

Podcraft

Season 16, Episode 3

Colin: Hey folks, and welcome to another episode of PodCraft. This is the show all about podcasting, from launching a show to monetization, and everything in between. I'm Colin from the podcast host. I'm joined by Alitu, I'm joined by Matthew. I'm making you into the robot now.

Matthew: Mister Alitu. I've done no work on Alitu. I'm not clever enough to work on the Alitu project. I'm quite humbled that you've accredited me with creating the whole thing though.

Colin: [laughs] Must be on my brain. How are you, Matthew?

Matthew: Very well. I am a podcast maker too, after all. I'm absolutely fine. How are you?

Colin: I'm good. For people that can't see the video that I can, which is everyone because this is a podcast, Matthew's building up his winter coat right now. His beard is looking much bushier and much thicker and luxurious than it normally does. Is that due to winter, Matthew or just laziness?

Matthew: I wish my wife shared your enthusiasm but I don't know that she's so keen on it. She's certainly once it came down a wee bit but I go on the barbers and the guy says to me, do you want your beard done? I have no idea, that could mean like the bare blade shave or it could mean I'm just going prune a couple of long hair. I just say, I'm laissez faire about it, do what you will, and he just tidies it up a wee bit. I am due a trip back there. We'll see what happens. Could be anything.

Colin: Could disappear. You're just looking very Leonidas right now, almost becoming a bit pointy.

Matthew: I Don't know what that word means.

Colin: You know, Gerard, good old Scottish guy in Hollywood, Gerard Butler who was Leonidas in *300*. Spartan.

Matthew: Right. I've not seen that film.

Colin: Need to look it up. Your beard is very much modeled on his at the moment. [laughs] Anyway, podcasting. This is a bonus episode, isn't it Matthew? Tell our listener about our current season because you're leading on that, what we're covering just now during this season.

Matthew: It's been a great wee chance to sit down with our various team members and colleagues here at The Podcast Host and Alitu and we're leaning on their expertise, insights, and experience. We're talking about all sorts of different things with our team members and colleagues, but all with that, that same central theme on PodCraft which is how could the podcaster, the Indie podcaster apply this to their

own endeavors and learn a wee bit along the way. We've had some really enjoyable chats so far and we thought we'd do something traditional today though and just get together ourselves, Colin, because we had a bit of data of really cool data to share, didn't we?

Colin: Yes, a little bonus here. We've been running just a background to it. We've been running, well, it's to do with our planner tool. We now have on the website, if anyone's interested in looking at this actually, you can pop over and see it. We have a podcast planner tool on thepodcasthost.com which is basically a guided tour to planning your show, it asks a lot of questions, it gives you a bit of guidance and it pops out at the other end a guide for your podcast. You get a PDF that you can download, which is a guide, it's like your plan for your show that you've put together using the planner tool. During that, we obviously ask quite a lot of questions around what kind of show are you planning?

What length you planning, what format, all that kind of stuff. We've been using that data to, anonymized of course, we put it in the planner saying that is it okay to use this? The data is really interesting actually in showing us the kind of shows that people are planning to create. That's what this came out of, wasn't it, Matthew? This is all around solo shows. This one, in particular, we've had 1,500 people, more now obviously, but at the time, it was 1,500 people, one and a half thousand people who'd filled it in, and told us what they thought.

What we're focusing on here is the fact that over half, no sorry, I'm getting the wrong data, it's 43%, so close to half of all the people that filled in our survey, that filled in our planner are planning a solo show. Was that surprising to you, Matthew?

Matthew: Definitely, yes, definitely. If you'd asked me to predict what that data would suggest, I would've been way off because I just think that for a lot of people that I hear from, it's almost like they've pre-assumed that they need to do interview shows, and then when you take an account like the events of the last couple of years with the pandemic and then you've got all these good remote recording tools on the market that are making it really easy to do. You think that people are just going to go down that route by default almost.

I was surprised. Actually, you know what, a bit glad to see this because, well there's a couple of reasons we'll dive into it, but very surprised, but also I think this is pretty much a good thing for the medium.

Colin: Yes, I like it. I do like it a lot. I've long recommended the solo format as a great starting point for podcasters and you say, well going into a few of the reasons why people seem to be choosing this. I think it's cool because like you say, interviews were always just the default. People thought of it almost as the easy option, because you get somebody on, you lean on their expertise, you don't even do much prep. That all led to a lot really average, or frankly, terrible, poor interview shows really, didn't it?

