

# The Rise of **EARFLUENCE**™

Storytelling to Engage,  
Educate, and Influence

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## Introduction

The current trends in our business environment demand authentic content at scale, while also aligned with the needs of micro-targeted audiences. Companies have invested billions of dollars in tools and talent to track you, talk to you, and influence your behavior.

Social tools, listening technology, personalized ads, and even robocalls to cell phones have created a digital tsunami that is both effective at times and intrusive at others. Yet, the question remains, how can brands create a lasting, micro-targeted, and authentic link to the consumers? Powerful storytelling.

Podcasts deliver stories that educate, entertain and engage, via a platform that allow consumers the power of choice. Companies like Netflix and Spotify have proven that consumers want real-time access to the content they select. While podcasting isn't new, the medium is increasing in relevance because it gives content creators the freedom to tell stories aligned with the interests of specific communities through authentic conversations and storytelling.

This white paper will explore the role that podcasting plays in micro-targeting, describe the audience demographics and behaviors that marketers covet, the built-in flexibilities of the format and its role in educating a targeted audience, and the keys to effective podcasting for brands and businesses of all sizes. Finally, we will explore the notion of podcasting itself as a startup enterprise, as well as the difference in the podcasting market currently being felt in the work of North Carolina podcast production and marketing startup, Earfluence.

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The modern era of marketing has been largely defined by content, and content marketing has become the centerpiece of larger strategies for businesses of all sizes and industries. Around 2004, blogs, ebooks, articles, and reports began to emerge, as brands began to take advantage of the internet's seemingly limitless opportunities for marketing, and by 2016, 88 percent of all brands used some form of content marketing. From site content and blogs to later advances like social media and video, compelling content serves many purposes and engage audiences--when done right--in the ways and places they want to be engaged.

Content marketing actually democratizes the business world, making success more accessible through tools that are often easy to use, and in many cases, more cost-effective than the avenues preferred by large corporations, such as television and

radio advertising. Almost every type of content marketing can be executed with a DIY ethic, or through hiring agencies and freelancers at different prices and skill levels.

### Podcasting Is a Key Channel for Content Microtargeting

One of the prevailing trends in marketing over the last several years is microtargeting, using influencers to create authentic brand stories within that influencer's message to drive consumer behavior. Microtargeting capitalizes on the consumer's demographic, psychographic, geographic, and behavioral data to predict his buying behavior, interests, opinions, and influence that behaviour with the help of targeted advertising.

Microtargeting strategies are common on YouTube, Snapchat, Vimeo, and of course, Instagram, but podcasting is a can't-miss emerging tool for marketers looking to create communities suitable for microtargeting. As the research shows, podcasting is able to reach certain targeted demographics, like any other media, because of the audience that's attracted to the platform. Due to the nature of the platform itself, that audience segments itself further by topic.

While podcasts first came on the scene around fifteen years ago, it's only recently that they've transcended entertainment, news, and politics to become a vital tool for business. For entrepreneurs and executives looking to promote their companies and brands, podcasts are no longer a tool that marketers can ignore.

## It's All about the Audience

As with any other marketing channel, it's important to consider your audience with podcasting. This format enables marketers to target their audience in many different ways. Right now, there are nearly three-quarters of a million podcasts on the market, and podcast fans make up about half of the households in America.

Generational appeal is key to podcasting. One of the reasons many companies have turned to content marketing in general is due to the aging of the advertising audience. Broadcast television networks have an average viewership age of 56. While radio trends a little younger (mid-forties), the average podcast listener is 35. Along with video, podcasting is a can't miss when a brand needs to appeal directly to a younger generation of purchasers and decision-makers. "Podcasts offer advertisers access to an audience that is perceived to be hard to find: Gen Z and millennials," said Marek Wrobel, head of media futures at Havas Media. "There are many different ways in which brands can get involved – from the most straightforward option of running ad spots to more integrated approaches including host reads, podcast sponsorships and producing their own branded podcasts."

