



ENTER THE ENGAGEMENT ERA

How Podcasters Are Learning
From The Creator Economy



**FINAL ENTRY DEADLINE
JUNE 27, 2025**

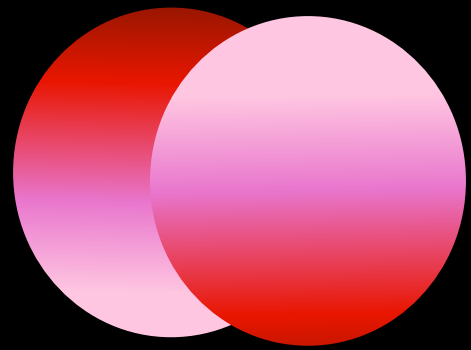
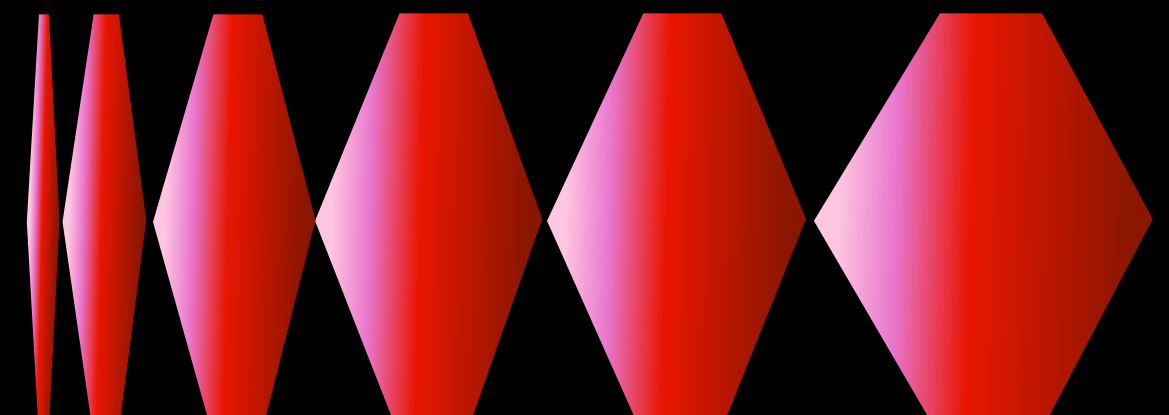
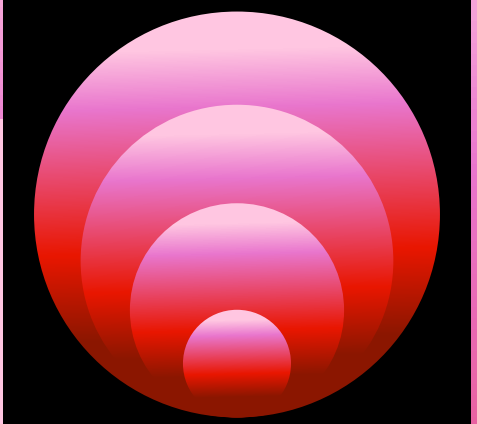


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Hello friends,

At The Signal Awards, we're constantly listening for the trends that will shape the podcast industry next. In 2025, what do we hear? Podcasting has entered its engagement era.

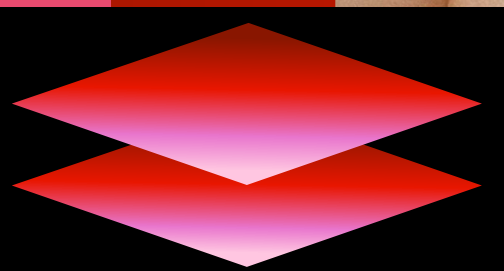
Podcast creators are cultivating communities IRL and online: opening up new revenue opportunities – from live tours to memberships and merch – as well as more real world responsibilities to their fans. Now is the time for hosts, networks and platforms to invest in the comments section.

In this report from The Signal Awards, we surveyed dozens of industry insiders about the power and pitfalls of pursuing engagement. We learned they're not just navigating a changing landscape, but reconfiguring their businesses to become more responsive to the people who ultimately matter most: podcast listeners.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Jemma Rose Brown".

