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**BH2 – Podcasts**

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**What is a podcast?**

In the broadest terms, a podcast is an audio file that can be downloaded from the internet to a computer or mobile device for listening on demand. You can download them when desired, or you can receive them automatically on your phone or other device through a subscription.

Beyond that technical definition, what makes an audio file a podcast is complicated because there are many types of podcast. The ultimate power of this highly flexible format lies in the sheer variety of possible podcasts. Listeners can find exactly what they want. Producers can use whatever style they choose.

Many people think that podcasting is the next generation of audio programming. Podcasts don’t have the restrictions that programs broadcast from a radio station have—there is no time limit, there is room for opinion, advocacy, and there is no required or standard production style.

A podcast can be an ongoing series of audio programs published on a regular basis. It can also be a limited series of programs available all at once. Many radio programs are made available as podcasts so listeners can hear them at their convenience.

Some podcasts feature a single voice talking about a particular subject. Some have two hosts chatting with each other, telling a story or giving information. Some are documentaries, some are magazine-style. There are panel podcasts, interview podcasts, fiction podcasts, and podcasts that feature music. Some podcasts are designed for a general audience, but the majority are made for listeners with specific interests as varied as politics, movies, model trains, religion, or economics. There are podcasts for people who love football or cooking. There are podcasts that talk about new books, fashion, gardening, or how to create an NGO. There are even podcasts about podcasts. Podcasts come from all around the world on almost any subject imaginable. And yes, there are a few podcasts for farmers. Not many, but they exist.

**How popular are podcasts?**

The podcast can trace its origin to the 1980s, but it was in 2004 when the term “podcast” replaced “autoblogging” that the concept really started to take hold. Over the next decade, people started to experiment with and publish their podcasts. In 2014, podcasts took a big leap forward with a program called *Serial*, produced by National Public Radio in the United States. *Serial* holds the record as the most downloaded podcast.

Podcast popularity continues to grow quickly. There are now hundreds of thousands of podcasts available worldwide.

A recent study in Canada shows that more than 26% of Canadians listen to a podcast at least once a month. In the United States, one study says that 42% of Americans have listened to a podcast. In South Korea, research says that 58% of people listen to a podcast at least monthly.

People listen to podcasts because they are convenient. They can be downloaded and listened to at any time of day. With so many available, listeners can choose exactly what kind of podcast they want to hear, depending on data plans and internet connectivity.

Podcasts have created an audio revolution that is challenging standard radio broadcasting in some parts of the world.

**How popular are podcasts in Africa?**

Reliable access to the internet is still an issue across sub-Saharan Africa, but it is being developed. And as it does develop, more podcasts are being produced. Currently, podcasts are being produced in countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Benin, Malawi, and Kenya. Check out the list provided at[www.africanpodcasts.com](http://www.africanpodcasts.com)to getan idea of what’s available.

**Who are your listeners?**

To make a successful podcast, it is absolutely crucial that you know your audience. On- demand audio programs need to match your potential listeners’ interests. Listeners won’t take the time to download your program if there is nothing in it for them.

Your work as an agricultural broadcaster can help you identify who your audience is and some of the information that is useful to them. You can design a podcast to meet those wants and needs. Ask for audience feedback on your radio program and use it to guide you as you choose the theme and content of your podcast. It could be a program about new farming techniques, or nutrition and health, or marketing, or other issues of interest to a rural audience. A podcast allows you to zero in on specific content without needing to appeal to a general audience. Podcasting is most often intended to be *narrowcasting* rather than *broadcasting.*

**How can podcasts help me serve my listeners better?**

* Content is available at any time—if listeners miss the live show, they can listen whenever they wish, and as often as they wish.
* Content is directed at a group of people who share an interest and presented in a way they find accessible and easy to listen to.
* If properly advertised, podcasts can expand your audience and create a community of listeners who care about the issues you care about.
* Podcasts connect people while educating and entertaining.
* Podcasts create a virtual listener community.

**How can podcasts help me produce better programs**

* Podcasts can be interactive. Many have websites that encourage listener response and suggestions for future programs.
* Podcasts can be created anywhere, shared everywhere, and can be about anything.
* No matter where it is posted, a podcast is a way to extend the life of your program, potentially grow your audience, and certainly make it easier for regular listeners who sometimes find it difficult to get to a radio when your program is broadcast.

**How do I get started? (Learn more about these and other points in the Details section below.)**

1. Making a podcast
2. Production styles
3. Publishing your podcast
4. Attracting listeners

**Making a podcast**

The easiest podcast to make is the radio program you already produce. If you have a website, you can post the recorded program there for listeners to download at their convenience.

