



THE NPR PODCAST REPORT

WINTER 2021

A photograph of the NPR building in Washington, D.C. The building is a modern, multi-story structure with a light-colored facade and large glass windows. A prominent vertical sign on the left side of the building displays the NPR logo, which consists of the letters 'npr' in white on a red and blue background. A news ticker is visible on the building's facade, displaying the text 'NEWS | Comparison: Mehdi Ouazzani is'. The address '1111' is visible on the building's corner. A black street lamp is positioned in front of the building. The sky is clear and blue.

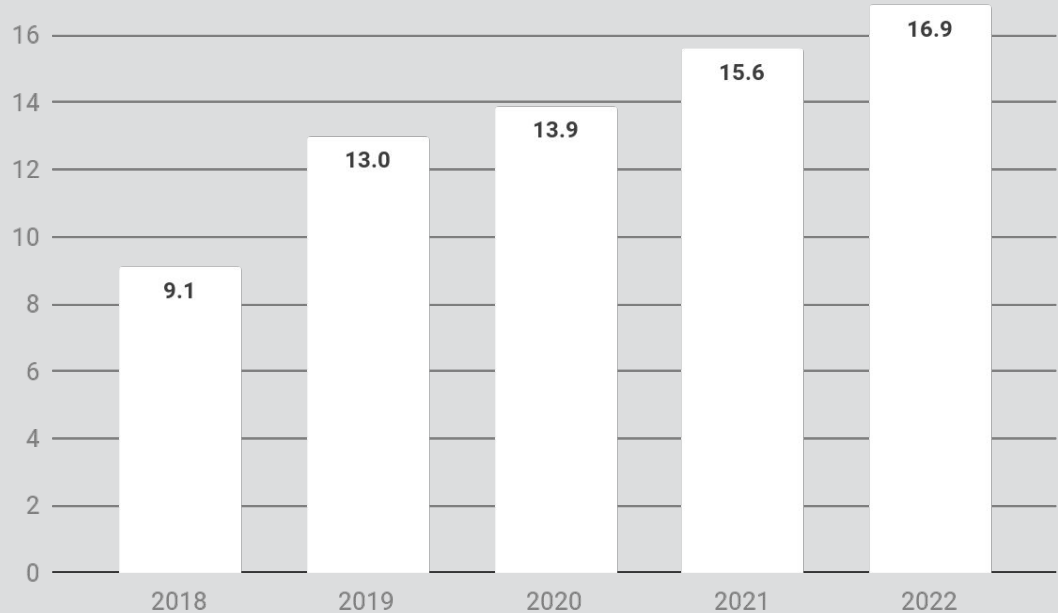
NPR PODCAST TRENDS

The events of 2020 bent and broke many Americans' media consumption habits, and so people found new ways of staying informed and entertained. And yet, for all that change, podcast consumption showed its strength. Its continued growth is a testament to the power of touching people's lives with great content, even during a difficult year.

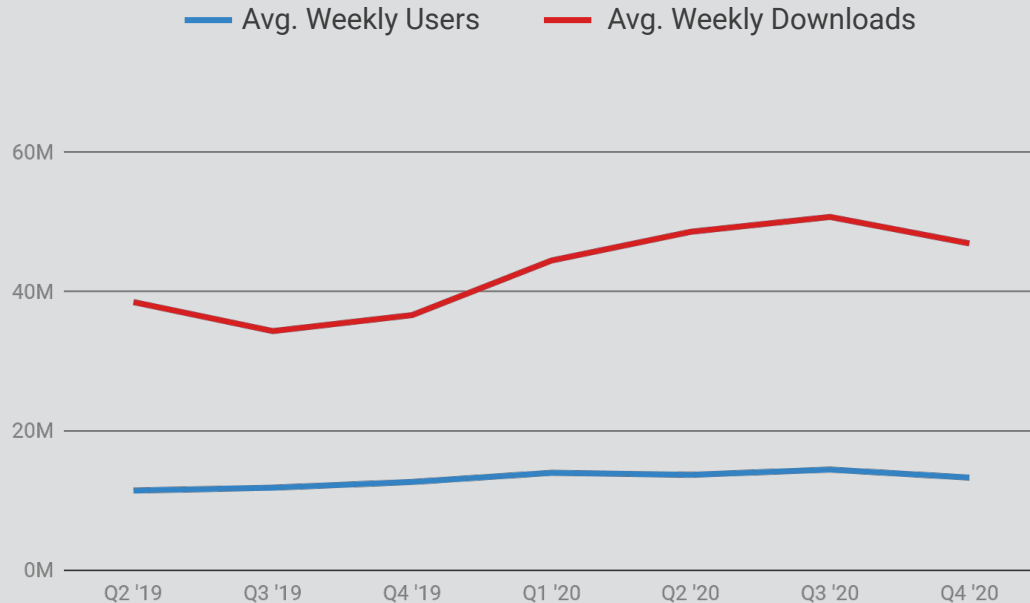
Even with last year's disruptions, the average time a person spent listening to any podcasts increased.

