

Taking a Journalistic Approach to Your Podcast

Podcraft, Season 16, Episode 6

Colin: Hey, folks, and welcome to another episode of Podcraft. This is the show all about podcasting, from launching your show to monetization and everything in between. I'm Colin Gray from the podcast host.com, joined by Matthew, as always. How you doing, Matthew? Happy New Year.

Matthew: So, yeah, time and recording. We've just moved in to 2023, haven't we? So, on this episode. We're continuing this season 16 theme of talking to our colleagues and companions here at the podcast host and Alitu. And this time it's another content pal of mine. It's Katie from Glasgow, who's a journalist, which is very impressive. So she wanted to talk to us, or I wanted to talk to her as it was about taking a journalistic approach to your podcast content. Because there's a lot we could pull from that world, isn't there, Colin?

Colin: Absolutely. I mean, it's been great to see the content. So we took Katie on about three months ago, four months ago now, didn't we? To put out more topical content. More content about the podcasting industry for people who are really deep in it, people who want to see how the industry is going, trends in the industry kind of investigate news stories and things like people claiming that this works for growth and that works for growth and things like that you can get into and really investigate and look at the data. It's been really cool to see that content coming out and doing really well as well. People are responding well to, Aren't there with you.

Matthew: That's right, yeah. And I just wanted to give a quick shout out because Katie is now running a Wee newsletter as well, which is publishing this content so you could get it direct to your inbox. So, however we plug for that, you could get it at the PodcastHost.com/Topical and you'll find all the posts there as well.

Colin: Excellent stuff. Well, before we jump into it, I'll just say this content always sponsored by our own podcast maker, Alitu, which can go call recording, it can do editing, it does all your audio cleanup and hosting as well. So you can pop over to Alitu.com to see that if you want to make your podcasting far easier. Should we jump into the content now, Matthew?

Matthew: Yes, let's do it. So, how are you doing today, Katie? You well?

Katie: Yeah, I'm good. Thank you.

Matthew: Cold and Glasgow?

Katie: Yeah, pretty cold and wrapped up in an embarrassing amount of layers.

Matthew: Yeah. Katie looks like an eskimo at the moment for anyone who can't see, which is everyone, because this is audio journalistic approaches. Katie, what does that mean? What does a journalistic approach even mean if you're taking one towards your content?

Katie: So I would say taking a journalistic approach to your content is really just taking time to research your subjects and sort of a structured approach to how you're building your stories and thinking about the sort of stuff you're going to be covering in your podcast. I would say, like any kind of good content creation process should involve a wee bit of journalism, obviously, apart from fictional stuff. But yeah, I do think that there's quite a lot that we can kind of take from the processes that journalists use to kind of improve content and kind of build the reputation as a more trusted source for your content.

Matthew: It's one of the things with podcasting, you're getting in front of a mic and you're just saying stuff. It doesn't necessarily all come out as factual. I suppose there's two ways to think about it. You might be coming to your podcast as an expert on a topic and you've gained all your expertise and your knowledge from something that you do in life anyway. Maybe you're trained, maybe it's your job or whatever. So a lot of this stuff you're saying you know anyway and you're qualified, but then there are a lot of other types of podcasts or content where you are having to do a lot more research, aren't you? Because that knowledge isn't a given for you. Maybe you're doing some sort of health eating podcast, but for you that's a new thing. It's not something you're qualified. And so you're going to need to do a lot of research on that front as well, aren't you?

Katie: Yeah, just basically using other sources and stuff to try and build trust with the content that you're creating. And also like asking people who know their stuff, asking experience that know, and being able to weave that into the content that you're creating as well.

Matthew: When we think about then putting together a podcast episode, we're going to sort of source some good stories. One of the classic pitfalls is Wikipedia, isn't it? Like you hear a lot about that in podcast and that especially in the true crime genre these days, someone will just bang up Wikipedia and just basically read off there. And that's pretty problematic, isn't it?

Katie: Like it can be, but also I think as long as people spend a lot of time working on the sources and stuff in Wikipedia articles and most good Wikipedia pieces will have original sources. So as long as

you kind of work your way backwards and trace where that information actually came from originally, then I would say it's okay to use Wikipedia as a source, but I definitely wouldn't just like quote a Wikipedia page as a source if there's no other further source to it.

Matthew: What about sourcing stories? Any tips on that front?

Katie: Yeah, definitely for sourcing stories, signing up for newsletters or email marketing for specific sources that are relevant to what your niche is, your podcast niches or whatever I would say is probably a really good start. And also like Google Alerts. Setting Google Alerts is something I would always do. Obviously you can set it to like instant or daily or weekly so that you're always getting notified of stuff that's going on within your niche and then that can be a good way of getting inspiration for topics to cover in your episodes.

