

# KUOW PODCASTS

*THE DRIVEWAY MOMENT FOR THE NEXT GENERATION*



## Executive Summary:

Podcasts are the fabled public radio “driveway moment” for the next generation. They provide immersive audio experiences that take beloved, arts-focused programs like *A Prairie Home Companion* and host-driven storytelling like *Car Talk* to a new level. Podcasts provide an alternative to the news and, unlike radio driveway moments, podcasts can be experienced anytime, anywhere without the worry of missing out on an important story or idea. The world of podcasts is ever-growing and changing. KUOW has an exciting opportunity to be a leader in audio innovation, building new audio content and experiences that welcome the audiences of tomorrow and focus on topics unique to the Pacific Northwest.

## Need for Podcasts: A Renaissance of Audio Storytelling

In their 2020 Public Radio Techsurvey, Jacobs Media and the Public Radio Program Directors Association found that 21% of respondents listen to podcasts weekly while 18% are daily listeners. Of the respondents, three in four identified as a Millennial.<sup>1</sup> A steep rise in smart speaker technology has bolstered this audio revolution. For KUOW audiences, smart speakers are the second most used device for streaming next to mobile phones. In 2020, KUOW listeners tuned in on their Google or Amazon smart speaker devices for a total of close to 6 million listening hours.<sup>2</sup> In The Smart Audio Report conducted by NPR and Edison Research, 24% or around 60 million Americans age 18 or older own a smart speaker. Of those smart speaker owners, 43% say they are using their smart speaker more now compared to the first month they owned it.<sup>3</sup>

We are living in an on-demand era with unlimited access to powerful storytelling at the tap of a button or via a simple verbal command. As recent as 10 years ago, listeners would tune in to 94.9 and expect to hear something that fascinated or delighted them. Media consumers today are accustomed to services like Netflix and Spotify leveraging algorithms to recommend new content based on a user's history and interests. KUOW's goal is to meet these consumers where they are—whatever platform they use—to help audiences discover their next favorite KUOW podcast focused on regional topics and relevant, accessible, informative storytelling.



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Triton, 2020

1. 2020 Public Radio Techsurvey. [2020]. Jacobs Media and PRPD.
2. Triton, 2020.
3. The Smart Audio Report. [Spring 2020]. Edison Research.

## Our Focus: Committing to Innovative Content and Podcast Development

In 2017 KUOW hired the station's first Director of New Content and Innovation to oversee the development of content that deepens KUOW's relationship with existing audiences and to lead the creation of new products to expand the station's listener base. Working closely with content, news, marketing and data research, a team of three experienced broadcast producers began to use narrative storytelling and sound design to reach new audiences via on-demand services. Podcasts such as *terrestrial*, *How to be a Girl* and *Second Wave*, laid the groundwork for future podcasts like *The Wild* and *Prime(d)* and at the same time created an incubator for new ideas and experimentation. Today the team has two full time editors, three full-time producers and three part time producers with an expanded focus on new technologies, and increased podcast development.



### KUOW Podcast Library

Since 2017, KUOW has produced 14 podcasts including stories crafted by students participating in the RadioActive youth media program. KUOW podcasts explore a wide range of topics from immigration to workplace culture. The most recent addition, *Seattle Now*, offers a 10-minute breakdown of local and national news shaping the Seattle community. Launched in March 2020, *Seattle Now* was downloaded over 100,000 times each month during its first year.<sup>4</sup>



### Balanced Podcast Content

KUOW podcasts present a balanced mix of news-focused and topic-focused content. Listeners can access favorite, weekly programs like *The Record* and *Week in Review*, revisit their favorite episodes of *Battle Tactics for Your Sexist Workplace*, or access readings, debates and lectures from around Seattle anytime via *Speaker's Forum*.

4. Triton, 2020.

## Aspirations: Building on Our Success with Your Support

**New News Habits:** Lifestyle changes related to the Covid-19 pandemic have shifted listening habits drastically in the Seattle-Tacoma market. Changes to commutes and work schedules have increased the number of KUOW listeners in the afternoon and decreased evening listening.<sup>5</sup> The demographics of KUOW listeners also changed substantially with spikes across the year in listeners aged 25–35, 35–45 and 45–55.<sup>6</sup> By upending listeners' daily routines, the pandemic has provided an opportunity to explore new programs, uniquely positioning KUOW to help listeners find their next favorite podcast and guide how audiences consume their news and information.

**Define Critical Mass:** The lifecycle of a podcast is complex. KUOW wants to explore how to expand on the station's current podcast library. What is the next step for a listener who has completed a KUOW podcast? Is there an "if you like this, then we think you will like that" option to offer? Could the station partner with other public media platforms to create new content? KUOW hopes to dig into these questions and more to craft a sustainable podcast ecosystem.

**Focus on Local Topics:** KUOW's *Prime(d)* podcast explored what happened when Amazon set up shop in Seattle and how the iconic company changed the local landscape forever. The team brought together a group of experts in the tech sector to explore this local topic with national implications. KUOW listeners share a wealth of interests that can be explored through this same model including social justice, science and health.<sup>7</sup> The next step is to answer key questions including: How are these interests and experiences unique to the Puget Sound region? How can we expand on existing partnerships and coverage to dive deeper into important topics such as the spread of mis- and dis-information, the meteoric rise and decline of Boeing or Seattle Police reform?

## Expected Results

Podcasts are a portal to the next generation of public radio audiences, an accessible way for non-broadcast listeners to engage with innovative audio experiences. Building on a library of podcasts will allow KUOW to attract exceptional talent to produce even more compelling content. Successes like [WNYC Studios](#) prove that there is an ongoing need for podcast incubation and innovation. KUOW hopes to replicate such success, crafting unique audio experiences that provide empathy, human connection, knowledge and even stress relief, all with a focus on stories that have impact locally, nationally and beyond.

5. Nielsen, 2020.

6. Nielsen, 2020.

7. Summer Audience Survey. (2020 July). KUOW.