

Podcraft

Podcasting Bits & Bobs

Colin: Hey, 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 thepodcasthost.com joined by Matthew, as always. How you get on, Matthew?

Matthew: I'm going to do this episode in the style of a very enthusiastic American podcaster. Love the enthusiasm they bring over the pond. So, Colin, I'm super stoked to be here. How are you doing?

Colin: Oh, awesome. No, sorry, we've just lost we've lost all our listeners. Yeah, awesome. But not yeah. Anyway, good. Yes, good, thank you. All right, we've got some good stuff today, haven't we? We've got all the bits and bobs, bits and bobs of podcasting on this very here gear season, haven't we, Matthew? What are we covering, then? What does that bits and bob mean to a podcaster?

Matthew: Yeah, so we've got all our main bits of cat. Now we just need kind of the glue that holds it all together, what connects it, what do we put it on? And after this, we're going to be set up and ready to record, don't we?

Colin: Indeed, indeed. And then we get to the software, don't we? Next few episodes will be well, actually, we're going to go to podcast studio next and then audio recording and editing software, then a bit of video to finish up the season. So we're getting towards the end, eh? Episode seven of ten here. So, yeah, the connecting stuff. So, yeah, just to give you an idea, we're going to go through boom stands, desk stands, we're going to go through all those standby type things that hold your mic first, then into some pop filters and shields, and then we're going to delve into a bit of cables at the end, aren't we, Matthew? We're going to the fascinating world of audio cables.

Matthew: Do you know your RCA from your elbow?

Colin: Very good. No, I'm not sure I do, but you can explain it to me. Cool. All right, let's jump into it, then. So stands, what we got? So, boom stand, desk stand. Let's tell the difference first. What's the boom stand?

Matthew: That's a great question, Colin. Yeah. Desk stand is that self explanatory little stand that sits on the desk, whereas a boom arm does attach to your desk. But these are the big sort of forked arms that you see with the microphone on it, the very professional sounding ones. I imagine you're using a boom arm just now, whereas I'm using a desk stand. So we see where we're both at on the scale here, don't we?

Colin: Indeed. Yeah. I think a desk stand usually used when you're in a more kind of temporary place, although you're not at all, are you? Because you have to move it around, you pop it up on your desk, generally quite short, not too maneuverable. Tell me about yours. Is yours more?

Matthew: No, this is the I'm going to break all the rules here and touch my mic whilst record. But the we thing, the Wi tripod type stand that I've got, and I'm sure those were the ones that came with the Samsung Q two U. So I'm using the Q two U at the moment. Do you remember those little three legs?

Colin: Indeed.

Matthew: And the mic just slots in. And to be honest, it works totally fine for me. I'm long enough in the tooth that I'm not battering the desk. Even when I do, I'm doing it very vigorously too much. It's not massively being picked up. Excuse me. So, yeah, desk stands, they're not as good as boom arms, but they do have their advantages, I would say.

Colin: Yeah, totally, yeah. Much more portable. That one from Samsung was a great we went too, because it was quite light. You could stick it in your bag, no worries. Kind of folded up, didn't it? And you can still put a Q two U onto it. I think the main downside of those to me is partly the stuff that you're talking about there. The fact that it's got no insulation or anything like that. The noise has all come up through your desk, but also the high height adjustment. I think that's probably the thing that matters the most to me, almost, that you're not stuck in one position for the whole time. So you can kind of maneuver it around, you can make it high, you can make it low, you can get your posture right. And that's why I love a good boom stand. Like the one I've got in front of me here is the good old Road PSA one, I think classic. And I've got a shock mount on this one as well. So a shock mount being almost a suspended cage on the end of your boom arm. And you can get these, you can put these on a desk stand as well, to be fair. But you put the mic into the shock mount and that insulates the mic even more from noises that come up the stand. So if you're hunting the desk or whatever, it's like kind of suspending your mic in a wee elastic band cage so that it doesn't actually touch the hard material of the stand itself. And therefore the noise is not transmitted into the mic. But the boom stand. I can move it around, so I'm kind of grabbing it. The idea is that it's quite you might be able to hear it a bit just now, but the idea is that it's generally easy enough to move around. It's quite silent and very flexible. So.

Matthew: Yeah.

Colin: I love these. I've got one of these on each of my more permanent desks, so very handy.

Matthew: I was just going to say, I used to use a pile of books for my positioning, so I had like in an old office, I had this pile of books and my terminology was, I need to adjust this two books up or like, I need to take three books off. I don't know why I needed so much variation from session to session, but there you go.

