



RIGHT  
SIDE  
UP

# Branded Podcasts **vs.** Podcast Advertising:

Why They Work  
& When to Use Each



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# Why Podcasting Works: What Marketers Need to Know

In the world of marketing, authentic consumer connection can be tricky to navigate. However, audio – specifically podcasts – have proven to be an effective method to find new audiences and grow deeper relationships with those already in the know.

Over the years, podcasts have evolved from niche entertainment into one of the most listened to mediums on the planet – and a trusted and effective way for brands to engage with an audience. But as marketers consider exploring the space, one of the first questions many wrangle with is:

“Should we advertise on podcasts or launch one ourselves?”

This guide is designed to help you make that decision based on what you want to gain from your marketing efforts and your budget for bringing in the right podcast partners.

We'll walk through:

- The differences between branded podcasts and podcast advertising
- The costs and timelines of each
- How to evaluate impact and prove ROI
- Best practices from decades of collective experience in the space, both at [Right Side Up](#) for podcast advertising and at [Quill](#) for branded podcast production

At the end of this guide, you'll have the strategic insight you need to choose the approach (or combination) that's right for your brand, your team, and your goals.

Before we compare the two approaches, it's important to understand why podcasting works so well for marketers and what's changed in recent years to make this channel more valuable than ever.

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## The Unique Value of Podcasts

Unlike most digital formats, podcasts are opt-in. Listeners make a conscious choice to press play, and in doing so, give brands something incredibly rare: **their attention**.

Add to that the emotional bond many listeners feel with their favorite hosts, and you have a medium that **doesn't just broadcast a message; it delivers it through a trusted voice**.



This makes podcasts especially powerful for brands looking to:

- **Earn attention** in a crowded, fragmented media landscape.
- **Humanize their voice** and values through long-form content.
- **Build meaningful relationships** through consistent, conversational storytelling.
- **Reach consumers** during high-focus, multitask-friendly moments: commutes, workouts, household routines.
- **Invest in evergreen content** since a podcast episode or ad recorded today can be discovered and engaged with months or even years later.

## Podcast Impact: By the Numbers

Podcasts may be in their nascency in the grand scheme, but they are more mainstream than ever. The data tells us that the majority of Americans have integrated podcasts into their media diet:

- According to [Edison Research's Infinite Dial](#), **70% of Americans (12+)** have listened to a podcast, and **55%** are monthly listeners.
- The [Interactive Advertising Bureau \(IAB\)](#) reported that U.S. **podcast ad revenue surpassed \$2.4 billion in 2024**.
- **41% of Americans (18+)** say they would be **likely to listen to a podcast about a favorite brand**, nearly as likely as they are to listen to a celebrity show.

# Branded Podcasts: Share Original Stories That Matter

A [branded podcast](#) is a podcast series owned or brought to listeners by a company. At its best, it shouldn't feel like marketing at all.

These podcasts are about telling stories, sharing ideas, and digging into topics that actually matter to the audience. They're thoughtful, long-form content that just happens to be brought to you by a brand.

**With that said, branded podcasts are not:**

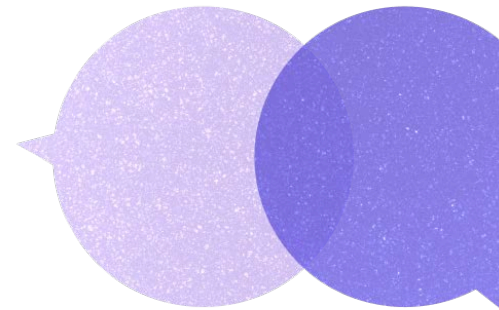
- A disguised ad
- A glorified press release
- A product feature list in audio form
- A pitch deck with background music

If your podcast only talks about your product, you're missing the point (and probably losing listeners). The goal is to earn trust and attention by offering something valuable, like a fresh perspective, a helpful insight, or a boost of motivation.

## Why Branded Podcasts Work

Branded podcasts offer a unique combination of depth, intimacy, and utility that few other channels can match. Here's why so many brands are turning to podcasts to build trust, spark conversations, and fuel growth:

- **Build thought leadership:** Nearly half of brands ([46%](#)) say podcasts outperform other channels for establishing thought leadership. Podcasts offer uninterrupted time and space to dive into big ideas — something you can't do in a tweet or a 15-second reel.
- **Boost lead generation:** Before launching, only [28%](#) of brands expected their podcast to drive lead gen. After launch? That jumped to [72%](#). Turns out, when you offer real value to listeners, they come back (and bring business with them).
- **Tap into a content ecosystem:** A single episode can be clipped into social posts, quoted in newsletters, turned into blog content, or repurposed into video. Instead of creating content from scratch, a podcast gives you an anchor to build from.
- **Provide networking opportunities:** Inviting guests onto your podcast isn't just good content; it's smart networking. Whether it's future clients or industry leaders, podcasting gives you a reason to connect (and record something useful along the way).