Jemma Rose Brown

General Manager, The Signal Awards



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INTRODUCTION: WELCOME TO THE ENGAGEMENT ERA

For years, the almighty download was *the* metric of a podcast's success. This singular datapoint dictated CPMs and chart ratings, it raised select shows up, and took others down. But the download was never the whole story.

As podcast metrics (and makers) have become more savvy, and as a host of new creator monetization tools have entered the mix –think Substack, Patreon, YouTube– the industry has realized that measuring devotion is just as important (if not more) than counting downloads.

“

Podcast fan communities are incredibly loyal, and often crave deeper connections. Listening to a podcast is such an intimate experience; you're right there in someone's ear, often week after week. Until recently it's been hard to turn that intimacy into something interactive or lasting.

–Helen Tobin,
Head of Communications, Substack

The Engagement Equation

Why focus on engagement? The more a fan is engaged with a podcast, the more likely they are to invest in its success longterm. They'll pay for a subscription, turn their friends onto the show and support the creator wherever they show up.

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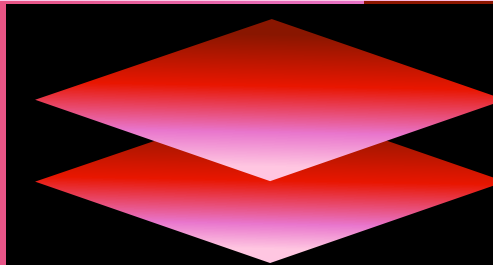
I've seen time and again that audience size isn't the important indicator of revenue potential. Small shows with highly committed fan bases can make real money because their fans will turn out.

–Joe Fucigna
Owner, Joe Fucigna Consulting

What we mean when we say 'engagement'

Any experience where the fan community is in dialogue with each other and/or with the show's host(s). Engagement is all about what evolves after a show is published.

- The comments section
- Chat forums like Discord and Reddit
- Polls
- Fan meetups
- Creator AMAs and livestreams on social
- Tours and in-person events



3 “I DO THIS OUT OF LOVE”

Parasocial relationships. The comments section. Fan communities. Podcasts are increasingly where people are going to find meaningful connection, and a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves. Podcast superfan and Community Manager Luis Castro explains.

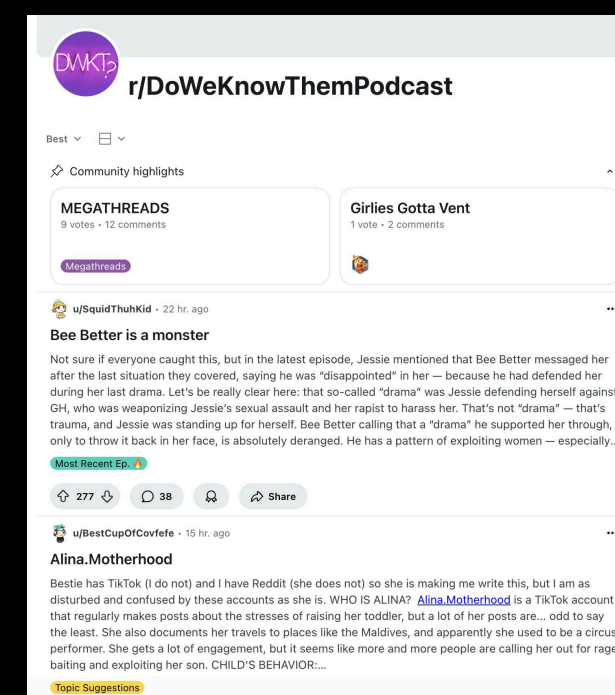
Luis’ story

Signal Awards: How has being part of this community impacted your life?

Luis Castro: Especially after the pandemic, people needed new ways to find community. I wasn’t someone who went out a lot. I’m not a social butterfly... For people who can’t go out or are afraid to, [podcasts] opened up a way to find your family.

