

The Hertfordshire Podcast Studio

Podcast Startup Guide

From first idea to published episode.

Letchworth Garden City

thehertfordshirepodcaststudio.co.uk

Welcome

Starting a podcast can feel like a hundred decisions at once. You bring the ideas and the conversation, and we look after the rest. This guide takes you through four stages, from planning to publishing. Don't aim for perfect: a podcast that exists and improves beats a perfect one that never launches.

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INTRODUCTION

Why Start a Podcast?

A podcast is one of the most personal ways to introduce your business to the people you want to reach. Before we get into the *how*, here is the *why*.

People Buy From People They Know

Think about how most customers find a business: a website, a few reviews, perhaps an advert. They learn *what* you sell, but very little about *who* you are. A podcast changes that.

Episode after episode, your audience hears (and, with a video podcast, sees) a recognisable face talking naturally about the things you care about. They grow familiar with you, start to feel a connection and begin to trust you. By the time they get in touch, it doesn't feel like a first conversation. It feels like the second or third.

That familiarity is very hard to build with a logo or a leaflet. It's what makes a podcast such a great way for new customers to get a feel for your business **before they even buy**.

What a Podcast Does for Your Business

- **Builds familiarity:** Listeners get to know your voice, your face and your way of talking about your work.
- **Builds trust:** Long, relaxed conversations show your personality, your values and your expertise in a way an advert never can.
- **Shows your expertise:** Talking knowledgeably about your field, and interviewing others in it, positions you as someone who knows what they're doing.
- **Opens doors:** Guests bring their own audiences, contacts and opportunities to collaborate.

- **Gives you content that keeps working:** One conversation becomes clips, quotes, posts and articles (see *Getting Your Podcast Heard* in Part Four).
- **Helps you stand out:** Many businesses in your field don't have one yet.

Is a Podcast Right for You?

A podcast could suit you if you can say yes to most of these:

- You enjoy talking about your business, your industry or your customers' challenges.
- You have knowledge, stories or opinions worth sharing.
- You want to build **long-term relationships**, not just a quick win.
- Your customers value trust, expertise or personality when choosing who to buy from.
- You can commit to a regular schedule. We take care of the recording, and can look after the editing too, so it's easier than you might think.

Be realistic. A podcast is a long game. It builds trust gradually, one episode at a time, rather than bringing in a flood of customers overnight. The businesses that benefit most are the ones that keep showing up.

Ideas to Get You Thinking

- Conversations with your customers about their stories
- Interviews with others in your industry
- A behind-the-scenes look at how your business works
- Practical advice and answers to the questions you're asked most

Before you move on: Who do you most want to get to know your business? And what would you like them to say after listening?

PART ONE

1

Planning Your Podcast

Shape your show before you press record: its format, your guests, your questions and the intro that gives it an identity.

IN THIS PART

1 Choosing your format

2 Finding guests

3 Research and prompts

4 Intros and outros

SECTION 1

Choosing Your Format

Your format is the repeatable structure of every episode. It's what listeners come to rely on, and it makes your life easier because you're not reinventing the show each time.

The common formats

- **Solo:** One host sharing expertise, stories or opinions. Easy to schedule, but it needs a strong, confident voice.
- **Co-hosted:** Two (or more) regular hosts bouncing off each other. Chemistry does the heavy lifting.
- **Interview:** The host talks to a different guest each episode. The most popular format and the easiest to keep fresh.
- **Panel or roundtable:** Several voices discussing a theme. Great for debate, harder to keep tidy.
- **Narrative or documentary:** Scripted storytelling, often over a series. Impressive, but production-heavy.
- **Hybrid:** For example, a short solo opener followed by an interview.

Questions to settle first

1. **Who is this for?** Describe one real listener. What do they do, and what do they want from 30 minutes of their time?
2. **What is the promise?** Finish the sentence: *"Listen to this podcast and you will..."*
3. **How long is an episode?** Pick a length you can sustain. Consistency matters more than length. 20 to 45 minutes suits most shows.
4. **How often will you publish?** Weekly, fortnightly or monthly all work. Choose a rhythm you can keep up for at least six months.

5. **Audio or video?** Video gives you clips for social media, but adds editing time and a need to look presentable on camera.

Plan a repeatable episode structure

A simple template keeps you on track:

Segment	Typical length
Cold open or teaser	15 to 30 seconds
Intro and theme music	30 to 45 seconds
Introduce the guest or topic	2 to 3 minutes
Main conversation	20 to 35 minutes
Wrap-up and call to action	2 to 3 minutes
Outro and music	30 seconds

Name and concept

- Choose a title that's clear, searchable and easy to say out loud.
- Say it to three people. If they ask you to repeat it or spell it, keep thinking.
- Check that the name isn't already taken on the major podcast platforms, and that the website and social handles are available.