People not doing any prep at all, just getting any old person on, not really giving them much guidance and in the interviewer just takes control and does whatever they like. Yes, I like it too, I love it. I like the solo format. Why do you think people are

getting into this then? What are the reasons, what are the benefits that people are finding in solo podcasting that are leading them down this path?

Matthew: Again, harken back to that, I've just mentioned the pandemic there but do you think there's an element of fatigue for things like getting on Zoom, getting on calls, do you think a lot of people are just really sick of that and wanting to try something different? I know that's not necessarily podcasting, but maybe just so sick of talking to someone online,

Colin: Totally agree. I think there's two things at play here thanks to the last couple of years of everyone having to get online. One is that Zoom fatigue. It just can't be arsed talking to folk online anymore. Too many calls. Can't do another call. The other one is that actually everyone just had to get, it was a crash course in setting up like a mic and setting up recording software and getting comfortable in speaking into your computer, which a lot of people weren't before, were they?

Now, there's so many more people now have a decent mic set up, have a pair of headphones, are okay, like jumping on a recording room like Zoom, anything from Zoom up to like any of the proper call recording platforms like Alitu or SquadCast or whatever. I think that's part of it as well. Anything else you think?

Matthew: The no scheduling aspect of it as well I think is a big boon for a lot of people. I've experimented recently actually where doing solo-podcast in my tabletop gaming podcast. That was a big part of it for me. The scheduling and I was running interviews like I was doing them at like eight at night and my daughter sleeps like literally next door to the wee cupboard that I record in.

A couple of times, I was paranoid about waking her up, and to be honest, I don't like doing stuff like that in the evening anyway. Evenings are time for me to chill out a bit more. I started experimenting with doing solo episodes and that meant I was completely on my terms. I could just grab the mic, middle of the day and just, I've got my notes that I've been making and I could just bash through it. Totally on your own terms with things like scheduling and that as well, aren't you?

Colin: I think that's huge. That's one of the big reasons I've often recommended solo recording to new podcasters, particularly because it cuts out so many of the logistics. There's none of this calendar ping pong, like trying to find a time. There's none of this making sure that the interviewee has a decent mic or is going to be in a quiet place. There's none of that trying to figure out their bio and an intro and figure out the questions.

There's so much to make a good interview show or even a good co-hosted show as well when your co-host, there's so much more prep required, particularly interview ones where you have to like research a new person every single time. Just the fact that you can just like get in a cupboard, note down like five or six bullet points in just a couple of minutes, something that you know, and just go for it 15, 20 minutes. That's it. It's great.

Matthew: Sometimes with my solo episodes, I've just recorded them incrementally. On a Tuesday afternoon maybe, done a wee five-minute, something I wanted to cover, but I know that's not my full episode. I've maybe built the episode in three or

four different sessions. Then I bring them together later on. That's just completely on my own flexible schedule as well.

Colin: Well, that totally ties into the other thing. There's three, the simplicity, the no scheduling is one. Two for me is control. It's full control. You can record a show in that way if you want, but equally, when you're interviewing somebody or even when you're co-hosting to an extent, you don't have full control of the content. Like you can ask a question, but you've got no control over the quality of that answer.

That interviewee might go off in one and like talk for five minutes about something completely irrelevant. I don't know, they might say something that you don't actually agree with and you can argue with it and sometimes that can make good content, but it's all control. It's all about the fact that generally, to get the same content out.

You can make something much more condensed, much more focused, much more dense with entertainment or material or learning or motivation, whatever it is. You can create such a good show in 10, 15, 20 minutes by yourself when it might take you like 40 minutes to get that same level of information out of an interviewee. That control's a huge one for me.

Matthew: What about the reputation aspect as well, because it said, when interview shows, you borrow experience, don't you? If you're doing a solo show, does that mean you're now the expert or authority?

Colin: Yes, for sure. That's the thing, like interview shows, listeners do get to know the interviewer, you as the podcast host, but you're lending, you're putting the spotlight on the interviewee and that's great. That can make for great content. If you're a good interviewer, it does make you look great as well as the interviewee.

