

What is a Podcast? A Simple Definition

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A podcast is a digital audio program consisting of a series of audio episodes that you can download or stream from the internet. It works very much like a radio show, but with one major difference – You can subscribe to a podcast and listen to it anytime you want.

Now, there is far more to it, of course. So, here's everything you need to know about podcasts to listen to, enjoy (and even create) them.

And if you are interested in hosting your own podcast, we'll also show you how to get started creating your own show too.

It's a lot to cover, so let's get right to it.

Dictionary

Search for a word



pod·cast

/ˈpɑdˌkɑst/

noun

a digital audio file made available on the internet for downloading to a computer or mobile device, typically available as a series, new installments of which can be received by subscribers automatically.

verb

make (a digital audio file) available as a podcast.

What is a podcast? A podcast is an audio file that's made available on the internet. Listeners can download the file to their devices or stream it through a listening app. Episodes are typically released as part of a series.

Generally speaking, the audio of podcast episodes consists of the spoken

words of a host (or multiple hosts), though many shows include [music and sound effects](#) to various degrees. Episodes (and the overall show) revolve around specific themes, like parenting, entrepreneurship, nutrition, etc.

Here's an example of a podcast episode from our very own show, [The Limelight](#).

Longshot Leaders with Michael Stein

Longshot Leaders with Michael Stein

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What do the words “podcast” and “episode” mean?

I mentioned both terms – podcast, and episode – several times already. And it's true, sometimes, when you hear them, they are a little confusing. Do they mean the same thing? Two different things? Something else?

I totally get the confusion. The term “podcast” is quite versatile, after all. Some people use it to describe the *overall program* that produces episodes. But others use the word podcast when they speak about the *individual episodes* themselves.

For instance, both these statements are correct:

- “This American Life is my favorite podcast.” (In this case, the person references the show.)
- “I just downloaded another podcast from This American Life.” (In this case, the word podcast refers to the episode of the show.)

And in both cases, the primary word used is *de facto* podcast (even though, in the second statement, it refers to the episode.)

So, often, when you hear someone talking about podcasts, they may mean the show or the episode, and you often need to get the actual meaning from the context.

In general, however, the word podcast *should* relate to the show. Each individual episode, however, should be referred to as an episode.

How is a podcast different from a radio show or other forms of media?

The main factor that makes a podcast different from a radio show or other media is how you access it. Podcasts are available to download or stream on the Internet.

Also, unlike radio, podcasts are pre-recorded and offer a wide range of formats. For example,

- A typical episode can be as short or as long as its creator wants it. Some episodes offer just short snippets of information, while others offer long-form content that spans more than an hour per episode.
- Podcasts have different publishing frequencies too. Some shows offer new content daily. Others post new episodes on a weekly, bi-weekly, or even monthly schedule.
- As you'll see shortly, they can also have a different format featuring anything from a solo show to a whole cast.
- Finally, podcasts cover an extensive range of topics, including news, storytelling, comedy, education, true crime, technology, sports, and much more.

Are podcasts free to listen to?

Yes, most podcasts are free to listen to. Instead of charging listeners to access the show, most creators use [advertising](#) or listener support through platforms like Patreon to monetize their shows.

That said, some podcasts offer additional content or paid subscriptions, or membership models.

How did podcasts start?

I bet you'll be surprised to hear that, but the concept of podcasting isn't actually that new. In fact, it goes back several decades.

Back in the 1980s, for example, we used to listen to something that was called an "audio blog."

Now, audio blogs (or audio journals, as they were also known) weren't online shows or anything. The Internet was still in its infancy back then, after all. We didn't have computers to record our audio on either.

Instead, when audio journalling, people would record their personal thoughts or experiences on cassette tapes using portable tape recorders. These recordings were similar to modern-day personal podcasts but were limited to offline sharing with friends, family, or a small circle of acquaintances.

When the internet took off in the 1990s, some radio stations and comedy shows offered downloadable versions of their audio content. These still weren't podcasts as we know them today, but they were close.