- **Bask in the halo effect:** [61%](#) of listeners said they felt more favorable toward a brand after hearing its podcast. That's the halo effect in action: when a show delivers real value, listeners come away with positive feelings that extend to the brand behind it.
- **Forge meaningful connections:** In a world of 6-second ads, podcasts offer something rare: time and attention. [75%](#) of listeners say branded podcasts hold their attention, and with episodes averaging [30 to 42 minutes](#), that's a lot of captured engagement.

## How It's Made & What It Costs

Creating a branded podcast takes real commitment, but the scale of your investment depends on whether you hire a full-service partner, tap into freelancers, or build an in-house team.

### 1 Full-Service Podcast Agency

**ESTIMATED COST: \$30,000–\$100,000+ PER SEASON**

**This option outsources everything:** concept, production, guest booking, distribution, audience growth, and reporting. It's ideal for brands that want minimal risk, top-tier quality, and clear ROI, without stretching an internal team.

### 2 Freelancers or Independent Producers

**ESTIMATED COST: \$20–\$200/HOUR**

**A good middle ground** for brands that want to keep strategy in-house but need help with editing, show notes, booking guests, or promotion. The cost will depend on the type of services you require, the level of expertise, and, of course, time spent. This approach gives you flexibility without losing control.

### 3 In-House Production

**ESTIMATED COST: \$1,000–\$10,000+ UPFRONT FOR EQUIPMENT, SOFTWARE, AND TRAINING**

**Best for brands with strong internal teams and audio know-how.** If you're ready to handle scripting, recording, editing, and promotion internally, this option gives you total ownership, but it does take time and resources to maintain a consistent publishing schedule.

Once you've chosen a production path, the next step is making sure your investment pays off, which means tracking the right metrics and measuring real business impact.





## What Success Looks Like

Real podcast success is measured by what happens after the click — how long people stick around, how deeply they engage, and whether your content moves the needle on brand goals.

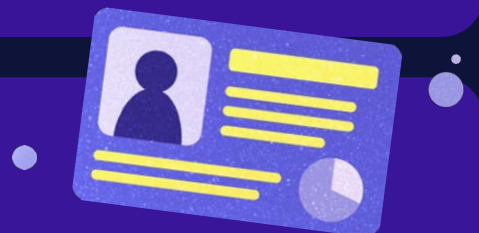
Here's what to track (and what it really tells you):



### Engagement Metrics: What Happens During the Listen

- **Consumption rate:** The average amount of your episode that audiences listen to, in a percentage format. If your average consumption is 75%+, you're retaining listeners for the majority of your episode. Lower than that? You might need to trim or rethink segments.
- **Completion rate:** The average amount of audiences that listen to the entire episode, in a percentage format. A strong rate (70–90%) means your content is compelling. If it's lower, pinpoint where listeners drop off and explore what could be the cause.
- **Drop-off points:** Within your consumption rate, find patterns in the exact moments listeners tune out. Is it always during a specific segment? Midroll ads? This intel is key for fine-tuning your content and structure.
- **Repeat listenership:** Track repeat listeners by analyzing unique listeners episode over episode. If you consistently see a similar number of unique listeners per episode, you can be confident that your show has a loyal, stable audience base.
- **Cost of listener attention (CLA):** Discover how much you're paying per minute of actual listening. Formula:  $(\text{Production} + \text{Marketing Costs}) / \text{Total Minutes Consumed}$ . This metric helps you assess ROI beyond downloads.

### Audience Metrics: Who's Listening (and Why It Matters)



- **Demographics and psychographics:** Age, location, interests, income, and social media habits are all part of the audience profile. This data uncovers who's actually listening and if you're resonating with the right people.
- **Firmographics:** The companies that your listeners work at, industries, job roles, and job titles give you the insights to further hone in your targeting and optimize lead gen efforts.



- **Website behavior:** If your podcast is driving website traffic, you'll see it in page views, time on site, and click-throughs on your podcast website or podcast landing page on your company's website. You may also observe an uptick in direct and/or organic search traffic coinciding with new episode releases.
- **Ratings & reviews:** Not just for social proof, ratings and reviews are one of the few times your audience tells you exactly what they love (or what they don't). This is one of the rare opportunities you have to see what's working and what needs refining.
- **Social media engagement:** Shares, comments, and conversations surrounding podcast content reveal what's resonating and what's engaging your audience.

## Brand Lift Metrics: Beyond the Airwaves

- **Qualitative feedback:** Use listener surveys and brand lift studies to understand what's sticking. Look for phrases like: "Kept my attention the whole episode," "Made me think differently about the brand," or "I'd share this with a colleague."
- **Earned media:** Did your show spark mentions in blogs, newsletters, or press? Who's talking about you? What are they saying?
- **Net promoter score (NPS):** Would your listeners recommend the podcast to others? This is a direct line to brand advocacy and loyalty.