There's something special about just putting a spotlight on yourself and actually sharing your own story, your own motivational information, or your own learning, whatever it is. I think that makes a huge difference as well, just from time to time. What would you say about someone who does an interview show Matthew or a co-host that you're actually mixing in some solo ones just for that reason as well?

Matthew: That's something I've always talked about, isn't it? That you're not bound to your podcast format. In fact, it's rare to find shows that only do one podcast format. Certainly, solo shows you'll get the odd interview and vice versa.

I think it's good to mix it up because you might in your mind think, I love interviews, but then you do a solo show, you might just realize you'll love that so much more. Again, you're not ever stuck to one or the other. Don't be afraid to mix it up.

Colin: For sure. I think a solely solo can work well, so just all the episodes are you by yourself. Totally fine. Two weeks of interviews, then two weeks of solo or an interview, then a solo, then a co-host, mixing up. I think there's absolutely nothing wrong with that at all. In fact, it works really well.

The other thing it ties I've noticed as well in that data, we have data around the other format stuff related to what your podcast would be like. Your scheduling, how often you want to do it, and how long that podcast might be. Do you want to share those

stats and thoughts, I'm interested to hear how you think that ties into why people might be going solo too.

Matthew: Definitely. We asked the question in the planner, and again, this is over 1,500 aspiring podcasters that have responded at this stage, and the overwhelming, the 55% answer was weekly. Second place at 15% was fortnightly. Were you surprised at that one at all, Colin?

Colin: Nah, I don't think that's surprising. I think weekly is often the best schedule for a couple of reasons. Partly, it fits into just human schedules, doesn't it? How many things do we all do that just fit into every Tuesday, you do this particular thing? As a podcaster, recording every week on a Tuesday morning or something like that. It's a really nice routine, like sticking to that and equal, if you're a listener too, like knowing that your show comes out every week on a certain day or even just that they have a day that they listen to you.

I think that's really interest.

The difference, the thing that surprised me slightly about this was the fact that second place was so small actually. I did think it would be a bit closer. I didn't think it would be so overwhelming, but fortnightly being only 15% and then all the other options being so small was surprising. What about you?

Matthew: I suppose this is the plan, this is the hope for people and realistically, some people just won't manage it for one reason or another. These stats will be different once the podcasts are launched definitely. I think going into it, most people do like the thought of doing weekly, just because it is so obvious. You wake up in the morning, you know it's a Thursday, you don't wake up in the morning and know it's the second Thursday of the month or whatever necessarily immediately. It's so much easier to know, okay, Thursday podcasting day, rather than, oh, third Tuesday of the month. You know what that means?

Colin: Yes, and tying it back to the whole solo format thing. I think doing something weekly, every single week, having to plan a co-host show, having to organize those schedules again, having to find an interviewee, doing that every single week, that's hard. It's hard.

That's why so many podcasts do fade away. It's why that's a killer of a lot podcasts. If people are aiming for a weekly show, I can see why people are moving more towards solo, based on that, just because it's so much easier. Is that jive for you?

Matthew: Definitely, yes. Shout out to daily podcasting, a brave 4% of folks planning to do that. To be honest, on our previous episode of podcast, we talked about daily podcasting and it's actually like you could argue it's easier than weekly. Again, we've got a full episode dedicated to that. I'll put a link in the show notes to that if you want to check that out.

Colin: Pop back to that. The length stuff. The length data looked like we want, so about half of podcasters, that's 53%, want to keep it under 40 minutes, and then 24%, so a quarter, one in four podcasters will keep it under 20 minutes.

That's a lot of short podcasts, which maybe lends into the solo thing as well because solo shows would probably tend to be on average shorter, because you're able to cover. Like we said, you're able to cover all the information you want, much more focused, much more in control. Does that surprise you? How many people are looking to do shorter podcasts these days?

Matthew: No, I think you've made a good point there. If you're going solo, you are looking at shorter episodes. That probably is a good reason why you've got that 6 to 19-minute range doing pretty well, 20 to 40. The fact that most people are going in wanting to do that. That correlates with the data that we've seen that that actually is the most popular length of published podcasts out there, so that matches up as well.

The one thing that does make me laugh slightly with this one is only 2% of people plan to do more than 90 minutes, to do more than an hour and a half. I think a lot of podcasters do end up, because we can go on a bit, can't we, as podcasters? I think more people will be doing that than they'd like to think.