Once or twice a day I go through the chat rooms and make sure no one is going against the community guidelines. If that happens, then we talk about it in our group chat. I’m not getting paid to do this work. **I do this out of love.**

Luis Castro, Community Manager for the podcasts, Do We Know Them? and Two Idiot Girls

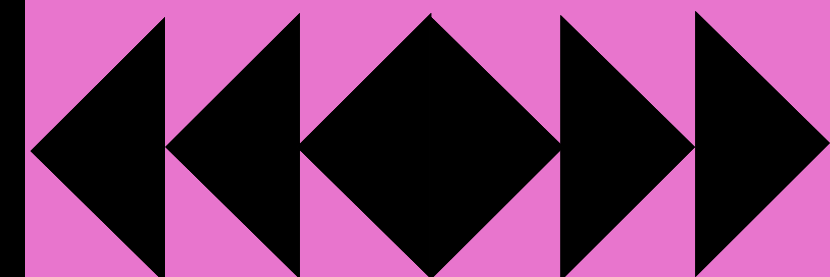


When surveying audiences about which attributes of podcasting were most important to them for The Podcast Landscape 2024, Tom Webster at Sounds Profitable saw ‘Audio to keep me company’ come in at 25% and ‘Voices and conversation to keep me company when I am alone’ at 22%.

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A significant use case for podcasting is companionship, which is surely an even more universal need than audio.

–Tom Webster, Partner, Sounds Profitable



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AUTHENTICITY IS EVERYTHING

Much ink has already been spilled about the number of podcasts in production today. So why should a listener choose to invest their time into your show? Today's listeners are tuning in to feel an intimate connection to the host and guests. In essence, they're listening for authenticity.

THE 7 MARKERS OF A MEDIA FIGURE WITH PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY:

- 1 PREDICTABILITY
- 2 SPONTANEITY
- 3 IMMEDIACY
- 4 CONFESSIONS
- 5 ORDINARINESS
- 6 AMBIVALENCE
- 7 IMPERFECTION

source: Mediated Authenticity How the Media Constructs Reality

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Podcast fans aren't tuning in expecting a morning news show broadcast. They want to see their favorite creator in their pajamas. They're there for intimacy, not for perfection.

–Joe Fucigna

PODCAST HOST CHELSEA DEVANTEZ ON AUTHENTICITY:

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I learned a big lesson in hindsight, which is that your people cannot find you if you're not putting yourself out there, and you can't put yourself out there if you don't accept who you are... To quote Dolly Parton, you want to be so loud, clear, and specific about who you are and what your show's values are that it attracts the right people, and that clarity acts as an invitation to join in.

–Chelsea Devantez, Founder and Host,
Glamorous Trash

ENGAGEMENT IS A TWO-WAY STREET

“I’m not interested in shows where the podcaster isn’t interested in their fans.”

–Luis Castro

Because the podcast ecosystem has roots in traditional journalism, podcasters were trained to publish one episode, and then immediately get to work on the next one. In the Engagement Era, the “one way street” approach is no longer feasible. To stand apart, podcast creators need to reimagine their workflows to be less about creating a broadcast, and more about creating an ongoing and meaningful dialogue with their listener communities.

