DOWNLOADS ASIDE: Measuring The Impact of Branded Podcasts

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Proving Branded Podcast Impact

You wouldn't launch a product without a go-to-market strategy. So why treat your branded podcast any differently?

Just like any product launch or campaign, creating a successful branded podcast requires an intimate understanding of your audience, a data-backed strategy, and a firm grasp of key metrics to see what's working (and what's not).

But proving how your podcast is benefiting your business is a lot easier said than done.

Whether you're convincing leadership to maintain investment, proving ROI, or just figuring out how to make your next season better, this guide will teach you:

- Why downloads don't tell you the full story, and what metrics do
- How to tie your podcast goals to business outcomes
- Where to find the podcast insights that matter
- How to prove your podcast's ROI

Rethinking Vanity Metrics: Moving Beyond Downloads

Vanity metrics — like downloads and subscribers — look nice on a slide, but they rarely tell you the full story.

This is largely because these metrics lack depth; they offer a superficial view of your podcast's reach but fall short when it comes to revealing crucial aspects like **audience engagement**, **retention**, or **loyalty**.

In other words: A download doesn't mean someone listened; a subscriber doesn't mean they're actively engaged with your content. Instead, we'll be focusing on the metrics that help you understand:

- What's falling flat in your content
- What's resonating with your audience
- The impact that your podcast has on your brand
- How to build a better connection with your audience

Key Metrics To Track For Branded Podcasts

If vanity metrics tell you how many people showed up, the next set of data tells you what they actually did once they got there.

In this section, we'll break down the key engagement metrics that give you real insight into what moves the needle:
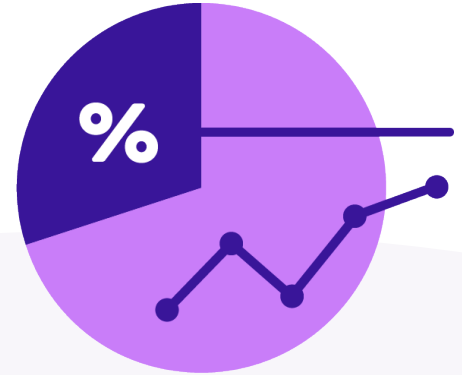
Engagement Metrics

Consumption Rate

One of the more telling indicators of engagement, consumption rate tells you the average percentage of an episode your audience listens to.

If it's hovering around 80%+, it means listeners are staying for most of the episode. Anything lower may suggest the episode is too long, the structure needs work, or the content isn't resonating.

Completion Rate

Completion rate tracks how many listeners actually finish an episode. While similar to consumption rate, this metric zeroes in on full-episode engagement. A completion rate in the 70–90% range typically signals that your audience finds your content compelling and worth their time and attention.

Drop-Off Points

Drop-off points highlight the exact moments in an episode when listeners stop listening. Maybe the intro drags, a guest segment runs too long, or ad placement feels disruptive. Recognizing and responding to common drop-off patterns helps you adjust pacing, segment length, or even cut underperforming content altogether.

Social Media Metrics

By tracking likes, shares, comments, and follower growth across platforms, you see how your content resonates and sparks conversation outside the airwaves. You can find this data on social media platforms or use tools like CoHost's Advanced Audience Demographics to see your listener's social media habits and how they act online.

Website Metrics

If your podcast is connected to a website or landing page, Google Analytics can offer valuable intel. Track how many visitors land on podcast-related pages, where they're coming from, how long they stay, and what actions they take. This helps you assess whether episodes are driving conversions.

Ratings and Reviews

Listeners who leave a review are invested, whether they're praising the content or offering critique. Reviews are valuable because they're one of the few occasions where you can hear what works and what doesn't directly from your listeners.

Branded Podcast Lift Study Insights

A branded podcast lift study taps directly into listeners' response to your program.

A survey asks them what they think about the content – what they like, don't like, and why – while also digging deeply into how it influences their opinion of the brand behind the podcast.

Here are some examples of the metrics a lift study delivers and the Signal Hill Insights benchmarks you can use for your own show:

- **Positive Brand Association, or "Halo Effect":** Discover how a listener's opinion of a brand changes based on the podcast. 61% of listeners say a branded podcast made them more favorable towards the brand.

- **Engagement with the content:** 75% of listeners agreed that a branded podcast "kept my attention for the entire episode."

- **Intent to recommend the podcast:** 63% of listeners say they would recommend a branded podcast after hearing an episode.

- **Verbatim responses to the content, in the listener's own words:** A listener to a B2B podcast said they liked a "focus on lessons learned," while another listener to a personal finance podcast said, "it was a story about a situation I'm likely to be in… very relatable."