In addition, Edison Research reports that the share of time Americans age 13+ spend with podcasts as a percentage of all their audio listening has tripled since 2014.

Average Minutes Americans Spend Per Day with All Podcasts



NPR PODCAST TRENDS



Source: NPR podcast measurement system, certified through the IAB



NPR's weekly users are up 5%
year on year (Q4 2020 vs Q4 2019).








Downloads have increased 28%
in the same time period.


Although audience growth didn't match pre-pandemic predictions, the year-on-year increases spanned the many NPR programs. Especially notable is the rise in the average number of downloads per person, revealing the increased loyalty of our listeners.

TOP 25 NPR PODCASTS

Based on average weekly users for Q4 2020

- 1  NPR News Now
- 2 Up First
- 3  NPR Politics Podcast
- 4 Fresh Air
- 5 Planet Money
- 6 Wait Wait... Don't Tell Me!
- 7 The Indicator from Planet Money
- 8 How I Built This
- 9  Consider This
- 10 TED Radio Hour
- 11 Short Wave
- 12 Code Switch
- 13  Throughline

 Fastest-growing shows since Q2 2020

- 14  Pop Culture Happy Hour
- 15 It's Been a Minute with Sam Sanders
- 16 Life Kit
- 17 Wow in the World
- 18 Car Talk
- 19 All Songs Considered
- 20 1A
- 21  Embedded
- 22 Ask Me Another
- 23 Rough Translation
- 24 Louder Than A Riot **NEW**
- 25  Radio Ambulante

FEATURE STORIES

Promoting your podcast? Consider “when” not just “how” for success

Identifying the best ways to promote and grow podcast audiences has long been a topic of conversation among professionals throughout the industry. How do we, as publishers, help audiences discover shows that they'd enjoy?

Podcasters have employed numerous tactics over the years, from posting [audiograms](#) on social media to running [cross-promotions](#) in other podcasts to generate awareness. Others have written on the subject on how to make [paid marketing](#) more effective.



With budgets tightening due to the ongoing pandemic it's clear podcasters need to make the most of each opportunity, particularly if that involves a paid marketing campaign. Timing promotions to align with the cyclical interests of audiences is one method we use to optimize our campaigns and make the most of our budgets. You don't see advertisements for skiing equipment in the middle of summer for a reason.

Align your promotions with audience interest

So how do you find out the best time to promote your podcast? This will differ for each show but the idea for each one is the same: identify moments when audiences are actively seeking out content that your show produces.

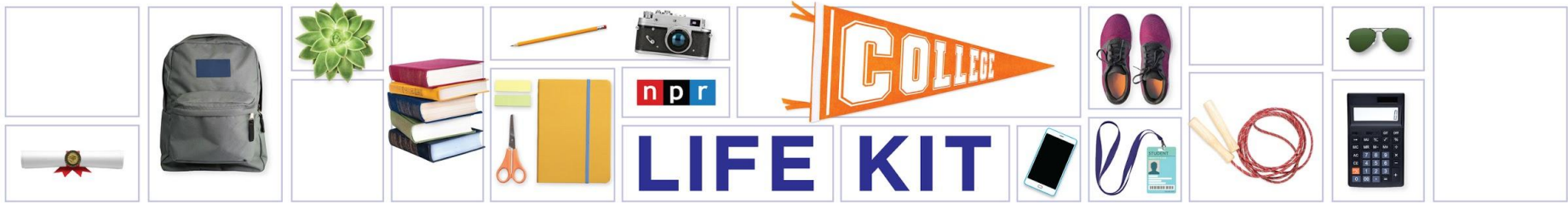
In our last podcast report we shared the incredible growth that podcasts like [Code Switch](#) had seen just as

protests against police brutality erupted around the country. We saw it again with the [NPR Politics](#) podcast during the most recent presidential election. Audiences were seeking out these topics; we simply aligned our promotions with that interest.