Many portals would also create pre-recorded audio shows and offer them as downloads from their sites. These shows haven't been aired, and they existed only as an mp3 file that anyone could download and listen to at their own peril.

In the early 2000s, when people began to distribute their audio content

via RSS feed, which allows users to “subscribe” to a show and receive constant updates.

And so, modern podcasting was born.

What about the term podcast, then?

That’s an interesting story, too.

You see, the term – podcast – comes from a combination of two words, iPod and broadcasting.

The term was first used in 2004 by journalist Ben Hammersley, who used the term to describe the emerging trend of distributing audio content over the Internet, and based it on the most popular audio player back then.

But naturally, podcasts are not limited to iPods anymore. As you’ll shortly see, you can listen to them on a whole range of devices. Yet the term “podcast” stuck, and that’s what we use today when describing these amazing audio shows.

Action

Want to make money with your show? [Check out our complete guide on podcast monetization.](#)

What are the Different Types of Podcasts?

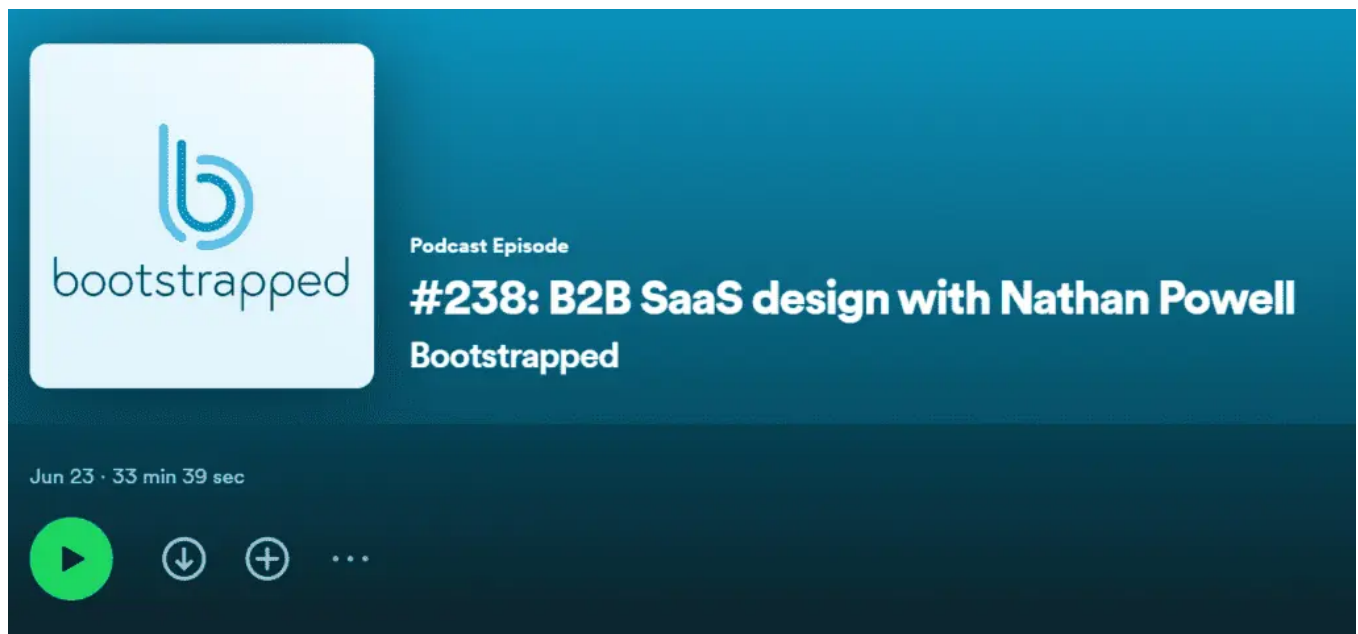
When you ask someone, “What is a podcast?” they will usually offer different *types* of shows. If you think an audio-only format is limiting, think again!

