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A Podcasting Series on Employing Podcasts as an Effective Marketing Method for Small Businesses

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A Podcasting Series on Employing Podcasts as an Effective Marketing Method for Small
Businesses

SeVohn Hunter

Thesis Project submitted
to the Reed College of Media
at West Virginia University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

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SeVohn Hunter

This time has been called the "Golden Age" of podcasting. The number of people listening to podcasts continues to grow year after year as the medium itself continues to evolve. The ability to target specific, or niche, audiences is one reason why podcasting is so attractive to consumers. This also makes podcasts useful for small businesses. Like podcasts, small businesses can target niche audiences and cater to specific needs. The purpose of this project was to investigate the benefits of podcast marketing as it pertains to the uncertainty reduction theory and to create a podcast that can serve as a guide for small businesses that want to create a podcast to generate brand awareness.

Acknowledgements

Earning my master's degree was never included in my college plans. I was satisfied with completing undergrad in three years and moving straight into the bustling world of the advertising industry. It wasn't until I was finishing up my associate's degree and moving on to West Virginia University's Morgantown campus that my then boss, LaDonna Gardner, stressed the importance of getting your master's before leaving college. Since LaDonna's encouraging words convinced me to pursue my master's degree, I have met many influential people who have helped me get where I am now – completing my degree. I'd like to thank them now.

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Introduction

Before 2009, Joe Rogan was recognized for his acting roles, stand-up comedy career, and hosting *Fear Factor*. Fast forward a decade, and now Joe Rogan is largely known for his podcast, *The Joe Rogan Experience*, which brought in a staggering \$30 million in 2019, a number that is only expected to grow. Early in his career, Rogan had a goal of becoming a successful entertainer. He took conventional opportunities to elevate his status; however, Rogan's path toward stardom took an unexpected turn with the start of his podcast, *The Joe Rogan Experience*, in 2003. It was a bit of a gamble at the time; the term "podcasting" didn't even exist, but it paid off. Today, Joe Rogan has been referred to as the "world's highest-paid podcaster" and attracts noteworthy and newsworthy guests on his show, including Elon Musk and Edward Snowden, among others.

The story of Joe Rogan is a great example of how quickly the podcasting industry has expanded and how the audience continues to grow. Edison Research and Triton Digital (2020) reported in its 2020 edition of *The Infinite Dial*, which studies consumer behavior involving digital media, that the number of podcast listeners is growing at about 16% each year and is soon to reach 100 million consumers (p.69). This consistent growth has occurred since the inception of podcasts. A year after the term "podcasting" was first applied in 2004, only 22% of Americans were familiar with podcasting. By 2007, 37% of Americans were familiar with podcasting (p.58). Podcasting was almost an instant hit even though the medium and the process of listening that it introduced were very new to the world of audio. As of October 2020, podcasting's share of listening had hit an all-time high. Tom Weber from Edison Research (2020) reported, "the share of time Americans age 13+ spend with podcasts as a percentage of all their audio listening has tripled from just 2% in 2014," and Weber explained, "podcasting has become the

greatest companion medium. Not only can you take it with you while you do other things, but we also see people turning to podcasts for a sense of community and connection during a very stressful time (Edison Research, 2020).”

This new media is used in a variety of applications, from news to entertainment to marketing. Podcasts are saturating the media landscape, but no one seems to mind. One reason podcasts are prolific is because it’s fairly easy to acquire the necessary technology and technological know-how to produce one. Another reason why there are so many podcasts that continue to draw listeners is the ability of podcasts to target niche audiences. In 2020, there are thousands of podcasts and millions of podcast episodes to choose from that match listeners’ specific interests. This negates a feeling of exasperation on the listener’s part by having to sift through lots of content to find something particular.

Like podcasts, small businesses in the U.S. often appeal to a niche community, either based on geography or on the goods or services the business provides. Reaching out to and connecting with a niche community or target audience should be the main focus of a small business marketing strategy, and it’s important that the target audience is being reached consistently and effectively. Meanwhile, the number of businesses, in general, using digital marketing is increasing as research shows that digital marketing methods are very successful in terms of key performance indicators (KPI) related to return on investment (ROI). Forbes reported 56% of businesses claim half of their sales occur online and 59% of brands intend to increase their spending on digital advertisements (Patoli, 2020). While digital marketing continues to aid businesses in reaching their goal KPIs, technological developments continue to lead to innovations in digital media; podcasting is one of the new avenues of digital marketing.

Traditional media has become just that, traditional. Placing ads on digital spaces and using digital platforms to reach audiences is the new normal. It is now easier than ever to reach an audience and leave an impression, thanks to the internet and its many advancements. Additionally, consumers want to be reached authentically, in a way that is unobtrusive and genuine. The traditional advertisement obstructing your internet browsing no longer does the trick; it actually does the opposite. This new digital age has created a new consumer, and therefore, requires a new marketing strategy.

Podcasts have been called the “reinvention of radio” (BunnyStudio, 2021). November 2, 2020, marked the 100th anniversary of commercial radio. On November 2, 1920, KDKA in Pittsburgh, PA, broadcast the returns of the Harding/Cox presidential election. KDKA continued to pave the path for commercial radio by broadcasting live sports including a West Virginia University football game in 1921 (Federal Communications Commission, n.d.). KDKA set in motion what would soon be called the Golden Age of Radio in the 1930s and 1940s. Now, there is a question of whether we are currently in the Golden Age of podcasts with popular podcasts like “Serial” gaining millions of listeners and the industry continuing to grow quickly (Sillesen, 2014).

Radio shows have been around for a century, and although they share some commonalities with present-day podcasts, there are also drastic differences. First, although there are a variety of radio shows, in general, radio shows have to be more generalized than podcasts because radio shows are being broadcast to mass audiences. Podcasts can target niche audiences because there are so many podcasts to choose from and all of them are accessible to everyone, at their convenience. Another difference is that the Federal Communications Commission regulates radio programming; however, podcasts published through the Internet do not face these same

regulations. Regarding accessibility, podcasts can be accessed anywhere, anytime, by anyone, and although radio shows have become more accessible, there are still shows that you cannot listen to after they have been broadcast. One could argue that these differences give podcasts some advantages as a marketing tool for small businesses.

The purpose of this professional project was to understand if and how small businesses are using podcasting as an advertising method and/or part of a digital marketing strategy, as well as to provide small businesses with information on how podcasting can be used as an avenue to help small businesses reach their business goals through effective digital marketing. The goal of the project was to ultimately help small businesses implement marketing strategies that include podcasting. In order to reach the goal of the project, it was first necessary to synthesize existing literature about podcasting and how it's used to advertise and market businesses. After gathering information from the existing literature, in-depth interviews with 7 small businesses were conducted. This qualitative research for the project was necessary as a means to collect data about the marketing methods currently used by some small businesses and for the researcher to gather more insights on podcasting for small businesses.

The information gained from the review of literature and the qualitative study was applied to develop an episodic podcast series that covers podcast marketing as a concept, how to use a podcast to market a small business, and the best practices of podcasting for marketing purposes. The first episode of the podcast series defines podcast marketing, how it has been employed by other businesses and a brief history of podcasting in general. The second episode of the series explains why podcast marketing works by defining terms like owned media and content marketing, as well as what podcast marketing looks like. The third episode of the series lists the equipment needed, platforms for distributing podcasts, and editing software

recommended to create a successful podcast. The fourth and final episode of the podcast discusses the goals associated with using a podcast as a marketing tool, who the podcast should target, what content can be included and the structure of the podcast. Each episode in the series is between five and seven minutes; the podcast series as a whole is approximately 24 minutes long.

Significance of the Project

The podcast industry is still relatively new and, as stated earlier, continues to grow and develop. It is challenging for small business owners to keep up with digital marketing trends and to constantly learn and implement new skills. This means small businesses that are eager to implement new digital marketing methods are faced with a large feat of trial and error until the perfect strategy is found. This project investigated how podcasting is being used by small businesses by using existing literature about podcasting and interviewing small business owners on podcasting as a means for advertising and digital marketing. Essentially, the significance of this project is that it caters to a niche audience that needs updated research and resources about podcasting as a digital marketing method.

Research questions/hypothesis

The problem addressed in this project is the lack of resources for small businesses that want to expand or create a digital marketing plan to include podcasting. The purpose of the qualitative study portion of the project was to identify which forms of digital marketing small businesses are currently using and whether any are using podcasting to reach their consumers. The research question my project aimed to answer is:

RQ1: How can podcasting play a role in the digital marketing efforts of small businesses?

Theoretical framework

Uncertainty reduction theory is a concept first introduced by Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese (1975). The two created this theory to explain how strangers in their first interaction use communication to reduce uncertainty. This means, when people are faced with uncertainty, they undergo certain processes of communication, interaction, and research to gain information in order to ease their anxiety, lower possible risks, and overall reduce the uncertainty about the situation. Srivastava and Chandra (2018) believe social presence also plays a role in uncertainty reduction and building trust, and with the onset of social networking sites and similar platforms, the uncertainty reduction process now includes gaining social information through the internet and technology (Antheunis et al., 2010).

This same uncertainty reduction process is undergone when people are choosing whether to interact or do business with small businesses. There can be a fear of engaging with small businesses because these businesses are not as widely known. This hesitancy is commonly addressed in the plethora of articles and blog posts encouraging people to shop small and local (Haber, 2016; Horvath, 2020; Olmstead, 2020). Due to the internet and digital devices, it is now common for consumers to research a product before they intend to buy it and gather information about the product and the supplier for several days before purchasing in-store (Alaimo, 2018; GE Retail Capital Bank, 2013). This information-gaining process will typically begin with an online search, which leads to the supplier's website, and then the consumer will head to the store to complete the purchase (GE Retail Capital Bank, 2013). Consumers' routines that involve online product and service research show why it's important for small businesses to maintain digital spaces and engage in digital marketing. Using a podcast as a marketing tool is a way for small businesses to share information about their products or services, establish or maintain their

business' digital presence, and reduce the uncertainty potential customers could have when deciding whether to support that business.

Literature review

The purpose of this literature review is to investigate the known impact of podcast advertising and digital marketing on small business success. It is well documented that podcast advertising and digital marketing are great tools for businesses that wish to increase brand awareness, engagement, and customer acquisition. What the current literature does not address is how small businesses with smaller budgets implement a marketing strategy that utilizes podcasting.

Before presenting the literature, it is important to provide the definitions for advertising and marketing, so the difference between the two is evident. The American Marketing Association (n.d.) defines advertising as paying to place a message with the intention of selling a product or service, whereas marketing is used to connect with customers with the intention of delivering messages and establishing their brand. With these definitions in mind, podcast advertising is paying to place ads in a podcast and podcast marketing is using a podcast to increase brand awareness.

This literature review covers the history and current state of podcasting and digital marketing in order to explain what these two topics are, how they are being used, and their impact on businesses that use them. A detailed list of the search terms used to locate the sources found in this review are as follows: podcast(ing), podcast advertising, small business, marketing, digital marketing, SME, sole proprietor, social media, campaign, niche marketing, digital spaces, owned media, small firm, strategy, online presence, offline presence, mobile marketing.

Podcasting Defined

A decade ago, McClung and Johnson (2010) described a podcast as “audio and video files that can be downloaded to a desktop computer, iPod, or other portable media players for playback later (p. 83).” Now, 10 years later, the dictionary definition of a podcast (iPod + broadcast) is “a program (as of music or talk) made available in digital format for automatic download over the internet (“Podcast”, n.d.).”