Checklist: Audience described. Promise written. Format chosen. Length and schedule decided. Title checked.

SECTION 2

Finding Guests

Guests bring fresh perspectives, new audiences and credibility. They're also the part of the process new podcasters worry about most.

Where to look

- **Your own network:** Colleagues, suppliers, customers, friends of friends. Start here because the answer is usually yes.
- **Local and industry communities:** Business groups, trade bodies, charities, clubs and societies.
- **Social media:** LinkedIn is especially good for professional shows. Look for people already sharing ideas and opinions.
- **Other podcasts:** Listen to shows in your space and note the guests who were interesting.
- **Your listeners:** Once you're up and running, ask your audience who they'd like to hear from.
- **Authors, speakers and event organisers:** People with something to promote are often delighted to be asked.

Making the invitation

Keep your first message short, specific and easy to say yes to. Include:

1. Who you are and the name of your podcast
2. Why *this* person, with a specific reference to their work
3. What you'd like to talk about
4. The practical details: length, whether it's remote or in the studio, audio or video
5. A simple next step, such as proposing two or three dates

Example:

> Hi Sam, I'm starting a podcast about local independent businesses and I loved your story about moving the shop to its new premises. I'd love to have you on for a 30-minute conversation about what you learned. We record in a professional studio in Letchworth, and I can work around your diary. Would any of these dates suit you?

Good guest habits

- Send a **short briefing note** ahead of time with the topics and the logistics.
- Ask for a **bio, photo and links** so you can promote the episode properly.
- **Follow up** once if you don't hear back, politely, then move on.
- After the episode, **send the guest the link** and a few shareable clips. Guests are your best promoters.
- Build a **guest spreadsheet** with name, contact, topic, status and recording date. A reserve list of two or three "yes" guests protects you from cancellations.

Checklist: Wish list of 10 guests. First three invitations sent. Briefing note template written. Tracking sheet created.

SECTION 3

Arriving Prepared: Research and Prompts

The best conversations *sound* effortless because the host did the work beforehand. Preparation is what lets you relax and listen.

Research your guest

Spend 30 to 60 minutes before every interview:

- Read their website, LinkedIn and any previous interviews or articles.
- Listen to at least one other podcast they've appeared on, so you **don't ask the same questions** and can go deeper.
- Note **three or four stories** they might tell well.
- Find an **unusual angle**, something most interviewers wouldn't know to ask about.
- Check correct pronunciation of names, places and company names.

Build a question sheet, not a script

Aim for **8 to 12 prompts**. Think of them as a map, not a route you must follow.

A reliable structure:

1. **Warm-up:** An easy, human opener. *"How did you end up doing what you do?"*
2. **Story questions:** *"Tell me about a moment when it nearly went wrong."*
3. **Insight questions:** *"What do most people get wrong about this?"*
4. **Practical questions:** *"If someone were starting out tomorrow, what would you tell them?"*

5. **Closing question:** The same one every episode builds identity, such as *"What's the best advice you've ever been given?"*

Tips for better questions

- Prefer **open questions** (*how, why, what was it like*) over yes/no questions.
- Ask **one question at a time**. Double-barrelled questions confuse guests.
- Use the **follow-up** often: *"Can you give me an example?"* and *"What happened next?"* produce the best material.
- **Embrace silence.** A brief pause often draws out the most honest answer.
- **Listen more than you plan.** If the guest says something fascinating, follow it and return to your sheet later.

Before you hit record

- Do a **quick pre-chat** to relax. Explain how the session will run and that mistakes can be edited out.
- Agree any **no-go topics** in advance.
- Have water ready, phones on silent, and notifications off.
- Leave the **technical side to us**. We look after the equipment and sound, so you can focus on the conversation.

Checklist: Guest researched. 8 to 12 prompts written. Pronunciations checked. Pre-chat planned. Closing question chosen.

SECTION 4

Writing an Intro and Outro That Give Your Podcast an Identity

Your intro and outro are the most-heard minutes of your show. Done well, they make your podcast instantly recognisable.

The intro

A strong intro does four jobs in under 45 seconds:

1. **Hooks** the listener with a teaser, question or striking clip
2. **Names** the show clearly
3. **Promises** what the listener will get
4. **Sets the tone** through voice, pace and music

A simple formula:

> *[Hook] + [Show name] + [What it's about and who it's for] + [Today's guest or topic]*

Example:

> "What if the best business advice you'll ever get comes from a market stall? Welcome to *Small Town, Big Ideas*, the show where Hertfordshire's independent businesses share what actually works. I'm Alex, and today I'm joined by..."