Matthew: So is that sort of similar to what you do? Because you're doing a lot of topical content for us, so you're keeping your eye on the game in terms of podcasts and news and big things that have happened and stuff like that. So is that the approach that you're taking?

Katie: Yeah, mostly I would say Google Alerts is like I mean, I have mindset to instant. So it's one of these things that you open up your email and you've got about 40 Google notifications because obviously the podcasting industry, there's a lot of stuff going on all the time. So if you have quite a narrow niche, something that's quite specific, this can work really well. It means it's less effort for you as well when things are just coming into your inbox. But yeah, I would say it's a good starting point, essentially.

Matthew: Do you have a process from like so you've got an inbox and stuff comes into it, but then you need to kind of go through it, pick out anything that's interesting. Do you have like a next step? Do you have, I don't know, maybe even like a Trello board or that where you'll put potentially interesting stuff and sort of go through it from there.

Katie: Yeah, I actually think Trello boards are a really good idea for this stuff. We both are big fans of Trello just because they're really visual and it's a free tool. So obviously that's like a good way to kind of organize your ideas. But also in the past I've used spreadsheets a lot, just having a column for a topic idea maybe, I think quite often in titles. I think that's also a good thing to take from journalism that all the time, journalists always look for stories in terms of, like a hook or a title because it just keeps all of your ideas really focused and it makes you also think about, is this something that my listeners are going to be actually interested in hearing about? Will someone click on this and what's the story? And then I would put that in a spreadsheet because it's always a good thing as well. Because if you're starting to run out of ideas or maybe time starts to run away with you and then it creeps up and you've got to come up with a topic all of a sudden and doing that from scratch. Obviously, glisters are low. That can be a bit of a nightmare sometimes. So then if you've got this bank of ideas in a spreadsheet that you can fall back on, it can be a real godsend sometimes.

Matthew: Then I suppose there's the thing around how long a story is going to be interesting or worth cover. Doesn't that because you'll get one that by 24 hours time, it might not be that relevant or interesting, whereas you'll get other stuff that's a lot more of a slow burn, won't you?

Katie: Yeah, I would say because for a spreadsheet, putting together a spreadsheet that obviously doesn't really not very many journalists would do that because everything's so time sensitive. But if you're running like a blog or a podcast or something, it is a lot more useful because the content tends to be more evergreen. So, yeah, that's kind of the difference between the two, I think, for podcasting, because it's kind of slow journalism, I guess you could say. So it is more useful because you can kind of pick up on topics later down the line. It doesn't need to be you don't need to have your episode out within that week for it to be relevant, for it to stay relevant.

Matthew: What about the process of researching a story then? Like, you know, something that you want to cover in your podcast or blog or whatever? What are the sort of first steps towards going about researching it?

Katie: Sources like Wikipedia and stuff like that aren't actually quite good with the management, are quite good for these things. If you come up with an idea that you're interested in researching, obviously like a Google search, first of all, but I would say don't just rely on the first source that you find you want to have. Like, I mean, I'm crazy for having about 40 tabs open at once. It's kind of like a bit of a curse of the journalistic approach to anything. But yeah, just I would say always trying to look at multiple sources because you'll always as well find particularly when you're looking at things like data, you'll find a stat that says one thing and then a stat that says the complete opposite. So I think spending time to actually build a picture that is a bit more trusted is kind of the best approach. And always tracing backwards. I would say if you find something that you think is like a juicy bit of information or something that you want to include in your show, but then the link that's included is a broken link or something, or it links to something that's really dated. I would say you wouldn't really want to talk about any data that's more than, like, five years old or something, because everything

changes so quickly that that stuff becomes so outdated. So I would say just trying to find that original source and always kind of trying to work backwards and you'll know, as well, we've got these podcasting statistics guides on the podcast host. Sometimes you have to remove stats that you include in it completely because the sources are just too old, so you can't really be confident about talking about them anymore. Which can always be a wee bit heartbreaking because if there's something that you think is interesting or you really want to see it, but the sources aren't reliable enough? I just would always say it's better just not to use it.

Matthew: Yeah. Or I suppose you could just use it as a mark in the sand. I suppose in 2018, things were like this, we don't have any modern stats because that's frustrating to me. If we're talking about stats and data, you see somebody's done a cool survey, they've just never repeated it again and we'd really like to see what the updated data was. But what about you've touched on this already, but the fact checking aspect and so are you looking at two, three, four trusted sources that you could get a more rounded view on something?

Katie: Yeah, even just having a couple of sources or recognizing that there are different angles to different arguments and stuff like that as well when you're working with data. But I think it just really depends on the subject as well. Like some subjects, it's okay to kind of include more things to do with opinion, but yeah, it's that line between fact and opinion can be a wee bit hazy sometimes, can't it? But yeah, I would say three or four is probably a good starting point for sure. And I think also it's like always a good thing to link to your sources in your description or show notes or whatever, just to give people the opportunity that they can do a wee bit more reading into it if they want to. They want to learn more about it or understand a wee bit more about the kind of data that you're using and stuff.