According to Inc's Michelle Manafy, podcasting attracts men

and women in almost equal numbers and an almost even number of adults in the coveted 18-54 demographic. While the audience for podcasts is still mostly white, the numbers are climbing across ethnic groups. She also notes the intimacy of the medium: "Often a headphones-on experience, a podcast isn't background noise, skimmable, or swipeable. Podcasts provide the kind of lean-in experience that actually harkens back to radio's early days, when families would gather around and listen to breaking news or serialized entertainment with rapt attention."

Indeed, a full 70 percent of podcast listeners report giving their full attention to the content, since they are listening to learn, stay up-to-date, or be entertained or inspired. A recent survey showed that only those checking the news or weather report a higher level of concentration on the content at hand than podcast listeners.

***"As a former television journalist, I understand the way the media typically chops, edits, truncates and shortens people's thoughts into 'sound bites' that suit short attention spans,"*** explains Earfluence advisor, Sharon Delaney McCloud, Vice President of Professional Development at digital marketing agency Walk West. ***"But our audiences are smarter than that. They crave deeper insights and context on narratives that impact their lives. Podcasts are the perfect vehicle to deliver content the way listeners want. As humans, we need connection as much as we need air to breathe. Meaningful conversations and interviews through podcasting are a game-changer in how brands and thought leaders connect to all of us."***

According to latest Infinite Dial report from Edison Research and Triton Digital, the percentage of Americans who are monthly podcast listeners grew from 26 percent in 2018 to 32 percent this year. 22% are weekly listeners, and those heavy users listen to an average of one episode per day. Better yet, many podcast listeners, according to the same report, consume multiple podcasts weekly. While 14 percent of listeners take in 11 or more podcasts weekly, 52 percent listen to four or more.

Podcast analytics company Podtrac also recently ranked the podcast categories with the greatest year-over-year growth in number of new shows, and business programs achieved the

greatest growth between 2018 and 2019 and stand fourth overall in popularity, behind comedy, news & politics, and society & culture in the podcast arena.

While other formats and channels, like video, can be equally compelling, the nature of the podcasting experience enables multitasking by the listener. Podcasts flow through the earbuds of the jogger as she runs before work, through the stereos of professionals traveling to meetings, and through laptop speakers as people get on with the business of the day. While studies show that 70 percent of podcast listeners give their full attention, marketers can still reach that 30 percent who are doing everything from driving and exercising to vacuuming their living room.

marketing, helping their audience access their brand in a different way that's free of the limits normally posed by print (speaking to a subject through dialogue rather than a more singular perspective in writing) or video (the sheer expense and usually greater consumption of time to produce).

Akinwole Garrett, founder of IMAGIN Media and Earfluence advisor, says, ***"Podcasting is a medium for storytelling, and what brand doesn't have a story to tell? In the age of the influencer and branded content, podcasting is a powerful platform for brands to tell authentic stories and connect in an organic manner with current and potential clients, partners, investors, and other stakeholders, thus elevating not only the brand, but also the brand's authority."***

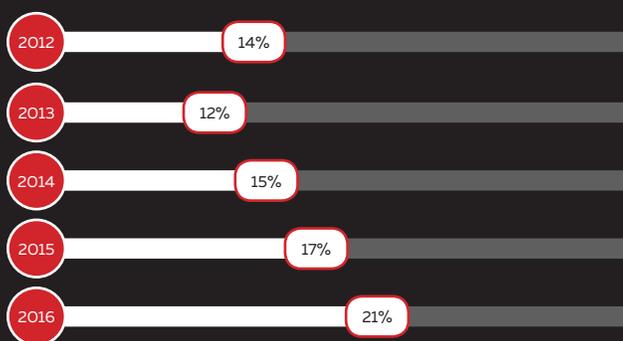
In addition to the technical and brand-building advantages are benefits that are rather unique to this digital channel. First, there's the physical podcast listening experience, due to its almost-passive nature. A listener could be a professional or executive on her morning commute to work, a stay-at-home parent consuming a brand's content while cleaning around the house, or a worker, head-phones in, on their laptop at a coffee shop or in the office. Unlike watching video or reading a blog, a person can safely listen to a podcast while doing almost anything else actively.