There are countless ways to organize a show’s content to make it compelling for your listeners. Choosing a clear format and [staying consistent](#) is key to building a reliable base of listeners. If your show

features a serious solo monologue one week, a comedy panel the next, and a fictional story the week after, you'll struggle to hold on to your listeners.

Here are the most [popular podcast](#) types:

- The [interview podcast](#) – This is one of the most common types of shows. A host (or hosts) [interviews a new guest on each episode](#). Here's an example of an interview-based podcast.



- Solo/monologue podcast – A simple narration from one person. It's ideal for anyone who is an expert on a specific subject.
- Conversational/co-hosted – This is when two people (who have great chemistry together) have a conversation together.
- Panel podcast – This is similar to an [interview](#) podcast but with a larger group of people having an organic discussion.
- Nonfiction storytelling – These are episodes about real-life events, such as a series of murders, a chronicle of an expedition up Mount Everest, or a historical event.
- Fictional storytelling – These are fictional stories told across multiple episodes, similar to dramatic television. A single person narrates

some. Other shows use teams of voice actors.

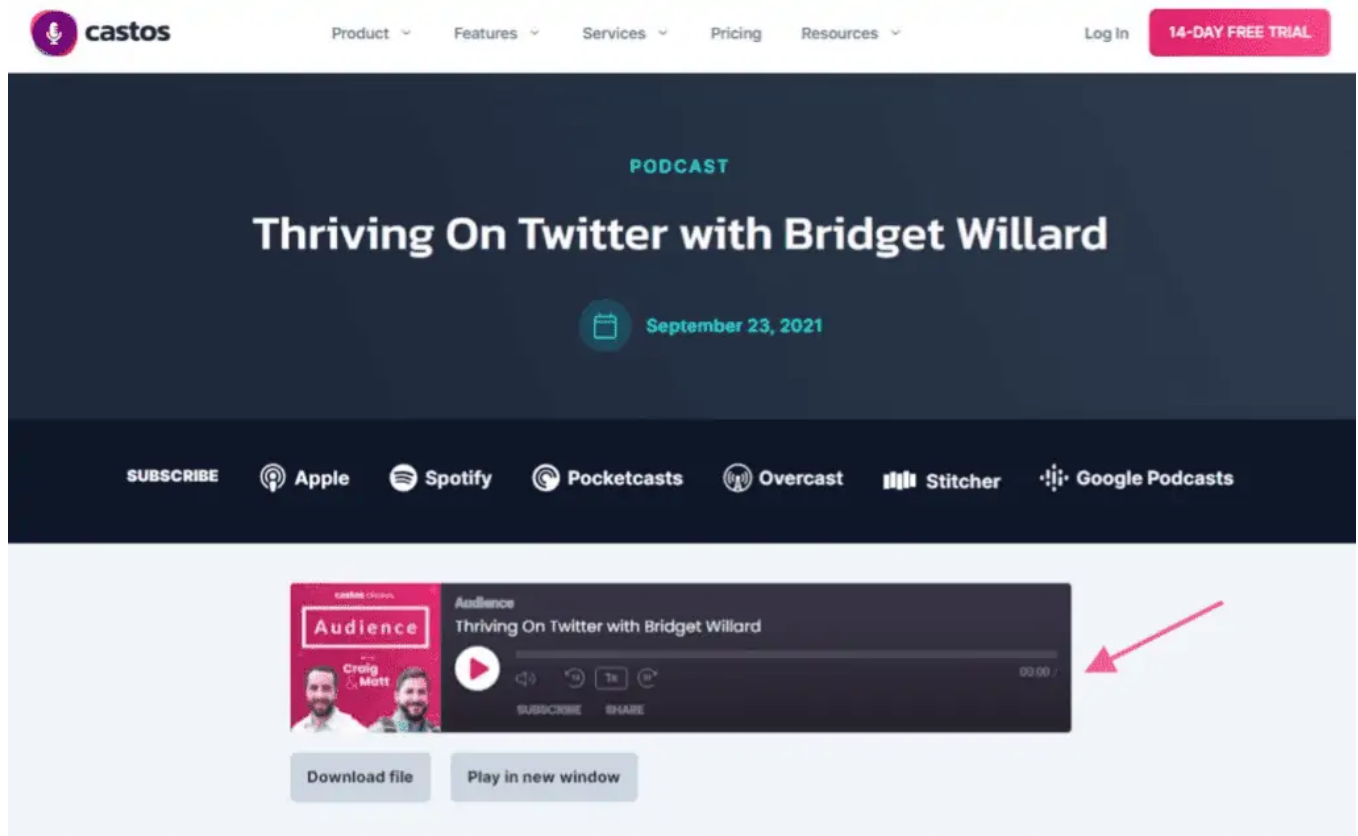
- Repurposed content – This is when you take existing content and translate it into audio form. For instance, a [church podcast](#) might record its weekly sermons and release them as podcast episodes.