Podcasts are completely digital audio files that may require downloading prior to listening to the file. The reason why podcasts are becoming increasingly popular is because of the control this platform gives the media consumer (Haywood, 2007). The consumer decides which podcast they want to listen to, when they will listen to it, how much of the episode they listen to, and whether they want to skip or listen again to sections. All the while, consumers have the ability to make these particular decisions each time they listen to a podcast.

Podcast Marketing

Podcasts are now a commonly used form of owned media. Owned media are channels of communication that a business has complete control over like their website, social media profiles, and emails (BigCommerce, n.d.). The creator of a podcast has complete control on what content is being shared, and this can be used to build a brand’s reputation similar to other forms of owned media. Implementing podcasts into a marketing strategy can increase website traffic, brand awareness and visibility, and the number of new customers (WebFX, 2018). Additionally, a podcast is a way for small businesses to show more of their personality and business mission, which is important for the process of uncertainty reduction because it allows consumers to meet and interact with real people rather than a brand. Podcast marketing is a great way for small

businesses with small budgets to increase important metrics associated with brand awareness without spending thousands of dollars.

Podcast marketing can be described as a form of branded content. Branded content is produced with the intention of entertaining or informing the target audience and is typically used as a tactic to support brand identity and exhibit business values (Jankovic, 2020). Using a podcast as branded content can help build relationships with audiences, educate the target audience about services or products, and increase conversions (Baker, 2020).

Content marketing is a strategy brands use to reach their target audiences that has proven to be effective and successful. It is an authentic way to reach the target audience and uses content to tell a story about the brand that will entice audience members to engage with the brand. Content marketing is used to boost important business metrics like sales, leads, website traffic, etc. (Baker, 2020). In a 2018 content marketing study conducted by ProfitWell, it was found that “companies utilizing a content marketing strategy are seeing 30% higher growth rates than their counterparts not utilizing a content strategy [and] this is likely due to the evergreen and brand elements of content” (Campbell, 2018).

When it comes to reducing uncertainty and increasing comfort, content can make or break a brand. Communication and credibility are very important when reducing uncertainty, and content is a great way to communicate with prospective customers and build a brand’s credibility (Androsko, 2011). A branded podcast encourages communication and interaction with prospective customers as well as builds a brand's credibility through the information they share.

Although this project focuses on podcasting as a marketing tool, it is important to discuss the history of podcast advertising and how the two (podcast advertising and podcast marketing)

are different. Since its inception in 2004, the podcasting industry has been on a steady climb. As podcasts have grown in numbers, so too has the audience and the medium's advertising revenue. It is predicted that in 2020, podcast advertising revenue will reach nearly \$1 billion, a 15% increase from the previous year (Vorhaus, 2019). Podcast advertising has come a long way from where it started.

Initially, advertisers did not jump at the opportunity that this new form of media presented. In a survey conducted in 2008, 20% of advertisers said they would be allocating 20% of their budget to podcasts (Shreffler, 2009). Today, podcast advertising revenue is consistently growing with an estimated 18.8% growth rate through 2024, and in 2020 there is expected to be \$800 million spent on podcast ads (Inside Radio, 2020). Podcasts may have been underutilized initially because of the focus at the time on social media sites and how to optimize that landscape. For those who hopped on early, however, they reaped the benefits of the growing industry. One example is Mailchimp, an email marketing platform founded in 2001 that sponsored the first season of the award-winning podcast *Serial*. Thirty-one million episodes of *Serial* were downloaded, meaning Mailchimp's ad basically went "viral" (Centaur Media, 2020).

With about 15 years under its belt now, podcasting is a less risky investment because there is more evidence of its success, and audience analytics are available for podcast metrics like listenership, downloads, etc. Additionally, with other forms of media (radio, television, websites, etc.) being saturated with advertisers, jumping over to a new medium gives plenty of room for play for advertisers. Edison Research (2020) reported that 75% of the U.S. population is familiar with podcasts and this number is continuing to climb. Podcasts are becoming the place to reach niche audiences and businesses should be using this to their advantage.

After many years of online advertising, the use of ad blockers is becoming more common and browsers like Google Chrome and Safari have also taken measures to prevent pop-up advertisements (Handley, 2018). This means companies are essentially wasting money on placing advertisements on websites because ad blockers are preventing the ads from being shown. The ability for consumer control makes podcasts and its advertising much more attractive to the consumer. Podcast ads can either be read live or pre-produced. There are also different positions to place ads in podcast episodes as well as different ad formats. Live-read ads are read by the podcast host while recording the episode. Pre-produced ads can be made by the sponsor and resemble a radio spot or read by the host typically from a script. Pre-produced ads are added into the podcast in post-production, and therefore create a break in the episode. Host-read podcast ads are delivered in a native form that makes it feel more authentic to the listener because it's delivered by a trusted person in a more subtle way (McKnight, 2019). Not only are podcast advertisements less disruptive, 78% of podcast listeners said they don't mind podcast ads, which could be why 61% bought a product or service after hearing an advertisement for it in a podcast (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2017).

Some of the most well-known brands have started buying ads in podcasts. Companies like ZipRecruiter, Capital One, iHeartMedia, Cash App, and Vivid Seats are frequently buying ads in different podcasts (MediaRadar, 2020). According to a study by Media Radar (2020) in 2019, the top three industries buying podcast ads are media and entertainment, financial, and tech companies.

The History of the Small Business

Starting a small business is a daunting task and one that may seem like an unnerving goal, but it also has potential to be incredibly rewarding in the end. The most common reason for

starting a small business is the desire of sole ownership and control. The next most common reason is the ability to pursue one's passion. Operating a small business brings freedom and independence, which is extremely attractive to many people. No matter the reason for starting a business or continuing to operate it, small businesses are an integral component of the U.S. economy and growth (Mohsin, 2020).

Small firms provide a large amount of job generation and destruction according to Headd (2010). This process is known as creative destruction, a term coined by Joseph Schumpeter (1942), that includes the creating and destroying of jobs due to the creation and destruction of businesses. Although this process seems to be counterproductive, David Birch (1979) found that the result of creative destruction is an increase in employment. Small businesses are a major part of creative destruction, which further proves the significant role small businesses play regarding economic growth. This statement is supported by Mohsin (2020) who said, small and medium-sized enterprises, "significantly contribute to global economic growth by providing employment, promoting sustainable industrialization, and fostering innovation" (para. 12).

In the U.S., a small business has fewer than 500 employees, as defined by the Small Business Administration. This characteristic is true for 99.9 percent of all businesses in the country (Mohsin, 2020). These businesses span almost every industry in the U.S. and have even created their own industries as gaps have been found in the supply and demand of certain services.

An advantage small businesses have over large firms is their ability to cater services or products to a niche audience. Although serving a niche community may put a limit on the number of customers or clients, servicing a niche community can reduce the amount of competition and increase customer acquisition.

Susan Ward (2020) from The Balance Small Business defines a niche market as “a focused, targetable portion of a broader market in which specialized products or services can be sold” (para 1). Ward explains that niche markets create a demand that mainstream providers cannot address and are often overlooked. There are a handful of benefits that can result from a small business serving a niche market, including low competition, the ability to cater marketing efforts to a narrow target audience, developing the reputation of an expert in the niche market, and a low-risk option with opportunity for expansion later.

Importance of Digital Marketing to Small Businesses

For some businesses, digital marketing is the only strategy used to market a business, build brand awareness, and increase customer acquisition. Additionally, digital marketing is seen as a necessity for small business success even if small business employees lack the expertise to effectively implement it.

In a qualitative study conducted by Christopher Serafin (2018) that investigated how small businesses in Palm Springs, California, understood and used digital marketing methods, one of the overarching themes found was “digital marketing was widely seen as an influential aspect pertaining to participant businesses” (p. 80). The findings from Serafin’s study gave inspiration for this study because many of the participants acknowledged how impactful digital marketing is but also how difficult it can be to understand and implement.

Serafin used a case study design to interview and observe sole proprietors to gather information about the digital marketing habits of sole proprietors. The participants of the study were 15 sole proprietors who operated their own marketing strategies. They were interviewed about the digital marketing efforts they engaged in and particularly focused on the use of social

networking sites. These interviews provided fascinating information about the sentiments regarding digital marketing from a small business owner's perspective.

The participants of the study revealed many concerns they faced while attempting to market their businesses. One concern was the availability of time. The sole proprietors believed they did not have enough time to maintain their digital spaces as well as keep up with other tasks related to running a business. A lack of knowledge was also a shared concern among participants. The complexity of digital marketing methods or digital networks in general was overwhelming to some participants and added to the pressures of running a business on their own. The participants recognized the influence digital marketing had on their business goals, but said the time and energy needed to implement digital marketing strategies was too demanding.

The results from Serafin's qualitative study further prove the significance of this project. It is obvious some small business owners are overwhelmed with the number of digital marketing methods to choose from and even more stressed with having to learn how to implement these methods.

Research Method

In-depth interviews were used to gather additional information needed to address the research question. Qualitative methodologies are useful when the research questions established have to do with "how" or "why" something is occurring and examining these processes (Trainor & Graue, 2014). This project has its own audience – small business owners. Since this project involves creating an informative podcast series for this particular audience, it is imperative that perspectives from this population are considered and included in the research. Also, conducting in-depth interviews allows the participants to say as much or as little as they like. This is not

something that can be easily accomplished in surveys or focus groups. The research question addressed in this study does not have a finite answer, and conducting in-depth interviews allowed each participant to express their opinions in their responses. The findings from this research were shared in a podcast series, and in-depth interviews were a great way to collect data for the research, as well as collect content for the podcast series. With the participants' consent, the interviews were recorded and relevant sections were inserted into the podcast episodes to share the experiences of small business owners first hand.

Participants/sampling

There are millions of people in the U.S. who own a small business and even more who work for one. Although the Small Business Administration defines a small business as a firm with under 500 employees, these parameters are too broad for the purposes of this project. For convenience and applicability, the population only included small businesses with less than 20 employees who are located in West Virginia and its nearby regions. Specifically the owners of small businesses were asked to participate in an interview unless they had an employee whose main job responsibilities were related to marketing, digital marketing, social media, web, or something similar. From the population, a total of 7 interviews were conducted. This number was based on convenience and time available for the project.

Procedure

To find small businesses, social media sites like Facebook and Instagram were very useful, as well as a website called Alignable, an online space where small businesses can connect with potential customers. Main streets in metropolitan areas within the geographic sample area were also researched as a way to find local, small businesses. This step is necessary because the

purpose of this study was to service small businesses that are overwhelmed with managing their digital spaces and businesses like these may not be easy to find online. From these procedures, a list, categorized by location, of 100+ businesses to reach out to for possible participation was created. This list served as the population pooled when selecting participants for in-depth interviews. Each business on the list was contacted and asked to participate in the study, for convenience, the first 7 businesses that responded made up the sample (see Appendix A).

The interview script (see Appendix C) was created with the research question in mind as well as the theoretical framework used for this research, uncertainty reduction theory. It was important to base the questions off of knowledge of this theory because the purpose of creating a podcast as a marketing tool, using digital marketing, and maintaining digital spaces is to inform customers about a brand and reduce the uncertainty of conducting business.

Prior to a recorded interview, the participants were made aware that the excerpts from the interview might be used in the podcast series (see Appendix B). The interviews were conducted via phone call, Zoom video conference, or email. Each interview was recorded for the purpose of transcribing the interviews and for the possibility of including portions of the interviews in the podcast series.

Analysis

The in-depth interviews were analyzed using the interview transcripts to find common themes among the small business owners and employees. The content of these transcripts was analyzed to find patterns, themes, and congruences, which will provide insights and help answer the research question. The information found from the existing literature along with my

knowledge and past experiences in podcasting was also used to answer the research question and to inform content for the podcast series.

