

TRENDS REPORT

The Podcast Advertising Inflection Point

Today's Podcasting Strategy Requires A 360-Degree Media Mindset

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Summary

Podcasting has reached a cultural and commercial tipping point. As this channel evolves to span audio, video, and social media, it offers brands new ways to connect with younger, harder-to-reach consumers. Yet, advertisers face challenges with fragmented buying ecosystems, inconsistent measurement, and brand safety concerns. This report helps marketers navigate these complexities by outlining the current podcasting landscape, highlighting its unique strengths, and offering strategic guidance for integrating podcasts into 2026 media plans and beyond.

Podcasts Reach New Heights Because They Tap The Cultural Zeitgeist

Podcasting has hit critical mass: In 2025, [68% of US online adults](#) say they listen to podcasts, [up from 58% in 2022](#). Cultural moments increasingly begin in podcasts and spread to other news outlets and media channels. President Trump's [3-hour interview on Joe Rogan's show](#) was featured on every major news outlet and permeated social media feeds. Taylor Swift's appearance on her now-fiancé's podcast, "New Heights," "broke the internet" and set the record for [most concurrent views](#) for a podcast on YouTube. But it wasn't always this way. Celebrities and politicians used to prioritize appearances on the top late-night shows. Now, those coveted interviews happen on podcasts. Luke Carrell, global ads integrated marketing communications manager at YouTube, told Forrester, "As late-night and daytime talk shows have receded, podcasts fill a very similar void for people." The medium has taken off because:

- **Celebrities are flocking to podcasts because of the intimate, long-form format.**

Stars like [Leonardo DiCaprio](#) and [Joaquin Phoenix](#), who typically avoid press junkets, are appearing on podcasts for personal, relatable conversations with hosts. Notable public personalities ranging from Conan O'Brien and Anna Faris to Michelle Obama and Anderson Cooper have launched their own podcasts. Former Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly launched her own [podcast network](#). Celebrities prioritize podcast appearances because they can engage in longer conversations that lead to more authentic media moments than you would get on a typical talk show. When Kim Kardashian sat down with Alex Cooper on the "Call Her Daddy" podcast in October 2025, she sparked significant coverage and buzz well beyond the pod itself, taking social media platforms and traditional media outlets by storm. As Steffie Park, associate director, marketing at SiriusXM, told us, "You used to watch celebrity interviews on TV — I think podcasts are how people get their interactions from celebrities now."

- **Longer-form storytelling lets the content — and consumer — breathe.** The average length of the top five podcasts on [Apple Podcasts](#) is over an hour. Contrast this with the fact that most videos on TikTok are [under a minute](#). Lauren Chaplin, SVP media investment at Digitas, told us: "Social media isn't as leaned-in of an environment as it once was — everyone talks about the death scroll. That leaned-in environment is with podcasting." In Forrester's ConsumerVoices Market Research Online Community, 77% of podcast listeners say they multitask when listening to podcasts. Many said that they are doing household chores, commuting, or exercising while they listen. Such autopilot activities require a lower

cognitive load, which may make consumers more mentally available to digest this longer-form content.

- **Podcasting content is diverse and differentiated.** An [Acast study](#) found that weekly podcast consumers listen to an average of six different topics, and 64% agree that podcasts cover topics not typically covered by traditional media. Luke Carrell from YouTube told us, “Podcasts allow for more types of content and a diversity of voices that traditional broadcast was not really designed to accommodate.” Whether it’s history, true crime, tech, comedy, finance, self-help, or pop culture, there is something for everyone. “Darknet Diaries” goes deep into the underbelly of the internet with stories about hacking and cybercrime. “A Hotdog Is A Sandwich” (it’s not) features two chefs debating “tough” food-related questions, [like the best pasta shape](#). The breadth of content available to consumers makes podcasts an appealing place to spend time with their multifaceted interests.