Colin: [laughs] We don't get into this because we don't like to talk.

Matthew: [laughs] Exactly. I have nothing to say. I'm just going to do one minute. By the way, one in five minutes, 4%.

Colin: Really? Super short. That's actually interesting too, isn't it? One in 20 people, one in 20 shows could be a lightning show. A lightning briefing type of thing. That's cool. That's good to hear. I do like that kind of show from time to time. Do you listen to any really short ones like that?

Matthew: The stoic meditations one, I'll listen to back in of the day, that stopped. It was well over a thousand episodes and he's, I think he'd been through all the books and stuff like that. I just got tired of it. Pod News, I know that's a daily podcast, although I just read the email rather than listen to the podcast, but I know that it's a very popular daily show. Do you listen to any of them like that?

Colin: I say I like the idea of it, but actually in many ways, it doesn't fit so much into what I really want. More often than not, I just want to pick something with a decent bit of length, 20, 30 minutes or more up to an hour, or longer sometimes and just let it go and just walk. I listen more when I'm going for a walk at lunchtime which might be an hour or doing a chore or something like that like ironing or doing the washing or whatever, it's just going to be like half an hour. Actually, it's funny. I like the format, I like the idea of it, but I don't actually listen to that many of them.

Matthew: You like to know that they're out there?

Colin: Exactly.

Matthew: Comfort.

Colin: There's no question that they're popular. Some of the daily news shows are huge now, so it fits into some people's routines. There was a couple recently actually which I did listen to on a daily basis. I would just pop it on as soon as I jumped in the car, I would jump it to the front of my playlist, and then it would finish, and then it would play on with the rest.

Actually, it's definitely more fitting and it depends on my mood, I suppose. Is it worth jumping into how to get good at this then? If that many people are going to do solo shows, again, it's a more difficult format in some ways. Only from a presentation point of view, a lot of people are intimidated by just speaking by themselves for 15, 20 minutes potentially. How do you think you get good at that? What's the thinking behind that?

Matthew: There's a few things that we could cover. Like you're saying, one of the big surprising aspects of the fact that so many people plan to do this is that it can be really intimidating. If you've never podcasted before especially, sitting down and feeling like you're talking to yourself is a big obstacle. Maybe that is the first obstacle that we could overcome because we're not actually talking to ourselves, are we?

Colin: Yes, exactly. I think that's the big thing, isn't it? We talk about ideal listener, we talk about personas, we talk about thinking about who it is you're speaking to and fleshing that out as well. We should put some links for our avatar-type articles in the show notes, like how to come up with an ideal listener, how to come up with a picture of who your ideal listener is because you can go really deep on that. You can really flesh them out, and it can be somebody imaginary, but you give them a name, you give them a background, a job, all these kind of stuff so that you can really vividly imagine them.

It could be somebody real as well. A lot of coaches who run podcasts have a client who is their ideal listener. This person who's one of their perfect clients, somebody they've had for a while that they can imagine. That's what it is. When you're speaking into this microphone, you just imagine them on the other end of it. You imagine them in your head, you're speaking directly to them, and you're saying it personally. You're not saying, "Hey, all you out there, all my listeners," you're talking to them individually. You're saying, "What do you feel about this? How do you feel about this?" That kind of stuff. Do you do that, Matthew?

Matthew: Not necessarily. I've got some of my own thoughts that I've made it easier for me. I realize why this stuff is important. I don't know if it's, I'm just a bit of a rambler and I maybe just talk to everyone the same anyway. I think that's one of the things with me, like no matter who I'm talking to, I just seem to talk the same way. I guess I'm not totally sitting down thinking, who's listening to this? You did PodCraft as a solo show back in the day. Were you pretty often doing that?

Colin: Yes. I found it really helpful, actually. I do find it really helpful. I even tried a couple of the tricks. The little sound and silly things that people do. I found them quite helpful from time to time. One of them is to take a picture, like actually take a photo or a cartoon or something that represents your ideal listener and put them behind the mic, literally stick it to the wall behind your script or whatever.