Podcast Production

Having experience in podcast hosting and production, I served as the writer, producer and host of the podcast series for this project. There are many podcasts that address small business success and even more centered around marketing, but I have yet to find a podcast about podcast marketing and specifically for small businesses. “The Business of Digital Podcast” is a digital marketing podcast hosted by two digital professionals. Each episode covers a topic related to digital marketing like SEO, repurposing content, apps and tools and so much more. In some episodes they are joined by a guest and in others it is just the two hosts. Each episode is around 20 minutes long. This podcast served as an exemplar of what I wanted my final podcast to resemble.

Another podcast that served as an exemplar is NPR’s “Up First”. This podcast gives a rundown of the top news stories every weekday. It features two hosts along with interview guests and inserted sound bites. Each episode is around 10 minutes and is effective in delivering the essential news of the day by being direct and concise. I wanted to model my podcast after this direct approach to delivering information.

After the research portion of this project was completed, I began the podcast production portion. First an outline was created for each episode, interviews and research were reviewed, and then scripts were written for each episode. After the scripts were completed, the podcast was ready to be recorded. I was able to record the podcast from home using a microphone and laptop. I used Audacity and Adobe Audition to record, edit, and produce each episode. I reached out to a

fellow student at West Virginia University to create original music for the podcast. I created the cover art for the podcast myself because I have design experience.

Once the podcast was produced, the last step was to distribute it. Most successful podcasts have a landing page where people who listen or want to listen can find the podcast and other information about the show and the host. Carli van Heerden (2018) said, “if your goal is to reach as many interested listeners and impact as many lives as possible, then a website will be the central tool you need to achieve exactly that!” Housing a podcast on a website can also help with connecting to listeners, sharing information, and tracking metrics. With this in mind, I built a page on my portfolio website where listeners can find my podcast and background information.

In addition to creating a webpage for the podcast, I also used Anchor (a hosting platform) to share the podcast on all major podcast directories including Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, and Spotify. Accessibility to the podcast is critical because I want every small business to have the opportunity to listen to the podcast and gain this essential knowledge about podcast marketing.

As promised to the participants in the qualitative study I conducted, I will share this research paper and the podcast webpage with them. The paper and podcast will also be shared on my personal social media profiles using keywords and hashtags related to podcast marketing and small businesses. I will ask faculty and staff in West Virginia University’s Reed College of Media and local chamber of commerce organizations to share the podcast on their digital spaces and provide the following language for them to use: SeVohn Hunter, a West Virginia University master’s student, conducted research and created a podcast for small business owners and entrepreneurs to use as a resource for creating a podcast used to market their business. Her

podcast features small business owners in the region and includes her research findings and how-to help for starting a podcast.

Findings

The purpose of this project was to understand the challenges and setbacks small business owners, and specifically, those in West Virginia and the nearby regions, face when it comes to digital marketing and more specifically, podcast marketing. The goal of this project was to provide these small business owners with a resource they can use to effectively integrate podcast marketing into their digital marketing plan. With the purpose and goals of the project in mind, the research question was created:

RQ1: How can podcasting play a role in the digital marketing efforts of small businesses?

The data collected through existing literature and in-depth interviews with small business owners was analyzed to address this question. The findings of this study are as follows.

Digital Marketing Challenges

All of the participants interviewed expressed they used digital marketing in some capacity. This shows, among the population sampled, these small business owners recognize the importance of digital marketing and having an online presence. One participant stated, “It seems like now, especially after corona, so many more businesses have realized how important it is to be online. You have to have an online presence now or you're probably not surviving” (see Appendix D).

Relevance for Industries

However, the upkeep of digital spaces is very time consuming, and the frequency of updates does seem to depend on the industry of the business. A participant who owns a flower shop expressed since her product is perishable, she must keep her digital spaces up to date almost in real time. This is also the reason she believes long-form media like podcasts and videos would not benefit her business (see Appendix E). Similarly, a participant who works in marketing for a company that sells a very niche product, antenna masts, feels the upkeep of digital spaces is important but not a top priority because it is not difficult for a customer looking for such a specific product to find their business. He said, “I think because our business has such a niche product, worldwide, there’s only a few companies like us. Typically, when someone is looking for our niche product, we’re going to come up close to the top of page one. We’ve tried other types of digital campaigns and we’re spending \$1000-\$1400 a month and we don’t get any traffic from it” (see Appendix F).

Lack of Time

With small businesses barely having enough time to manage their digital spaces, adding a new strategy to the mix is not a plausible option. A small business owner and his marketing manager said they discuss new strategies to potentially implement, but the services they provide to their clients take priority. They also expressed they try their hardest to post on social platforms like Facebook and Instagram, but it has never been consistent, and the solution would probably be to hire someone to manage their socials full-time, but that isn’t something that can be done currently (see Appendix G). A participant who first outsourced social media content and eventually ended up hiring someone to take over social posting said, “I was sketchy at best with it, but when I did post, I felt like it was the right thing, I just didn’t do it often enough. Social

media posts are free, but it does take a lot of time to get it right, so I'm really happy having it in house now, but I think that you do have to find the right voice so it's always consistent with the brand" (see Appendix H). Additionally, a third participant agreed about the lack of time to manage digital spaces while also running a business, stating, "I really think people don't understand how hard it is to be a small business owner. There are so many things you have to think about all the time. It's just hard to come up with new ideas every single week."

COVID-19 Crisis

The unexpected onset of the pandemic also produced numerous unforeseen issues for small business owners. For example, the flower shop owner explained how travel bans made it nearly impossible for her to get flowers. A participant who works in the salt-making industry said she had to let go of most of her staff at the beginning of the pandemic because most of their business came from restaurants and events on their farm. The small business owner and his marketing manager also suffered from staffing problems due to the pandemic. They had previously hired an employee to take care of digital marketing but had to fire them once the pandemic began.

Podcast Marketing

The analysis of the literature review revealed there are not enough resources about podcast marketing. Most of the current information available focuses on how to market a podcast, rather than using a podcasting as a marketing tool; or how to utilize a podcast marketing agency, which may be too costly for small businesses. Conducting a search of "podcast marketing" on Apple Podcasts results similarly in podcasts about marketing (i.e., digital, online, social media, etc.) but not any podcasts about podcast marketing.

Learning Curve of Technology

If it is already difficult for small business owners to manage their previously established digital spaces, it may seem nearly impossible to figure out how to create new digital content. One participant expressed her stress of not knowing if a new strategy will pay off stating, “It’s very difficult to know that these sorts of things are working and if these sorts of things are just fads that are just going to last for six months or something. They might bring you a couple clients, but are they really going to sustain the whole length of the time that you want to be in business. That’s a big hurdle is just trying to keep up with all of the changes that keep happening.” Similarly, another participant said, “As a small company of only 12 employees, I think you kind of get stuck in a rut with the way that you do things. I’ve done this for two decades so I’m not constantly looking and branching out for new ideas.”

Medium of Podcasting

Collectively, the research participants had heard of podcasting but only a few knew about podcast marketing in the sense of using podcasts as a digital marketing tool to promote their business. Three participants had previously sought out information about how to start their own podcast but had not yet gone through with creating the podcast for different reasons associated with running a small business. One participant explained she had considered starting a podcast but wasn’t sure if her target audience listened to podcasts. She also was unsure what the content of the podcast should include, and she did not know if she would have the time to be consistent with recording, editing, and distributing. Another participant faced similar problems, stating, “We’re working on that [creating a podcast]. We’re trying to figure out the time and when we need to do it and how often we should do it. I do see the benefit of it. It’s one of those things that, as a small business, you get so caught up in the day-to-day stuff, and to add one more thing. We

just need to figure out how to carve out that time.” Additionally, all the participants were interested in learning more about podcast marketing and expressed their excitement for a resource made specifically for small business owners like themselves.

Evaluation of the interviews reveals small business owners are facing a dilemma: they are expected to maintain their digital spaces using the newest digital marketing strategies and tactics, but they are not provided with the resources they need. Every participant expressed their interest in podcast marketing, yet there are no resources for small businesses about using a podcast as a marketing tool. The uncertainty reduction process is important to consider when it comes to doing business with small businesses and validates the need for small businesses to maintain a strong digital presence through means including a podcast. Furthermore, the findings from this research prove the importance of the podcast created for this professional project.

Evaluation

My initial interest in the project topic came from reading Christopher Serafin’s study about digital marketing methods employed by sole proprietors I mentioned in the literature review. I knew running a small business was a daunting task, and frequently ended in failure, but being one of the biggest factors in economic growth, you would think there would be endless resources available and targeted at small businesses to aid in their success. Sadly, this isn’t the case.

Through this project, I truly learned just how draining and difficult it can be to create and maintain a successful small business. The already strenuous responsibilities associated with running a small business were amplified by the pandemic. This caused a setback when it came to researching small businesses as many businesses are currently operating in crisis mode and

participating in my study can't be a high priority right now. With a longer timeline, I could have completed more research, interviews, and even a longer, more in-depth podcast series. However, this research and podcast is the foundational step to my own future business.

Next Steps

The future of this project includes promoting this series using multiple strategies as well as eventually building upon the series and using this project to launch my own business in podcast marketing.

Upon the approval of this project, the podcast will be shared to all major podcast directories using Anchor, my preferred hosting platform. A [landing page](#) will be created where small businesses can listen to the podcast, read the full report, access the transcripts for each episode, learn more about the small businesses that participated in the study, and contact me for questions or to work together (image on the left).

Along with sharing the podcast on my personal social media profiles using relevant hashtags and keywords (i.e., West Virginia, small business, and podcast marketing), I will also ask organizations like the West Virginia Small Business Administration, West Virginia Chamber of Commerce, and local Chambers of Commerce and visitors bureaus to share the podcast on their websites and social media profiles (image on the right on page 24).

Another aspect to monitor after the distribution of this podcast and project is the return on investment (ROI) of the podcast. Since there were no financial contributions to this podcast, the ROI will be evaluated using metrics such as number of listeners, website traffic, and social media engagement. I will measure the number of listeners each month with a goal of reaching 100 listeners every month. These metrics can be viewed using the in-site analytics feature from Anchor. I will measure website traffic by viewing the number of visitors before and after the podcast has been distributed. This can be viewed using the in-site analytics tool from Squarespace, the host of my website. I will measure social media engagement by viewing the number of likes, comments, and follows generated on posts about the podcast.

Eventually, I will add to this series and go more in-depth about the topics covered in these four episodes already produced as well as exploring more topics related to podcast marketing. Other resources can also be created like infographics, videos, one-on-one sessions, and more. The goal of this project at its conclusion is to create brand awareness for myself and acquire new contacts and connections that can lead to a successful business in podcast marketing.

Appendices

Appendix A – Recruitment Script

Hello!

I'll start by introducing myself. I am SeVohn Hunter, a master's student at WVU. I am currently studying journalism, but my passion is marketing and advertising (my undergraduate degree is in advertising and public relations). During my time in school, I have dabbled in social media marketing, videography, podcast production, graphic design, and my involvement in the college led me to being named one of the top PR students in the US in 2020.

The reason I'm contacting you is related to my master's program. I am working on a thesis project involving small businesses, digital marketing, and podcast marketing. I found your business through your podcast. It is my understanding that your business is classified as a small business - if that isn't the case, please let me know so I can remove you from my contact list - and for the purpose of my research, I have chosen to focus on small businesses in West Virginia and nearby regions.

Participation in this research project will involve an in-depth interview where we discuss the digital marketing methods used by your small business. Participation in this research study must be voluntary and there will be no identifying information shared about the participants.