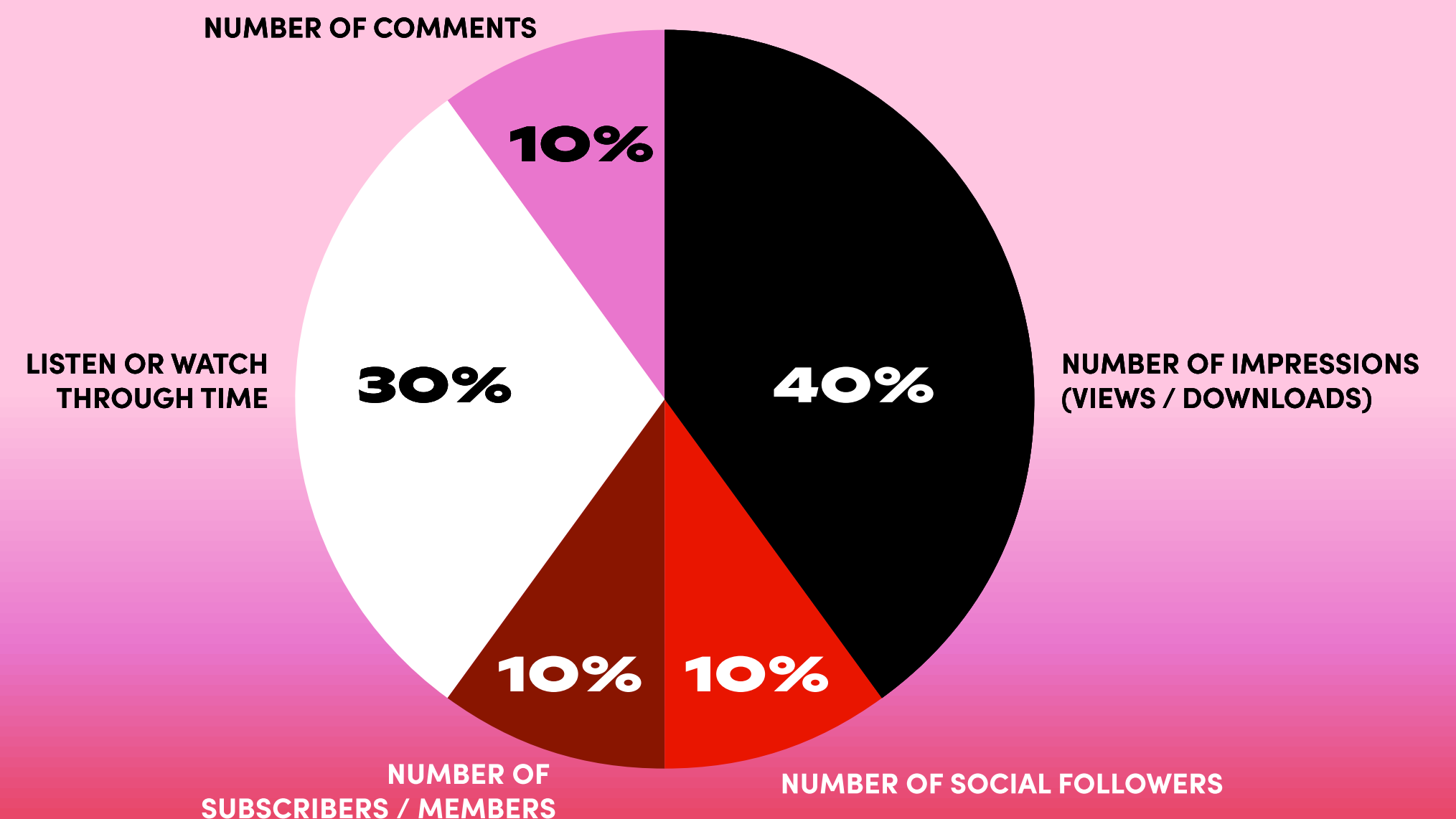
HERE’S HOW NETWORKS AND PLATFORMS ARE PRIORITIZING ENGAGEMENT:



We're investing more time and resources to build community engagement in all aspects – from incorporating fans into the show to actively responding in the comments section and hosting IRL events where the host is actually mingling (not just a live taping). Building communities around our shows means opening up more avenues for two-way interactions with us and with each other, rather than just broadcasting our content on feeds.

–Nathalie Hill, Chief Audience Officer, KCRW

WHAT METRIC DO YOU MOST CLOSELY TRACK TO MEASURE YOUR SHOW’S ENGAGEMENT?



People who make podcasts have been trained by the RSS feed to upload their show and walk away. My encouragement to a podcaster is to think like a YouTuber.

–Steve McLendon,
Head of Podcast Product, YouTube



Spotify has launched direct ways of cultivating communities and interacting with fans on our platform through features like comments and polls. It’s exciting to see this medium, which was historically one-sided, evolve to be a two-way experience for podcasters and their fans