Intro tips:

- Keep it **short**. If listeners are skipping it, it's too long.
- Write for the **ear**, not the eye. Read it out loud and cut anything awkward.

- Use a **cold open** (a 15-second highlight from the episode) to grab attention before the intro.
- Use **the same intro every episode** so it becomes a signature. Update the guest line only.
- Consider a **tagline**, a short phrase that sums up the show.

The outro

The outro's job is to turn a happy listener into a returning one. Include:

1. A **thank you** to the guest and the listener
2. **One clear call to action:** subscribe, leave a review or visit the website. Choose one, not five.
3. A **tease** of the next episode
4. **Where to find you**
5. A **sign-off line** you use every time

Example:

> "That's all for this week. If you enjoyed the show, the best thing you can do is tell one friend about it. Next week we're talking to a baker who turned a kitchen table into a business. I'm Alex, and this has been *Small Town, Big Ideas*. See you then."

Building identity

Identity comes from **repetition and personality**:

- A consistent **sign-off phrase**
- A recurring **closing question** for every guest
- A distinctive **musical signature** (see Part Three)
- A consistent **voice and tone**: warm, witty, serious, or irreverent. Pick one and stay in it.

Checklist: Intro written and timed. Outro written. Tagline decided. Sign-off phrase chosen. Both read aloud and trimmed.

PART TWO

2

Production

Recording day. We look after the equipment and the sound, so you can turn up and talk.

IN THIS PART

5 Your first time in the studio

SECTION 5

Your First Time in the Studio

Walking into a studio for the first time can feel a little strange. A few simple habits will help you sound relaxed and natural from the first minute.

Choosing your seating

We offer a choice of seating, so you can pick the set-up that suits your show and your guests. Let us know your preference when you book.



From top to bottom: relaxed sofa, traditional armchairs and the group set-up.

- **Relaxed sofa:** A comfortable sofa set-up for a casual, chatty feel.

- **Traditional armchairs:** Two armchairs facing each other across a small table. A classic interview layout for a host and a guest.
- **Group set-up for three or four people:** Armchairs and a sofa together, so a bigger group can sit comfortably. A good fit for co-hosts, or a host with more than one guest.

Not sure which to choose? Tell us who's coming and what kind of conversation you want to have, and we'll suggest the best fit.

Before you arrive

- **Confirm the details:** your session time, who is coming, and whether you're recording audio or video.
- **Bring your question sheet** (see Section 3), printed or saved on a phone or tablet.
- **Brief your guest.** Make sure they know the topics, the length of the session and what to expect.
- **Arrive a few minutes early** so you can settle in without rushing.
- **Dress comfortably.** Avoid noisy jewellery such as bangles and chunky necklaces, which can be picked up by the microphones.
- **Eat and drink beforehand.** A rumbling stomach and a dry throat are hard to hide.

When you arrive

- We'll show you around and get everyone seated. Ask anything you like.
- **Silence your phone**, and your smartwatch if it buzzes.
- Keep the room quiet while we run our checks. This is a good moment to take a breath and read through your notes.

Speaking to the microphone

- Sit comfortably and **face the microphone**. We'll show you the right spot, so try to stay about there.

- **Talk at your normal volume.** There's no need to shout or whisper, because we look after the levels.
- Avoid **tapping the table, shuffling paper or clicking pens**. The microphones hear everything.
- Try not to **touch or move the microphone** once it's set up.
- **Take turns.** Wait for the other person to finish before you speak, so everyone can be heard clearly.
- While someone else is talking, **nod rather than saying "mm-hm"**. It keeps the audio clean and looks natural on video.

Staying relaxed and natural

- **It's a conversation, not a performance.** Talk to your guest, not to the microphone.
- **Mistakes are fine.** If you stumble or lose your thread, pause, take a breath and say it again. We can edit it out.
- **Slow down.** Nerves make most people talk faster than usual.
- **Don't worry about silences.** A short pause is natural and easy to tighten later.
- **Have a sip of water** whenever you need one, and ask for a break if you want one.
- **Keep an eye on your time.** Aim to finish on the length you agreed.

Before you leave

- Mention anything you'd like us to cut, or any moment you want to re-record.
- Talk to us about next steps, including our editing and distribution services.
- Book your next session while your guest list is fresh.