Podcasting Is A Content Genre, Not Just A Media Channel

Podcasts originated as an audio-first genre, leveraging RSS feeds as their primary delivery mechanism to various audio platforms, such as Apple Podcasts and Spotify. But media planners and buyers are changing their tune when it comes to having an audio-first podcast mindset. Why? *Video* podcasts are growing in popularity. Matt Shapo from IAB told us: “Podcast is social, podcast is in real life, podcast is video, and podcast is certainly still audio. Consumers get it — they think of podcasters as a very particular type of content creator.” In fact, many creators — like Katherine Ryan in “What’s My Age Again” — approach their podcast content with a 360-degree media mindset. In today’s podcasting landscape:

- **Social media is the gateway for many listeners.** While podcasts laid roots in audio two decades ago, they’ve bloomed in the age of creators and short-form video. Many creators use social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram to promote their podcasts, and others — like [Steven Barlett](#) — create stand-alone clips for social media platforms versus promotional content. TikTok is making this practice even easier with a new feature called [Smart Split](#), an AI editing tool to help creators cut down long podcasts or videos into smaller clips. As a result, more podcast content finds its way into the feeds of potential new listeners — leveraging social media’s robust discovery algorithms, which fall short on traditional podcast channels. YouTube’s Luke Carrell says that today’s podcasters are “multihyphenate, format-fluid creators.” He noted that creators use shorts to reach people outside of their typical subscriber base: “They create those shorter-

form promotional assets, like the salty moment from the conversation makes you think, ‘OK, I need to see the rest of that.’”

- **Video brings visual interest and additional reach for podcasts.** A billion people watch podcasts every month on YouTube — significantly more than any other platform that distributes podcasts. YouTube is becoming a discovery engine for podcasts while also offering a new way for people to consume this genre of long-form content. According to Joseph Wengrod, VP of network audio investment at Carat-dentsu: “YouTube has become a megaphone for podcasting. It supercharged the growth of the podcast space.” Netflix and Spotify [recently brokered a deal](#) to bring select video podcasts to Netflix in 2026, which will give greater visibility and audience exposure to Spotify’s podcasts. However, video isn’t expected to wholly replace podcast audio. It’s more likely that it will continue to be a compelling gateway for people who then add on listening as a secondary consumption vehicle.
- **Live podcast events draw highly engaged audiences.** While live-recorded podcasts are not a new phenomenon, they have evolved from shows at conferences or concerts into multicity tours in premier venues with mass audiences. Tickets for podcasters, influencers, and authors are [up 500% year over year](#), with Alex Cooper and “Crime Junkies” leading the way. Popular podcast “The Basement Yard” [sold out Radio City Music Hall](#) and appeared at Madison Square Garden this fall. Joseph Wengrod described the podcast event evolution: “Podcasters are rock stars. People are paying to go watch a podcaster just talk into a microphone.”

Complex Media Technicalities Hold Podcast Advertisers Back (But Not For Long)

In 2021, [Forrester forecast](#) that podcast advertising would exceed \$2.4 billion in 2025. A [2024 forecast](#) from the IAB similarly projects that the market will reach \$2.6 billion by 2026. B2C marketers are getting onboard: [Forrester’s 2025 data](#) shows that 91% of B2C marketing executives plan to run podcast ads in 2026 and will do so in a variety of formats (see Figure 1). However, the adtech infrastructure for podcasts has not yet caught up to consumer and advertiser enthusiasm. As Joseph Wengrod told us, “Standardization is a big theme of a challenge across the board — from measurement to planning to execution.” Podcast advertisers struggle because:

- **Buyers can’t centralize their media strategy due to fragmentation.** Advertisers face a crowded podcast ecosystem riddled with disconnected and overlapping players (see Figure 2). Some audio media companies, like Spotify, publish their

own platform-specific podcasts and have a robust adtech suite (ad marketplace, ad server) to support them. But Spotify doesn't just publish its own podcasts; platform users can listen to podcasts from other publishers (e.g., SiriusXM or iHeartRadio) that have their own media buying motions. Some advertisers buy podcast advertisements through run-of-network buys with publishers like The New York Times. Others may buy directly from online video and audio web players, like YouTube or Deezer. Lauren Chaplin from Digitas told us: "There are thousands of podcasts out there, with no single dominant platform, either. Brands can't spread themselves across all these partners."

