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Podcasting in 2020 - What You Need to Know

Pat Flynn: Hey, I want to start off by doing a podcasting quiz with you. I'm going to ask you a question. I want you to consider your answer, and I'll tell you the sort of answer that most people give. Now, I don't have to ask you whether or not you listen to podcasts—it's kind of obvious since you're listening to this episode—but more than fifty-two percent of the US population, at least, is actually listening to podcasts now. If you were to ask people, even three years ago, "Do you listen to a podcast?" The answer would not only be, "No." It would be, "I don't even know what a podcast is." Thankfully now, most people do, thanks to just it being around for much longer now, people having access to it more than ever, and a lot of celebrities and big-time names coming on, starting their own shows, which is inviting a lot of people into the listening space. So, I imagine this number is going to be increasing well over time, for sure.

But here's the next question. How many shows are you subscribed to? Hopefully at least one, this one, but I'm curious. Maybe it requires you to go into your app just for a sec to see how many podcasts you are actually subscribed to, but the average number is actually seven. Maybe you're above average, or maybe you're below average, like me. I listen to—or am subscribed to—three, and it's that because I used to subscribe to twenty-five. But I realized that it was just taking up so much time, and I wanted to consume all those things that I wasn't having enough time to get anything done. So I'm in the camp of, well, I purposefully have cut out the noise so I can just focus on what I need to focus on. Hopefully you're subscribed to this one. Make sure you subscribe if you haven't already. So, seven is the average.

The final question here in this quiz is, when you sit down or go to listen to a podcast or your listening podcast sessions, how long are you listening for? I want you to consider other kinds of content here so we can compare when you consider a blog post and how long a person might read a blog post. They might be spending five to ten minutes. They're not even reading every single word. They might be distracted by other things, clicking around, going from here to there. Five to ten minutes, maybe. A YouTube video, a person may be

watching for less than five minutes. I've found out since diving into YouTube this past year, if you get a person to watch your video for more than five minutes, you are doing extremely well.

Consider that versus your answer for your podcast listening session, which if it's like anything in any of the surveys or questions that I've run in-person at events, it's probably anywhere between twenty-five minutes to an hour at a time, if not more. Some shows, not mine, but some shows, like from Tim Ferriss or Joe Rogan, are often two to sometimes three hours in length. That is a lot of time to get in front of people. Podcasting is just such a beautiful platform for these reasons, and it's because where we listen to podcasts, we're listening on a run. We are listening on a commute. We're listening while we're on a walk with our dog or what have you. It's just, you can't get in front of people in any other way, other than audio.

This is why audio is booming now. It's why it is growing, and it's why we have, today, a very special guest with us, and that is Kevin, Kevin Finn from buzzsprout.com. Buzzsprout is an amazing software that helps people create podcasts. It's a podcasting hosting company. *[Full Disclaimer: As an affiliate, I receive compensation if your purchase through this link.]* I've used several in the past. I use Libsyn, as well, but I'm also user of Buzzsprout. My show, AskPat, is hosted there, and I'm very, very happy with what they've been able to do and just all the things that they're creating, and I often recommend for people when they start with a podcast to start with Buzzsprout.

So I wanted to invite Kevin on. He was very interested in helping you out to learn more about podcasting, some of what's happening in this space today, and even what's going on in the future. I also wanted to dive in a little bit to the history of this company, because it's a very interesting way that they work and they get things done. For anybody who is developing any products, Kevin has brought on some really amazing advice for just kind of how to get systems going and how to keep going with product creation. So, really exited to invite Kevin on to talk about all things podcasting today. Before we get to that, let's get to the intro. Here we go.

Announcer: *Welcome to the Smart Passive Income Podcast, where it's all about working hard now, so you can sit back and reap the benefits later, and now your host. He has the best voice of a guy in the world, shucks, Pat Flynn.*

Pat: What's up, everybody? Welcome to session number 395 of the Smart Passive Income podcast. My name is Pat Flynn, here to help you make more money, save more time, and help more people, too. A beautiful way to do all those things is by podcasting. I've been podcasting for about a decade now, and I'm just super stoked to bring on Kevin from Buzzsprout, an amazing company I'm in full support of, and I'm an affiliate. I use the product. It's amazing, but we're here to talk not about Buzzsprout and getting started with them, but just about podcasting, in general, because I know you've been thinking about starting a podcast. Or maybe you've already started one and you're curious about what a person who is on the inside in this space is thinking about the industry and where it's going. We have some fun things to talk about here. Let's not wait any longer. Here he is, Kevin Finn, from buzzsprout.com.

Kevin, welcome to the Smart Passive Income podcast. Thanks for being here today, man.

Kevin Finn: Hey, Pat. Thanks for having me. I'm very excited.