If you don’t have a website, you can upload your program to such sites as Soundcloud or Facebook. You can direct your listeners to the download site. It may take a while for people to catch on and begin to listen on demand, but once they start to listen, it is likely they will spread the word. That’s how podcasts work.

As reliable internet service develops in Africa, podcasts are likely to become more popular. By posting your program for on-demand listening, you are part of an audio revolution. You will be helping your audience get used to the convenience and endless possibilities of the podcasts that will be produced in the future.

As you get used to the idea of podcasting, you may find yourself wanting to produce a podcast that complements your radio program. Here are some ideas on how you can do that.

**Production styles**

Anyone with a recorder and an internet connection can make a podcast. But it takes the skills of a radio producer to make a good quality podcast that will attract, inform, entertain, and build an audience.

There are a variety of podcast production styles, just as there are varieties of radio programs.

Here are some of the most popular styles used in podcasts worldwide, along with some of the benefits and drawbacks of each. Whichever you choose, it is important to stick with that style. Familiarity and dependability can help build audience loyalty. If listeners know what to expect and enjoy it, they will keep coming back.

1. **Single host, single voice**

The host of the podcast is the only voice the audience hears. The host talks for the entire episode—telling a story, giving opinions, telling jokes, explaining a concept or procedure.

Example: The host talks about a visit to a farm where there has been an invasion of Fall armyworm. The pest destroyed much of the maize crop and damaged the sorghum. The host gives the history of the pest, how it came to Africa, and how much damage it has caused. She talks about how the farmer used pesticides to control the pest. Then she talks about the health effects of spraying the chemicals.

**Benefits**

The producer can use this style both as an efficient way of providing a lot of information and to tell the story of an individual. The producer can bring her own thoughts and analysis to the story, based on her research. The producer can use information and experiences gathered from making her regular radio broadcast.

**Drawbacks**

It is sometimes difficult for a listener to stay with a single voice for an extended period of time. The producer has to be an excellent storyteller and performer. The success of this style relies on how engaging the host is. These kinds of podcasts are best when they are non-scripted, or at least when they sound as if there is no script. The host needs to be familiar enough with the content to talk with confidence. This is a skill that can take time to develop, but it is worth developing! The first podcasts in this style could be shorter, getting longer as confidence grows. But longer isn’t necessarily better.

1. **Single host with guest(s)**

The host invites a guest(s) to do an interview.

Example: The host introduces the podcast episode by giving a little background information about the Fall armyworm infestation. She describes the threat the pest poses to maize and sorghum and then interviews the agriculture extension officer about the problem. She then interviews a doctor about the health threats of using and misusing pesticides.

**Benefits**

Podcasts have no defined length. They can be as long as you need. So interviews can be more in-depth and longer than on a regular radio program. The host can spend more time with her guests if needed to fully explore their expertise. The same is true for guests with personal stories.

**Drawbacks**

Knowing that time is not as much of an issue as it is with a typical radio program can lead to sloppy interview habits. Many interview podcasts suffer from a lack of focus—the interviews don’t lead to a specific point. Instead, they try to cover many points. This can be confusing to listeners. As stated above, a longer podcast is not necessarily a better podcast. A better podcast is one that is well-focused, well-edited, and well-paced.

1. **Magazine-style**

This is very much like the radio programs you produce. There is a host who introduces recorded items and conducts interviews.

Example: The podcast opens with a host telling the listener what to expect in this episode. Then she reads an introduction to a recorded interview she conducted in the field with a farmer whose crop has been ruined by Fall armyworm. The next item might be a quick run-down of prices and market conditions in the immediate area (assuming the podcast is available on a daily basis). That is followed by an agriculture extension officer explaining how pulse crops fix nitrogen in the soil. The last item is an interview with a local chef about cooking with lentils.

**Benefits**

Both you and your listeners are familiar with the magazine style of production. But with a podcast, there is more freedom in terms of time. There is also a chance to experiment with different content and different ways of presenting it. Starting a new podcast allows you to experiment with content and style—and these two elements are part of what will make your podcast unique.

**Drawbacks**

Making a magazine-style podcast is a lot of work. If you are already producing a weekly radio program, you may not have the time to make a magazine-style podcast as well. But you do have the option of using some of the content from your program in your podcast.

1. **Two hosts**

Some of the most popular podcasts feature two hosts who share stories and information with each other. The podcast consists of them talking to each other in an unscripted but well-researched way.

Example: The two hosts tell listeners that they have been hearing a lot about the devastation caused by Fall armyworm. Host One explains how this invasive pest arrived in Africa. Host Two picks up the story, telling her co-host and the audience about one farmer’s experiences. The co-hosts ask each other questions to help move the story along. Host One shifts the conversation to using pesticides and explains the dangers. Host Two introduces other ways of managing Fall armyworm, such as handpicking the caterpillars from the crops and interspersing crops that are not affected by Fall armyworm among the maize and sorghum. Host One finishes the episode with a story about a farmer who is rallying her neighbours to try these other ways of managing the infestation.