Javier Leiva, Earfluence advisor, works on the digital marketing team at tech giant Red Hat and also runs Pretend Radio, a documentary-style podcast with over a million downloads: ***"Audience attention spans keep shrinking and shrinking. There was a time when viewers could watch an entire 30-minute video. Suddenly, that time got chopped in half. Then content became even shorter. Now the average length of a YouTube video is four minutes and 20 seconds. Podcasting is one of the few mediums that defies that trend. People actually consume hours and hours at a time. If you have something valuable to say, podcasting can be the medium to tell your story."***

Also, due to the subscriber-driven construction of podcasting platforms like iTunes and Spotify, marketers can build a more loyal following, and with a greater appeal than most other types of content marketing.

## PODCAST POPULARITY

Percentage of Americans (12+) who listen to one podcast per month



## Flexibility of Podcasting

The advantages posed by podcasting are considerable, both from technical and brand-building perspectives. On the technical front, podcast platforms can drive greater traffic to a website and help saturate certain keywords in search, routing potential customers to more of a brand's supporting content.

On the brand-building side, businesses benefit from higher brand visibility, while adding significant variety to their content

## ADVANTAGES OF CREATING A PODCAST



**INCREASED WEB SITE TRAFFIC**  
Listing your podcast on networks lets you link back to your site



**GREATER BRAND VISIBILITY**  
Your brand appears in more places online



**SEARCH SATURATION**  
Your podcast will show up in branded search results



**CONTENT MARKETING VARIETY**  
You can host a podcast on your site, a separate network, and other places online



**PASSIVE CONSUMPTION**  
Listeners can enjoy your podcast anywhere, even when they're driving



**LOYAL FOLLOWING**  
Releasing regular podcast episodes encourages a strong, loyal listenership

approachable, and even fun and engaging, that professional has positioned himself to succeed with entrepreneurs in a big way. Whether a brand represents a tech firm or a solo advisor, podcasting can be a driver for lead cultivation.

The ultimate goal with podcasting is to create authentic information, delivered in an engaging format, and educate those potential purchasers, equipping them to choose us if the fit looks right. "Listeners trust their podcast hosts highly, prefer host-read ads and look for creative, informative, humorous and integrated podcast experiences," according to a study by Futuri Media and the University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications. "They want to listen to hosts who are authentic, feel like a friend, and share the users' passions and beliefs."

### Strategy, Marketing, Production: the Keys to Podcasting

### The Ultimate Mode for Educating a Targeted Audience

Educating others about products and services needs to be fun and engaging. Consumers and purchasers in the business world are always looking for ways to vet and validate potential products, services, and strategic resources. For example, a high-tech firm may have a product offering that's too complex to get across in a single elevator pitch. "Dumbing down" the offering isn't an option, so marketers for that firm must expand their toolset for building educational materials. They can achieve this goal with podcasts, and to great effect. With proper marketing, podcasts can capture the attention of a target market, and hold that attention while prospective buyers and clients drive to work or prep for a meeting on that same topic within their organization. The podcast content, in this scenario, gets them coached up quickly, getting them smart faster.

This medium is also particularly effective for the service provider. For example, practically every entrepreneur or executive needs lots of advisors, like lawyers, accountants, and consultants. Those entrepreneurs, always pressed for time, crave the knowledge of not only the legal and tax implications of running a startup, but also who the key players are for them to get to know and perhaps get a business relationship started. If they are finding a lawyer or accountant who seems wise,

Strategy, marketing, production--it's the three-legged stool of content, and podcasting is no exception. In terms of production, marketers must consider more than simply having a good studio, or mobile equipment, or a good phone connection, all three of which can be used to facilitate great work. Getting into pre-production research, on both the topic and the backgrounds of guests, will enable the best stories to emerge.