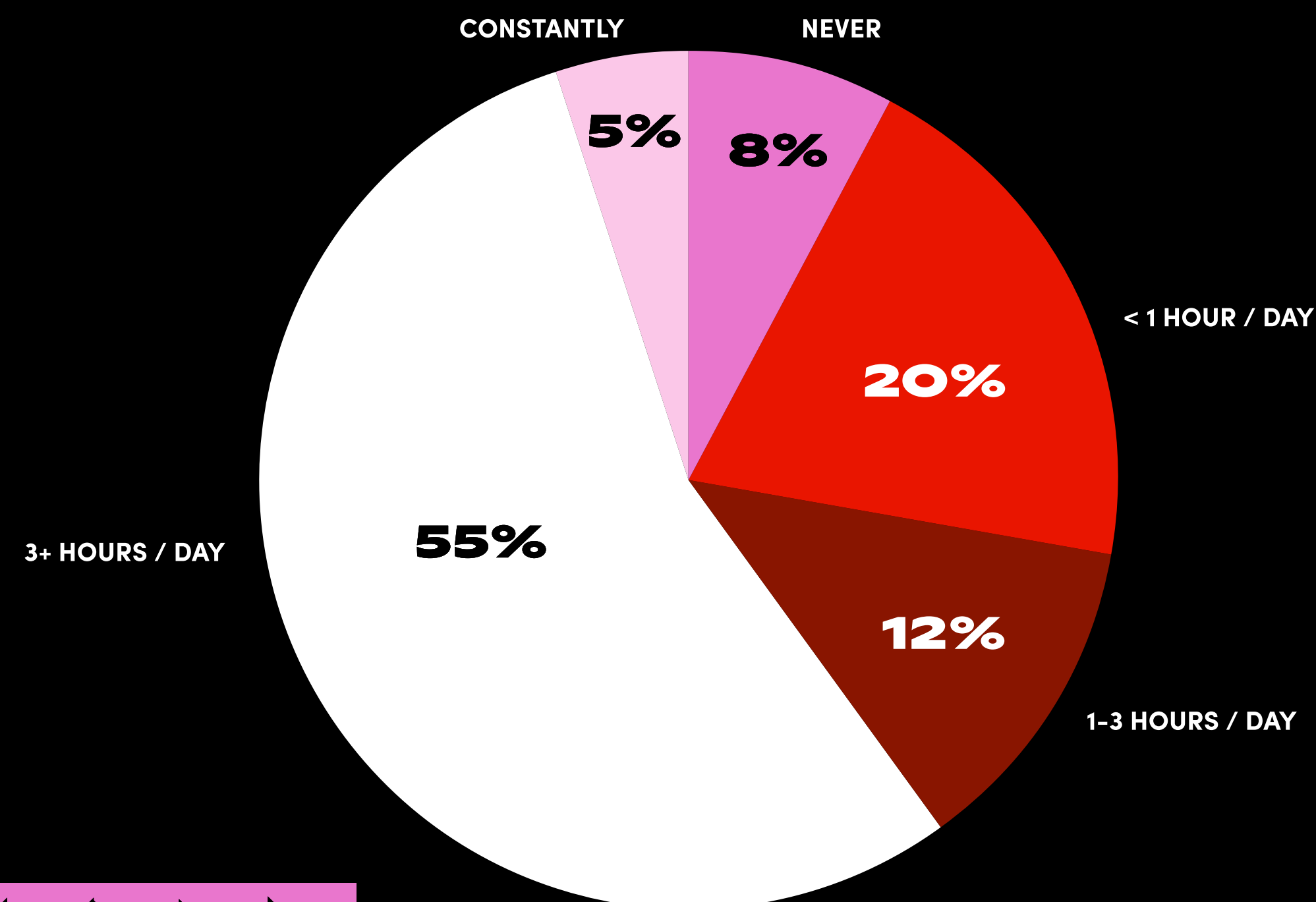
–Chris Larson, Senior Product Manager,
Podcasts at Spotify

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CONSISTENCY IS KEY

Consistency is the number one rule of the Engagement Era. Just like any relationship, podcast fans want to know that their show will be there for them, and in return, they'll keep showing up.

HOW MUCH TIME DOES YOUR TEAM DEVOTE TO COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT OR FAN ENGAGEMENT?



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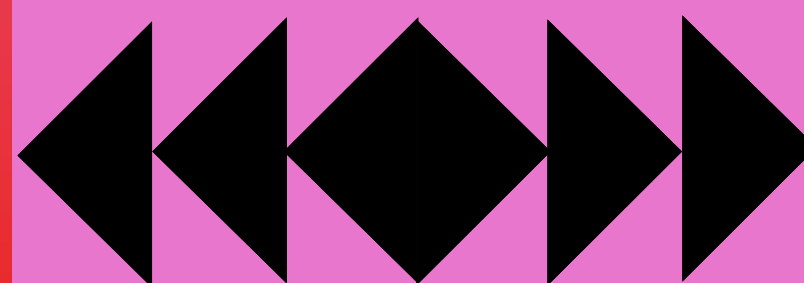
When people know they can count on you to show up regularly, in a tone that feels genuine and grounded, it builds trust. People start to feel like they know you, not just your work. Substack isn't about shouting into the void—it's about creating a space where your voice, used with care and clarity, can become part of someone's weekly rhythm. And that, to me, is what keeps people coming back.

