

Personal development**Podcasting is booming: is it time to join in?**

Experienced hosts advise newcomers to connect with listeners — but do not expect to make money



'The Guilty Feminist': Deborah Frances-White during a live version of her podcast © Callum Baker

Jill Martin Wrenn APRIL 27 2020

Scott Galloway did not intend to launch a podcast in a pandemic. The marketing professor at NYU Stern School of Business says: “It wasn’t strategic — it was accidental.” The entrepreneur and bestselling author had already recorded several episodes of his new podcast, *The Prof G Show*, ahead of the show’s launch in late March. But then the world changed.

The podcast was designed to offer tips to listeners on how to get ahead in the winner-takes-all economy. “And then the coronavirus hit, and we threw all that out the door,” Prof Galloway says. “We recorded our first episode the day before it aired.”

He and his two producers re-worked *The Prof G Show* to focus on the social and economic impact of the virus, along with predictions of how the post-coronavirus world could look.

“Everything we do is kind of set against this backdrop. By no means was it a strategic decision to launch in the middle of a pandemic,” says Prof Galloway, speaking from his home in Florida.

As the coronavirus upends jobs and careers around the world, many are trying to find projects they can pursue from home. Because digital audio programmes can

be produced from home with little to no budget, podcasts have become one of the fastest-growing segments of the media market. Apple says there are more than 900,000 shows on Apple Podcasts. That number has nearly doubled in the past two years.

“And the good news is there are very few barriers to entry. It’s kind of two turntables and a microphone and you’re on,” Prof Galloway says. “The bad news is there are no barriers to entry.”

With hundreds of new podcasts making their debuts every day, standing out from the crowd can be difficult. Turning a profit can also be elusive, particularly for those who don’t already have a strong base of followers.



Scott Galloway hosts 'The Prof G Show' and says a podcast should be approached as a marketing tool, which is hopefully self-sustaining © Tobias Hase/dpa/PA

Mr Galloway has what many aspiring podcasters don’t: a large, engaged social media audience, including more than 200,000 Twitter followers. Westwood One, a radio network, distributes *The Prof G Show*, and handles ad sales. “The reality is, other than probably the 50 or 100 biggest podcasts in the world, these are not big businesses,” he says.

The correct way to think about a podcast, he adds, is as “top-of-the-funnel marketing that is hopefully self-sustaining, that feeds your audience or creates awareness that you can monetise elsewhere.”

Even for established podcasters, the pandemic is shifting strategies. *The Guilty Feminist*, created and hosted by London-based comedian Deborah Frances-White, has been downloaded 75m times since it began just over four years ago. The podcast calls itself a forum to discuss the big topics that 21st century feminists agree on, while confessing the hypocrisies that undermine them. “The idea of *The*

Guilty Feminist is we don't have to be perfect to be a force for meaningful change," Ms Frances-White says.

Live events have played a key role in many podcasts' success, as they provide both audiences and revenues. *The Guilty Feminist* team has regularly performed what Ms Frances-White calls "feminist variety," including comedy, interviews and music in front of live audiences. A tour in January and February took her to the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, but Covid-19 forced her to cancel a planned May tour. In order to generate extra revenue, Ms Frances-White turned to Patreon, a platform that lets fans pay to support artists and creatives in exchange for exclusive content.

She is not alone — during the first three weeks of March, 30,000 people [joined](#) the funding platform as the economic fallout from the pandemic hit the freelance sector. In addition, Ms Frances-White has launched a new Instagram Live series called *The New Normal*, featuring guests from *The Guilty Feminist*, to guide listeners through the lockdown. "In quarantine, there's a whole new vista opening up," she says. "Because now, we're looking at how the human race deals with staying inside, losing the connections with the people they love."

Ms Frances-White asks her guests about their ups and downs of the new reality, which she says feels like a logical extension of the space that the podcast already has.



Deborah Frances-White with 'The Guilty Feminist' at Women of the World Festival © Callum Baker

Looking at podcasting as a tool to engage with listeners, rather than a path to profit, is more productive, at least initially, experts say. Podcasting as a form of

media is still relatively new — and so are the business models behind it. But that is part of what makes the medium attractive to would-be producers and hosts.

In its Covid-19 Barometer study, market research group Kantar found that 18- to 34-year-olds increased their podcast and music streaming listening by nearly 40 per cent in late March.

“Although a lot of people listen to podcasts, from a media consumption point of view, and a currency point of view, it’s still fairly early days. There aren’t that many official podcast measurements,” says Jane Ostler, global head of media at Kantar’s insights division.

Because podcasting is a fairly new medium, it is flexible and can be a useful career development tool: Ms Ostler is not only a fan of podcasts — she hosts a marketing series called *Future Proof* in collaboration with Saïd Business School at the University of Oxford.

“It is a hugely creative and experimental area, which I think is very exciting,” she says. Podcasting can also provide unique opportunities for bonding with a listener base, because of the ways audiences access the content.

Podcasts are extremely appealing because they are intimate, and present listeners with the illusion that they are friends with, or have special access to the host.

As Prof Galloway says: “So whenever someone comes up to me and they say, ‘Oh hi, Scott . . .’ and they start talking to me as if they know me, and I don’t know them, it’s [because of] the podcast.” Because with a podcast, he adds, “you’re in someone’s ears, and it’s as if you’re having a conversation, and they begin to believe they know you.”

So you want to start a podcast?

Deborah Frances-White has hosted more than 200 episodes of her award-winning podcast, *The Guilty Feminist*. Here is her advice for launching your own:

Find a topic that’s missing from existing podcasts This is always the best advice for podcasting. What is it that you want to hear, that nobody else is saying? What is it that you want to explore that you’re not getting from any other show that you’re listening to? That is your target, that is your sweet spot.

Make a modest investment in some kit Get yourself a decent mic. Teach yourself how to edit. Or find someone who can edit who wants to be a part of your project. Put out a really good show. Get feedback. Listen to what people are saying.

Engage with your listenership Your audience may not be large. Maybe only a few

Engage with your listenership Your audience may not be large. Maybe only a few people want to hear what you're thinking. But those people will really want to hear it. And the thing with podcasts is: you're not aiming for quantity — you're aiming for connection.

Don't be afraid to enjoy yourself, even during the lockdown Yes, it's a global pandemic, but your podcast is a silver lining.

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