarily in our service area, but we also hope to reach beyond that. We want library users and non-users to enjoy listening. We envision our audience as people who enjoy learning about all kinds of things and maybe have some higher education, but aren't particularly academic; they aren't especially engaged in their community, but are aware of typical community resources; and they are motivated by convenience and good feelings rather than by convictions based on rigorous thought.

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Does the library have someone enthusiastic about performing and producing a podcast? Does the host have the judgement to direct a conversation? Are the host and producer the same people?

- Recording a podcast is much like performing or public speaking. The host needs to be comfortable being recorded, skilled at moving a conversation forward, and able to redirect tangents back to the main topic.
- The host needs to be able to judge what not to say in order to not give the wrong impression about the library.
- The host should be comfortable using multiple pieces of potentially glitchy software that interact. (This might not be as much of an issue if you aren't using free software.)
- The producer needs to be able to listen for small details and use a mouse with precision during editing. Editing a sound file can be tedious.
- Experience as a sound engineer is helpful during recording, but not necessary.

Example:

Jill is enthusiastic about recording, has performing and public speaking experience, and is responsible for the library's public relations. She is also comfortable with technology and has some experience as a sound engineer.

What format will the podcast take?

- One person talking?
- A talk show with two or more people?
- One person who interviews others?
- A radio drama?
- Something else?

Example:

Our podcast will be hosted by Jill. It will typically be a talk show with a co-host. The co-host will be someone on staff who is excited to be recorded. No one who does not want to participate will be expected to record. Sometimes, it will be an interview conducted by Jill.

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What mood will the podcast have?

- Formal and strictly professional?
- Relaxed and casual?
- Academic?
- Something else?

Example:

Our podcast will be relaxed. Humorous mistakes will not be edited out. We want the feel to be that listeners walked into the library on a slow day and overheard staff talking. Another way to put it is that we want listeners to feel like they walked into a living room and joined a casual conversation among library workers.

From where will you get content? Does what you want to do fall under fair use or do you have permission from the copyright owners? Will it make your users uncomfortable? (I'm not an attorney. Talk to your own lawyer and do your own research.)

- Reading an entire book might be a lot of fun and get a lot of listeners, but it probably isn't covered by fair use.
- Writing your own radio drama to perform is probably fine.
- Telling stories about patrons, even with their names or genders changed, might not be the best public relations tactic.

Example:

The primary content will be the opinions of the participants. The host will be responsible for ensuring content use falls under fair use. Stories told about patrons will only be positive, always anonymized, and used judiciously.

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Do you have time to record and produce a podcast?

The more thorough the editing, the more time it takes. If you are learning how to edit as you go, it takes even more time.

*Example for a **30-Minute Finished Product** (Assuming you don't have a recording studio ready to go at all times):*

Set-Up and Sound Checks:	10 minutes
Recording:	45 minutes
Break Down:	5 minutes
Bare-Bones Editing:	60 minutes
Create Show Notes:	15 minutes
Upload Episode Details:	<u>10 minutes</u>
	145 minutes = 2.25 hours

How often will an episode be released? On which days?

- Once per week?
- Once per month?
- Twice a week?
- Twice a month?
- Something else?

Example:

We will release one episode every Wednesday.

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How will you gain listeners for your podcast? Do you have time to promote it? Who will be responsible for promotions? Will you pay a service to generate promotional content?

Podcasts need to be promoted as much as any other library service, maybe more, since there is so much competition and “library podcast” sounds boring. You are competing with an estimated 550,000 other podcasts (Buzzsprout).

- Buzzsprout recommends 7 pieces of promotion per episode.
- How many places are you going to promote your podcast?
- Does the person responsible have the credentials to effectively promote?
- Is it more cost effective to hire Buzzsprout or another service to generate content for you?

Example:

We will promote the podcast through social media, on our website, and word-of-mouth. Jill is responsible for the library’s social media and will create the posts. All staff are encouraged to tell patrons about the podcast. At this time, we will not hire a service to generate content, but this is something to look into for the future. Promotions will be as we have time, but the minimum goal is one social media post per episode.

How will you measure success?

- What evidence will show that you are doing what you hoped to achieve?
- How many listeners, downloads, or plays do you hope to get in the first year?
- What would cause you to decide the cost, including time, is more than the benefit?

Example:

If after 12 months, we have an average of 12 listeners, we will consider the first year successful. If the average is less than that and there is not significant positive feedback from our community, we will discontinue the podcast. If the average is less than that, but we receive frequent positive feedback, we will continue for one more year with a goal of an average of 21 listeners for 12 months. If we lose staff willing and/or able to record and produce the podcast, it will be discontinued.

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Getting the Gear

Sound is the most important. This is an auditory experience. Quality sound is the most important consideration.

There are all kinds of options for recording set ups. There are all kinds of price points, too. Things change as technology changes. Decide on your priorities and do your own internet research.

Example:

Our budget is \$500. If we cannot get equipment to provide quality sound with minimal editing, we will not create a podcast. A simple hosting solution is important.

Hosting

You will need a service to host your audio files. This is the same concept as needing a service to host your website. Some popular options are:

- Blubrry
- Buzzsprout
- Podbean

Different podcasts have different needs. Choose something because it fits what you prioritize, not because another library uses it.

Example:

We want a hosting site that has a price structure that is easy to understand. We want the website to be easy to use without a noticeable learning period.

We chose Buzzsprout because of its positive reviews for being user-friendly, simple price structure, and because Wordpress plugins are unimportant to us (if they were, we would use Blubrry).

