Archival Resources on the Web

Podcast Resources for Archivists

By Dana Gerber-Margie, Editor, Bello Collective

Millions of Americans have traded music for podcasts to fill in the daily commute, chores, and long walks. Unlike broadcast radio, podcasts offer listeners a wide variety of on-demand programming from exquisite storytelling, to three friends chatting about movies, to in-depth social critique, to educational histories of a region, and so much more. Podcasts are also revered for being an exceptionally accessible medium for potential creators, as producers, agents, or gatekeepers are not required. The most obscure of subjects find audiences and the most marginalized of voices are heard. Listening will only grow; according to Edison Research's *The Infinite Dial 2017* report, monthly listeners of podcasts are growing from 21 to 24 percent each year.

The archival community has been touched by podcasts too. The University of Iowa's *Historically Yours* (https://blog.lib.uiowa.edu/speccoll/category/historically-yours-podcast) asks what we can learn about history from one letter. Newly debuted *Archivists' Alley* (http://archivistsalley.com) discusses media preservation issues and elevates the less represented folks in our profession. *The Wisdom Project* (http://nunncenter.org/wisdomproject) takes recorded oral histories from the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History and crafts them into a narrative arch. *Library Bytegeist* (https://soundcloud.com/librarybytegeist) unites audio stories from New York City–based archives, museums, and libraries.

These shows only scratch the surface of the podcast landscape, a landscape that you are welcome to join—the accessibility

to the medium applies to you and your archival institution too. The following includes resources devoted to creating a podcast and suggestions on how to become involved with podcasts without creating one.

Tools, Equipment, and Software

Technical questions are often the first and most-asked by nascent podcast creators, but no one solution, microphone, or studio setup will ensure your podcast is successful. Depending on your institution's or manager's backing, you might be eager to pick up the cheaper microphone and start, or you might invest in a high-end microphone with a dedicated computer. If you are part of a campus or if your public library invested in a media lab, you might look into renting studio time.

You will need the following items to produce a podcast: a hosting site such as Libsyn or Podbean where the RSS feed will live, a quiet place to record, a recording device, editing software, and a computer for editing. Colleen Theisen's article about creating *Historically Yours* outlines the equipment and hosting service her institution chose here https://academicarchivist.wordpress.com/2017/07/12/historically-yours-a-love-letter-to-manuscripts-as-a-podcast-from-the-archives.

Most notably, Theisen was able to use a Zoom H4N recorder that had been acquired for oral histories, found a hosting deal that included statistics (to track and report to administrators), and downloaded the open source free software Audacity. With those low-cost solutions in hand, the biggest challenge she faced was finding a dedicated quiet recording space.

Pat Flynn, of the very popular *Smart Passive Income* podcast and blog, has a set of videos dedicated to the technical side of creating a podcast at https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLzJ1r4EGn-enCMU1kPstXd7e1SjI3jP_O. Transom (https://transom.org), a center that began as a dedicated space for teaching techniques to budding public radio reporters, today includes crafting independent podcasts. Browse the extensive, free, and unendingly helpful archives of Transom for recommended equipment basics, techniques for good radio, and thoughtful essays on production.

(Continued from page 9)

Production

It is important to understand that producing a podcast from idea to pretty published file takes a lot of work. It will require staff time and energy to develop an interesting concept, flesh out multiple episodes, book guests, conduct interviews or recordings, organize that work, edit the episode (including removing all the "ums" and breath intakes), publish, and publicize. The better you plan, the better your product will be.

Theisen's article guides readers through the iterative creative process that led to her brilliant idea. The core of the podcast—which poses the question, "What can you learn from just one letter?"—cleverly grounds the show's path, which draws from an inexhaustible amount of source material in the archives and does not require an element of timeliness, so that Theisen was able to record and edit a whole season of episodes, release them regularly, and then leave the publication and marketing for the second phase.

When in the conception phase, think deeply about your institution's history, mission, and vision. Consider what you want to convey. What type of podcast would best fit your staff time, interests, and strengths? Do you need an ongoing podcast, or can you produce one stand-alone series, like the British Museum's *The History of the World in 100 Objects* (http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/about/british-museum-objects)?

Format varies considerably across podcasts, so you have the freedom to choose your style: storytelling/narrative, interview, investigative journalism, roundtable or panel (including the podcast stereotype of two people chatting in their basement), recorded lectures, or even audio drama. The podcast landscape is very full; think about what would make your institution stand out.

Once you have an idea, you need to execute. Amanda McLoughlin, an independent podcaster, has written multiple articles navigating the issues that come with creation: financial tracking, workflows, sponsorships, how to work creatively on a team, and lessons she's learned doing this without professional producers, editors, or marketers (https://bellocollective.com/@shessomickey).

Radio Rookies, a show produced by WNYC that highlights teens' radio stories, has created a DIY Toolkit that includes a beautiful comic book, videos, and tip sheets, with information about story planning and interviewing basics at https://www.wnyc.org/shows/rookies/DIYToolkit.

Working with Podcast Creators

As you can see, setting out to make a podcast for outreach is time consuming. It requires technical know-how, audio editing, creativity, project management, and more. On top of the staff time required, your institution's podcast would also have fierce competition for the ears of podcast listeners, as it's a booming medium with a ton of talent. Instead of making a podcast, it may be more feasible to support or participate in one.

Archives appear in podcasts all the time. To create good content, people need to do accurate research. If they are reporting on a historical event or person, archival audio or video content can bring the story to life. Historical audio drama shows like *Bronzeville* shine even brighter when their stories are well researched. *Presidential* features recorded interviews with subject specialists at the Library of Congress, lending credence to the seriousness behind the research. *Slow Burn: A Podcast about Watergate* routinely utilizes archival audio to give listeners a sense of what it was like in the moment. For archives with more niche subject specialties, consider the extremely popular podcast *99% Invisible*, which regularly dives into archives to learn more about the history of architecture and design.

You can let a podcast creator into your archives with open arms in several ways, and the first is to acknowledge that podcasts are professionally done, important cultural work to take seriously—as seriously as you would a news broadcast or a film documentary. Second, if your institution has a specialty or a particular collection that would be of interest to the public, reach out to podcasts that cover that subject. Consider contacting podcast production companies like Gimlet Media, which has published a show about genealogy, *Twice Removed.* You have a story to tell. There are talented producers out there waiting to tell it.

Collecting Podcasts

There's another way to become involved, and that's to collect podcasts. It is an incredibly popular medium and is truly having a cultural impact as a platform for underrepresented, diverse voices. These programs will have enduring significance and scholarly value, and yet the majority of cultural heritage institutions are not collecting them. Furthermore, most podcast producers are not familiar with personal archiving, so their recordings are saved with filenames like "use this one."

Podcasts may seem permanent, but they are not: they live inside iTunes, Stitcher, PocketCasts, and other podcatchers

because of their single RSS feed. The host pays monthly for this single RSS feed. When the producer stops paying for the hosting of the feed, that podcast goes away and only lives locally within the producer's files.

I am happy to report that the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has given METRO, out of New York City, grant funding of $142,000 for a two-year project. This project, led by myself, Mary Kidd (New York Public Library), and Molly Schwartz (METRO) will be an education and awareness campaign to promote affordable, easy-to-implement archival techniques for podcast preservation by independent producers. We will be producing our own podcast, a zine, and a series of workshops to deliver at podcast conferences around the country. We will take what we have learned from these workshops to archives conferences, continuing to spread the word about collecting and preserving podcasts. We hope you will keep an eye out for *Preserve This Podcast: A Podcast Tutorial and Outreach Project.*