Colin: Yeah, indeed. Sometimes you're low and you've not got your American energy going on. You're kind of hunched over low. Other times you're high posture. Okay. The only other one I think maybe worth mentioning because you see it a fair bit on more video podcast setups where you've got two people in chairs facing each other and you might have a floor stand actually, just basically the same idea as a desk stand, but it's a bigger stand, big heavy one, generally, because it needs to have a taller vertical pole and then probably an arm sticking off the side of it, too. And these tend to be a bit more adjustable because you can make them so that they're loosely held, so that you can unpool it kind of forward and back, at least towards yourself. But they are a bit more kind of a bit less flexible in terms of position. But you'll be sitting in your chair, a kind of arm sticking across from the stand on the floor that gives you a bit of a better reach for your mic and keeps it in a certain position so you can sit comfortably. So they're something that's used often in video podcasts and setups too.

Matthew: Yeah, I'll use a floor stand and audio drama recordings when I've got actors. Because unless the actor is playing as they're sitting down, actors want to stand when they're delivering.

Colin: Oh. So in that case, you probably don't even need like, the horizontal arm. You've just got the mic on top.

Matthew: Of the vertical traditional musician stand.

Colin: Yeah, totally. You see a lot of the floor stands that video podcasting setups use, they've got huge big horizontal ones. So you've got the stand, a really heavy base so that it can kind of support the long horizontal arm. And then horizontal arm is maybe a meter even more away from it. So it's just like sticking totally sideways. It looks kind of weird sometimes, but do the job.

Matthew: You mentioned the Road PSE one, which I think is about like it's obviously really good. It's about \$100. So do you think it's necessary for most podcasters to spend that much?

Colin: No. I remember in our early days, we had the what was it? The newer equivalent. We always went to newer are a company that make a lot of this kind of gear. They make lighting stands, all that kind of stuff. I think they may even make mics these days, don't they? But they tend to make actually decent quality, but far cheaper gear. It's never as good, is it? Those things were they were okay and they did the job and they didn't fall over, but they were fine. But they were only 20, \$30 maybe for those.

Matthew: Yeah. So you'll get a good one for probably less than half the price of the PSA One, wouldn't you? But we did have a few like 1015 quid jobs, though, didn't we? And what happens with those?

Colin: Oh, yeah. Oh, they were terrible. Yeah. The whole idea with a boom arm is that it should have a mount that attaches to the table and the arm is only loosely setting in the mount so that you can rotate it the roads. The PSA One is a kind of really sturdy clamp that goes in the table and then the arm has a nice big what would you call it? Well, there's a hole in the stand and then there's just a little pole that goes into that hole, but it's really nicely fitting, it moves really smoothly and you can sort of twist around really easily. But, yeah, those \$15 ones were what, they definitely didn't fit nicely and they had to have a little clamp that you screwed in as well, so you couldn't even turn.

Matthew: They would just scrape counterproductive. Really useless. Damaged the table in some instances and then literally fell apart. Careful with the very cheap ones. Yeah.

Colin: Spend a bit more than 1520.

Matthew: Yeah.

Colin: 30, 40, though, gets you newer are definitely a good brand. And there's others out there as well, two good ones.

Matthew: And again, but I'm using a desk stand here and it's fine as long as you behave yourself.

Colin: Yeah, totally. Yeah. The PSA One, though, I do think actually, if you're going to be doing any amount of recording, it's worth it's. A really good mount, holds any mic that's another thing, like the weight it can hold, that kind of thing, and how far it extends, all that kind of stuff. It's a bit bigger than your average cheaper stand. Yeah, I don't think there's any real brands around to recommend on the other stuff, like the desk stands or anything. Like they're all pretty kind of much of a search on Amazon. A lot of desk stand or floor.

Matthew: Stand, a lot of USB mics these days will come with their own stands, too. So depending on what you're buying, you'll maybe have a stand built in as well, so you might not even need additional

kit for it. But you have the opportunity, you have the option sorry, to put it on a boom arm as well, if you want.

Colin: Yeah. Like the classic the Blue yeti comes with its own stand. One of the early ones to do that, but all of the kind of improvements on that in recent years have come with their own too. All right, that stands on that, I.

Matthew: Can't stand to talk about it anymore.

Colin: Cool. All right, pop filters, though. Pop filters attach to your stand.

Matthew: Now.

Colin: What's the purpose of a pop filter, Matthew?