—Helen Tobin,
Head of Communications, Substack

“

Having regular content that fans can come back to week by week is foundational. That consistency is essential for audiences to develop listening habits — we've seen listening trends associated with certain times of day and certain routines. Audiences need to know what days and times they can expect to listen to really build that habit.

—Chris Larson, Senior Product Manager,
Podcasts at Spotify





MAKE ENGAGEMENT-INFORMED DECISIONS



Nathan Tower • 1st

Podcast Strategy & Development @ Lower Street Media

1w • 🌐

Your podcast is NOT for you. It's for your audience.

Too many shows are designed around the host's wants—not the audience's needs.

How can Podcast Creators take advantage of The Engagement Era? It's simple: listen to your fans.

Creators who are highly attuned to their audiences see them as allies and experts in their show. The audience's wants and opinions inform editorial decision making. In our research, we found that listener comments impact everything from episode topics to ad load to guest bookings. Survey respondents additionally reported paying greater attention to audience feedback over the past year. Additional metrics from video and an increased desire to serve the listener were the top cited reasons.

CREATORS WHO LISTEN

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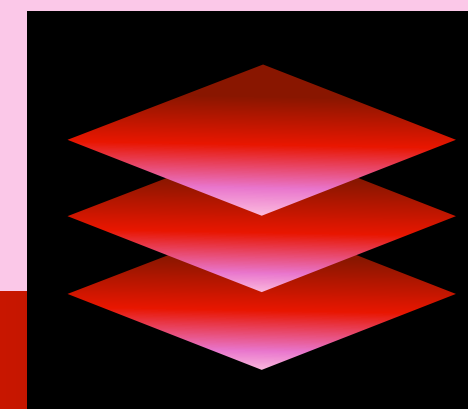
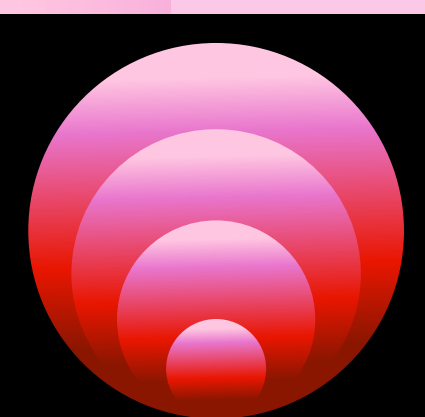
The fans of this podcast (who we call the 🍪) have heavily shaped the show from the start and continue to. Everything from voting in polls on what content to cover, to DMs that inspire whole episodes, to weighing in on the brand and office decor.

–Chelsea Devantez, Host,
Glamorous Trash

“

If viewers are leaving early, we dig into why. Maybe the episode is too long, not visually dynamic enough, or the thumbnail isn't compelling (so they're not clicking). We see our job as listening closely to what the audience is telling us. From there, we test new formats, styles, and lengths based on what we learn

–Alex Ramsey, President & Co-Founder,
Forever Dog Productions



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VIDEO IS CHANGING THE GAME

YouTube is now the number one podcast platform. According to Coleman Insights' *The State of Video Podcasting* report, over 1 billion people engage with podcasts on YouTube every month.

So how is your team taking advantage of video to drive engagement?

DIFFERENT APPROACHES FOR DIFFERENT GOALS

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We use short form videos for discovery, and long form videos for deeper engagement.