Advertisecast's Podcast Marketing 2019 Ultimate Guide lists several important ways to produce and market a podcast. For the content itself, producing compelling work is a given, but producers must also publish podcasts consistently and on certain days according to audience expectations. They advise to give podcasting at least 20 episodes to gain traction with your audience and start producing results, and be sure to be consistent in packaging and production values.

Virtually anyone can be a storyteller, but in a business context, most people need the right questions before they will become the storyteller. The right questions will trigger a more visceral response--a much higher level of engagement from a subject matter expert--and when interviewers ask the right questions, they get compelling responses that include the knowledge and wisdom listeners expect.

With regard to marketing tactics, the AdvertiserCast team advises to use a Google keyword planner, so that people will find the podcast on platforms like iTunes. Other tactics include paid advertising on platforms like Overcast, Facebook, and of course Google AdWords. Social media marketing is also key, and tactics on social media platforms may align to the microtargeting strategies keywords and topics. A good example of aligning social media to keyword optimization is in creating a Facebook group, where the audience joins for the same reason they listen to a podcast, because it suits their interests.

Savvy marketers also find other ways to leverage podcast content. The podcast becomes a content-producing engine, providing material for everything from blog articles to social posts. Transcribed footage can deliver greater ROI and help marketers reach their audience through other digital channels, enabling their targets to hear from experts faster, better, and cheaper.

## The Podcast as a Startup

The evidence is clear that podcasts are an effective choice for many brands and individuals looking to build awareness, engage their audience, micro-target for filling their sales funnel, and a whole lot more. But can the podcast itself, like other broadcasts, become a business unto itself?

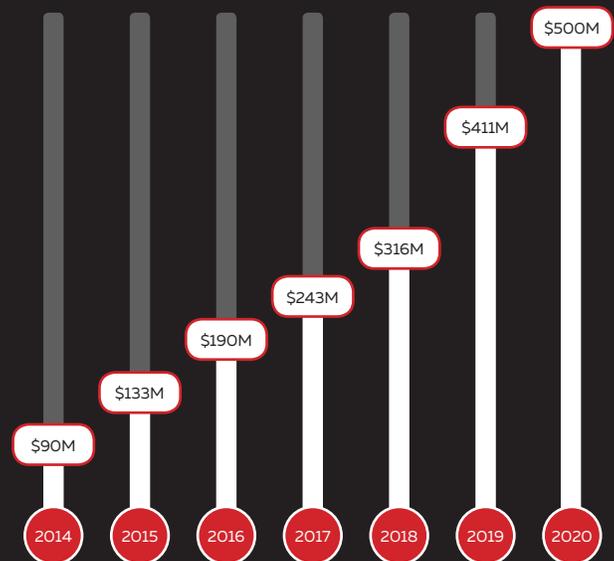
There has never been a time to jump in with both feet. In an article late last year, the team at industry researcher eMarketer outlined a pretty compelling landscape for those looking to sell ads and sponsorships, just as broadcasters have done for decades on radio and television.

In the article, they explained just how NPR, the most popular publisher of podcast content in the US, has seen B2B brands become one of its largest advertiser categories alongside consumer brands. If current trends hold, nearly 84 million people, or nearly one-fourth of the US population, will listen to podcasts in 2022, up from current levels of 76 million.

Furthermore, the format of podcasting is quite advertiser-friendly, especially when compared with tools limited by digital ad-blocking software, consumer blindness to banner ads, and

even the way watchers zip through commercials with shows viewed on DVR. Most podcast advertising comes in the form of the host(s) reading ad copy, making advertising seamless with the rest of the show's production, whether it's conversation or theme music for intros and outros. Podcast listeners become so familiar with, and in some cases, become fans of the hosts, that the host-read ads feel more like a celebrity or influencer endorsement.

## PROJECTED PODCAST ADVERTISING SPEND



## The Earfluence Difference

Currently, there's a gap in the market for business podcasts. Podcasting production, in and of itself, is a transactional service. To make a business out of podcasting, people need something more. In the case of Earfluence, that "something more" is the convergence of our expertise in not only producing technically and creatively beautiful podcasts, but also helping people monetize their work. We grow communities and enhance messaging. We can produce, host, and position content that's focused on advertising revenue, community engagement, and real return on investment. That's how you scale and fund any business, with a formula that works to bring value to your clients.