Audience Metrics

Demographics, Psychographics, and Firmographics

Knowing *who* is listening is just as important as what they're listening to. Demographics (like age and income), psychographics (like lifestyle and values), and firmographics (like companies listening, industry, and job seniority) offer a fuller picture of your audience.

For brands and agencies, this data helps answer critical questions like:

- Are we reaching the right people?
- Are we creating content that aligns with their needs and interests?

> With CoHost's Prefix, you can gain in-depth demographics and firmographic insights into your listeners with Advanced Audience Demographics and B2B Analytics – no hosting platform migration required.

You can also use a first-party listener survey to supplement sources like CoHost, drilling down into consumer and purchasing behaviors related to the brand and vertical, and other important demographic or psychographic data. Listener surveys provide feedback on:

- How well content is reaching a target audience
- How well it's serving their needs
- Where to focus audience development efforts

Repeat Listenership & Retention

Most podcast platforms won't tell you how many listeners are new vs. returning, so you'll need to get a little scrappy. A good workaround is tracking **unique listeners** – **the number of individual devices (iPhone, computer, etc.) that have played your show.** At CoHost, we built a dedicated unique listener dashboard so you can get an accurate view of your show's reach:

Show Unique Listeners Over Time ⓘ
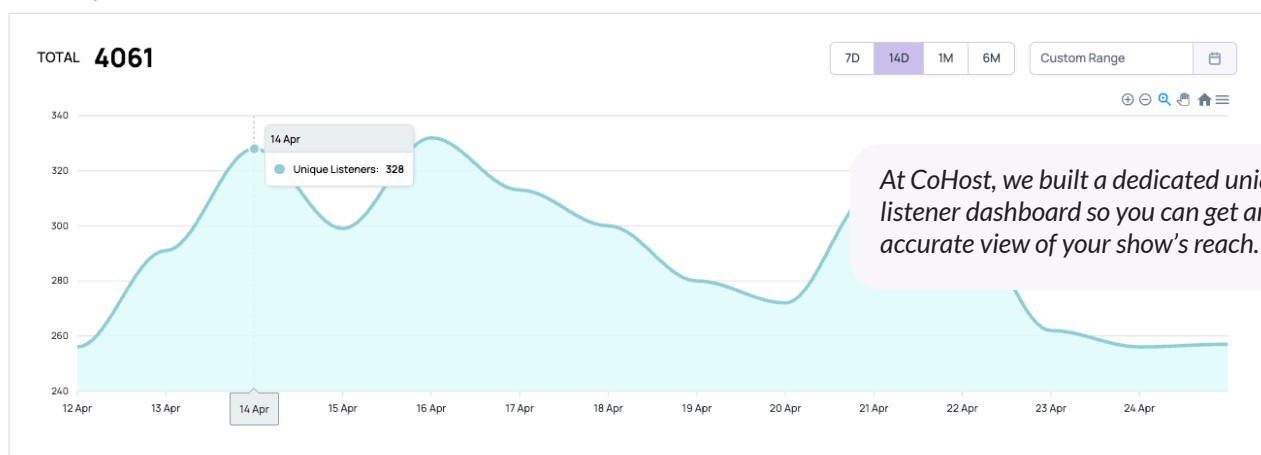
TOTAL **4061**

7D | **14D** | 1M | 6M | Custom Range

14 Apr
● Unique Listeners: 328

At CoHost, we built a dedicated unique listener dashboard so you can get an accurate view of your show's reach.

340 | 320 | 300 | 280 | 260 | 240

12 Apr | 13 Apr | 14 Apr | 15 Apr | 16 Apr | 17 Apr | 18 Apr | 19 Apr | 20 Apr | 21 Apr | 22 Apr | 23 Apr | 24 Apr

Track your unique listener count over time — week to week or episode to episode. While the number may fluctuate, you'll start to spot patterns. For example, if you consistently see 300 unique listeners per episode, it's a solid sign of listener loyalty.

Cost of Listener Attention

Instead of just tracking how many people are listening, the Cost of Listener Attention (CLA) helps you measure how much you're paying to keep listeners tuned in.

Here's the formula:

> **CLA = (Production Costs + Marketing Spend) / Total Minutes Consumed**

Let's say:

- You spent $5,000 on producing an episode (editing, scripting, hosting, etc.)
- You spent $2,000 on promotion (ads, social posts, newsletter mentions, erc.)
- That episode got 1,500 downloads, with an average consumption rate of 75%, and is 40 minutes long

Here's how it plays out:
Total Minutes Consumed = 1,500 downloads × 0.75 × 40 minutes = 45,000
CLA = ($5,000 + $2,000) / 45,000 = $0.16

You're spending $0.16 per minute of listener attention.