If what I've expressed so far is of any interest to you, please respond to this email and we can discuss your business more in-depth and possibly schedule a short interview to help with my research.

Have a great day!
SeVohn

Appendix B – Interview Protocol

Cover Letter
Minimal Risk

Dear Participant,

This letter is a request for you to take part in a research project to understand how small business owners are using podcasting as a tool for advertising and digital marketing. This project is being conducted by SeVohn Hunter in the Reed College of Media at WVU under the supervision of Emily Corio, a Teaching Associate Professor at WVU in the Reed College of Media, to fulfil requirements for a Master's Degree in Journalism.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to partake in an in-depth interview via phone call, video conference, or email where you will be asked to share your personal experiences with podcasting and digital marketing for small businesses and what strategies you are currently using. If the interview is conducted via phone or video conference, the conversation will be recorded so that it may be transcribed. Portions of the interview may also be used in the podcast series I am creating to present my research findings. Your participation in this project will take approximately 30 minutes. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

Your involvement in this project will be kept as confidential as legally possible. All data will be reported in the aggregate. Any personal information collected about you will not be shared. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer and you may discontinue at any time. West Virginia University's Institutional Review Board approval of this project is on file.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me at 304-886-3787 or by e-mail at sbh0006@mix.wvu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the WVU Office of Human Research Protection by phone at 304-293-7073 or by email at IRB@mail.wvu.edu.

I hope that you will participate in this research project, as it could help us better understand the applicability of podcast and digital marketing as it related to small businesses. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

SeVohn Hunter

Appendix C – Interview Questionnaire

Interview Questions

1. To begin, can you tell me a little bit about your small business?
 - a. Why did you start your business?
 - b. What is your main goal with your business?
2. Does your business have a digital marketing strategy?
 - a. If yes, what digital marketing methods are included in this strategy?
 - b. If no, why do you choose not to follow a digital marketing strategy?
3. Do you believe digital marketing has an impact on small business success? Why or why not?
4. How comfortable do you feel with digital marketing and trying out new digital marketing methods?
5. Are there any new digital marketing methods you would consider implementing?
 - a. If yes, which ones?
 - b. If no, why not?
6. What challenges have you faced while trying to implement a digital marketing strategy or new digital marketing methods?
 - a. What do you think is the biggest barrier small business owners like you can face while implementing a digital marketing strategy or new digital marketing methods?
7. Are you familiar with podcast marketing? If so, do you think podcast marketing has substantial benefits?
8. Does your business have a podcast or ever appeared on a podcast?
 - a. If so, what made you choose this digital marketing method?
 - i. What advice would you give to other small business owners who want to employ podcast marketing?
 - b. If you don't have your own podcast, would you ever consider starting one? Why or why not?
 - i. If you would, do you know the basics of how to start and maintain a podcast specifically for marketing a business?
9. Has COVID-19 affected your digital marketing efforts? If so, how?
10. Do you have any closing thoughts or advice for small business owners or aspiring business owners?

Appendix D – Podcast Scripts

Episode 1: What is podcast marketing?

Intro: You're listening to Podcast Marketing Made Easy - a show about podcast marketing for small businesses that want to create an appealing new way to engage with their customers.

Hello and welcome to episode 1 of Podcast Marketing Made Easy. I'm SeVohn Hunter. In this episode I'll explain what podcast marketing is and why, as a business or brand, you should consider including it in your marketing plan.

Digital marketing comes in many forms. Podcasting is just one of these ways to market your business or brand.

Megan Bulluck runs a digital marketing agency in Charleston, West Virginia. She says digital marketing is a powerful way to reach people.

"For business to consumer, digital marketing really creates an opportunity to build authentic relationships with people, with individuals, and also to share more peer to peer recommendations, rather than top-down recommendations. I think it's a really powerful way to reach people."

While podcasting can help introduce your business or brand to more people, it's also a personal way to connect with your audience.

Segment 1:

Some of the most well-known brands have started buying ads in podcasts. Companies like ZipRecruiter, Capital One, iHeartMedia, Cash App, and Vivid Seats are frequently buying ads in different podcasts.

As podcasts become more popular and listenership grows, the prospect of starting a podcast isn't as daunting as it once was, and more brands have started *creating* their own podcasts instead of paying for ads in others' shows.

Media companies like The New York Times, iHeartRadio, and NPR are frequently featured in Apple Podcast's top shows. The information shared on their podcasts provides something to their listeners, whether that be news or entertainment, and in turn, the podcasts promote the companies.

Segment 2:

But let's back up for a minute...what exactly are podcasts? According to academic researchers Steven McClung and Kristine Johnson, podcasts were described as "audio and video files that can be downloaded to a desktop computer, iPod, or other portable media players for playback later." The definition more commonly used today is that podcasts are completely digital audio files that require downloading prior to listening. I won't go into RSS feeds and such just yet, but

since the inception of podcasts, we now have applications like Apple Podcasts and Spotify that do the downloading of podcasts for us.

According to academic researcher Daniel Haygood, the reason why podcasts are becoming increasingly popular is because of the control this medium gives the consumer. The consumer decides which podcast they want to listen to, when they will listen to it, how much of the episode they listen to, and whether they want to skip or listen again to sections. And consumers have the ability to make these particular decisions each time they listen to a podcast.

Segment 3:

Now that you know how podcasts began and what they have become, we can move on to the topic of *this* podcast: podcast marketing.

And the type of podcast marketing that this show is focused on is when a brand or business creates a podcast related to their products or services that's aimed at their target audience.

It's important to stress that podcast advertising and marketing are not the same. The key difference between podcast marketing and podcast advertising is the content. The purpose of a podcast ad is to get the consumer to do something - buy a product or complete an action of some sort. The purpose of podcast marketing is to provide the consumer with information or entertainment related to the products or services the business provides.

Outro: In the next episode, we'll discuss why podcast marketing is working for so many brands. I encourage you to go find a podcast you like - it could be about literally anything - and I'm sure you'll find one you like. Pay attention to the format, the content, any ads within it and think about what the purpose probably was when creating the show. I think this will help you begin to understand why this has become such a popular medium for listeners and for content creators.

Outro: Thanks for listening to episode 1 of Podcast Marketing Made Easy. I'm SeVohn Hunter. This podcast is the product of research conducted for a master's project at West Virginia University's Reed College of Media. The music for this podcast is by Cj Rhen. You can listen to all 4 episodes of this series and access the full report of the research conducted for this podcast at sevohnalexiscollective.com - link in the show notes.

Episode 2: Why podcast marketing works

Intro: You're listening to Podcast Marketing Made Easy - a show about podcast marketing for small businesses that want to create an appealing new way to engage with their customers.

Hello and welcome to episode 2 of Podcast Marketing Made Easy. I'm SeVohn Hunter. In this episode I'll explain why podcast marketing works and we'll go over some concepts like owned media, content marketing, and uncertainty reduction theory.

At this point, you may still be uncertain about whether you should invest your time (and some of your money) into starting a podcast for your business. You're not alone in wondering if this is the right step.

Founder of In His Image, wedding photographer Zoe Evans is trying to determine what platform could boost her business.

“I have gone between what would be more beneficial, a youtube channel or a podcast, but I still haven't decided which would be better for my market. Like it's just all those factors of are my ideal clients listening to podcasts, are they watching Youtube videos.”

As of October 2020, podcasting's share of listening has hit an all-time high. Tom Weber from Edison Research (2020) reported, “the share of time Americans age 13+ spend with podcasts as a percentage of all their audio listening has tripled from just 2% in 2014,” and Weber explained, “podcasting has become the greatest companion medium. Not only can you take it with you while you do other things, but we also see people turning to podcasts for a sense of community and connection during a very stressful time (Edison Research, 2020).”

In this episode, we'll dive deeper into why a podcast might be a good marketing option for your business or brand.

Segment 1:

Think back to a time when you were in search of a specific product or service. Thanks to the internet and digital devices, you probably started your search for this thing online. Once you found what you were looking for, you probably read reviews to see what other purchasers had to say or to learn more about the business selling the product. If it's a business you've never heard of, you may have looked deeper into its reputation. If it's something you'd never purchased, you wanted to make sure it was what you were looking for.

This process is known as Uncertainty Reduction, and it was first introduced by academic researchers Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese in 1975. The two created this theory to explain how strangers in their first interaction use communication to reduce uncertainty. This means, when people are faced with uncertainty, they undergo certain processes of communication, interaction, and research to gain information in order to ease their anxiety, lower possible risks, and overall reduce the uncertainty about the situation.

With social networking sites and similar platforms, the uncertainty reduction process now includes gaining social information through the internet.

This all shows the importance of businesses maintaining digital spaces and engaging in digital marketing. This is where owned media, branded content, content marketing and podcast marketing come into play.

Segment 2:

Owned media, as defined by BigCommerce, are channels of communication that a business has complete control over like their website, social media profiles, and emails. And now podcasts are on that list as a commonly used form of owned media. When a business creates its own podcast, it has control over what content is being shared, and can use the podcast to build their reputation, similar to other forms of owned media.

According to digital marketing professional Danka Jankovic, branded content is produced with the intention of entertaining or informing and is typically used as a tactic to support brand identity and exhibit business values. I mentioned in the first episode that media companies like NPR and The New York Times are able to produce podcasts that inform and entertain their target audience and in turn the popularity of their podcasts promotes the companies themselves. This is because their podcasts are branded content. According to HubSpot marketing manager Kristen Baker, using a podcast as branded content can help build relationships with audiences, educate the target audience about services or products, and increase conversions.

Content marketing uses content to tell a story about a brand that will entice audience members to engage with the brand. The difference between branded content and content marketing is that branded content is used to reach beyond a brand's typical consumer and does not blatantly push sales or actions. Content marketing is intended for turning leads into customers and is used to boost important business metrics like sales, leads, website traffic, etc. In a 2018 content marketing study conducted by ProfitWell, it was found that "companies utilizing a content marketing strategy are seeing 30% higher growth rates than their counterparts not utilizing a content strategy [and] this is likely due to the evergreen and brand elements of content". Using a podcast as a marketing tool would be a way for small businesses to share information about their business, establish or maintain their business' digital presence, and reduce the uncertainty potential customers could have when deciding to support the business.

Outro: Based on all the information I just shared, we know that a podcast used as a marketing tool needs to provide some sort of information or entertainment to the audience. It *can* mention the products or services offered by a brand, but it must first provide something for the consumers. In the next episode we will discuss the actual production of podcasts, including the equipment and software needed. In the meantime, I encourage you to look at the content shared by your favorite brands and think about whether it is branded content or content marketing. For example, PayPal's Instagram page not only shares all the ways their customers can use PayPal, but also informational content about current events and entertaining content like virtual Easter egg hunts.

Outro: Thanks for listening to episode 2 of Podcast Marketing Made Easy. I'm SeVohn Hunter. This podcast is the product of research conducted for a master's project at West Virginia University's Reed College of Media. The music for this podcast is by Cj Rhen. You can listen to all 4 episodes of this series and access the full report of the research conducted for this podcast at sevohnalexiscollective.com - link in the show notes.

Episode 3: The affordable podcast setup

Intro: You're listening to Podcast Marketing Made Easy - a show about podcast marketing for small businesses that want to create an appealing new way to engage with their customers.

Welcome to episode 3 of Podcast Marketing Made Easy. In this episode we'll discuss equipment, editing software, and hosting platforms.

Segment 1:

Before we begin, I want to encourage you to do your own research. It's important that you find what works best for you and what fits in your budget. I conducted this research and created this podcast specifically for small business owners because through my research I have found they have a limited amount of time, money, and easily accessible resources that are targeted to their needs.