How Do You Listen to Podcasts?

Listening to podcasts is simple as long as you have access to the internet. Most podcasts are free to listen to. You just need to find a website, platform, or app that suits you.

Listening to podcasts on a website

Most [podcasts have a website](#) for their show. These websites usually have pages for each episode. Each page includes an audio player along with other assets, like [show notes](#) and a [transcription](#). Simply click play on the audio player to enjoy the episode.



There aren't many more well understood growth channels for a brand's audience than social media. But like a lot of things when it comes to growing your brand, it's often not complicated, but it's hard.

Listening on your phone or tablet

If you want to listen to podcasts on your mobile device, your first step is to download a listening app. [Apple Podcasts](#), Google Podcasts, and Spotify are the most popular options, but there are lots of alternatives. [See our full list of podcasting apps](#). (iPhone and iPad users should already have the [Apple Podcasts](#) app installed.)

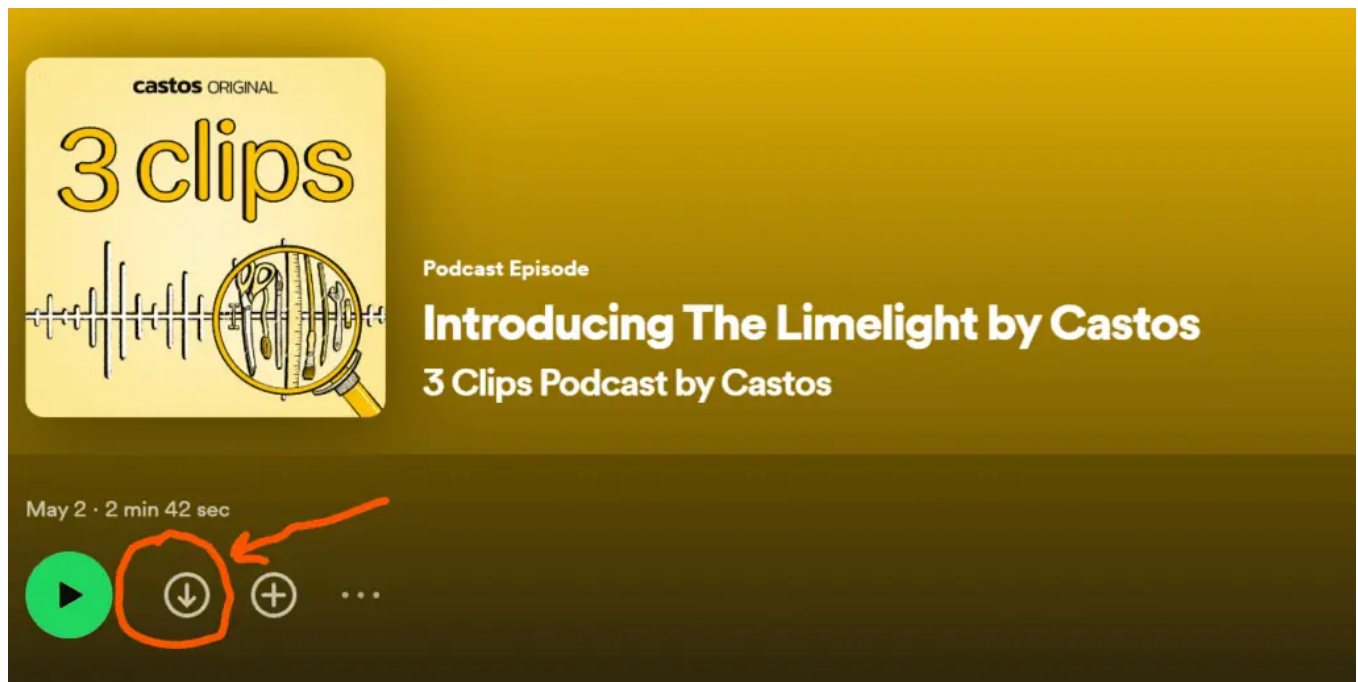
Once you have installed a [podcast listening](#) app to your mobile device, simply search the app for interesting podcasts. You can listen to any episode you like. If you enjoy the podcast and want to be notified about future episodes, use the subscribe button.