Matthew: Yeah, typically plosives, isn't it, which is like little bursts of air from your mouth when you're saying certain words or certain letters. We've all done it before, but I mean, the bigger picture here is like any burst of air, any air movement around the mic can distort your audio. So we want to protect that mic head as much as possible and pop filters, or pop shields, the terms are really interchangeable. Are good layers of protection here, aren't they?

Colin: Yeah, definitely. What kind do you use these days?

Matthew: I could see you've got a foam pop shield on. I've got the same, yeah. And the Q two U, the head on that just like the sure SM 50. These round heads are pretty good, they're basically built in pop filters, so extra layer of protection there. What is it you're using?

Colin: I'm the same, yeah, just a wee windscreen, I think they call it. Do they call these a windscreen as opposed to a pop filter? Is that foam?

Matthew: Windshield is the term I would use. And then your pop filter is more of that. It's the desk with the mesh across it that sits in front of the mic.

Colin: Indeed, yeah. So it's a bit separated from the mic. So, yeah, just if you're listening to visualize it, the windshield type approach is the kind of foam thing that actually fits over the end of the microphone. It's attached to the microphone, gives it that kind of classic mic look, like the big bulbous end. And the pop filter is actually a separate thing. Usually it's on an arm that you attach to the boom arm or your mic stand, and it kind of sits maybe two, three inches away from the mic, doesn't it, and stops you, I think, technically, and I've never really noticed that much difference here. Not done a whole lot of testing, though, but I think Purists would say that a pop filter, the one that's separated from the mic, like a couple of inches away, tend to be more effective, don't they? Yeah, the windscreen potentially lets through a little bit more of that pop, but I've always found that this windscreen does the job for me through hours and hours, dozens of hundreds of hours of recordings.

Matthew: I've also heard the extreme Puristo saying that no pop filter is acceptable because certain frequencies aren't getting through. So if you're wanting a complete picture of the human voice, you're actually taking out this tiny little portion of frequencies and therefore you shouldn't use it. But yeah, you get all sorts of weird esoteric extremes in any specialization, so ignore that.

Colin: Yeah. Is the theory behind that theoretically, you should have perfect mic technique and never talk directly into the microphone and therefore you shouldn't be getting these pops. Is that the thought behind that?

Matthew: Could be that if you're recording music or that I dare say there's a different argument there, but for us, as spoken word podcasters, there's no concerns there.

Colin: How do you yeah, and it's always worth thinking about mic technique, but actually we're just having conversations. You want a podcast to be nice and natural, you want it to be kind of a little bit dynamic, like a wee bit of movement, a wee bit of excitement. So I think that's why they're worth thinking about in a podcast, because it means that you can concentrate on your vocals, your conversation. Forget about them. That's what you want to do, don't you?

Matthew: Forget about the mic.

Colin: Really?

Matthew: Exactly. Yeah. Set and right.

Colin: Exactly. Exactly. So what about all right, have you ever done the old sorry, Matthew, with our American enthusiasm today, we're stepping all over each other. I was going to say, have you ever done the old DIY? Make your own pop filter?

Matthew: No. I used to laugh at that advice. Get a pair of tights and make one, given how cheap they are to buy. I mean, if you've got a lot of tights that you want to cut up, then fine. Have you ever used any of your tights to make one?

Colin: No. I think I did try it once, actually. I got a coat hanger. It was just like kind of almost an experiment, because I'd seen so many doing it. I was thinking about doing a blog post on it and I played around with it for like, 510 minutes, but I was like, this is pointless, I'd.

Matthew: Rather just wear all my tights than cut them up and make pop photos.

Colin: Indeed. You do look good in them.

Matthew: This has gone a new level.

Colin: They are just not that much. They don't cost very much, but, I mean no, it's absolutely possible, though, if you do have very low budget or you do just want to go DIY, you can totally make one out of a coat hanger and some tights. Just make a loop out the coat hanger, sort of stretch the tights over the loop and then attach that to your stand somehow.

Matthew: Jobs are good.

Colin: Indeed. Indeed, indeed. All right, what next, then?

Matthew: Some cable chat? I don't think we need to dwell on this too much, do we? Is it just a sort of quick fire, run through the types of cables and use cases?

Colin: Maybe, yeah, it's a funny one, isn't it? Because for 90% of people, we recommend just a USB mic. You don't want to go any further than that. It does the job. It's perfectly good. It's very good. In fact, there's not even any trade offs these days, you get such good USB mics. But in some cases, it's worth knowing the other approaches, isn't it? So we'll just run through, like, kind of talking about XLR just for a minute, just to give people an idea what it is, what it means, when you might want to use it, so that you can kind of look in more depth in future if they need to. So, yeah, tell us, Matthew, what's an XLR and why might you want to use it?