Matthew: Yeah, I mean, any podcasts that do like you'll hear sometimes on podcasts, a host will talk about a certain study or date or that, and they won't go in it too much. How many people were actually involved in this and how was it done and stuff like that. They're just giving you the they're giving you the result, but you very little other information about it and then they won't link to it. So you have to then Google it yourself. So it's bad practices overall there, isn't it?

Katie: Definitely, and I think also there's this misconception that a lot of the time because of the format of podcasting that listeners don't pay attention and that you can just say these things, kind of mention a stat flippantly and nobody will want to look at up or to check it. And I think in general, people do want to know more, they want to be able to do their own research.

Matthew: What about then? We're talking about report nonstop there. But what about if you're taking the journalistic approach with a view to actually tracking some people down to get quotes and that for a story. Is that something that you do a lot of?

Katie: Yeah, I've also done a little bit of PR kind of in the past as well, so a lot of this is also like tracking people down for comment and things. And I think a lot of people shy away from doing that. They think that it's not something I don't know. I think they're kind of maybe frightened of rejection. But in general, in my experience, I would say that people love being contacted for comment and they normally will take it like as a real compliment. So obviously sometimes someone's going to be too busy, but the worst that can happen is they don't apply to your email or they say they're not interested. So I think it's always a really good idea to try and contact people for comment, for sure. And I do think as well, it's always really important to like, when we're talking about citing sources, if you have contacted someone for comment, using things like verbal cues like quote, unquote or saying that you're paraphrasing someone. Otherwise you might rub someone up their own way or think that you're plagiarizing their content or their comments or something like that.

Matthew: Do you think there's a risk, like, if you take a proper journalistic approach, that you're almost removing yourself and any opinions and thoughts from the content and therefore you become less of an authority over time because people more just see you as the person that's pulling us all together, but they never really see you as, like I say, the expert or authority.

Katie: Yeah, I think there's definitely a balance there because I think another one of the draws, obviously of podcasting is that that sort of intimacy with a host and how a host's opinion is also so important and kind of brings the kind of, I don't know, the life to a podcast as well. I mean, people aren't going to listen to a podcast to hear a really completely impartial, objective view of a subject in the way that you do see in a lot of newspaper sources and things like that. But it's just finding that balance is good to bring your own perspective or your own angle to something. But it's just whenever you're researching or finding the core of a story, it's just that element of it building on top of fact and stuff so that you can build trust and then you can add that layer of your own opinion on top of it. I would say I think a really good example of this. I use an Irish podcaster blind boy as an example all the time for pretty much everything that I think is good about podcasting. But he's really knowledgeable in a lot of areas and he does a lot of research, goes into every podcast that he does, but he never claims to be an expert in any areas and is always very clear about all of the studies and

stuff that he uses in his content. But then he's also so opinionated and he brings this extra layer over the top that really that's what people, I think, tune in to hear. They want to hear his opinion but they also enjoy hearing his opinion because he bases everything on these studies. He's just very conscious of sources and of experts and doesn't claim to be an expert. So he gets contacted a lot by people in the Irish government and stuff to talk about mental health, some things, because he talks about mental health a lot on his podcast but he won't do it because he says, I'm not a mental health expert. If you want somebody to do it, get a mental health expert on. And I just think that's quite admirable because a lot of people would just go, yeah, I can do that, I'll just go on and I'll speak about that. But I think that it's just quite dangerous territory and I think he builds such a loyal following because he's very honest and a bit humble about his expertise.

Matthew: One of the things I was thinking I did as well is when we talk about putting your own spin on it, there can be that angle of like what does this mean for you, my audience? And this is a lot of what you're doing when you write the topical content for the website. So there's a story there, but you are then saying, okay, what does this mean for the indie podcaster? So that could apply to any niche or any topic, couldn't it?

Katie: Yeah, definitely. I think it kind of goes back to your sort of like your hook as well, like when you're thinking about what to cover in your podcast, always thinking about your listeners, who your listeners are, keeping your demographics in mind and thinking about what will they actually take from this, will they actually find this interesting? It kind of keeps you focused on something. There is an acronym that we used to use a lot. I'm really bad with acronyms, but it's like, what's in it for me? So WIIFM that's probably not correct, but just always thinking about that and keeping your kind of listeners in mind. Because that's kind of, in my opinion, that's kind of where I see, like, weaknesses in some podcasts I listen to is when things go there's wormholes and you go off in these kind of tangents where the value kind of starts to disappear a bit. And I think it's really useful to always have that in mind of, are you providing value? Is this something that's going to engage people or is it just something I find interesting that I want to talk about.