Can you listen to podcasts offline?

Absolutely!

Most podcast apps allow you to download episodes in advance so that you can listen to them without an internet connection. That said, you have to remember to download an episode before you disconnect. Otherwise, it won't be available to listen offline.

Here's an example of a download button on our [podcast episode](#) in the Spotify app.



Who creates podcasts?

[Podcasts are created by individuals or teams](#) who produce and record the content.

They can be professional productions or amateur endeavors, with hosts or [experts discussing](#) specific subjects.

Who is a podcast producer?

Some shows use a podcast producer to handle production and the management side of the program. They handle the recording, editing, promotions, and other behind-the-scenes activities. This allows the host to focus on producing great content.

How Do You Start Podcasting?

[Starting a podcast](#) has a slightly higher barrier-to-entry than other forms of content creation. But once you have everything in place, it's our experience that creating a new episode takes less time than writing a blog post or producing a video. This is especially true if you outsource some of the tedious parts of the process, like editing and promotion.

So how do you [start a podcast](#)? It boils down to these 10 steps.

1. Choose a topic
2. Determine the right format
3. Give your show a name
4. Create cover artwork
5. Pick up some basic equipment
6. Select a podcast hosting service
7. Plan your first episode
8. [Record your first episode](#)
9. Edit your episode
10. Upload your episode

As you can see, the process is fairly straightforward. After publishing your first episode, all you have to do is repeat step seven through 10 for subsequent episodes. We recommend distributing your show to all of the podcast listening apps once you have three episodes published. This gives new listeners something to binge when they discover your show.

Action

For a much deeper look into the setup process, [read our extremely deep guide on starting a podcast](#).

How are Podcasts Distributed?

A big part of running a [podcast show](#) is making it available to listeners and ensuring that they can listen to it using their preferred method.

Podcasters refer to this as distribution, and it basically means making a show available on as many [podcast listening platforms](#) and apps as possible.

In order to make your show available on each podcast listing platform, you have to visit the platform's site and submit your RSS feed. The process varies slightly on each platform, but they are all pretty straightforward.

Submitting your show to each platform may seem tedious, but you only have to do it once. The app will monitor your RSS feed for new content and updates.

In order to distribute your show as widely as possible, you should also publish new episodes as posts on your [podcast website](#). Each post should include an [audio player](#) and [some notes](#) about the episode.

Additionally, we always recommend [republishing new episodes as YouTube videos](#). By adding your podcast [cover art](#) as a static image to your audio file, you can quickly create a YouTube-ready video file.

If your show becomes a big hit someday, you may gain access to other distribution methods as well. For instance, your show might join a [podcast network](#) with their own distribution systems. Some podcasts are even played over the radio!

What is a podcast network?

Some shows are part of networks. [Podcast networks](#) are similar to TV networks in that they distribute content through similar channels.

Essentially, a podcast network is a group of podcasts that work together to promote each other. This type of structure is enticing for [advertisers](#)

because it allows them to spread their ads across multiple shows.