Checklist: Session confirmed. Guest briefed. Question sheet with you. Phone silenced. Jewellery and outfit sorted. Next steps discussed before you leave.

PART THREE

3

Post-Production

Where the recording becomes a polished episode: editing, music and a look of its own.

IN THIS PART

6 Let us edit your podcast

7 Music and sound effects

8 Setting a visual style

SECTION 6

Let Us Edit Your Podcast

Your recording is the raw material. Our editing service turns it into a polished, ready-to-publish episode, so you don't have to learn editing software or spend your evenings cutting audio.

What we take care of:

- Trimming the start and end, and cutting tangents, repeated points and false starts
- Removing distractions such as coughs, long pauses and stray noises, while keeping the conversation sounding natural
- Balancing the voices so everyone is easy to hear
- Adding your intro, outro and theme music
- Delivering a finished episode, ready to publish

What we need from you:

- Any moments you'd like cut, or kept
- Your music choices and any sound effects (see Section 7)
- The correct spelling of names and titles

Interested? Ask the studio team about our editing service.

SECTION 7

Choosing Music and Sound Effects

Music and sound effects shape how your show *feels*. They're part of your identity, and the legal side matters too.

Choosing your theme music

- Match the **mood** to your show: upbeat for a lively chat, calm for reflective storytelling, bold for news and business.
- Choose something **memorable but not overpowering**. It will be heard hundreds of times.
- Prefer **instrumental** music. Lyrics compete with your voice.
- Pick a track with a **clean start and end**, or a short loop you can fade.
- Keep your **intro music under 20 to 30 seconds** before dropping under the voice.

Using music well

- Use short **stings** (a one to three second musical flourish) to separate segments.
- Keep music for the opening, the closing and transitions rather than under the whole conversation. It tires the ear.
- Tell us where you'd like it, and we'll look after the mixing so your voices always stay clear.

Sound effects

- Use them **sparingly**. One well-placed effect beats ten gimmicky ones.

- Good uses: segment transitions, a recurring "signature" sound, punctuating a joke.
- Keep them consistent in style, so the show doesn't feel like a patchwork.

Staying legal: copyright and licensing

This is the most common trap for new podcasters. **Never use a popular song** without a proper licence. Even a few seconds can lead to your episode being muted or removed.

Safe options:

- **Royalty-free music libraries** with a clear licence that covers podcasts and commercial use (for example Epidemic Sound, Artlist, Audio Network or Pixabay Music, each with different terms)
- **Creative Commons** tracks, as long as you follow the attribution rules
- **Original music** commissioned from a composer or musician
- **Libraries included in your editing software**

Always **keep a record** of where each track came from and a copy of its licence.

Checklist: Theme music chosen and licensed. Licence saved. A few stings or effects selected. Music choices sent to the studio.

SECTION 8

Setting a Visual Style

Even an audio-only podcast needs a visual identity: cover art, social graphics and a website. If you're recording video, your style extends to the episodes themselves.

Cover art

Your artwork appears as a tiny thumbnail on most listeners' phones, so it has to work **small**.

- Format: **square**, ideally **3000 x 3000 pixels**, saved as a JPG or PNG
- Use **bold, simple design** with minimal text, mainly the show title
- Choose **high-contrast** colours and a legible font
- Avoid fine detail, long taglines and busy photos
- Test it by **shrinking it to thumbnail size**. If you can still read it, it's good.

Your brand kit

Decide these once and reuse them everywhere:

- **Two or three brand colours**
- **One or two fonts**: one for headlines, one for body text
- **Logo or wordmark**
- **Photo style**: candid, polished, monochrome, etc.
- **Tone of voice** for captions and posts

Episode graphics and social media

- Create **one reusable template** for episode artwork with space for the guest's photo and name.

- Build templates for **quote cards**, **audiograms** (an audio clip with an animated waveform) and **short video clips**.
- Use **captions or subtitles** on video clips. Most people watch social video with the sound off.
- Think about the platforms: tall vertical clips suit Reels, TikTok and Shorts, square or portrait suits the feed, and widescreen suits YouTube.

If you're recording video

- We provide the set and equipment, so you only need to think about how you look and sound.
- Dress in **plain, solid colours**. Avoid tight stripes and busy patterns that look odd on camera.
- Tell us your guests' **names and job titles** so we can show them on screen.
- Pick out **short highlights** of each episode for social media: 30 to 60 seconds, with a hook in the first few seconds.

Checklist: Cover art designed and tested at thumbnail size. Brand colours and fonts chosen. Episode template created. Clip format decided.

PART FOUR

4

Distribution

Getting your podcast out into the world, and getting it heard.