Winchester flower shop owner, Andrea Harrison Mongold, says she doesn't have a budget for digital marketing.

“The major benefit to doing like social media marketing is it's only costing me my time, it's not costing me any money. Where like radio and TV and billboard and print advertising all cost a lot of money which I get, but I just don't have that kind of money as a small business. Like I have zero dollars for advertising, and most small businesses, you know, don't, depending on the business they are.”

This was a common sentiment expressed by the small business owners and employees I interviewed. So, I kept this in mind when compiling my list of recommendations for this episode.

Segment 2: Equipment

We'll begin with equipment. This is likely where the most money will be spent, but you'd be surprised what you might already have that can be used for producing a podcast. I have recorded a podcast using just my iPhone and those apple headphones that used to come with iPhones. A super simple setup, I didn't have to buy anything, and I still got a decent quality recording.

The first thing you'll need for recording your podcast is a microphone. If you want to buy a microphone, an affordable option is Blue's snowball microphone, which is under \$50. I'm recording on Blue's yeti microphone and I love it, but it's a pricier option.

Next you'll need headphones. The main purpose for headphones is if you're recording with someone virtually, as most things are right now, their audio will come through your headphones instead of out of your computer and allow your recording to only pick up your audio instead of both of your audios. Really any headphones will work, and you don't have to splurge on those. I think you can find a good pair of headphones for around \$30.

Once you have your microphone and headphones, it's time to record. There are a few recording options. There are many voice recording apps for your phone or computer. A computer is needed regardless for editing and distributing the podcast. It is also possible to record on the editing software you choose.

If you have a separate audio recorder, you could use this to record yourself and any guests you have on your show. But I wouldn't recommend spending money on a recorder if you don't already have one. I either record using voice memos on my iPhone or MacBook or directly into the audio editing software program, on my computer. Right now, I'm using Adobe Audition.

Segment 3: Editing software

Once you've recorded, it's time to edit. My personal favorite editing softwares are Audacity and Adobe Audition. I highly recommend Audacity for those who are just starting out because it's free, has a simple interface, and will be easy to learn. If you have the Adobe creative suite, Adobe Audition is also an option for you, but I will warn you when you move into paid software, the interfaces are more complicated. Other options are GarageBand, which comes on mac computers, and all-in-one platforms like Spreaker and Anchor, which allow you to record, edit, and distribute your podcast all on the same platform.

Segment 4: Hosting Platforms

Once your podcast is edited and ready to go, it's time to share it with the world. Podcasts are shared through RSS feeds. Explaining everything an RSS can do would take an entire episode, but to put it simply, when a podcast is distributed through a hosting site, an RSS feed is created which contains all of the data of the podcast. This RSS feed is shared to podcast directories. When you're listening to a podcast on one of these podcast directories, that RSS feed is what is pulling the new content each time a new episode is uploaded to the hosting site.

Choosing a hosting platform can be difficult because there are so many, free and paid, and they all have different things they offer. I recommend Anchor because once again, it's simple to use. There's also Whooshkaa, Omny, Libsyn, and so many more.

After your podcast is uploaded to a hosting platform, you can choose which podcast directories you want your podcast to be shared on. Hosting platforms, like Anchor, typically allow you to share your podcast to podcast directories with a few simple clicks, or the platform will do it all for you. It is best practice to make your podcast available on as many directories as possible to ensure anyone who wants to listen to it can. The most popular directories are Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, Pocket Casts, and Tunein, but there are so many more.

Outro: So those are the basics of podcast production. Like I said in the beginning, make sure that you're choosing what's right for *you*. In the next episode we'll talk about structuring your podcast to help achieve your business goals.

Outro: Thanks for listening to episode 3 of Podcast Marketing Made Easy. I'm SeVohn Hunter. This podcast is the product of research conducted for a master's project at West Virginia University's Reed College of Media. The music for this podcast is by Cj Rhen. You can listen to all 4 episodes of this series and access the full report of the research conducted for this podcast at sevoxnalexiscollective.com - link in the show notes.

Episode 4: How to: podcast marketing

Intro: You're listening to Podcast Marketing Made Easy - a show about podcast marketing for small businesses that want to create an appealing new way to engage with their customers.

Welcome to the fourth and final episode of Podcast Marketing Made Easy. In this episode we'll discuss how to plan a podcast that's used as a marketing tool for your business.

Co-founder of a family salt-making business in Charleston, Nancy Bruns, says they're working on creating a podcast to see the benefit it could provide to their unique business.

"We're trying to figure out the time and when we need to do it and how often we should do it. I do see the benefit of it. It's one of those things that, as a small business, you get so caught up in the day-to-day stuff, and to add one more thing. We just need to figure out how to carve out that time, make this a priority to do, and get in the habit of it."

Nancy brings up an important point - creating a podcast will take time. It will be part of the work you do to market your business. Consistently providing podcasting content is very important in the success of your podcast. Plan to make a schedule of recording, editing, and uploading so you have new episodes coming out regularly.

Segment 1: Goals for podcast marketing

As I've mentioned before, the key to podcast marketing is to provide the consumer with something, whether that be information about an interesting topic or entertainment, in addition to introducing them to your business or brand.

For example, "Why We Eat What We Eat" is a podcast by Blue Apron, an "ingredient-and-recipe" meal kit delivery service. This podcast investigates eating habits and similar topics like the "kale conspiracy" and the history behind potlucks. This podcast is providing information *and* entertainment to all food enthusiasts and in turn creating brand awareness.

It is important that podcast marketing aligns the brand with a topic, niche community, industry, or something similar and poses the brand as a thought-leader or entertainer within their community/industry. Consider these goals when deciding the content of your podcast.

Segment 2: Target audience

The target audience of the podcast should be the same target audience of the business. Small businesses typically deal with niche communities and provide them with a product or service. There are a handful of benefits that can result from a small business serving a niche market, including low competition, the ability to cater marketing efforts to a narrow target audience, developing the reputation of an expert in the niche market, and a low-risk option with opportunity for expansion later.

Segment 3: Content

The content of the podcast should provide something to the consumer. So, think about entertaining topics and informational topics. What are common questions about your product/service/industry? What makes your product/service/industry necessary? What makes it unique? What are the people who use your product/service interested in?

It's important to choose a topic that is evergreen, meaning you can forever create content about it. Consistency is key for a podcast, so if you can only think of a handful of episodes about your topic, you'll need to choose something else. In this case, maybe entertainment should be your aim. Going back to Blue Apron, another topic they could pursue is the increase of lactose

intolerance or popular agriculture scandals. The serial-style of podcasts is very popular and is where a nonfiction story is covered over multiple episodes.

Segment 4: Structure

There are a variety of ways a podcast and its episodes can be organized. A show can cover an unfolding story across many episodes, or each episode can cover a new story/topic. The most basic structure of a podcast episode is that it has an introduction that addresses the audience and establishes the topic, then there's the main content. This could be an interview that the host of the podcast conducts, or it could be a story or a monologue, and then there's the conclusion of the show. Consistency in format is important. In a branded podcast, it's very important that the name of the brand is mentioned several times I.e. "brought to you by Blue Apron".

Outro: These are the basics of podcasting, and I hope, over the course of these four episodes, you've gained enough knowledge to begin to develop your own podcast.

Outro: Thanks for listening to episode 4 of Podcast Marketing Made Easy. I'm SeVohn Hunter. This podcast is the product of research conducted for a master's project at West Virginia University's Reed College of Media. The music for this podcast is by Cj Rhen. You can listen to all 4 episodes of this series and access the full report of the research conducted for this podcast at sevoohnalexiscollective.com - link in the show notes.

Appendix E – Interview Transcript 1

To begin, can you tell me a little bit about your small business?

Sure. Okay, so it was four years ago, oh my goodness it's weird to say that. In 2016 I graduated high school and I started college and I was just like wondering what in the world I was going to do with my life, and I feel like everybody kind of goes through that because everybody wants to have a purpose and wants to build some sort of career. But I think really what happened was I always loved photography and I took some pictures of like my friends who were seniors and like in high school and stuff I was always interested in it. But then we lost my husband's father in 2016, so it was my senior year, and it was in April, so it's been almost five years ago. And we just like kind of found ourselves just like looking back at all these pictures and that's kind of when it like hits you that somebody's gone. And you just feel like all these emotions when you're looking at these pictures because they just take you back into a moment of time, and so when you're gone from this life all that your loved ones have left are pictures or videos from your life, and I just realized then like how important that was and how special that was. So, then I just kind of did a little bit of research and got a business license and I was like 'okay I'm going to do this.' So, I started full time while I was in school in 2017 and I worked my way all through school just running my business on the side while being a full-time student. And then I graduated from Potomac State in with my associate degree in business, and then I went on to WVU, and it was really such a blessing because at that time, they just opened up their very first online business degree. So, then I ended up being able to stay home and run my business and then also do school whenever I could squeeze it in in between things; I'm still a full-time student. So, I started my business thing and then after I graduated at WVU, I graduated in December 2019, and then it was Corona. Now, ever since then I've been running my business full time. I actually worked full time last year some at a bank, but that didn't really work out, but I still was running my business. So, all in all, I've just been doing the things that I can. Now things are pretty much opened up and I'm allowed to do weddings, of course with weird restrictions. I love weddings and I love seniors and I also do some families, like in the summer and fall, but I do like a very limited number of those just because my focus is mainly on weddings and seniors. So yeah, that's kind of all the background information.

Has COVID-19 affected your digital marketing efforts? If so, how?

So, it's been very weird because, a lot of times, like a lot of people don't realize that when you're a small business owner it's almost like you miss the community aspect of things. So, I was involved in like small business community meetings and stuff and then, of course, like you find friends in the small business community that you connect with. And ever since then we've just had to do like online stuff like this, so it's just really weird because you don't get to do a lot in person, you're just like really lonely. So, I feel like everybody is experiencing that right now, but I just think, all in all, like at the end of the day, we're all just trying to get through this and that's kind of what everybody knows, what everybody's motto is right now. We're just getting through it and making sure that we can do things safely while also living our lives because here we are a whole year later and it feels like we've just missed so much. So, working from home, it's different I would say because sometimes I met with future couples, where other small businesses kind of just have to do that over facetime or zoom or something. But it really hasn't put too much

of a damper because I was already used to working from home, so it's kind of just like you have to shift things to more online, just dealing with more emails or video calls or something like that.

Does your business have a digital marketing strategy? If yes, what digital marketing methods are included in this strategy?

There's so many different aspects to this. Me and another friend photographer of mine have actually been talking about this and it seems like now, especially after Corona, so many more businesses have realized how important it is to be online. You have to have an online presence now or you're probably not surviving. So, we were talking about how we feel like our clients or potential clients feel like so bombarded with things because now it's not like before they were used to seeing some ads like when they're scrolling through their social media or whatever, and now it's just like everybody's advertising for something. Because we're all in this place where last year, at this time, we weren't making any money, nobody was doing anything, the economy was terrible, and we were just like in limbo trying to figure out how we were still going to run a successful business with the world being shut down. So now, I use Instagram daily, I also use Facebook daily, and then I tie those into my online presence through my website and I do blog post regularly because that drives traffic to my website. Sometimes it's a recap of old weddings or I usually post like current. So, like if I do a wedding one weekend, and the next week I have a blog post on that, but because of last year, and just all the craziness of things, I've just been kind of doing throwback posts for weddings that happened last year. Then I also do like tips for visiting the Thomas area or the Deep Creek Area or I also do posts that are beneficial to any bride planning her wedding. It might be just like why you might want to consider a first look or stuff like that, so I think it's important to not only make sure that you're active on social media, but that you're also using that social media to drive traffic to your website to then land future clients, or even spark leads or whatever.