For example, [Rainmaker.FM](https://rainmaker.fm) is a podcast network with ten distinct shows, each covering different aspects of digital marketing.



What is a Podcast RSS Feed?

A [podcast RSS feed](#) is a critical piece of technology that powers every podcast. This is a URL that contains information about your show and its episodes.

The [RSS feed passes that information to podcast directories](#) and listening apps, like Apple Podcasts or Spotify. The apps monitor your RSS feed and update their apps with the new content whenever the feed has new information.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9siehlwMAbw>

Your RSS feed is important because it eliminates the need to manually upload content across each platform. Instead, you simply update the feed and any site, platform, or service that reads the feed has the new information instantly.

Adding new information to your RSS feed is simple if you use a [podcast hosting service](#). Simply use the [host's platform](#) to upload your audio file. The host will update your feed with the new episode for the podcast listening platforms to find.

To function properly, a podcast RSS feed needs information like a title, description, artwork, category, language, and explicit rating. The RSS requirements for Apple Podcasts have become the standard for podcasting.

castos Podcasts Analytics Subscribers Hi, Dennis Hammer

All Podcasts > The Ecommerce Guru > Settings

Settings

Feed Details


Podcast Title Give your podcast a title that will help listeners find your show. This can be changed at any time.

The Ecommerce Guru

Description A few sentences that describe your show and who it's for.

Test

Cover Image This is the image listeners will see on podcast platforms like Apple Podcasts and Spotify. Podcast artwork is required.

 Choose File No file chosen

Actions

Return To Podcast List

Go To Episodes

Do podcasters make money from their shows?

Ahah, yes, many of them do.

Like other content-based endeavours, [podcasts typically earn money through sponsorships](#) (advertising). They can also generate income through [affiliate](#) partnerships, paid private memberships, merchandise, digital products, and other ways.

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What Podcasting Equipment Do You Need?

In order to start a podcast, you'll [need a few pieces of equipment](#). You don't have to spend a lot of money, but it helps to have some basic gear. These pieces will give your show a professional sound.

1. A computer
2. An XLR or USB [microphone](#)
3. A mixer
4. [Pop filter](#) or windscreen
5. Headphones
6. Microphone stand
7. [Acoustic treatments](#)
8. Recording and [editing software](#)
9. [Podcast hosting](#) provider

Action

[Learn our recommendations for podcast gear](#) (on any budget).

How Do You Get Podcast Hosting?

What is a podcast without a great podcast hosting provider? Nothing!

Once you've recorded your first episode, you'll need to publish it on the web so people can enjoy it. But you can't upload it just anywhere. You need a special [podcast hosting platform](#) that's specifically configured for audio downloading and streaming.

Essentially, a podcast hosting platform is where you store your files. Your host also generates and updates your RSS feed. Like we mentioned earlier, this feed is critical. It contains all of the information the listening apps need to offer your show. If your feed is configured incorrectly – or worse, missing entirely – listeners won't be able to access your show.

Apple, Google, Spotify and the other [podcasting apps are just directories](#). They don't store your content or generate an RSS feed for you.

Can you host your podcast on your own site? Not really. Your website host isn't configured properly for it. You could purchase the right web hosting plan to store your own audio files, but that would be more expensive than using one of the [podcast hosting](#) services.

Once you are set up with a [podcast host](#), you'll need to visit each directory and submit your RSS link so they know where to look for your show. This is a one-time task. Once they have your feed, they will monitor it indefinitely for new content.

Furthermore, a podcast hosting service isn't just space for your audio files. It offers other benefits, like analytics, WordPress [integrations](#), support, and tools to promote your show.