## Conversion Tracking: What Moves the Needle



- **Unique promo codes:** Use show-specific codes to track redemptions and attribute purchases directly to your podcast.
- **Custom URLs:** Create branded, trackable links to monitor clicks and page visits from podcast listeners.
- **Tracking links:** Leverage smart links that follow user behavior across platforms to see what actions listeners take post-episode.

To learn more, explore our [guide to podcast attribution](#), where we show you what to measure and where to find it.



# Podcast Ads: Tap Into an Existing Engaged Audience

Brands don't need their own show to benefit from the momentum in the podcasting world. For many marketers, the smartest first move is to tap into the trust and audience loyalty that already exists. That's the power of podcast advertising: it lets you step directly into a relationship that's already been built between a host and their listeners.

**Podcast advertising is, at its core, about borrowing credibility and reach.** Your message lives inside someone else's show, most often in the form of a 30- to 90-second ad spot. The most common ad placements include:



**Pre-roll:**  
at the beginning of  
an episode

**Mid-roll:**  
in the middle, when listener  
engagement tends to be highest

**Post-roll:**  
at the end of  
an episode

The delivery of the ad is just as important as the timing. And while pre-produced ads offer a polished, consistent brand voice, **host-read ads remain the gold standard** for impact. When hosts speak in their own voice, and ideally from personal experience, the ad feels less like a sales pitch and more like a trusted recommendation. That authenticity is what makes podcast advertising so effective.

We've seen this dynamic firsthand. At Right Side Up, we've stewarded over \$250M in podcast ads profitably, and after [analyzing over \\$3M in podcast media](#), we found that **host-read ads that included personalization consistently outperformed generic scripts**, especially when the host could share a real anecdote or emotional connection with the product.

For more information about what makes a brand ready for podcast ads, read a deeper dive [here](#).

## Why Podcast Ads Work

There's a reason advertisers keep coming back to podcasting: it works. But not because it mimics other performance channels. It works because it's different. Podcast ads earn attention, build trust, and drive action for the following reasons:

- **Quick access to engaged audiences:** Reach people who are already tuning in weekly (or even daily) and trust what the host has to say.



- **Lower creative lift than branded podcasting:** There's no need to build an audience or manage a content calendar. Write copy points for the host, then let them record the ad in their personality and tone. Refresh the content as needed.
- **Variability in genres and shows:** From finance to comedy to true crime, podcasts let you explore and test different types of content, and scale what works best.
- **Attribution tools to measure success:** Promo codes, vanity URLs, and third-party platforms like [Podscribe](#) and [Magellan AI](#) help you understand what's resonating, in addition to broader methodologies like [post-purchase surveys](#) and media mix modeling/multi-touch attribution.

And when those ads are host-read, the performance speaks for itself. According to [Nielsen](#), host-read podcast ads drive a **71% brand recall rate** and a **63% lift in purchase intent**, outperforming almost every other digital channel. Done right, podcast ads don't interrupt the experience; they are part of it.

## How It's Made & What It Costs

A meaningful test of podcast advertising typically requires a **budget of \$75K–\$90K spread across 10–12 weeks**. This allows you to test across a range of genres, shows, and networks — enough to evaluate what works and build a path to scale. Budgets below that range often result in inconclusive or overly placement-specific learnings.

**Podcast ads are sold on a cost-per-mille (CPM) model, usually between \$18–\$50**, depending on show popularity, format, and placement. Mid-roll, host-read ads tend to cost more but consistently deliver stronger results due to their length, tone, and authenticity. Host reads are often personalized, and when possible, it helps to give hosts first-hand product experience to make the message more relatable.

Most shows handle ad production themselves. Your job is to **prep them with a concise 1-page copy guide**, based on [best practices](#), giving them enough brand context without over-scripting. Additional onboarding materials (or a quick call) can be useful for complex products or nuanced messaging.

Behind the scenes, your internal team should be ready too. That means **confirming all vanity URLs or promo codes are live and tested**, and that any pixel-based attribution is properly installed and shared with publishers. Be sure to work closely with your attribution partner to verify that everything is flowing correctly pre-launch.

Finally, **don't expect immediate results**. Podcast listening is on-demand, and conversions often follow a delayed curve. Set expectations with your team around ramp-up timing and remember — this is a channel that rewards patience and iteration.





## What Success Looks Like

Podcast ads are uniquely positioned to support both upper funnel brand awareness and lower funnel performance marketing. The format naturally blends storytelling with action, giving marketers the chance to both educate and convert. Depending on your goals, key performance indicators (KPIs) can include:

### REACH AND IMPRESSIONS:



Delivery reports from podcast networks and impression tracking via a pixel attribution partner measure reach and impression delivery (and frequency, if you're working with an attribution partner).