How comfortable do you feel with digital marketing and trying out new digital marketing methods?

So, that's kind of in the works. I don't know why I just have not – I'm not a Tik Tok user. There have been like very few great success stories from photographers using Tik Tok, but like I know this one photographer that I follow, she like got famous overnight and like that's great, that's great for you, but I'm just like wondering, is that where my market is. Because you have to think about all those things when you plan your marketing plan which is usually all over the place, especially now. But YouTube is kind of in the works. I'm considering like instead of the form of a blog post with words and pictures doing like a link to YouTube like in the form of the blog post, but that may not happen till next year. So, I work with a really close friend who's a videographer and photographer and this winter, we put together a 10-video series of like planning tips and it's just exclusively for the brides who have like paid for the [company name] wedding experience, so I send them like every week. So that's kind of like more video marketing but it's already to the clients that I'm serving now. I definitely think that the way that we're moving is more towards video because it's almost like, on Instagram, we have especially seen this. You have to like capture their attention with whatever you post, or whatever story or caption

you put, and a lot of times they're not going to read it, which I know that. I mean if they're really interested in who you are and your story, or what you might have to say, they might read it, but most the time when you're scrolling through your Instagram or Facebook you're just scrolling and then you might see like oh that interest me and then you might watch the video or look at the pictures or whatever, but I think it's like really important for people to realize, you have to have something more than just pictures and video. I just think that that's the way that everything is shifting on social media because everybody loves watching videos. It's so much easier to see my face and hear me talk than it would be to see a picture of me and like read a little bit. So, I think that it's really important for small businesses especially to get on the video train because I just think it's going so quickly. Just like how these businesses last year realized, oh my goodness, I don't even have a Facebook page, how are people going to know that we're open or closed or whatever. And now like if you go to another area or whatever and you're wondering if some places open for takeout or dine-in, you're looking on your phone, you're googling that, saying okay there they don't deliver whatever. So, it's really important for every small business to make sure that their online presence is one, up to date and two, they're actually on there actively. I just think really, it's going to move toward more and more people noticing your social media through how current you are with the things. Like did they post last week? No, then I'm probably not gonna write them because they're not active, right?

What challenges have you faced while trying to implement a digital marketing strategy or new digital marketing methods?

Okay, so I really think people don't understand how hard it is to be a small business owner. They really don't because I literally am like a one man show. Like there are so many things you have to think about all the time, and I think that it's just hard to come up with new ideas like every single week. So, like usually how I start my week is on Mondays I'm like okay what things am I trying to accomplish this week, or even this day. And like overall goals of monthly or even like quarterly or yearly because it's just hard to come up with, okay what's going to be different, what's going to be new, where is my ideal client, where are my clients shopping and looking for wedding vendors, or stuff like that. And it's just hard because you're constantly in this battle of Am I doing enough? Am I booking enough? Am I making money and building a profitable and purposeful business? But then you're stuck with, am I doing enough? so it's like you just constantly are questioning is this going to get me at the front of the game? is this going to make sure that I'm showing up in all my clients feeds? Am I serving the people that I have booked already well? I just think the main problem is time because you just you have all this time when you're home but then it gets eaten up with, I know that I have to do this today, I know that I have to get this done today, and then you're stuck with oh I really hope that this is working, that my marketing strategy's working when I'm posting every day or showing up on Instagram stories because people like to see the behind the scenes or hear you talk a little bit about your life and it's just not really knowing for sure unless you have lots of years of experience if this works or this didn't have what really is working. And the other thing is the social media platforms are changing so quickly like Three years ago, Instagram was not the same that it is now. we didn't have reels. we didn't have the video component like we do now. it's totally different. So how can you measure something if it's constantly changing? it's just very difficult to know that these sorts of things are working and if these sorts of things are just fads that are just going to last for six months, or something. they might bring you a couple clients then, but are they really going to

sustain the whole length of the time that you want to be in business? So yeah, that's like a big hurdle is just trying to keep up with all of the changes that keep happening and it just seems like it's so quick. it's like one minute you're used to the format of things, and then they change it all up on you and you're like great.

If you don't have your own podcast, would you ever consider starting one? Why or why not?

I thought about that before. I have gone between what would be more beneficial, a YouTube channel or a podcast, but I still haven't decided like which would be better for my market. Like I said, all those factors of okay are my ideal clients listening to podcasts, are they watching YouTube videos, and that's like two totally different directions, but kind of like the same content would be the same presence of them. I mean, I don't know, maybe both? it really is interesting to me it's like I just haven't had the time to sit down and say, this is the block of time that I'm going to plan out YouTube channel, podcasts, all those things.

Do you know the basics of how to start and maintain a podcast specifically for marketing a business?

Not really. And that's just because like, I don't know, you just have to make sure you have the time. The biggest thing is like figuring out content because if you say you're going to start it, then you have to commit to that and make sure that you have content for weeks or like some people do it every day, or every other day. You have to make sure that you have all that time to do that, and I just don't think that I do. I think that so many small business owners just really don't understand the value of hiring someone who is knowledgeable at all these things and in media in general. I'm like oh yeah, I know it well enough, and I can handle that, but really if I step back and take a look at so many things that I should be implementing that I haven't yet, it would probably be beneficial to say like hey do you want to be in charge of my social media posts and all this stuff. it's just like I'm not quite there. and it's just hard to determine if this is going to be more beneficial than another expense. it's almost as if you have to pick and choose like I know it says like I should do these 10 things, but I only have time to do these three so I'm just going to do these three and hope that's enough. and that's how it is like every day and from week-to-week things change so much. so, we're like coming out of my slower season, which I just had enough time to update my website, update my portfolio, do all those backend things. The slow season is just getting caught up and getting ready for the year ahead and then like now it's going to be April and from April to October we're just running from session to wedding to all the things. So yeah, I really think that would be very beneficial for any small business owner because it's important to keep up with everything that's happening in our world and with the clients that we're trying to reach because they're always looking for something new and we have to be willing to provide that for them.

Appendix F – Interview Transcript 2

To begin, can you tell me a little bit about your small business?

It is a retail flower shop, and it was started in 1952 by the Snelling family. My family took it over in 2003. I had moved here with my now ex-husband and I have been in the industry since 1996. So, I moved here, started working for Mr. Snelling at the time, who was the son of the original owner. He was interested in retiring and my parents were interested in an investment, so they purchased the building and the business, and I took over the running of the business.

What is your main goal with your business?

Given the current economy, my main objective is to stay in business, make a profit, be able to pay people, and pay my bills.

Does your business have a digital marketing strategy?

So, I do utilize most social networks. I have found in the past that print advertising doesn't really do very well for us just because our business is so visual. People want to be able to see the flowers and see the arrangements and that doesn't translate well in black and white. So probably back in 2008 we stopped doing print marketing as far as yellow pages and advertising in the newspaper. I have found that with social media marketing it's more of a direct route. I can pick the income level, if they're married, not married, so I can target specific body. If I want to advertise my wedding services, I can pick girls from the age of 18 to say 45 and within 100-mile radius. So, to me digital marketing is a much more effective way to market to customers. I have tried to blog, that really didn't garner as much interest as I thought it was. I guess, maybe I'm too polite on my blog. So, I yes definitely more visual as far as you know, Facebook and Instagram. I don't do snapchat. I have a Twitter account but, again, it doesn't really seem to translate to the audience that I need to reach.

How comfortable do you feel with digital marketing and trying out new digital marketing methods?

Not at all. I mean I tried Twitter, but, again, with my industry it's very much image based. I do most of the maintenance on our website myself, so I do promote our website, and I do take advantage of managing all my listings online like Google listings and Yahoo and Bing and all of those things. and part of that is, one claiming the listing so you have control over it, and two like making sure all the information is up to date, especially with COVID. People are googling places to buy products, and when they do that, Google will pop up local places, so I add probably a good 20 photos I'd say every month or every other month to my Google listings so that people will see different photos of the business, and I know based on Google Analytics that I rank a lot higher as far as businesses like mine that utilize their listings to the full capacity, especially with the photos. I'm contemplating Tik Tok. I am contemplating it. I have a personal account. So, one of the content creators on Tik Tok was doing a live Q&A session, and so I asked her about my profile and she said, why don't you want to advertise your business on here and, for me, I need a little bit of separation between my private personality and my public professional personality, because of the demographics in my area, I'm dealing with a lot of older adults (boomers) and they're not as forgiving of negative images or negative. Basically, I can't be myself necessarily. I have to present a professional demeanor so I have my private Tik Tok account, but I am debating about having a shop Tik Tok account that I can be engaged and bring that into the shop and show

flowers and interactions and things like that. I have noticed lately that my demographic has shifted. It's heavily female, I would say 80% female and the age variant is between 25 and 55 is the biggest group, and then 55 to 65 and then some younger, but not really below that. People that come into the store tend to be more in the 55 and older because they're a bit more old-school and they want to come in and they can't right now, because COVID. Where the younger demographic, I post something on Facebook, they click on it, it goes to my website, they scroll through my website, and I have a really healthy conversion rate on my website.

Are you familiar with podcast marketing? If so, do you think podcast marketing has substantial benefits?

I'm not super familiar with it. I know it. So far, I've done radio or podcast interviews before. I do have a YouTube channel as well for the shop, but there's only so many things that I can do and control and maintain. And again, it would be talking versus showing people things so I don't know that that would translate well, I guess. I would try it but it's not on my priority list.

If you don't have your own podcast, would you ever consider starting one? Why or why not?

I'm not sure. You have to weigh out, the time, the pros and cons of it, if there was any cost factors. the major benefit to doing social media marketing is it's only costing me my time; it's not costing me any money. where like radio and TV and billboard and print advertising all costs a lot of money, which I get, but I just don't have that kind of money as a small business. like I have zero dollars for advertising, and most small businesses don't depending on what kind of business they are. With my business, which is I think similar to restaurants, we're dealing with a perishable product, so If I buy flowers, I need to use them before they die. I can't be like a bookstore and it can sit on the shelf for 10 years and it doesn't matter. So, my return on investment needs to be very quick and So I don't have a lot of extra cash flow in order to build that up. Because I can only buy new inventory every other day. selling it, buying more, it's a process.

Do you know the basics of how to start and maintain a podcast specifically for marketing a business?

Probably not everything no. So, if you wanted to go over that, then I would love to hear about it because I don't know everything. I know a friend that does a podcast for Pittsburgh Steelers, but as far as like you know many like putting all of that, together, I don't know.

Has COVID-19 affected your digital marketing efforts? If so, how?

It's definitely affected our business. most people do not realize that the flowers come in from other countries, so When everything really started shutting down in March of last year, in the beginning of April there's a Dutch flower market And no one could buy the flowers to ship them because they weren't allowed to ship anything in, and they couldn't ship anything out and they threw away millions of dollars of flowers every day. So, you know there's farms down in South America, and that has to go through Miami and then that has to come to my wholesaler. My wholesalers got shut down so they couldn't receive the product, which means I can't get any product, so we were shut down for about a month because I couldn't get any flowers from anyone anywhere, so that was a huge thing. I mean I could have worked, but one the governor's mandate and we weren't considered essential and the other was I couldn't get product. and then,

when I started getting product You know the wholesalers were trying to recover so they're not ordering at the same volume that they normally would, and you know some growers went under like they had to shut everything down out over their fields because it's time sensitive. And the product, when we did get it in, was not always great or I found that when I would order, something that used to be easy to get like hey I need 50 orange roses on Friday, they wouldn't come. They just wouldn't ship to my wholesaler and I wouldn't find out until that morning because we didn't get it. so, it also affected how we do business. We were allowing people to come in, but we had to shorten the space where they could come into the shop and it's a very small business, it's myself and my kids. And I have to say, they're not in high school, but they're right out of high school girls who work like part time, and a driver. And our business is probably 2000 square feet, so it's a big area and I can't just disinfect all of that every time someone comes in. Plus, when people started like arguing about wearing a mask, not wearing a mask, then I just shut it off and put a sign on the door that says you have to call. We'll do curbside pickup, we'll do no-contact delivery, but you can't come in. So, at some point we will probably let them back in, but probably not until it gets warmer. Getting hot fresh air in here because it is an old building, I don't have a lot of windows. I was able to update our Google listing with the new code restrictions or we were able to do deliveries, if you were able to come in our hours of operation changed. Same thing with Facebook. So, it's very, very easy to get on those platforms and make an announcement on our Google listing and it would post to there, so people would see oh well, they just opened back up or oh they're hours changed. So that definitely helped.