**Benefits**

Two hosts working with each other to tell a story is lively and engaging. The listener is eavesdropping on a conversation rather than listening to a lecture. The research workload can be shared equally and each host is responsible for only half of the content.

**Drawbacks**

As with a single host, this style depends entirely on the ability of the two hosts to perform with no script in an engaging, intelligent way. The two hosts also have to work well together as a team. If there is no “chemistry” between them, the podcast will not work.

1. **The group**

Some podcasts feature three or more people discussing a topic. They appear in each episode as regular participants. There are two versions of this style. In one, a host or moderator presides over the discussion, directing the conversation and asking questions. It is similar to the panel discussions used on many radio magazine programs. This difference is that the participants are regulars and the discussion is often less formal than one would hear on the radio. The participants get to know each other and have the freedom to respond to each other without the host having to ask them to. In the second version of this style, there is no host. This version of a group podcast takes advantage of the strengths of the participants to share equally the roles of storyteller and interviewer. All members of the group assume the duties of the host, taking turns introducing and leading the conversation.

Example: A producer finds three very informed and articulate farmers from three different communities. She brings them into the studio once a month to discuss farming issues. In this episode, the three talk about the misuse of pesticides. One of them tells the story of a child with breathing problems in her village. The doctors believe the illness was the result of pesticides being sprayed often close to the child’s home. The other two farmers ask questions and share stories from their communities. One talks about an elderly couple who had to leave their home and move in with their son several kilometres away because of breathing problems. Together, the participants make a list of how, when, and even *if* pesticides should be used. They ask listeners to respond to what they have heard and to submit questions for the three farmers to discuss.

**Benefits**

As with the two-host style, the audience can listen in to a conversation between engaged and engaging people who are experts about their own lives and experiences and can speak with confidence about what they have seen and heard.

**Drawbacks**

It is difficult to find a group of people who are all articulate, knowledgeable, generous with their colleagues, and have the confidence to speak for a period of time. A podcast like this will likely need extensive editing for clarity and focus.

1. **Build your own**

The above styles are common in the more than 700,000 podcasts in production in countries around the world. But you are not limited to these. You can combine two styles or create a brand new one. Most of the rules about how podcasts should sound, how long they should be, and how often they should be published (daily, weekly, or monthly) have yet to be written. They may never be.

But there are some guidelines you should follow:

*Good taste*: There is little to prevent you from making a podcast that includes foul language or ignorant and hurtful remarks. But there is no reason to. Respect, integrity, and good taste must always be foundations of all your programs, including your podcasts.

*Research*: Podcasts often feature opinions. Opinions, however, are only useful to the listener if they are based on facts. Whichever style you choose, you need to do the same kind of research that you would do for your regular radio broadcast.

*Pacing and technical excellence*: Many podcasts are made by amateurs who don’t have the technical and programming abilities of a radio producer. These podcasts are rarely successful. Listeners won’t stay if they hear bad edits, uneven levels, and guests or hosts who drone on too long. Podcasts have to be well-paced, well-edited. and well-produced. Audiences expect it.

Smartphone apps are continually being developed that enable you to record and edit audio and upload a file for publication. These are making podcasting simpler and simpler. You don’t need a studio and editing software on your computer to make a podcast. But, as stated, audio quality is important to listeners. If you have the necessary equipment, you may get a better product by using it rather than doing everything on your phone.

**Publishing your podcast**

It is vital to make your podcast easily available to listeners. There are many podcast-hosting companies that will store your podcasts and send the episodes out to subscribers on a scheduled basis. Searching the internet for these companies will provide you with a lot of options. While some of them may offer inexpensive or free options, generally you will have to pay for this service.

But there is at least one free way to post your podcast. You can create a free account on Soundcloud (<https://soundcloud.com/>), upload your podcast, and connect it to a Facebook page you create for the podcast. Be sure to let listeners know about that Facebook page. It can be used as well for listener responses, making the podcast to some degree interactive.

**Attracting listeners**

Experience in North America has shown that the most effective way to generate interest in a podcast is by word of mouth—people sharing their enthusiasm for the podcast via social media or through conversation. It is easy to start advertising your podcast through a Facebook page—and free. You can promote your Facebook page on your radio program to get things started. You can start an email list of people who have been guests on your program and ask them to help you get the word out. It can be a slow process, but if a specific audience finds the podcast interesting, the word will spread.

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Contributed by: Dick Miller, freelance radio producer, trainer, and ex-CBC Radio documentary producer, lecturer in the Advanced Documentary Workshop, University of King’s College School of Journalism.