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Microphones

Learning about mics is an education in itself. Which microphones you chose will depend on the nature of your podcast. If you have plans to video your recording sessions, that will also influence the kinds of mics you choose.

Do not use your computer's internal microphone. It is possible to record with the internal mic, but the sound quality isn't as good as when using an external mic, especially if you have more than one person talking.

Connection types:

- XLR (the traditional pin types connections; requires hardware beyond a computer)
- USB (plugs directly into the computer)

Common microphone styles:

- Condenser tabletop with multiple pattern selection
 - Easy to change recording pattern (directly in front, both sides, etc.)
 - Record one or multiple people with the same mic
 - May be easier to control settings than headset or lavalier
- Headset
 - Good for people who move
 - Good for videos, depending on style
 - Picks up noise from clothing, hair, etc. that touches it
- Lavalier/Lapel
 - Good for people who move
 - Good for videos, depending on style
 - Picks up noise from clothing, hair, etc. touching it

Example:

We chose Blue Yeti tabletop condenser microphones because of their high reviews for an affordable mic and their versatility. We chose to purchase two mics because we will have two people recording and controlling sound quality is easier when each person has their own mic.

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Software

Audacity is easy to use when you don't know anything, yet has plenty of features for those who do. It is donationware. It will record multiple mics with the addition of mixer software, but it will record them onto the same track, which gives less control over editing.

Voicemeeter is useful for recording multiple mics into Audacity. It is donationware.

Skype has free and paid versions. I've read that it has the ability to record calls, but I haven't seen it on the free version. I've read that Skype and Audacity can be used together, but have not been able to do this.

Where to Record

A room with minimal noise is best. If your recording has doors closing, people talking, etc. in the background, it can be difficult to edit out.

A small room will help prevent recording an echo-type sound.

A room with materials that will absorb sound (carpet, draperies, etc.) will also help prevent echoes and other unwanted effects.

The higher-quality mics (e.g. Blue vs. an internal computer mic) will help eliminate unwanted sound quality from less-than-ideal recording rooms.

Experiment with different rooms and positions within a room. Even something as simple as facing the wall at an angle instead of straight on can help improve the sound quality.

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Optional

Pop filters are an inexpensive way to improve sound quality. Their primary use is to smooth out noise interference from the explosion of air when singers say “b,” “p,” and similar sounds. For speakers, I tried with and without a pop filter and preferred the sound quality with it. To me, the sound was more like the sound of a live person and less like the sound of a recorded person.

External hardware mixers are most likely needed if using XLR mics. There may be some other options for converting XLR to USB, but a mixer is the most common solution.

External hardware mixers are pricy, but they give the greatest control over recording quality sound.

My Opinion

If I could afford it, I would start with a quality mixer and software to record all mics onto separate tracks. Then I would get mics to go with the mixer and software. I would use pop filters on the mics. This set up would require the greatest amount of learning about sound engineering, but would also provide the opportunity for the best sound quality.

A Sample Supply List Budget

2 Blue Yeti Microphones	\$260
2 Auphonix Pop Filters	\$ 84
Audacity	\$ 0
Voicemeeter	<u>\$ 0</u>
	\$344
1 Year Buzzsprout	<u>\$144</u>
	\$488

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Putting It All Together

Recording Phone Calls

I haven't learned to do this yet. I've read that it is very easy to do with Skype, but the record button that is supposed to exist doesn't show up in my software (the most recent version).

I've also read that you can use Audacity to record Skype calls, but again, the button that is supposed to be there doesn't show in my software (the most recent version).

I've read of other software that will record computer calls.

I've read than a smartphone with the correct app can record calls, but then there is no assurance of sound quality. Presumably, the sound file could be transferred to a computer for editing.

Recording in Person: 2 People

Set Up

You will need:

- A computer with
 - Mixing software (e.g. Voicemeeter)
 - Recording software (e.g. Audacity)
 - Editing software (e.g. Audacity)
- 2 Microphones (e.g. Blue condenser tabletop USB)
- Hosting service (e.g. Buzzsprout)
- The quietest, smallest room available

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Recording in Person: 2 People

Recording and Publishing Process

1. Install microphones onto computer
2. Open and calibrate Voicemeeter
3. Open Audacity and perform a sound check
4. Work between Voicemeeter, Audacity, and mic settings until you are satisfied with the sound
5. Record episode into Audacity
6. Save episode
7. Close Voicemeeter
8. Uninstall mics
9. Edit episode in Audacity, being sure to work with a file copy, not the original
10. Save the edited file as WAV or other format accepted by the hosting site
11. Upload the file to the hosting site and add show notes
12. Publish
13. Promote

Final Thoughts

Written out, the process looks overwhelming, but it isn't any more difficult than planning another type of program. The biggest risk is in selecting microphones, other hardware, and software because there is always something better and more expensive. Get what you can afford and go forward with confidence.

That said, whatever you can do to record tracks separately will help you to create a more professional end product.

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Resources

Buzzsprout. "How to Promote Your Podcast on Social Media."

https://www.buzzsprout.com/blog/promote-podcast-social-media?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=promote-podcast-social-media

Buzzsprout. "Podcast Setups for Every Level of Podcast."

https://www.buzzsprout.com/blog/podcast-setups?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=podcast-setups.

Discover Pods. <https://discoverpods.com/best-podcast-mic-podcasting-microphone/>

The Podcast Host. <https://www.thepodcasthost.com>