- **Podcast engagement and impressions are difficult to accurately measure.**

Podcasts run on an RSS-based infrastructure, so they're downloaded (often progressively) to a user's device, not streamed. [Per IAB guidelines](#), downloads — not verified streams — are the standard to measure listens. Alyssa Pyros Dzogan, product manager at The Trade Desk, explained: "Due to the nature of how podcasts are accessed and the high opt-out rates from users, it can be challenging to get the signals to determine if an ad was listened to completion versus just downloaded. This requires advertising technologies to handle the format uniquely to ensure optimal buying outcomes for advertisers." This structure makes ad verification and real-time media optimizations difficult. Ads are stitched into the content when the user hits play or downloads an episode, and impressions are counted once the ad is downloaded (see Figure 3). But this is beginning to change. Sharon Taylor, chief revenue officer at Triton Digital, noted the shift into alternatives to open RSS delivery: "As new models emerge, it's critical for the industry to collaborate on developing better metrics without compromising the openness and accessibility that have made podcasting so successful."

- **MMMs underrepresent podcasts due to a lack of data structure and transfer standards.**

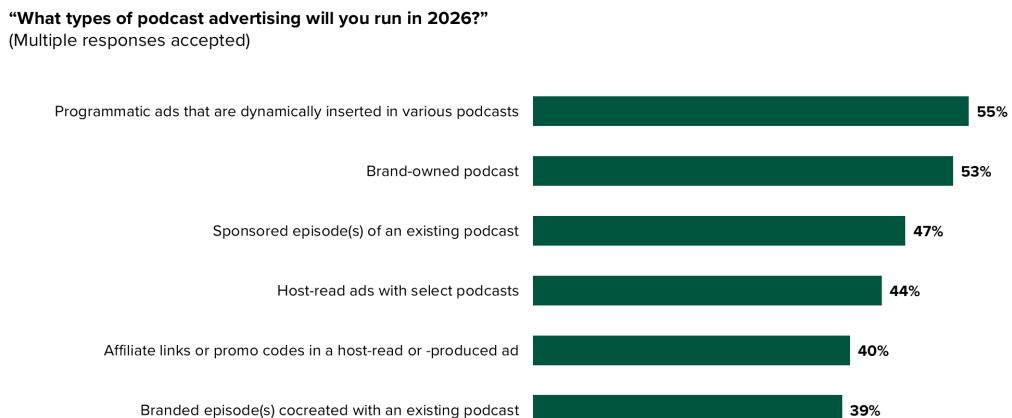
[In Forrester's Marketing Survey, 2025](#), more than half of B2C marketing decision-makers say that it's difficult to measure the return on advertising spending of streaming audio. Podcasts are often considered an even more difficult subset of streaming audio. Podcasts aren't represented well in marketing mix models (MMMs), partly because they're often lumped in with audio and not broken out separately. Matt Shapo from IAB explained that the issue isn't necessarily an infrastructure problem; it's a data packaging and delivery issue. He told us, "It's not that the technical infrastructure doesn't exist — it's that the data isn't being sent over the existing infrastructure in a way that modelers need it to be sent." For this to change, media owners and buyers must agree on how to structure, package, and deliver the data to enable better measurement.

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- **Content regulation lags amid concerns over brand safety.** The sheer breadth of podcasts and podcasters is a double-edged sword. Though an advertiser can find an audience for almost any topic, media running programmatically can end up on podcasts that don't align with that advertiser's brand values. Kacey Vaughan, director of inventory development at The Trade Desk, said this continues to be a barrier to entry for advertisers: "We have clients that won't run podcasting because brand safety technology doesn't operate in the same way as other channels. Because podcast advertising is an intentional format, brand suitability for advertisers is more of a spectrum than a binary categorization." But many brands are loosening up. Steffie Park, from SiriusXM's podcast marketing team, notes, "Brand safety concerns used to be bigger, but now it's less of an issue as advertisers understand host-audience dynamics." Technical advancements, such as automated podcast transcription analysis to inform ad buys and [emerging podcast-specific brand safety tools](#), help mitigate advertisers' concerns.