Matthew: Yeah, they're like the sort of traditional analog audio industry cables that you use to plug microphones in, aren't they? So if you look at either end of the XLR cable, you've got the male end and the female end and it's like a three pin connection that you use there. And this obviously means they don't plug directly into the computer. You go through a USB device like an audio interface, or you go in like a zoom recorder. And the sole purpose of XLR is audio, isn't it? You're not going to see an XLR cable pop up in some other situation like a USB cable does.

Colin: No, totally, they're just for audio. They're big fat connectors. They're big fat cables, aren't they? Because they're kind of designed to chunky. Yeah, chunky designed to kind of be full quality. They're often shielded, so they try and get rid of interference, that kind of stuff. I think that's the only real kind of use for them. If you have really professional audio gear, some of the really top end mics, most of the top end mics really are all kind of XLR based and a lot of mixers really only deal with XLR as well. So if you're using a RODECaster, for example, if you do go that route, or any of those podcast specific recording devices, then often you'll be using XLR for them as well, won't you? So yeah, you might want them at that point, but that's fine. Isn't the there's that whole thing around balanced as well, Matthew? How does that work?

Matthew: Yeah, it's almost worth not mentioning aside to say just get a balanced XLR cable. To be honest, I don't come across loads of unbalanced XLR cables for sale anyway, but a balanced XLR cable, which almost all of them are these days, basically, they're much more protected against interference and stuff like that, just because of the way that they're built an unbalanced one. If you had one, it'd be fine if it was like a very short cable and it'd be slightly cheaper. But you know what, XLR cables are that cheap anyway. Just make sure it's balanced and it.

Colin: Probably will be 1015, 20 quid a for a few years at least. So, yeah, no worries. What's that? Ghostbusters style, never cross the streams. Tell us this, Matthew.

Matthew: Yeah, this is just some cable etiquette, isn't it? So you don't want your I'm just having a look at my setup here. You don't basically want any power cables crossing with your audio cables because there'll be a electronic signal in there that could be picked up. Has that ever happened to you before?

Colin: Yeah, it happened a fair bit, actually. Setting up back in earlier days, bit more inexperienced. Just trying to figure out how to set up our studio in Dundee. Certainly we had a fair bit of cabling in there, we had a computer in there, we had lighting, that kind of stuff to do video as well. So we had loads of power cables and loads of audio cables s, and we often got a wee buz in there and sometimes I'd blame it on the gear, we'd have a cheaper mixer or something like that, be like, **** it, I need to spend more money. And often it would turn out it was just crossing some cables or stuff like that. There's things like ground loops and stuff like that as well. If you plug power cables into the same thing as your audio gear, sometimes that can set that up stuff, it's just crazy stuff like that if you have a really kind of complex setup but way beyond the context of what we're talking about here.

Matthew: I did notice though, on my previous laptop, if I had that plugged into the mains and I had my focus right on, I would get a slight electronic hum underneath so I had to put the plug off at the wall or take the cable out to eliminate that.

Colin: That could be that very thing, yeah, if your computer is plugged into the same one as the focus right, I think that can set up a kind of what they call a ground loop.

Matthew: The focus rate is just powered by USB so it's not got a plug, see?

Colin: Oh well yeah, no, not the case then yeah, okay, that was the thing. It's very mysterious, a lot of that stuff and yeah, definitely beyond our kind of podcaster requirements so get your USB mic out if you really want to get a RODECaster with some XLR, that kind of stuff and that'll be fine as well

because RODECaster is designed for that setup. Perfect. Right other connections, we ought to cover a couple of these before we finish up.

Matthew: Yeah bit of terminology here, jack and plug, all you need to say is like the plug is the connection itself and the jack is the hole. I used to think of a jack as like the plug so I kind of got that the wrong way around but this is just terminology. You might come across an audio jack and an audio plug so we would say like that's a quarter inch jack, it takes a quarter inch plug and so on.