Sometimes you can use tools like Google Trends to identify cyclical patterns or renewed interest in topics. As just one example, search interest in “New Year’s Resolutions” spikes each year in January (duh!). This cyclical interest in topics like eating healthier, working out, and reading more is exactly what we wanted to take advantage of at NPR with our [Life Kit](#) podcast.

Interest in “New Year’s Resolutions,” Google Trends





Set the stage for your success by publishing episodes related to your marketing appeals

The Life Kit podcast is perfectly positioned to meet the interest of these listeners with expert advice on topics ranging from health to finance and parenting. Leading up to the start of 2021, the Life Kit team knew to expect a wave of new listeners and planned for it according to Beth Donovan, Life Kit's Senior Director.

"We think about our host voices and who the new audience will meet. We think about our sound and form. We want those New Years grazers to have good experiences and stick around."

They prepared their podcast feed by republishing popular episodes about subjects like [forming habits](#) and [understanding weight loss](#) that they knew would appeal to an audience with a New Year mentality. Both of those episodes were downloaded around 60% more than the average Life Kit episode.

Earlier in 2020, the Life Kit team increased their publishing frequency to 3 times per week to meet the growing need for service journalism and respond quickly to news events. That change allowed them to respond quickly to the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6th with a timely episode about [talking to kids about scary news](#).

When it came to the promotions themselves, our messaging focused on how Life Kit can help listeners fulfill their New Year's resolutions. We aired cross-promos with that messaging in several NPR podcasts around the New Year. These promotions, along with Life Kit being featured in Apple's "New & Noteworthy" section, helped lift the show into the top 10 on the Apple Podcasts chart.

Our partnerships with podcast apps didn't stop there. Spotify has helped us reach new audiences throughout the year by featuring Life Kit in many of their playlists. Just after the New Year the previously mentioned weight loss episode was included in their [Brain Snacks](#) playlist with over 50,000 followers. Other platforms, like Stitcher and Amazon, both featured Life Kit in emails that go out to their users. Combined, these efforts resulted in Life Kit users doubling over the span of just a couple weeks. It also outpaced the growth we had seen over the same period last year.



The Life Kit Audience

71% are female

79% are between 25-54

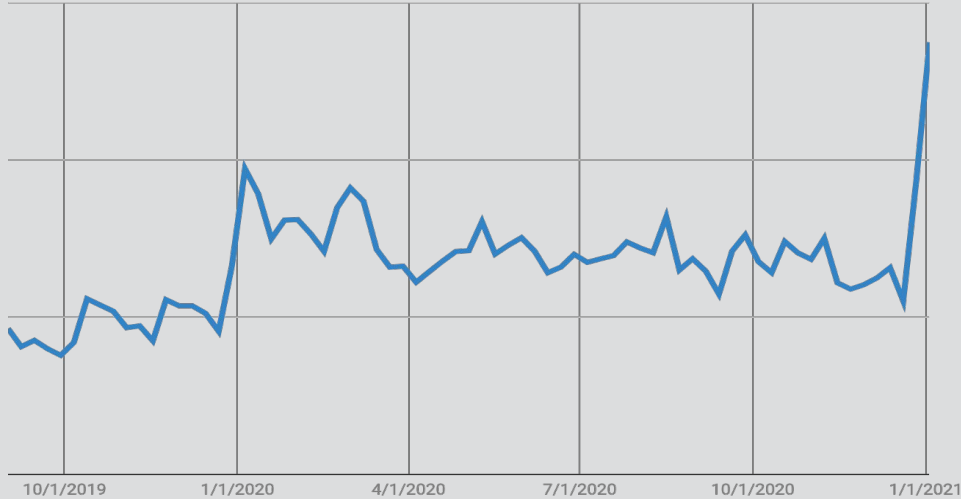
52% are under the age of 35

29% have children

89% have a college degree

NPR All Podcast Survey, May 2020

LIFE KIT WEEKLY USERS



Most of the promotional tactics we used in the case of Life Kit aren't unique to this podcast or this campaign. Cross-promotions and outreach on social media are things we and other publishers do routinely throughout the year. But NPR has consistently seen these efforts pay off the most when we take the path of least resistance and recognize the needs of audiences at specific moments in time. The success of Life Kit demonstrates that *when* you promote your show can be just as critical as *how* you promote your show.

—Dan Frohlich, Digital Analytics Manager

Podcast sponsorship is an effective way to drive purchase intent

The unique attention our audience gives to podcasts provides an ideal environment for brands to get their message to an audience that is listening and open to new information.