Matthew: Just briefly on your own background, Katie, what other jobs have you had over the years in this field?

Katie: Yeah, it's been quite varied actually. I interned a couple of newspapers when I was at Uni because I thought I was going to get into journalism. But then when I graduated I realized that to do a journalistic role, you don't necessarily have to work at a newspaper or a magazine or anything and a lot of other jobs can kind of bring in elements of journalism. So I moved into content management, so I was ghostwriting industry specific business to business, like B to B content for CEOs and founders or companies and stuff. So it was like real kind of deep dive researched articles and stuff for primarily search engines and things like writing for SEO, working in PR. There's like so many kind of different branches of roles that kind of incorporate journalism but aren't traditional journalistic roles, if that makes sense. And also obviously being a feature writer for the podcast host as well. These kind of roles can be really varied. You're creating topical news content, but then also guides to help people with their podcasts as well. So it's lots of variety.

Matthew: Yeah, the topical content is pretty new for us because the bulk of our content over the past 1213 years now has been like, how to stuff, so teaching people how to do stuff. But yeah, we've recently moved into that topical analysis and it's going really well, isn't it? I'm enjoying the articles that are coming out, you and the other writers that are putting them together. So we've got a podcast news section on the site now that they'll find the homepage, the podcast host.com. And then you're working on a newsletter as well.

Katie: Yeah, we do. We've just launched a newsletter. The first one went out last week called Podcast Newsroom. That's just basically the highlights of the week. So any topical news stories that we're covering but what I really like about it as well is that we're not just covering stories for the sake of covering it, we're only covering stuff that we know is interesting, that's really going to be of value to podcast creators. So the idea is that you shouldn't really have any filler content in these newsletters. It should all be kind of of interest to anybody that makes a podcast.

Colin: That was great. Good conversation, Matthew.

Matthew: Thank you very much. Yeah, I'd like to thank abroad all the quality info there. Don't tell Katie.

Colin: Obviously, you expertly guided the conversation to facilitate said excellent content.

Matthew: That's right. With it being a New Year, Colin, we've got a couple of episodes planned. We're going to have a chat about a couple of quite futuristic topics, aren't we? Because now it is obviously the future.

Colin: That is the future. And yeah, it was a coincidence, wasn't it, really? We had a couple of articles come out towards the end of last year about a couple of topics that just felt kind of, well, just a bit

mental, really thinking like, if we'd been talking about these three, four years ago, you'd have thought you were in the future. And now actually it's just commonplace, which are using drones and podcasting for capturing great footage for promo stuff. And AI as well. A, Matthew, how are you faring with AI? Is it taking over your life yet?

Matthew: Yeah. I mean, I'm a big terminator two fan. I'm a big terminator One fan as well. Not keen on the other films, but yeah, it both excites and scares me. But I am waiting on the day where Arnold walks into the pub and demands my clothes, boots and motorcycle. It can't be that far a week on it now.

Colin: Not long, but yeah, on a serious note, we've been playing around with it, with a bunch of stuff around Chap GPT and kind of prompts around podcasting topics and all the ways it can help podcasters. So actually, I think there's lots of ways it can be of real good value and it doesn't mean replacing you as a host or even a writer. So we'll talk about all the things we've discovered around here. Matthew, you're not going to lose your job anytime soon, not this month.

Matthew: Yeah, well, in the current climate, we'll not tempt fate to oh, yeah, sorry.

Colin: I shouldn't.

Matthew: Looking forward to having those chats. So yeah, this is topical. Stay following because I'm guilty. Still saying stay subscribed. Lindsay is doing an article about this as well at the moment, whether we should be using the term subscribe and follow, but I'm very much a man of my time. It says subscribe and reviewers on itunes.

Colin: Yeah, that's it exactly. All right, before we tie up, we just mentioned Alitu. Again, if you are looking for a way to make your podcast much easier, look at Alitu. Alitu is our podcast maker app designed for any podcaster just to make your workflow easier, whether you're a beginner and you want to forget about the tech automate, things like Call Record, like the audio cleanup help. Things like call recording. You can do all your editing in there in a podcast specific editor. And it does hosting now as well. So you can actually host your podcast for free within Alitu. Well, you pay for Alitu, obviously, but hosting has been added in for free, up to 1000 downloads a month. So if you want to check out Alitu, go over to alitu.com and you get a seven day free trial so you can try out, check it's for you and then start making your workflow easier. All right, I'll do for this week, Matthew. I'll see you again next week for some drones action. We'll be flying through the skies of the podcasting industry.

Matthew: Yes, plenty of drone and on puns, I'm sure, so looking forward to that.

Colin: All right, I'll talk to you then.