Now let's flip the perspective to measure how efficiently your budget is turning into listener engagement:

> **Listener Attention Efficiency (LAE) = Total Minutes Listened ÷ Total Spend**

In this example:
45,000 minutes ÷ $7,000 (production + marketing) = 6.4 minutes of attention per dollar spent

So, for every $1 you spend, you're earning a little over 6 minutes of focused listener attention. So what does this tell you?

If your CLA is high (say $0.25 or more), it's costing a lot to engage listeners. This could mean you're in a niche market, so it costs more to acquire listeners, or it may be time to look at improving content retention or trimming expenses. **If your LAE is low** (say under 5 minutes per $), your budget isn't stretching far enough.

Maybe your marketing isn't hitting the right audience, or your episode structure needs a rethink.

Performance: Brand and Conversion Impact

Brand Impact and Lift Metrics

Brand recall and recognition (surveys, polls, shares, referrals, and NPS scores) show you how the podcast and content are creating a positive brand association and driving brand metrics like favorability, consideration, and purchase intent.

Conversion Metrics

Conversion metrics detail the actions taken from your podcast, including visits to websites, product purchases, and sign-ups. You can track these using unique promo codes or by tracking podcast CTAs.

Combining brand lift and conversion metrics give you a full funnel view. You see how well content moves consumers from awareness to conversion, possibly identifying speedbumps or roadblocks in the funnel. If someone doesn't take an action, like visiting your website, attribution can't tell you why, but a lift study will help answer that question.

Where To Find Podcast Metrics

By now, you know that vanity metrics don't cut it. You need numbers that help you tell the real story — one with actual listeners, engagement, and audience behavior you can act on.

So, where do you go to find those insights? Let's break down the main places podcasters get their data.

🎧 Podcast Listening Apps
Best for: Platform-specific insights

Within podcast directories like Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Amazon Music, you can track platform-specific analytics like downloads, devices, and some demographic details like gender and location.

This is useful to get an overview of your podcast's app-specific performance, but it doesn't show you the bigger picture of who your listeners are and the content they enjoy most.

Podcast Hosting Platforms

Best for: A snapshot of how your show is performing (and potentially who's listening)

Podcast hosting platforms store and distribute your podcast. In addition to the usual features, like storage, bandwidth, and RSS feed generation, many hosting platforms also provide analytics, ranging from more basic data to more advanced insights.

Hosting platforms typically include downloads, unique listeners, subscribers, and `basic demographic information like location. This is a great starting point, but marketers will need more advanced capabilities to prove podcast ROI. Do your research to explore different podcast hosting options and which ones provide the depth of data you require.

Podcast Analytics Tools

Best for: Deep insights into who your audience is and how they behave

If you're serious about growth and ROI, podcast analytics tools are critical. You're not just seeing *how many* people listened, but *who* they are and *why* it matters. Think consumption rates, audience demographics/psychographics, firmographics, tracking links, and more.

These insights help you understand your audience's behavior, preferences, and engagement, so you can better tailor your content and promotion strategies.

Available regardless of your current hosting setup, CoHost offers advanced listener insights through B2B Analytics, Advanced Audience Demographics, and Tracking Links. **Think: job titles, industries, income, seniority level, social media habits, family size** — you name it.

Branded Podcast Lift Studies

Best for: Deep insights into how audiences perceive your podcast

Branded podcast lift studies will tell you how your podcast resonates with listeners and how it performs for brand metrics, from brand awareness and favorability to purchase intent. A study will tell you why listeners respond, and why they are, or are not, taking action.

Signal Hill Insights is a branded podcast research specialist, providing lift studies for podcasts of any size, offering real-world benchmarks to assess your performance, and deep insights to put results to work in optimizing your podcast.

Setting Branded Podcast Benchmarks and KPIs

To understand whether your branded podcast is actually working, you'll need to set clear, measurable KPIs tied directly to your brand's goals.