To help sponsors most effectively convey their message to our audience, NPR works with Veritonic to test audio messages. With Veritonic testing, a sample of podcast listeners hear an audio ad and as they listen they indicate their emotional reaction to the message. They also respond to questions before and after hearing the message. We are then able to see how listeners respond to the copy overall, to specific words or phrases, and how reaction to NPR messages compare to Veritonic's norms. Across all the messages tested in 2020, NPR's benchmarks demonstrated that NPR sponsor messaging is perceived as more sincere than other podcast ads tested in Veritonic, and drives intent to purchase.

NPR sponsor messages are perceived as

13%

more **sincere** than other podcast ads

Podcast listeners are

14.5%

more likely to purchase a product after listening to an NPR sponsor message vs. other podcast ads

When creating podcast advertising, it's time to consider the moment

This year as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic began to drastically change the way we work and live, companies started asking us for advice on how they should adapt their messages to acknowledge the crisis and reach podcast listeners in a way that was genuine and respectful, staying consistent with the sincerity that is a key aspect of NPR sponsorship

And we wondered: what do podcast listeners want to hear from brands at this time, and what kinds of messages are they most receptive to?





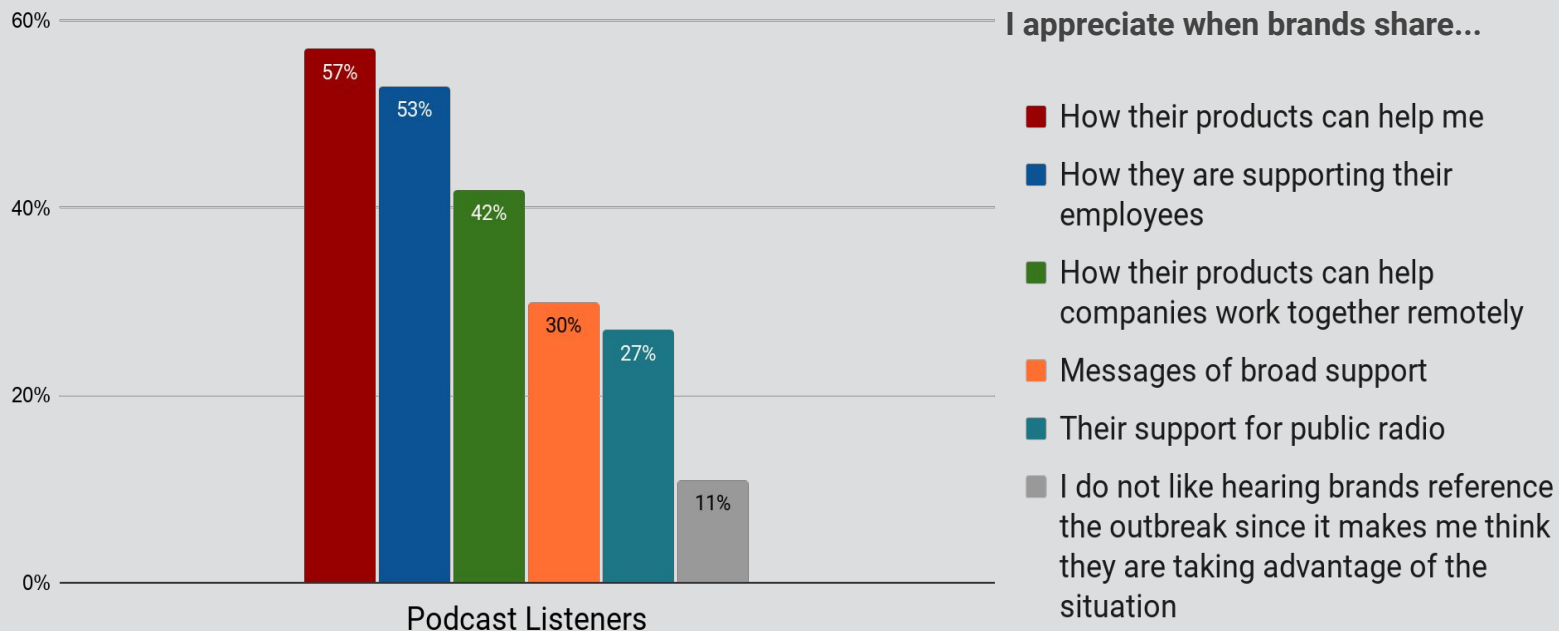
Best practices for reaching podcast audiences during COVID-19

To explore what podcast listeners want to hear from brands during the pandemic, NPM worked with Veritonic to test messages that acknowledge the COVID-19 crisis and survey listeners to find out what messaging is perceived as most appropriate. Our findings revealed that audiences prefer messages that:

1. **Address the current moment:** Reference the uniqueness of our current moment, acknowledging that these are challenging times.
2. **Tell people about products that can help them:** Mentions of specific products and initiatives spike listening engagement and the largest intent increases were for companies offering products geared toward quarantine life.
3. **Share initiatives that support employees and the community:** Messages about community initiatives are perceived as more sincere and public radio listeners want to hear how brands are supporting employees.