You're looking at that as you're talking. It's weird. It sounds stupid, but it makes a difference. You've just got this thing, this person, this idea of something you're talking to. I don't really need that these days, but I remember back, like when I was first getting started in all this, and it does feel intimidating figuring out how to speak to a mic like you're talking to yourself. It makes a difference. The other one is a teddy. I've seen people do that. They'll put a teddy bear or a doll or something on a chair

facing them, and they can almost imagine that that's a real person, that that's their ideal listener. [laughs]

Matthew: Imagine your wife walk in, and then you're talking to Teddy and you just turn and say, "Look, this is for the internet."

Colin: [laughs] Any other tips on doing it well?

Matthew: Aye, so the two things that really work well for me, one of them is pretty obvious and one of them's probably a bit more unconventional. The more obvious one is just a good level of prep. I think this applies no matter what kind of podcast format you do, to be honest. I think it's especially important when you're there on your own, and you've nobody to bounce off.

I think good thorough bullet points of the different topics that you want to hit, the different beats you want to hit, that could take a lot of the pressure off because you don't find yourself getting lost and things like that, getting off track. Good preparation, a nice clear script to run through. Probably the more unconventional thing that's worked for me is being able to move around when I'm recording.

You could look at this in two different ways. The more obvious one is that you go outside and record. This is something we've talked about in the past. You maybe get yourself a wireless microphone or something, a live mic, and you just go out for a walk and you see people all the time these days. I always think it's people talking to themselves, but people on phone calls, because we're all hands-free these days.

You'll get somebody walking towards you in the street and you think they're talking to you, but you realize they're on the phone. It's not even it would look weird these days if you're out there recording a podcast. Nobody knows it's not a live call. Get out there and record while you're walking the dog or whatever but I actually do this inside too.

Again, this goes against the grain, any sound engineers or that, but I'm using that just a basic old SM 50. I actually hold the microphone when I'm recording solo. I'm not doing it now because it's a bit different when I'm recording with someone. I'm risking varying distances from the mic. I'm risking a bit of handling noise, but I think it's a good trade-off when I'm recording alone. I like to feel a bit more on the move.

Often, I'm referencing things as well. I'll often talk about maybe something that I'm painting at the moment. I'll go over and have a look at it as I'm talking through it. I like to just be dynamic. I feel that that leads to me sounding a lot more natural. Again, this isn't for everyone. It could literally just be me that benefits from that. Certainly, I would say if you want to get into solo and you're feeling a bit stiff just sitting there in front of the mic, maybe pick the mic up and get moving or like I say, get a live mic and go outside and do it.

Colin: That's cool. No, I don't think that's just you at all, Matthew. I'm standing up right now while recording and I always find that makes me sound better too because I can move a little bit. I can move my feet and as long as you're careful around the noise and stuff, you can still move around and it gives you a bit more energy. It just keeps you a bit more upbeat.

I think that's the biggest risk with solo recording or at least it's one of the things that people get worried about. It's sounding a bit monotone or your voice getting a bit boring because it's just you. You need to keep it a bit more dynamic. You're absolutely right. Moving around a bit, even just standing up or grabbing a mic or having something you're doing at the same time, as long as that noise is under control, I think it's really cool. I don't think I've heard any of your episodes on the war gaming show where you've been picking up models and stuff. I will have to have a listen.

Matthew: Yes, tune in on my latest episode, it was a trip to Warhammer World. I talked through-

Colin: Oh, nice.

Matthew: - my visit there. That was a solo episode. I just talked through the visit. Get a wee listen and leave me a three-star review on Apple Podcast, we have to call it now.

Colin: [laughs] I think probably just the last thing I would say on solo recording is that I don't think it matters what you do. It does feel weird the first few times. It's something that does take a bit of getting used to. I think like we said earlier, more people are used to it these days because we've had to do so much Zoom and online calls and stuff in the last couple of years, but it still, still is a bit weird.

It gets less weird. It gets normal really quickly. It's practice. There's a big part of it. It's just doing it a few times and it might turn out that you do it three, four, five episodes and hate it and it's not what you want to do in future, but it might turn out that it becomes a nice little tool in your toolbox where you can pull it out if there's any time you're let down by an interviewee or you just can't be bothered to try and organize an interview or schedule something in with a co-host, you just pick up the mic and get it done. That gets you an episode out there in the world, doesn't it?