Figure 1
Advertisers Plan To Invest In Multiple Podcast Ad Formats



Base: 116 VP+ B2C marketing and advertising decision-makers who plan to run podcast advertising in 2026
Source: Forrester's Q3 2025 CMO Pulse Survey

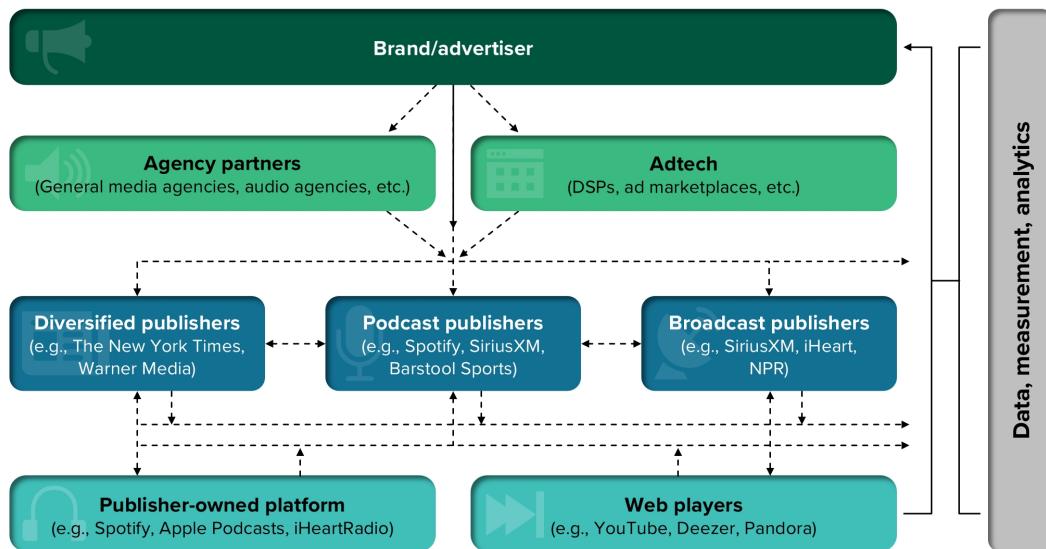
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Figure 2

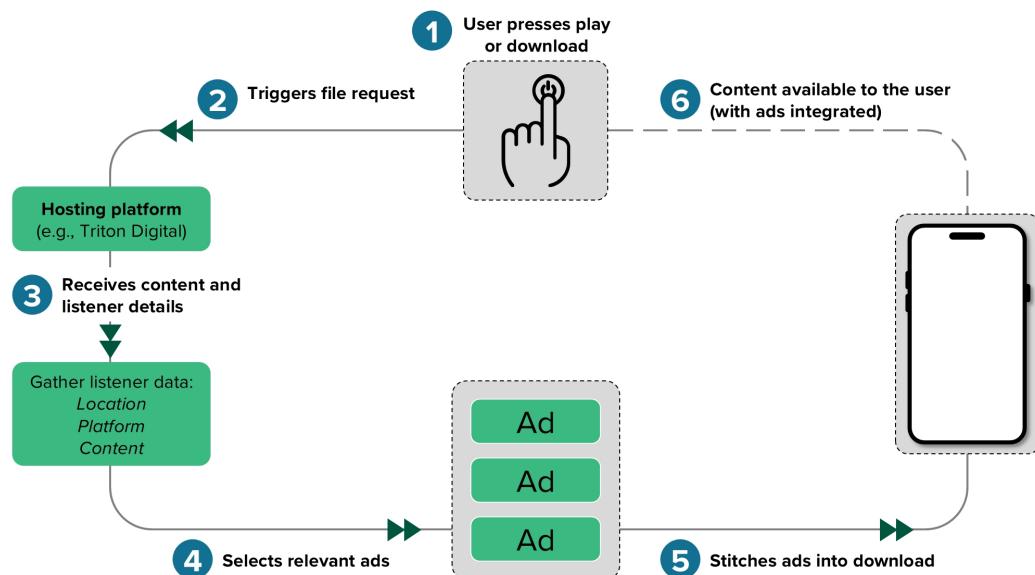
Advertisers Navigate A Complicated Podcast Ecosystem