Do you have any closing thoughts or advice for small business owners or aspiring business owners?

You don't get rich. it's incredibly hard work. The benefits are that sometimes you have no flexibility in your schedule, and then sometimes you do. for example, both my kids were raised in the shop. I just brought them to work with me to breastfeeding, the whole thing. there was a crib in the office that was it. But it's in my industry specifically. it's demanding around holidays, so I do miss that. I mean it's a struggle, but it's rewarding, and, for the most part, I'm my own boss, so if I want to completely change the store around, I can do that. where when I worked for someone else, they wouldn't always take in constructive criticism like 'hey kind of dumb to have all the display cases pushed against the windows', but you know that's how it always been saying care. that's probably about it, but yeah you definitely have to evolve with the times. like I said my dad wanted to do print advertising for the longest time and I had to push and push and push and tell him, nobody looks in the phone book anymore. So, he finally got it and we stopped wasting money on that, but you know, like I said with this whole podcast idea I guess for me it'd be hard, I guess, I would want to know or Think about what I would say and what kind of content, I would promote. That to me is probably the hardest thing is not knowing exactly what people would want to hear from me. Sometimes I have to set reminders for myself hey you haven't posted on the Facebook page. Facebook just introduced business suite to where they combined postings across Facebook and Instagram so now, I don't have to go into each one. I can go onto Facebook, go into the business suite, and cross post, which is a time thing, like that's a big deal.

Appendix G – Interview Transcript 3

Does your business have a digital marketing strategy?

The only thing that we really have is our website. We are getting ready to launch a new website, the new search engine optimization program, and that's about the extent of it.

If no, why do you choose not to follow a digital marketing strategy?

We tried a few things. I think because we have such a niche product, worldwide, there's only a few companies like us. And when somebody is searching for a product, we just really use our website to direct traffic. Plus, we've tried other types of digital campaigns and pay per click campaigns and we're spending \$1000 to \$1400 a month and we don't get any traffic from it. Because typically when somebody is looking for a niche product they go out and search for it with an organic keyword search and when they type in a composite telescopic mast, we're going to come up close to the top of page one, or on top of page two. And the only other thing that we do for marketing is these trade shows.

Do you believe digital marketing has an impact on small business success? Why or why not?

I think they do, depending on what the product is.

How comfortable do you feel with digital marketing and trying out new digital marketing methods? Well, I think we're comfortable with it, and we did go down this path a few times with this new company that's designing our website. We're building the website first, and it's taken a while because the pandemic. We're about six months in, which we thought we could have been launched by January. A lot of digital marketing doesn't align with our niche markets. It's not that we're against them it's a cost analysis thing.

Are there any new digital marketing methods you would consider implementing?

I would say we don't keep up with it as far as looking for new ideas. As a small company of only 12 employees, I think you kind of get stuck in a rut with the way that you do things, and I've done this for two decades, so I'm not constantly looking and branching out for new ideas, but if there's something out there that is available through this effort or like through our website company then we would be interested in looking. We do get emails and questionnaires and things from other platforms quite often. When you sign up for these large conferences, the companies go out and they have phishing tools that get your information, and there's about 30,000 people that go through there, so our name gets blasted out there. I don't know how they get it, if they sell it or not, but we do get contacted by several different marketing companies.

What challenges have you faced while trying to implement a digital marketing strategy or new digital marketing methods?

So, being a small company and really, the only one in that department – we do have an assistant that does all our quoting and that part of the sales. But one time we hired an assistant that specifically worked on our marketing campaign and I didn't really have a lot of time is because, being the only one in department, I have to handle all the sales, for say \$20 to \$30 million dollar sales here for a small company that has 12 employees. When you look at the value of how much a company does and millions per year per employee, that's not too many companies that do that,

so our time is so valuable on the day-to-day business that I didn't have a lot of time to do that. So, when we hired this person to help out, what we didn't realize was we don't have a lot of time to train him, and it lasted about two years and we had to cancel their campaign. I think the small is good in a way, but it's a detriment that you have to branch out.

Are you familiar with podcast marketing?

I am not.

If you don't have your own podcast, would you ever consider starting one? Why or why not?

Maybe not this year, but next year once we get the SEO going, maybe we can add that into it. So, it is of interest, it's just new to us, so you know it's gonna be down the road.

Appendix H – Interview Transcript 4

To begin, can you tell me a little bit about your small business?

How I started the business was a combination of a previous business that I own, which was a Xerox agency, where I sold digital equipment and the owners at that time were a customer of mine. I approached them if they ever were at a time that they wanted to sell that printing business to let me know because I thought it was a good addition ton not only selling the equipment to customers, but also then being able to provide a print environment for customers because, even though you have your own copier in house, you don't do the type of printing that we do. So that's basically how I got into the printing side of the business.

Does your business have a digital marketing strategy?

I don't know if we classified as a strategy right now. We do of course Facebook, we have an Instagram account, I have a LinkedIn account that struggles. That problem we have with all that is really having someone to run it and manage it on a full-time basis, so to speak. [Employee name], who's kind of jack of all trades here with the design end, but also helped out with it. He posts on Facebook, we've done some Instagram, but we need to get to a point where it's a consistent pattern, and with COVID taking place this past year, we don't have the staff that we had prior to that. So that's also kind of not helping matters in having someone that can concentrate more on doing a thorough, consistent job with that type of media.

Are there any new digital marketing methods you would consider implementing?

I mean we posted a few videos just on our Facebook page. Tik Tok, I have not ventured into that at all to be honest with you. So, that's those are areas that we had been practicing. Before COVID we hired an individual and the intent was for him to be sort of overseeing those types of projects and that didn't work out, so we just never got that off the ground.

Are you familiar with podcast marketing?

Familiar with the basics of it, but I'm not thoroughly trained on actually doing it or are comfortable in doing that, which is another big gap in I guess building that type of marketing avenue for us. We certainly would entertain having that information and in trying to use that you know to benefit our marketing. It sounds, if I hear you correctly, if you have some sort of a template put together that's easy to follow and get started on a small scale, that may be ideal for us to, be able to start building that type of media. I understand it doesn't have to be a major production, I guess, just having some tools in front of us to say okay let's follow these steps and work our way into that type of media. Together f we talked about different things we can do, different approaches, and digital always seem to come up. The Facebook, Instagram, and things that you mentioned like Tik Tok, which is a little bit newer, and the podcast, things like that. We haven't delved into either of those like to the podcast or the Tik Tok, but it always seems to come up in conversation. So, him and I, together with everything else that's going on around us try to apply what we can to Facebook, we can apply to Instagram as best as we can, and the timeframes, we have. So, I don't go home at night and do research. It comes up, we have a conversation, we go out of a couple days, and you know monitor over and start plugging away when we can. Production jobs just again take priority and pulls us away from these things. We did just have my wife actually is going for her PhD and had some classes that weren't in

communications and did kind of a report review analysis of our social media. So we would kind of think about it, we kind of like but, again, I think the personnel is the probably, the knowledge of those social media outlets, and the person to actually be involved and do that consistently is where we're falling short. Not that we're not interested, or wouldn't like to follow that, but we are a small business.

Appendix I – Interview Transcript 5

To begin, can you tell me a little bit about your small business?

Sure, so I spent the first part of my career, 20 plus years, as a chef. Went to culinary school after college and then worked in different parts of the food industry and owned a restaurant for 10 years and then sold that and was looking for the next chapter of my career and really started digging into my family's history and learned a lot about the salt history, which I didn't know really anything about, even though I grew up here in Charleston just because it wasn't going on when I was growing up and my father never talked about it. But I thought it was fascinating, and being a lover of food, I was also started to collect salts from all over the world, which I found fascinating and interesting to cook with and the different textures and flavors and how they interacted with different foods. So then, it just occurred to me that it would be such a neat thing to revive the business on the same property that we've had, so I started working on it and I was living in North Carolina at the time. I'm like well I'm not even living there, how am I going to do that, so I kind of put it on the back burner, but it just wouldn't go away, and it would be you know kind of this intuition was driving me back toward it all the time. So, I decided well I'll write a business plan, and you know just see what it looks like with the numbers and you know how to set up labor and all of that, and it seemed to work out pretty well, so I talked to my brother, Lewis Payne, who lives here in Charleston and he got very interested in it too, so we decided to start it back. So, we put our well in in spring of 2013 And Here we are. So, we make our salt by solar evaporation, unlike our ancestors to use fossil fuels to burn down the furnaces stoke furnaces, but we use solar evaporation. We want to have a very low environmental footprint. So, it's about a five-week process, from start to finish, but we've grown from just producing salt and our flavored salts into we have a line of caramel sauces that we make as well, and then we have other partnerships with Appalachian businesses that we sell their products and some of them use our salt in their products as well. So, the salt industry in the 1830s and 40s was the largest in the nation. And so more salt was coming out of here than anywhere else, most of it was going to Cincinnati. It was one of those industries, at that time, built on the backs of slaves as well, so we try to honor that history, make sure we share that.

Does your business have a digital marketing strategy?

We don't do anything on TV. We do use a lot of social media, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter. I've recently hired in house a marketing guy who's young and he's really good at it, so he takes pictures of things and keeps our website up to date and does all the posting for social media. It's difficult. I did it at times kind of in between, sometimes I outsource it to a third party, but that never seemed to – I was never happy with it because I didn't feel like they have the right grasp on my business. I was sketchy at best with it, but when I did post, I felt like it was the right thing, I just didn't do it often enough that, you know, social media posts are free, but it does take a lot of time to get it right. So, I'm really happy having it in house now, but I think that you do have to find the right voice and the right kind of vibe for it, so it's always consistent with the brand. They started working with us in 2013 when we started the business, so they've done all the branding. Oh, they do all the label design and then they built our website, so they've been a really good partner with us, for you know, eight years so. we're growing and we're in about 600 restaurants and retail stores across the country and that's growing on a daily basis, like three or four or five a week. or month probably we're at five new accounts for stuff. it's been a steady incline over the years. You know, last year we had a big decline in our wholesale accounts but. At the same time,

our direct-to-consumer sales went up a lot, so I think people really got focused on small business and supporting small business and wanting to have really high-quality ingredients they're also cooking at home, more and wanted to explore different things which was great and so we really took advantage of that.

Has COVID-19 affected your digital marketing efforts? If so, how?

At first it was really rough. I had to lay off the whole staff. But then, after a couple weeks I started hiring a few key people back and then we got back into production. And so, our online sales really took off, so that was great, and then slowly, the wholesale retailers in the restaurants have come back, not all the restaurants, but most of our retailers have. And we do a lot of events on our farm, so that business was way off, but even with that decreased revenue and events, we ended up for the year being having 8% increase in revenue over the previous year. So, I was very happy with that.