When you launched your show, you probably had a few objectives in mind, like:

- Driving **lead generation**
- Increasing **brand awareness**
- Establishing **thought leadership**
- Boosting **audience engagement**
- Increasing **brand and content favorability**

Now it's time to turn those goals into trackable metrics. These could look like:

01
Brand Awareness KPIs
- Increase downloads and unique listeners by 5% this season
- Increase subscribers by 10% this quarter

03
Lead Generation and Revenue KPIs
- Earn 15 leads from my podcast this season
- Secure a sponsor for my upcoming season

02
Engagement and Community KPIs
- Increase the average consumption rate to 85% this season
- Decrease drop-off rate by 10% this quarter

04
Brand and Content Lift KPIs
- Increase brand favorability with listeners this season
- Grow the percentage of listeners who rate the content as "very good" or "excellent" this season

Here are some metrics you can use to create your KPIs, and where you can find them:

Metric	Source
Downloads	Listening Apps, Hosting Platforms, Podcast Analytics Platforms
Unique Listeners	Listening Apps, Hosting Platforms, Podcast Analytics Platforms
Leads/Conversions	Website Analytics, Product Analytics
Brand and Content Metrics	Branded Podcast Lift Study
Website Engagement	Website Analytics
Social Media Engagement	Social Media Analytics
Average Consumption Rate	Listening Apps, Some Hosting Platforms, Podcast Analytics Platforms
On-Site Downloads (Reports or Ebooks) or Sign-Ups (Webinar or Newsletter)	Website Analytics
Demographic Data	Podcast Analytics Platforms, Some Hosting Platforms, and Listener Surveys

Best Practices For Measuring Branded Podcasts

Know Your Podcast Listeners Inside Out

The better you know your listeners, the better you can serve them content they care about — and the more likely they are to keep coming back.

You'll want to keep track of:

1. **Demographics:** Age, gender, location—basically, who they are and where they are.

2. **Firmographics:** Company they work at, industry, job title, job role.

3. **Listening Behavior:** Are they binging? Skipping intros? Dropping off at minute 17?

4. **Listening Motivation:** Do they listen for entertainment? To learn something new? To be inspired?

5. **Consumption Rate:** Are people actually finishing your episodes?

6. **Preferred Listening Platforms:** Where your audience listens and how to best engage with them.

7. **Engagement Touchpoints:** Reviews, shares, DMs—how are they talking back? And what are they saying? **Tracking Links** makes finding top channels easy.

You can then use this data to:

- Tailor content and structure to listener preferences
- Double down on what's working and cut what's not
- Prove the impact of your show to internal stakeholders

Dive Into The Stories Behind The Data

Raw data is meaningless unless you know how to interpret it. The real value of podcast analytics comes from the insights you pull and how you use those insights to refine your content, format, and marketing strategy.

If you're not digging into the "why" behind your numbers, you're leaving valuable insights on the table, including:

How Content Resonates: If listeners consistently drop off at the same point in episodes, that's a signal. Small tweaks have a big impact on how long people stick around.

Where Your Audience Lives Online: Learn which channels your audience hangs out on to maximize time and budget. For example, you may assume your audience is on Instagram, but you find that LinkedIn actually drives the most downloads.

The Business Impact of Your Podcast: If you're trying to get buy-in for another season, raw passion won't cut it. Show how the podcast is moving the needle — whether that's building awareness, brand favorability, generating leads, or driving engagement.

Overlooking What Sponsors Care About: If you can show advertisers who's listening — how old they are, where they live, what they care about — you instantly become more appealing. Without that data, you're just another show asking for money.

Set Yourself Up For a Long-Term Podcast Strategy

Podcasting isn't a one-and-done campaign. It's a long game. And like any long game, your goals (and how you measure them) need room to evolve. What worked in season one might not be the right metric in season three — and that's okay!

Here's how to keep your strategy sharp as your show matures:

01

Start With Clear Goals, But Don't Get Stuck There: As you build an audience and hit your stride, your KPIs should shift too.

02

Let The Data Shape Your Next Moves: If you notice your listeners are more engaged with certain topics or formats (say, shorter episodes or interviews with industry guests), that's a signal to evolve your content.

03

Build Alignment Across Teams: Your podcast doesn't live in a vacuum. It touches marketing, sales, comms, and even HR. As the podcast grows, regularly revisit KPIs with stakeholders and ensure everyone's on board with where the podcast fits in your larger marketing mix.

About Quill

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

Reach out to our team to elevate your marketing strategy with branded podcasts that make an impact.

About CoHost

CoHost is a podcast analytics and audience insights platform designed for brands and agencies to manage, measure, and grow audio content.

To learn more about CoHost, reach out to our team or book a demo.

About Signal Hill Insights

Signal Hill Insights is the leading audio-first research firm with a core focus on brand lift studies for podcasts and survey-driven audience insights. Signal Hill partners with broadcasters, publishers, and brands, like Acast, AdLarge, ART19, Cumulus/Westwood One, Gumball, OnStar, Red Hat, Soundrise, SiriusXM, and Triton Digital.