Colin: Yeah, perfect. And yeah, worth noting as well when you're buying cables often you'll see that difference there's quarter inch and there's 3.5 mil. 3.5 millimeter is generally your old school kind of headphone jack. Oh wait a minute, I've got the wrong way around there plug headphone plug, yeah, now that you've just cleared up so the 3.5 mil one is the small one that you get on any sort of normal headset, normal headphones and quarter inch is more of a kind of professional connection. It's what you might get on a guitar lead actually like if you're plugging an electric guitar in or a really pro set of headphones like studio monitors like we were talking about in a previous episode, you might get a quarter inch plug on them as well. But yeah, 3.5 quarter inch are the different kinds of plugs and you get adapters so if you do have a pair of 3.5 mil headphones, you can plug them into the RODECaster, for example. RODECaster requires a quarter inch, but you just get a 3.52 quarter inch adapter and that can turn your 3.5 inch plug, 3.5 millimeter plug into a quarter inch one. So easy enough to convert.

Matthew: I've also got on my focus right here and on my Zoom h five. And I think the H six and H four are probably the same. But you've got what you call combo jacks because you could plug XLR or quarter inch into them. Not at the same time, obviously, but the XLR jack, it's basically got a wide enough hole in the middle of it that a quarter inch could win it too.

Colin: Yeah, and that's just because it's kind of a similar kind of gear in many ways. Like if you're plugging in a bit of audio gear, you can plug in an electric guitar through XLR, I believe. Never tried that. But yeah, it can go into the same kind of connector. It's just an audio input essentially. So can take both sides. Yeah, perfect.

Matthew: We'd mentioned on a previous episode about the Tstrs and TRRS thing, so I've covered that already. But yeah, these are just the little rings. I'm paranoid about the jack plug thing. Now, along your plug you see little rings. So, yeah, tip sleeve, tip ring sleeve or tip ring ring sleeve, which you would see exclusively on 3.5, I'm sure. And that's basically your phone, microphone, your Bluetooth headphones or whatever.

Colin: Yeah, perfect. I think you do get them in quarter inch actually as well because you get stereo quarter inch, I believe, but probably not the TRRS, I think.

Matthew: Yeah, you'd get TRS. Yeah. I don't know that it'd be necessary to have TRRS on a quarter inch. No, definitely you'd need a very big phone. Like one of the things that I use, basically.

Colin: That'd be an enormous phone. Yeah. Okay. And last one of our cryptic anagrams what's? RCA. Matthew. What does that mean?

Matthew: Yeah, last and least I would say, because probably don't need this and won't need it. But an RCA cable. You would find these on your old if you're old enough, like we know your old CD player. These are the sort of connections you might have used. And rare examples, not now because I think there's enough equipment out there. But I would see podcasters years and years ago, they maybe wanted to play some audio from like a CD or that and they had this big set up and they maybe use an RCA cable. But you'll almost certainly not come across one or need to use one in your own podcast and set up.

Colin: Perfect. Okay, that's the cables. That is the bits and bobs, all of the bits and bobs for your podcast. So just before we finish up, I'll mention another bit, another bob, a really valuable one, which is if you really like this content we're putting out. If you have some value, if you've taken some value from it, we'd love it if you support us through some of the products we do, one of which is Alitu. So one of the things you can record into, if you're using some of these cables, you plug in your USB mic, you can record right into Alitu to make your podcast. It can do that call recording right into Alitu through your USB mic and then obviously offers all the other stuff as well. You can do everything you need to do to make your podcast. It does your audio cleanup for you, takes out some of that background noise, takes out about that electronic hum we talked about earlier, Matthew. If you have that hum that you've got from a ground loop or just dodgy cables or whatever, it can help take that out too. You can do your audio editing in there, cut out any of the plosives potentially. Probably not, because they're part of the words. But if you have any of the other stuff, you can cut out using the audio editing and it's got hosting and transcription built in as well, so that you can publish both your audio and text versions of it to a website built into the Alitu website. So if you fancy that the easiest way to make your podcast, we do believe. Over@alitu.com that's a seven day trial. If you want to

give it a shot over at alitu.com that'd be great to see your support there. All right, what have we got left, Matthew? Three more episodes, eh, in this gear season?

Matthew: Yeah. So next episode, we want to try and set up our studio, don't we? We want to set up the room so that it sounds decent for us, but this applies to wherever you want a podcast as well, even.

Colin: Always a big question, isn't it? Yeah, people are always interested, how do I make my room sound better? How do I get rid of that background noise, soundproofing treatment, all that kind of stuff? So, yeah, so it'll be a good one to dig into. So we've got that, then? We've got the software and we've got video as well. That's the final two episodes of the season as well. Recording and editing software and then video and streaming at the end. All right, let's tie up for the week, then we'll see you on the next one for building your own studio. Thanks for joining us this time around. We'll talk to you then. Close.