IN THIS PART

9 How distribution works

10 Audio vs video podcasts

11 Distribution with the studio

12 Getting your podcast heard

SECTION 9

How Podcast Distribution Works

Podcasts aren't uploaded directly to Spotify or Apple Podcasts. Instead, your show lives with a **podcast hosting service**, which sends your episodes out to all the major apps for you:

1. Your finished episodes are uploaded to the hosting service.
2. Your show is set up **once** with Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Amazon Music, YouTube Music and the other major apps.
3. The hosting service sends each new episode to all of them.
4. From then on, every new episode **appears automatically** everywhere.

This means you only set the directories up once.

What you'll need before you launch

- **Cover art** (see Section 8)
- **Show title, description and category.** Write a description that explains the promise in two or three sentences, with searchable keywords.
- **Episode titles and descriptions** for each episode
- **Whether your show is clean or explicit**, and the language it's in
- **A contact email** for your show
- **Your finished episodes.** If we've edited them, we already have them, so there's nothing to send over.

Launch with more than one episode

Publish **two or three episodes on day one**. New listeners who like what they hear can binge, and the algorithms see early engagement.

Episode titles and descriptions

- Put the **guest name and topic** in the title, and keep it clear before clever.
- Open the description with a **strong first sentence**, because that's what shows in most apps.
- Add **timestamps, links and guest details**.
- Be consistent, so the feed looks professional.

SECTION 10

Audio vs Video Podcasts

Video podcasts are growing quickly, and many listeners now *watch* podcasts on YouTube and other platforms. Some hosting services can also distribute video episodes, not only audio.

If you record video, decide up front whether to:

- publish **audio only** to the podcast apps and **video** to YouTube, or
- distribute **video through your hosting service** where the apps support it

Our team can talk you through the options.

SECTION 11

Distribution Through The Hertfordshire Podcast Studio

If you'd rather not deal with hosting accounts, we offer a **managed distribution service**. We already have your finished episodes, so you only supply your artwork, titles and descriptions, and we handle getting your show published and keeping it live. Combine it with our editing service (Section 6) and we take your episodes from recording to release.

Ask us for current pricing and what's included.

SECTION 12

Getting Your Podcast Heard

Publishing is the start, not the finish. Growth comes from steady, deliberate promotion.

Launch week

- Tell **everyone you know** and ask them to listen, subscribe and leave a rating.
- Share a **trailer**: a 60-second teaser of what the show is about.
- Ask your first guests to **share their episode** with their own audiences.
- Post **clips, quote cards and audiograms** across social media.

Ongoing habits

- **Publish consistently.** The single biggest factor in growth is not disappearing.
- **Cross-promote** with similar shows through guest appearances and shoutouts.
- Create a **simple website or landing page** with episodes, show notes and a way to contact you.
- **Repurpose each episode**: a blog post, a newsletter, three social clips, a quote graphic.
- Ask for **reviews** in your outro, but only once and with a reason.
- **Collect an email list** so you own a direct line to your audience.
- Use **the guest's name and photo** in every promotional asset. People love sharing their own appearances.
- **Track your stats** (downloads, listener locations, drop-off points) and see which episodes perform best. Do more of those.

Be patient

Most podcasts grow slowly. The shows that succeed are the ones whose hosts keep going, keep improving, and keep showing up for their listeners.

Checklist: Show description written. Trailer and first two or three episodes ready. Distribution arranged with the studio. Launch-week posts scheduled. Guests asked to share.

AT A GLANCE

Quick Reference

Pre-Launch Master Checklist

Planning

- Audience and promise defined
- Format, length and schedule chosen
- Title checked and approved
- Guest wish list and first invitations sent
- Question sheets prepared
- Intro and outro written

Production

- Session booked and guests briefed
- Question sheets printed or saved
- Arrival time and outfit planned

Post-Production

- Editing arranged with the studio
- Theme music chosen and licensed
- Cover art and brand kit finished
- Episode graphics and clip templates made

Distribution

- Distribution arranged with the studio
- Artwork, titles and descriptions ready
- Trailer and launch episodes ready
- Promotion plan in place

Notes

Use this page to jot down your show name, tagline, sign-off phrase and launch date.

Show name:

Tagline:

Sign-off phrase:

Closing question:

Launch date:

Need a hand with any stage? The team at The Hertfordshire Podcast Studio is here to help. Visit thehertfordshirepodcaststudio.co.uk to find out more.



The Hertfordshire Podcast Studio

Ready to start recording?

Book your session at The Hertfordshire Podcast Studio and let us take care of the rest.

Letchworth Garden City

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