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Figure 3

Podcast Downloads Trigger Ad Stitching



Test Into Podcasts Now, And Scale As The Technology Catches Up

Podcast media, including host-read ads and dynamic insertion, performs across marketing objectives — from brand awareness to lower-funnel direct response. While the adtech that supports programmatic podcast media catches up to other channels (not unlike the trajectory of CTV), advertisers can test into podcast media by leveraging one or two partners that offer both programmatic *and* host-read ads. Marketers, here are four reasons to consider slotting podcasts into your 2026 media plan:

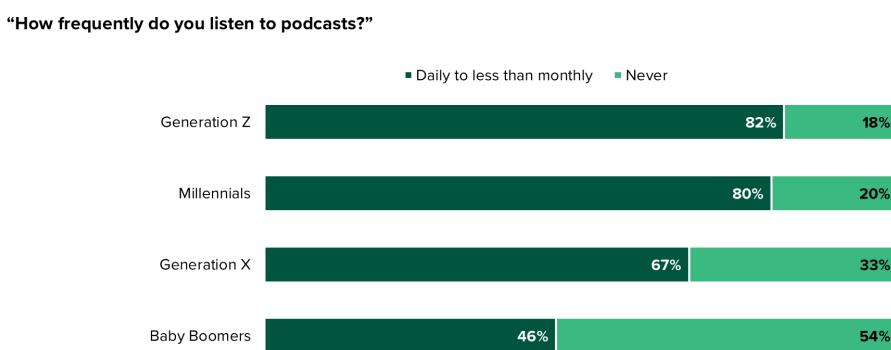
- **Podcasts are memorable.** In a world where getting consumer attention is nearly impossible, the memorability of podcasts is meaningful. Joseph Wengrod at dentsu told us: “The theater of the mind still applies. Without a visual component, it forces your brain to work harder to fill in those gaps. And when your brain is working harder, you remember more.” According to dentsu’s Attention Economy report, podcast ad impressions generate twice as much attention as TV ads.
- **Hosts are trusted creators.** Consumers spend a lot of time with podcast hosts. In [Forrester’s Media And Marketing Survey, 2025](#), 46% of US online adults who listen

to podcasts at least weekly say they spend five or more hours a week doing so. The sheer amount of time consumers spend with podcasters naturally begets trust. As Will Pearson, president of podcasts at iHeartMedia, told us, “Podcasters have trust levels — eight in 10 listeners trust their recommendations on products and services.” Consider host-read podcast ads as an extension of your existing creator marketing strategy.

- **Podcasts attract younger, harder-to-reach audiences.** Gen Z and Millennials are more likely to listen to podcasts than their older counterparts (see Figure 4). Podcast listeners are also more likely than nonlisteners to pay attention to advertising overall (not just in podcasts). Since finding these audiences in such an attentive environment isn’t easy, brands should build a 360-degree podcast strategy across audio, video, and social media.
- **Podcasts perform across the full funnel.** There’s a reason why brands that advertise in podcasts keep doing it: It works. Gabb, a “kid-safe tech” company, [wanted to reach parents](#) aged 25 to 55 with children 6 to 17 years old. Using Acast’s Ad Platform and a mix of host-read sponsorships and preproduced ads, it advertised on podcasts in the lifestyle, parenting, and family categories — garnering a 72% increase in consideration, 59% increase in awareness, and about 20,000 visitors during the campaign.

Figure 4

Younger Generations Are More Likely To Listen To Podcasts



Base: 2,717 US online adults
Source: Forrester's Media And Marketing Survey, 2025

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Supplemental Material

Companies We Interviewed For This Report

We would like to thank the individuals from the following companies who generously gave their time during the research for this report.

Analytic Partners

dentsu (Carat)

Digitas

Gain Theory

Google

IAB

iHeartMedia

The New York Times

Omnicom Media Group (Hearts & Science)

SiriusXM

The Trade Desk

Triton Digital



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