Pat: Yeah, this will be a lot of fun. You and I have gotten to know each other quite well over the last few years. I get to see you at a lot of the podcasting conferences that are out there, and you guys just always create a lot of buzz, and hence the word Buzzsprout for the company name. Definitely want to dig into the history of the company and sort of the things that you guys are doing over there for helping us podcasters. But first, I wanted to talk about the podcasting space, in general, because a lot of things that happened in the last just even year and a half. A lot of big players coming on-board, and you, as providing a service, a software company within this space and have been in it for a while now, what are your thoughts on where things

are headed in the podcasting space? I'm curious to hear your perspective on that.

Kevin: Yeah. We got into the podcasting space in 2009. At the end of 2009, it's when we actually launched Buzzsprout. Back then, most people had no idea what a podcast was. In fact, we had launched the product to answer the requests of some users who had a need in another product that we had. They didn't even use the word, podcasting. They were just saying, "Hey, we have all this audio content, and we want to put it online." And so, we were faced with the question of, should we build this as a feature of an existing product or build it as a standalone product?

This space has changed quite a bit. Back then, going from educating people to actually what you're talking about and asking for is called podcasting, and we are interested in building a tool and solving that problem for you, until today when everybody knows what a podcast is. It's the hottest thing. Conferences are popping up everywhere. There's thousands and thousands of people attending conferences. I can actually go meet a parent at a soccer field. They say, "Hey, what do you do?" I say, "I work on this software product, and it's helped podcasters get their audio content online." They're like, "Oh, podcasts are awesome. I listen to this show and this show." I mean, my world has changed quite a bit in the past ten years.

Pat: It's changed for me, too, both, as a consumer of content. I mean, I remember I used to read blogs all the time. Do you remember when we would read blogs by waking up in the morning, and you'd check your sort of RSS feed?

Kevin: Yeah, for sure.

Pat: I'd see like thirty posts from my favorite personal finance blogs and other entrepreneurial blogs. Now, that doesn't even happen anymore. Now, it's like I get notified on my phone when I get a new podcast for something, and then I go and I'm like, okay, when am I going to be able to listen? Oh, on my trip or on this commute. Do you

listen to podcasts quite often, Kevin, and what do you actually listen to?

Kevin: I do. I listen to quite a few podcasts. Some of my favorites are . . . I mean, I love . . . I don't know how popular it is. I think it's a pretty popular show. One of my favorite new shows that launched this year was "Conan O'Brien Needs a Friend." I think that's a fantastic show. I listen to that all the time. My all-around favorite show is "How I Built This with Guy Raz."

Pat: Yeah.

Kevin: You ever listen to that?

Pat: Absolutely. That comes from the NPR world and Conan is obviously a very big celebrity. What are your thoughts on all these celebrities coming in to the podcasting space? I think it's really exciting, but I think a lot of people worry that, hey, the big celebrities are on now. We're kind of too late.

Kevin: Oh. I don't think so. I mean, maybe I'm being optimistic about it, but I'm kind of like the rising tide rises all ships type of mentality on that. I think it's fantastic because if a celebrity comes into podcasting, they're going to market that show like crazy. And so, we have more and more people saying, "Hey, I heard Conan O'Brien has a podcast," or, "I heard Ron Burgundy is doing a show," or whatever. "Can you help me listen to a podcast?" Or, "How do I get these on my phone?" Those conversations are happening more and more, which is just driving listenership. And so, while you're in there, other shows pop up when you're just browsing shows or searching for various topics, whether it be Smart Passive Income or browsing categories. I want to see business podcasts, or I want to see sports podcasts, or whatever. Once you're in the ecosystem and you start enjoying this content, then naturally, you're going to seek out more content. I think it's super exciting.

Pat: Yeah, I would agree with that. I mean, I even saw a spike back when Serial was really popular and it was sort of the first mainstream podcast. It was parodied on SNL, and then a lot of people got into it. It was many people's first introduction to podcasts. I saw a spike in my downloads when that was all going down. I agree with you. I think it's great that a lot of these celebrities are coming on, but we're also starting to see—as you know as somebody who has created a hosting company for podcasts—more people are starting their own show, which is really cool. With that, comes a lot of noise. It comes a lot of worry that maybe it is too saturated.

Yes, maybe celebrities are bringing more people into the listening space, but in terms of more and more people creating a podcast, I know it's exciting, and obviously you're helping people create podcasts, but how can we, as podcasters, cut through all that noise? I want to talk a lot in this episode—and we'll talk about it throughout this episode—just tips for people who are creating podcasts. How can one stand out now as they're starting to think about the show they're creating, or maybe they just started one? I would love your perspective on that, as somebody who has been in this space for a while.