Matthew: Yes. Just to iterate that data, and again, I'll link to this actual report and the show notes. 43% of people, 43% of over 1,500 aspiring podcasters plan to do a solo show. 29% plan to do interviews. The how often will you publish question, 55 people planning to do weekly, and the episode length that folks are planning to do, 20 to 40 minutes, that sweet spot, 53% of folks are planning to do that as well. The good thing about the podcast planner data, we're always collecting it because this is a tool that you could use as well to plan your podcast. We've got loads more big data points that we're going to cover in the near future as well.

Colin: Indeed. Sorry. I was about to try and look up the planner there, but, you caught me as I was mid-typing on mute behind the curtain there. I think you can get to the planner from our website. You know what, let's just put a short link in these show notes. Pop over to the show notes. What are the show notes for this season again, Matthew?

Matthew: It's thepodcasthost.com/podcraft16.

Colin: Podcast 16. If you pop over to that, thepodcasthost.com/podcraft16, I'll pop a link in there for the planner. If anyone wants to go through it, it actually works really

nicely. We've found some good feedback from people who are not just launching. It works really well for if you're planning your show for the first time, launching a new show. If you have a show that's been around for 50 episodes, 100 episodes, it's actually a really nice little exercise to go through and replan almost, isn't it, Matthew?

To think about your listener, to think about your format, to just ask yourself those questions on, is what I'm doing right now actually what I want to be doing for the next 50 episodes? Could I relaunch or just re-jig or just refine a little bit? I think that's always a nice little idea. If you're in that situation too, pop over. Again, Podcraft 16, thepodcast.com/podcraft16, and you'll get all the resources related to this episode. Alrighty, that us for this week, Matthew?

Matthew: Yes. I believe so. Any latest on Alitu? I think you did name me Alitu at the start of the episode, so presumably, it's on your mind.

Colin: [laughs] No, I think I mentioned the hosting on the last episode when we talked to Lindsay. Just seeing how people are responding to hosting. It's really cool actually how many people are taking it on. If you hadn't heard that episode, we've launched hosting inside Alitu, which is our podcast maker app. Now you can get free hosting up to a certain level, up to 1,000 downloads per month, which actually, looking at the stats, covers a lot of podcasters.

A lot of podcasters get under 200, 250 downloads per episode. That 1,000 can take you through your first few months, if not your first year or so, as you're growing. Having a hosting in there's really cool, I love having it so that people can just come, sign up and it's really all they have to use. If you fancy having a go, go over to alitu.com, A-L-I-T-U.com and you can get a seven-day free trial to see if it works for you.

Mathew: What's the funniest pronunciation of Alitu you've heard out there in the wild?

Colin: [laughs] The most common is Alitu. It seems to be. Our great friends over in the US, anyone I talk to tends to be, if you're out there listening in the US, a lot of people would pronounce it. I don't know, it's something about the accent and the emphasis that they emphasize that "I" Alitu. Has there any crazy ones? There has been a couple. I can't bring them to mind at the moment, but there has been a couple where they've absolutely butchered it. Sorry, our problem having a really weird name, which is a hangover from web 2.0. You have to make up something silly. At least we don't have, remember those names that always had 70 extra vowels in them? [laughs]

Mathew: Yes, yes. A nightmare for spelling out.

Colin: Exactly. You would call it, what would it be like? If it was a word-processing tool? You would call it typely, but it would be T-Y-E-E-E-P-E-E-L-Y or something like that. [laughs]

Mathew: Then there was definitely the period where vowels were frowned upon as well. You can have vowels in your name.

Colin: Yes, they disappeared. It would just be T-Y-P-L-Y or something like that.
[laughs] That's true.

Mathew: It was like you got charged more in a domain name if you had vowels in it. It's what it was like. We had borrowed the naming stuff. It'll only get harder, imagine 1,000 years from now, if we're still alive. Imagine trying to come up with a name for something.

Colin: It's all been taken.

Mathew: It's almost impossible.

Colin: Cool. All right. Good to speak to you, Matthew, and thank you for listening out there. Hope you got something out of this episode. Hope it gives you some ideas or maybe doing a solo episode or maybe even fitting it into your current schedule. That'd be cool. Again, pop over to thepodcasthost.com/podcraft16 for the show notes, and we'll talk to you on the future episode.