### CONVERSIONS, LEADS, OR ACQUISITIONS:



Through unique promo codes/vanity URLs alongside post-conversion survey data, acquisition activity can be linked back to the show and channel. Pixel-based attribution provides an additional way to link podcast listens to customer actions.

### BRAND LIFT:



Measured via internal or third-party studies with trusted partners like [Signal Hill Insights](#), which assess changes in awareness, favorability, or intent after someone hears your ad.

### ROI:



As measured by return on ad spend (ROAS), customer acquisition cost (CAC), lifetime value (LTV), and downstream halo impact across channels.

**Podcasting is an offline channel:** Even though podcasts are accessed digitally, listener actions aren't always trackable — there's no "last click" to tie directly to conversions. Before launch, align on goals and measurement methods so you can confidently assess performance and make the case for scale.

**Not every show will hit — and that's the point:** Testing across a broad range of shows helps identify what works. Some placements may miss the mark, but others can unlock new, high-performing segments. At Right Side Up, we aim for 30–50% of test shows to hit benchmarks — a strong signal that the channel can scale efficiently through iteration.

**Patience is part of the process:** Podcast consumption is on-demand, so performance often ramps slowly. Listeners may hear your ad days or weeks after release. Resist the urge to judge early — give the campaign time to play out before making optimization decisions.

# Build It or Buy In? Your Podcast Strategy Starts Here

Whether you choose to launch your own branded podcast, buy ads on trusted shows, or do both, **you're entering a medium built on trust, depth, and attention:** three things in short supply in most marketing channels today. Both formats can work when they align with your goals, resources, and commitment to showing up in the podcast space for the long haul.

**Before you decide, take time to clarify what you want your audio strategy to achieve.** There's no one-size-fits-all strategy for you to follow.

Do you want to deepen trust and thought leadership over time while building an audience?

OR

Are you focused on driving awareness, conversions, or leads quickly and efficiently?



**Ready to find out which path is right for you?**

[Take the quiz](#) to see if your brand is better suited for a branded podcast, podcast advertising, or both.





# Branded Podcast vs. Podcast Advertising Quiz



## 1 What is the primary goal of your audio strategy?

- a) Build long-term trust and deepen relationships with our audience
- b) Drive traffic, leads, or conversions

## 2 What kind of storytelling excites you most?

- a) Original stories, expert interviews, and immersive content our audience will binge
- b) A punchy, memorable message in 60 seconds

## 3 How much time are you willing to invest in production?

- a) We're ready to commit to a content strategy that unfolds over time
- b) We want a campaign that's fast and scalable for our creative team

## 4 Which best describes your commitment to audio?

- a) Short-term
- b) Long-term

## 5 What does success look like for you?

- a) Building brand affinity, thought leadership, or industry authority
- b) Hitting short-term marketing goals like app downloads or sales

## 6 How much creative control do you want?

- a) Total control—we want to shape every piece of the listener experience
- b) We're happy to trust creators and producers with messaging, tone, and delivery

## 7 What's your timeline for results?

- a) We're in it for the long game
- b) We need to show performance this quarter

## 8 How do you see your brand showing up in the podcast space?

- a) As a content creator—we want to own and publish the show
- b) As a supporter—we want our brand featured within existing shows

## 9 What kind of budget are you working with?

- a) We can invest in a long-term content property that evolves over time
- b) We need flexible, performance-based spend options





## Quiz Results

### MOSTLY A'S – BRANDED PODCAST

Your brand is ready for storytelling. You value deep audience relationships, thought leadership, and long-term brand building. A branded podcast gives you the control and creative space to build trust, connect emotionally, and make your brand unforgettable—one episode at a time.

### MOSTLY B'S – PODCAST ADVERTISING

You're looking for reach, results, and ROI—fast. Audio advertising is your best bet. Whether you're launching a new product, scaling a campaign, or targeting niche audiences, podcast ads offer flexibility, credibility, and quick impact without the long-term content lift.

### MIX OF A'S AND B'S – HYBRID APPROACH

Why not both? Many top brands combine branded podcasts and audio ads for a well-rounded strategy. Use ads to build awareness and drive traffic, then let your podcast deepen relationships. It's the best of both worlds.



## Quill

Quill is an award-winning podcast production agency that specializes in branded content and podcast marketing services for leading corporate brands.

Elevate your marketing strategy with branded podcasts that make an impact.



[TALK TO QUILL](#)



L'ORÉAL

EMERGENT



## Right Side Up

Right Side Up is a marketing talent platform that helps leading brands grow through access to expert marketers across every discipline. As the largest independent buyer of podcast ads, they've profitably invested over \$250M on behalf of clients.



[TALK TO RIGHT SIDE UP](#)