Wrap Up

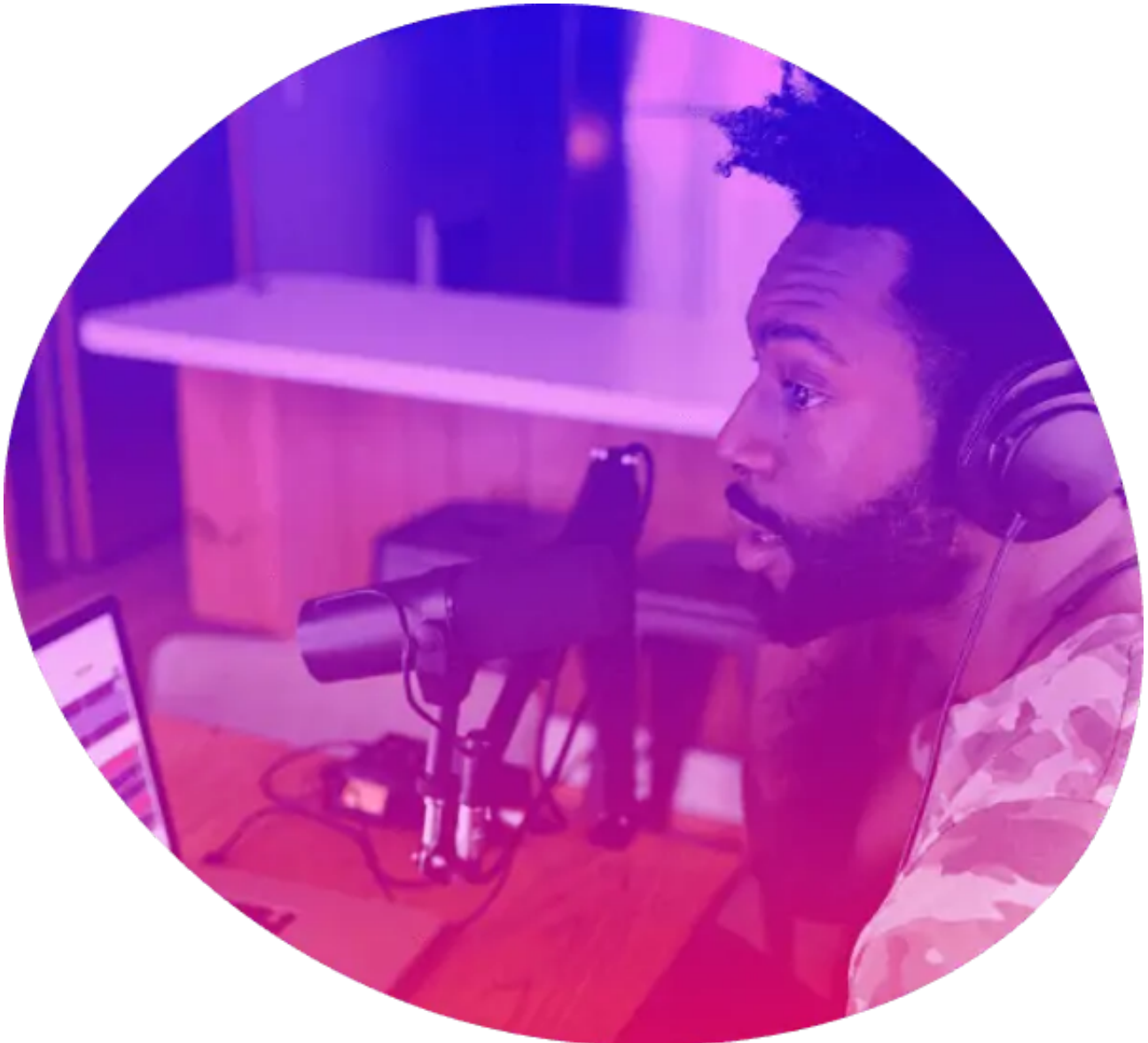
If you were one of those people who were wondering “What is a podcast?” we hope we answered your question as thoroughly as possible. If you’re still unclear, feel free to leave a comment and we’ll do our best to help you out.

Podcast Hosting Made Just For You

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Launch Your Podcast in 7 Days

This 7-day, 10 minutes-a-day guide will teach you everything about launching a podcast. Subscribe today and you'll be a podcaster before you know it!

Dennis is a content marketer and web developer with years of experience helping startups and small businesses build their online platforms. He lives in Connecticut with his wife and daughter.