What challenges have you faced while trying to implement a digital marketing strategy or new digital marketing methods?

I struggle with if it's worth paying for them. There's certain platforms out there that have all these algorithms so we can capture more business if you pay for this and that's only \$10 a day and I'm like \$10 a day is a lot of money. But so, I kind of try those out, you know yelp ads and I've used a company called Springbot, I don't know if you're familiar with them or not, but I still feel like there's probably a lot I don't know and there are probably better places to put money but our best reach, to create the most revenue really seems to be direct to consumer emails, which we have a MailChimp account and we capture all of our emails through our e-commerce site. And people respond to that best and then keeping our brand fresh on Facebook and Instagram. People like to see what we're doing with new products, but I do feel like I'm a little bit in the dark and I kind of pick and choose if somebody contacts me, which I get contacted all the time by different platforms, and it kind of depends on what kind of mood I'm in at the time. If I have a few minutes and it sounds interesting and their 30-second pitch draws me, I might listen to them, otherwise I'm too busy.

Are you familiar with podcast marketing? If so, do you think podcast marketing has substantial benefits?

I'm familiar with podcasts but not podcast marketing. One of my employees, actually my manager who's been with me for six almost seven years, is interested in starting a podcast and interviewing different producers that we work with, as well as keeping people up to date on what we're doing. So, we're working on that. We're trying to figure out the time, and when we need to do it, and how often we should do it. I have been on a few local ones, not anything too recently, but I do see the benefit of it and it's one of those things as a small business you get so caught up in the day-to-day stuff, to add one more thing is like okay, well, we just need to figure out how to carve out that time and okay we're going to make this a priority to do and then just get in the habit of it.

Appendix J – Interview Transcript 6

To begin, can you tell me a little bit about your small business?

I was in the corporate world for many, many years. I'm a West Virginia grad from 1983. I'm certified to teach school, did that for a few years. I worked with a mental health retardation agency for 12 years. I saw TV advertising for a year and then I worked at a small psychiatric hospital in Charleston for 240 months. When it got too corporate for me, I resigned and started [company name]. I'm the only employee that we have. I am a marketing, public relations, promotions, anything that has to do with marketing company. Go to my website and you'll probably find 16, 17, maybe 18, or 19 various services that we offer. My company is a handshake deals with people who do what I don't do. We collaborate on a lot of projects for the benefit of a mutual client, and it really benefits the client. We believe a lot of small businesses, like me, who only have one or two employees, and we all collaborate because we have specialties in web design or graphic art or programming on the back end of a website. When people call me and say do you do websites, I go, yes, we do, and then I call somebody else, and we do it together, but it comes to my company. So, it's a really nice model. I started out and four and a half years in I just landed my largest client on Wednesday of this week. I'm really, really excited my companies doing pretty okay even through COVID. I lost a lot of promotional projects because I promote conferences, I promote fairs, I promote events, I promote home shows, and hunting and fishing shows, and stuff like that, concerts, various things. Any event I help promote. We didn't have events, so I lost a lot of business. Also have been a public speaker at conferences, I lost all that line of business and anything that has to do with events, I lost all of that. But I have enough clients that retained me and kept me going to help get their message out and it helped me get through 2020 and I, quite frankly, I did okay. I was about 20% down, but 2021 is started off great. I mean I'm one quarter in and I'm doing probably 25 to 30% more than I was last year at this time and I just landed like four or five clients this week alone. And so, people say what do you do, and I go what do you need that has to do with marketing I can do it for you. I do a lot of social media marketing, I do some digital marketing, strategic emails, I do a lot of video marketing, I host my own TV show, I'm a radio guest, I'm the media relations guy, I'm a lobbyist, I'm a professor, I'm a speaker. My thing is, I'm not great at anything, but I'm pretty good at a lot of things and my network and my connectivity allows me to be pretty resourceful. And so, when people call me, I can help them, even if I can't help them directly, I helped them indirectly because of 1.8 million West Virginians, I know 1.4. And if I don't know the other 400,000, I'm one degree of separation from every West Virginian. I've made it work for me and I'm 22,086 days old today. in dog years I'm 60 and a half years old, so I've been here a long time. I'm from West Virginia, proud West Virginian, and I've networked like nobody's business, and I know every pocket of the state. I did leadership West Virginia 2001, and it really behooves me, and I made my connectivity work for me as a positive. I also write children's books. I do a lot of speaking on attitude and I sell children's books. I'm an adjunct professor at the University of Charleston. I have lots of streams of interest and revenue and different things going on. And I just kind of roll all that, through my somewhat I consider now with an entrepreneurial spirit that I never would have thought that I would consider myself an entrepreneur when I was a substitute schoolteacher certified to teach school K through 12 education back in 1984 and yet here I am.

Does your business have a digital marketing strategy?

I try to I try to do a blog from my website once or twice a week. Very engaging in four different social media platforms obviously Facebook, I do Twitter, I'm very good with LinkedIn, and I do Instagram. I haven't tried Snapchat, wasn't for me. Tik Tok wasn't for me. Almost have to do Facebook, even the young people think it's not the cool thing to do, anymore, but it's just so far ahead of us. You have to use it as a business, you have to use it as a brand, so I do use Facebook quite often. I do some videos for my company. I sponsor things and I have my own TV shows, so that's a soft sale. I just try to position myself and be involved in the community and digitally, I don't spend a lot of money, so I'm just trying to be active.

If you don't have your own podcast, would you ever consider starting one? Why or why not?

Yes, I would love to start a podcast. I have a lot of great material for a podcast. I think I'm out of physical time to have one. If someone would just say I'll lead your podcast and just tell you where to be and you get it ready to go and I'll record it and mark it up for you I'd be able to. I'm a one-man band, I don't even have a personal assistant, I don't have an administrative assistant, I don't have an accountant. I literally do everything which is wearing me out.

Appendix K – Interview Transcript 7

To begin, can you tell me a little bit about your small business?

So, we do digital marketing for other people. So, we're a design studio and we do, mostly branding and digital branding, web design and development. And we do a lot of social media campaigns, so we do digital marketing in that regard. We don't do a lot of paid media. We do mostly earned media and content creation, but we do not do any podcast marketing.

Does your business have a digital marketing strategy?

Branding, yes, and yeah, we have our website, and we use social media. We mostly use Instagram and then we redirect posts on a few different platforms, but we are really a referral-based business. So, we really focus most of our energy on the relationships with clients. We use social media more to reflect some of our current work, so we use social media to just share our process. We work through a participatory process, so we collaborate with a lot of different groups of people all over. So, we share behind the scenes with that, with our process, and then we also run a design lab in Charleston. We have a storefront space and we do designing and coding workshops and we host community lead events, and so we share out a lot of that just documentation of the things happening in our space online, but we don't really receive a lot of clients that way. We are very targeted with the type of clients that we actually work with so, we mainly write proposals, we bid for work. I will be like invited to bid for a project and we'll compete against like five other companies that are invited so that's where our process of bringing in work and earning revenue.

Do you believe digital marketing has an impact on small business success? Why or why not?

Yeah, definitely. I think digital marketing is great for B2C business. So that's part of why we don't use it as much because we are B2B, but for business to consumer digital marketing really creates an opportunity to build authentic relationships with people. And also, to share more peer-to-peer recommendations, rather than top-down recommendations, so yeah, I think it's a really, really powerful way to reach people yeah.

How comfortable do you feel with digital marketing and trying out new digital marketing methods?

Really comfortable. I mean we work at a lot of new technology; we tend to be more into trying out new digital technology that will integrate with a website and the platforms that we build, and sometimes that is social media. We do a lot of like social integrations, but yeah, we have all been tapping around on Tik Tok just like seeing what's up, seeing how people are using it, watching how content creation is changing. But I think, for us, I mean it's kind of different so it's at the work that we are making for clients, that is where our drive to explore new digital platforms and new mediums rather than to market our own studio work.

What challenges have your clients faced while trying to implement a digital marketing strategy or new digital marketing methods?

I think there's kind of two answers. I think the biggest barrier for companies and organizations that we work with, especially small businesses, are just to have someone that actually manages the digital platforms on the day to day. Basically, we create the content, we create stories, and different things. So, folks have outsourced to us to help just create all of the storytelling pieces, all of those graphics, and I think the biggest barrier is just having somebody on the day to day that will manage, that can respond to people, respond to comments, like actually work to build those relationships to capitalize on whatever you're sharing because you can't just share out content. And also, it needs to be a two-way conversation. It needs to be interactive as you're building an engaged audience.

Are you familiar with podcast marketing? If so, do you think podcast marketing has substantial benefits?

You know I'm not really surprised, I mean it totally makes sense, but I'm not a big podcast consumer, so I haven't really thought about that. I've thought about podcasting more as the revenue generator being commercials and sponsors. I can see also how I mean the way that you're talking about podcasts like the blue apron example like direct-to-consumer company, and you know if you're sharing playful educational, you know informative information in that, I could also see working for business to business or a B2B company. Because you can position yourself as an expert in something you know. If we had all the time in the world, we could do a podcast on participatory design and like why it's important to include people that you're designing for in the design process and we can position ourselves as experts in that. We've been doing it for 10 years, and now we give talks about it. I think it seems like it's such a heavy lift to spend the time to actually make a podcast or even like do one episode of the podcast, but I can see that being really valuable to be able to talk about your process and share that with whoever was able to listen. And then you're also capturing that you know, rather than giving a talk one time to a room full of people, you know where you have like a finite reach, a podcast allows you to document that conversation, and like have it forever, which is pretty cool. And then you have infinite reach. It's just kind of an evolution of like written editorial. It's great to have, when you're building a website, it's great as part of your digital strategy to have some type of blog content helps with your SEO and also just as an opportunity to talk more about your company in the field that you're working in and position yourself, so podcast feels like a level up.

Appendix L - IRB Approval

Acknowledgement of Not Human Subjects Research

02/18/2021

To: Emily Corio

From: WVU Office of Research Integrity & Compliance

Protocol Type: NHSR / Flex

Approval Date: 02/18/2021

Submission Type: Initial

Expiration Date: 02/17/2026

Funding: N/A

WVU Protocol #: 2101219025

Protocol Title: Professional Project: A Podcasting Series on Employing Podcasts as an Effective Marketing Method for Small Businesses in Select Industries

The West Virginia University Institutional Review Board has determined that your protocol submission of protocol 2101219025 does not meet the definition of human subjects research, as provided in 45 CFR 46. This determination was based on the following:

- Research means a systematic investigation designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Most case reports and most oral histories are not generalizable and, therefore, not research. Many classroom projects, if not intended to be published, are also not considered research. Many quality improvement or program evaluation studies are not research.

The following documents were reviewed and acknowledged for use as part of this submission. Only the documents listed below may be used in the research. Please access and print the files in the Notes & Attachments section of your approved protocol.

- Recruitment Script.docx
- Appendix C - Interview Questionnaire.docx
- Cover Letter.pdf
- OHRP-47 eIC OMR No Signature Submission Worksheet.pdf

WVU IRB acknowledgement of protocol 2101219025 will expire on 02/17/2026.

Amendments and continuing reviews are not accepted for this type of study. You may continue this study beyond the expiration date if no changes are made to your study that exclude it from NHSR eligibility.

If changes are made to your study that exclude it from NHSR eligibility, it is your responsibility to resubmit it to the IRB as a new, initial submission under the appropriate protocol type.

The WVU Office of Human Research Protections will be glad to provide assistance to you throughout the research process. Please feel free to contact us by phone, at 304.293.7073 or by email at IRB@mail.wvu.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph Malcolm BS, CCRP".

Joseph Malcolm
Program Coordinator

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