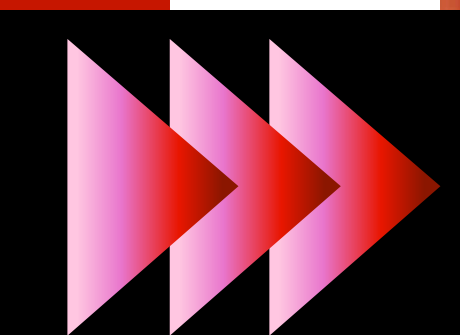
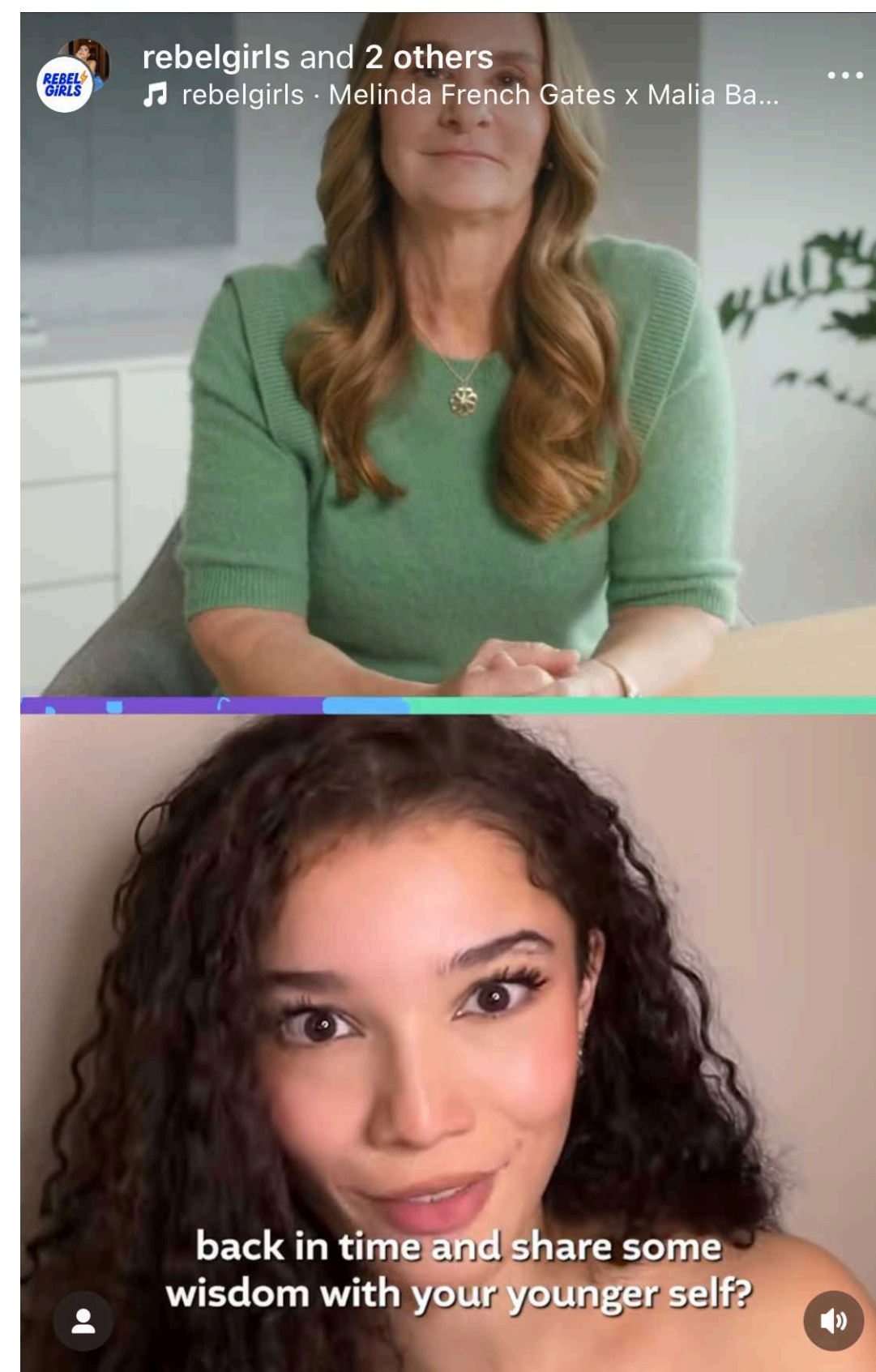
–Nathalie Hill, Chief Audience Officer, KCRW

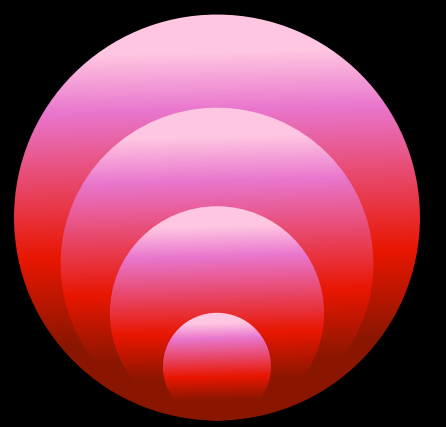
TEST, WATCH, PIVOT

“

We actively test different video formats... and track watch time, engagement, and retention. For example, we've seen that live-action interviews, colorful pull quotes, and action steps help keep younger viewers engaged longer. But most importantly, we use video to amplify the emotional core of our stories: to make the girl who's watching feel inspired, capable, and ready to take that inspiration into her own world.