Address the current moment

89% of podcast listeners appreciate when brands **reference the uniqueness of our current moment**. They find messages more relevant, sincere and trustworthy when brands acknowledge that these are challenging times, and we saw increased engagement around phrases like “during these challenging times,” “make the transition to working from home,” and “virtual happy hour.”



Tell people about products that can help

When asked about the types of messages they appreciate hearing from brands, **57% of listeners (the largest percentage) said they appreciate hearing about products that can help them.**

Mentions of specific products and initiatives also saw spikes in listener engagement.

The largest intent increases among the messages tested were for companies offering products geared toward quarantine life.

38%

Increase in intent among public radio listeners after hearing a spot focused on work from home products

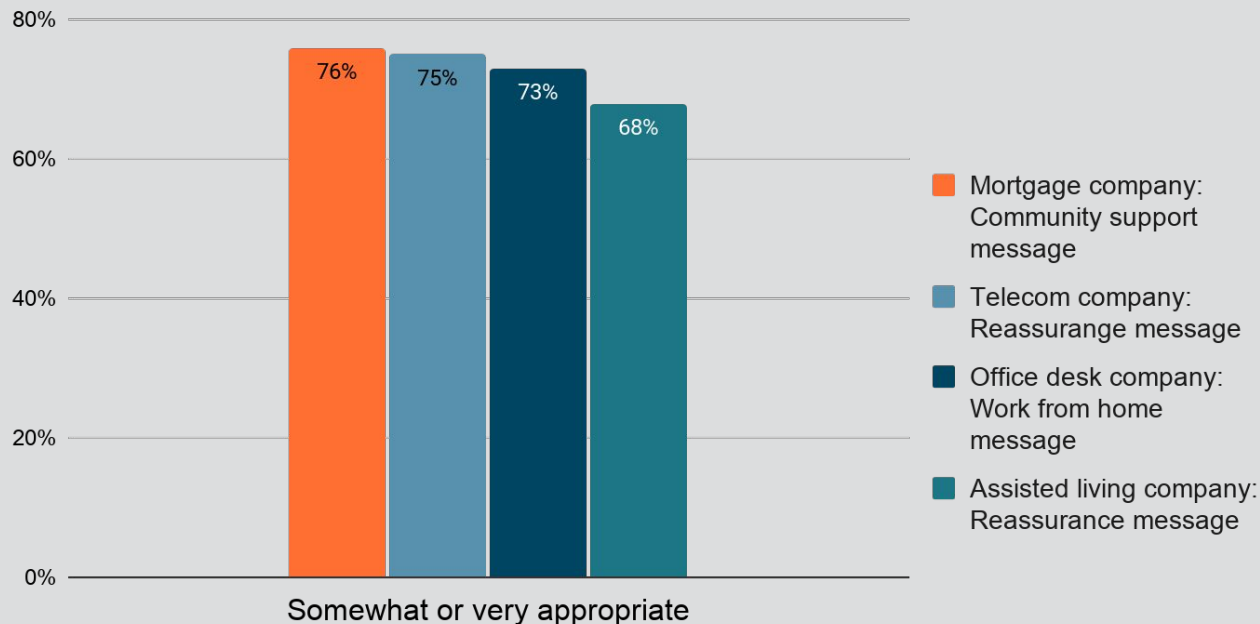
29%

Increase in intent among podcast listeners hearing a mid-roll focused on work from home products

Share initiatives that support employees and the community

53% of public radio listeners specifically want to hear how brands are supporting employees. And, when podcast listeners were asked about the appropriateness of COVID-19-related messages, a mid-roll about a brand's efforts to support the community came out on top – 76% of listeners rated it as appropriate (and only 8% found it inappropriate).

Given the current environment with the COVID-19 outbreak, how would you rate the appropriateness of this message?





DISCOVER MORE

Explore NPR podcasts:

npr.org/programs

Sponsorship opportunities:

[nationalpublicmedia.com/audio/
podcast-sponsorship/](https://nationalpublicmedia.com/audio/podcast-sponsorship/)