Our consultative approach is comprised of thinking about the end-to-end production, marketing, and engagement right from the start. Clients need a strategy that helps them build an engaged community and earn more credibility. To that end, we are leaders in voice activation at Earfluence. Our founder, Jason Gillikin, has a strong opinion on the value of this medium:

***“Podcasting is a unique opportunity to reach customers in a creative way, and businesses who are utilizing this platform have a competitive advantage. Brands that are podcasting are the experts in their field, creating increased exposure and more opportunities to communicate with clients, expand their influence, and generate compelling evergreen audio content.”***

With this focus on building a competitive edge for brands, Earfluence has steadily built a diverse portfolio of business podcasts which now reside in our production stable, which accomplishes the following for our clients:

- 1. Establishes Expertise.** You know your stuff. You know you know your stuff. But do your clients know for sure that you know your stuff? Podcasting is a great way to show your expertise with greater breadth and depth through conversation.
- 2. Tells A Story.** While your website “About Us” section may give people a high-level view of who you are, with podcasting, you have an opportunity to tell your story in greater detail over a long period of time.
- 3. Builds Company Morale.** You’ll want to feature your people and their ideas on your podcast. They are likely experts at what they do as well, and bringing them on to share that expertise is an easy way to build loyalty and camaraderie among your team.

**4. Facilitates Networking & Conversations with Interesting People.** One of the quickest ways to build listenership of a podcast is to bring on guests, and if you bring on people you find interesting and valuable, that helps build your network and makes your podcast more compelling, too.

**5. Introduces New Categories, Product Launches, Or Opportunities.** Want to let everyone know about a new product you have coming out? Or that you’re hiring, and you don’t want to go through job boards or recruiters? Or that you’re putting together a seminar and would like the listeners to attend? Podcasting is a perfect complement to your social media, email marketing, blogging, and other forms of content marketing and advertising you’ll do to support new initiatives.

Podcasting--while new and different to many brands--is still content, and content needs a strategy so consumers can find it and engage. That’s where Earfluence comes into the equation. We develop a strategy to make a topic more interesting, add elite production value, and create compelling promotional materials in the post-production process. At Earfluence, we build and amplify podcast communities and enable companies to create and leverage the same kind of critical evergreen content, in audio form, as you would with blogging, video, and PR as part of omni-channel marketing strategy.

Podcasts can drive digital activity for your brand, and this is a space where product and service education can be fun and engaging, if you create and execute your content correctly. Podcasting allows consumers to hear from the experts faster, and at a cheaper cost to your organization than other forms of advertising. Partnering with Earfluence will not only elevate your podcast, but take your entire business to the next level, whether you’re promoting your brand, putting out thought leadership, or even podcasting as a business.

## Key Takeaways

- ✓ Podcasting is a content-production engine, with transcribed footage setting the stage for greater ROI through blog articles and social media posts.
- ✓ Podcasting is a great medium for supporting microtargeting strategies, as listeners trend younger and self-identify their interests by the topical content they choose.
- ✓ Podcasting attracts men and women in equal numbers, and while half of American households are podcast listeners, the preponderance of listeners are in the coveted 18-54 purchasing demographic.
- ✓ While its format caters to those who can multitask (commute, exercise) while consuming content, 70 percent of podcast listeners report devoting their full attention while listening.
- ✓ Podcasting is the perfect medium for brands with a bigger, more complex value proposition to relate and story to tell.
- ✓ The opportunity window to build a startup around a podcast, via selling advertising to complement the content, is open, with nearly a quarter of the US population expected to regularly consume podcasts by 2022.
- ✓ Podcasts can have many benefits, even for smaller businesses. In addition to storytelling and brand-building, podcasts can facilitate networking and provide an ideal medium for product launches.
- ✓ In addition to simply achieving high-level production values, podcasters need an end-to-end strategy, of planning, production, and marketing promotion.

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