–Anjelika Temple, Chief Content Officer, Rebel Girls





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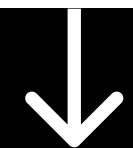
TAKEAWAYS

Are you ready to enter The Engagement Era? We've identified three ways your team can embrace the conversation and transform your audience into a devoted listener community.

1

SEND OUT SURVEYS

You can't know if you don't ask.



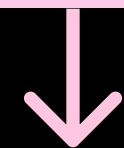
At Patreon, we highly *highly* encourage our podcasters to survey their community. Ask for what your listeners and fans actually want to create an engaging community. Do they want merch? Where are they based? Get to know who they really are and what they're motivated by. Your audience doesn't need to be a black box.

–Tom McNeill, Senior Partner Manager at Patreon

2

MVPS ARE YOUR BEST FRIEND

Test out new ideas and get playful, especially when it comes to new media formats.



Don't overthink it. The biggest learning is that everyone needs to be open minded to experimentation and be aware of performance metrics. It's good to try new things, but pivot if something clearly isn't working (low RSVPs, low engagement, low reach, etc). Minimum viable products are our best friend.

–Nathalie Hill, Chief Audience Officer, KCRW

3

GET IN THE COMMENTS SECTION

Invest in the people who invest in your show.



Respect the audience. Don't talk down to them. Be communicative. Prioritize long-term trust over short term paydays. Participate.

–Eric Silver, Head of Development, Multitude Productions

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CONTRIBUTORS:

Luis Castro, Community Manager, Do We Know Them? and Two Idiot Girls

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Joe Fucigna, Owner, Joe Fucigna Consulting

Nathalie Hill, Chief Audience Officer, KCRW

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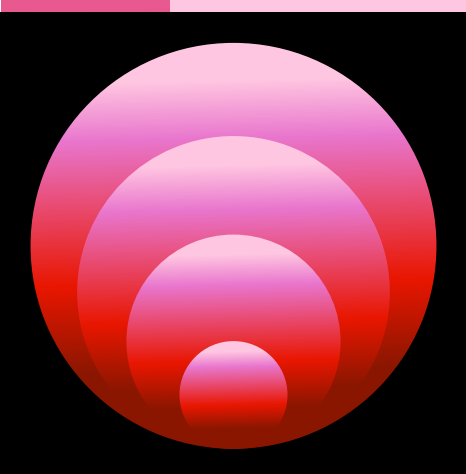
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Nathan Tower, Podcast Strategy and Development at Lower Street

Tom Webster, Partner, Sounds Profitable



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ABOUT THE SIGNAL AWARDS

The Signal Awards recognizes the podcasts that define culture. We are mission-focused on uplifting the podcast medium by honoring the most potent, meaningful and unprecedented audio projects being made today.

Signal accepts entries as Shows, Limited Series & Specials, Individual Episodes and Brand Storytelling across a broad spectrum of genre and craft categories. To learn more about how to honor your podcast, contact Jemma Rose Brown, General Manager of The Signal Awards.

CREATED BY:

Vanessa Azen, Sr. Project Manager

Jemma Rose Brown, General Manager

Aurore Chao-Oger, Social Media Manager

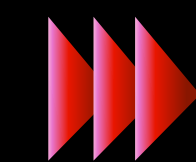
Meredith Gibney, Designer

Leslie McMann, Copywriter

Emma Whitfield, Production & Experience Director



CALL FOR ENTRIES ARE OPEN!



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Sources:

- [Coleman Insights' "The State of Video Podcasting"](#)
- [IAB, "Podcasting in the Creator Economy"](#)
- [Journal of Radio and Audio Media, "One of Us: Examining the Authenticity and Parasocial Relationships of Stand-Up Comedian Podcast Hosts"](#)
- [Nielsen, "Podcasting Today"](#)
- [Sounds Profitable, "The Podcast Landscape 2024"](#)