Kevin: Sure. I think I would start by saying you have to bring something—not necessarily unique, but you have to bring something of quality. The best place to figure out what is something of quality is by thinking about a podcast—something that you're creating—as your own product. Just like me being a software developer when I'm thinking about, what new product ideas do I have or what product do I want to bring to the world. I want to go out, and I want to look at a competition, and I want to say, "What do I enjoy? What am I excited about? What opportunities are there?" If I was going to find a podcast today that would be my ideal podcast, the exact thing that I want to listen to, there's probably something similar, but there's probably not exactly what you want.

And so, defining your show upfront before you just get behind the mic or you and a friend get behind the mic and just start talking about

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something random, but defining exactly what you want to talk about and what value you want to bring and who your audience is going to be, and thinking that all through upfront can totally separate you from everybody else because you've already done the research, right? You've said, "Hey, I'm interested in creating a podcast that speaks to entrepreneurs." Well, there's thousands of podcasts that speak to entrepreneurs, but what's your unique flavor? What's your unique spin on that? What do you have to say that other people aren't saying? That will always break out from the noise because it's unique, and it's your voice, and it's your perspective. It's not just you sitting down behind a mic and rambling about entrepreneurship. You put some thought behind it, and I think that's important, and that's what's becoming more and more necessary as the market is becoming more and more saturated.

Pat: Yeah. I love the idea of thinking about your podcast as a product. I wish I had that same advice when it came to my blog, because blogging and podcasting are very similar. Seth Godin recently said that podcasting is the new blogging. But I remember with the blog, for example, I mean, I had hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of posts. It wasn't until somebody finally came by—actually, it was here on the show in Episode 200. He was like, "Pat, your blog is just this giant chunk of content that was created over time, and it's not necessarily the best product for somebody to go and find for the first time. It's overwhelming. There's too much stuff. If it was treated like something that would be helpful to the eyes of, both, people who are on the site and Google, what would it look like?"

That episode, Episode 200, talked about literally deleting or redirecting a bunch of old stuff that wasn't necessary so that it actually could turn into this nice package. I think a podcast can be thought of in the same way, and it's a little bit harder to go back and edit and do those things later on. So getting really smart with what content you're creating, who is going to be on your show, what those stories are going to be told about, and how that sort of progresses people from episode one and then moving forward is, I think, a really smart idea.

I'd love your thoughts on—because this is a big common question I have with a lot of people who come in to my podcasting space, who either learn from me for free on YouTube or come to get deeper level information in my courses, they go, "Okay, how niche should I go?" Right? One way to stand out is to go niche, but there is a line. You could go too far. How do you balance that? How niche is too niche? I know you get often asked, "What should my show be about?" What's your comment on sort of niching down or niching too far, potentially?

Kevin: I'd probably lean more towards niching further down than further up. You're right. There is a point at which it could become too specific. When your audience is just you and your best friend, you've gone too far. It certainly depends on your goals. Right? The question I always want to start with when I interact with people at a conference, or through a support channel, or something like that, is, why did you start? What are the goals of your podcast? That can help us define how narrow of a market is appropriate.

I live in Jacksonville, Florida. If I was speaking with a local realtor who wanted to start to share their real estate expertise in this market, then that could get really specific about that niche, but I don't need thousands of listeners for my show. Right? I can only serve maybe ten or fifteen customers with quality service at a time. If I have a hundred or two hundred listeners for every episode, I'm doing fantastic. So I can be very specific in my niche.

Now, there's sports podcasts, for example. I might not want to . . . Unless it's just a hobby and a passion project, but I might not want to create a sports podcast for a local middle school basketball team, that might be a little bit too tight, especially if I want to cover the cost of my hobby. Right? If I want to do affiliate marketing or something, or generate a little bit of revenue to pay for my microphone and pay for my hosting, you might have a hard time doing that. But maybe if I covered all of middle school sports in my county and I did team reviews, or who is playing who, or score updates, things like that, that would be a little bit broader, but again, I'd have more opportunity to

talk about maybe a local sporting goods shop, and go in there and get ten percent off your purchase if you mention my podcast or something.

Pat: I like that. What are some of the goals that people come to you with? When you ask that question, "What are your goals," what are some of the common reasons why people are starting a podcast? We talked about getting more clients if you're in real estate, for example. You had talked about just a passion or hobby sort of thing. What are some other common goals that people have and reasons why podcasts are started?

Kevin: Yeah. We do a lot of work with non-profits. Those are people who just have a message that they feel compelled to share with the world, whether that be a religious podcast or a charity, or something like that. We do a ton of work there. We see a lot of podcasts in that space. Just like growing influence in expertise, that's kind of a big thing.

Pat: I mean, I think there's obviously . . . I know some people who have books that they want to sell. That goes along the same lines as an influencer, right? But products, courses, is a big reason why . . . Actually, it wasn't the reason why I started the podcast. It became a part of the podcast because now I have courses to offer my listeners and students. Events, a lot of people have podcasts to support events that are coming up. Sometimes, they're seasonal. Sometimes, they're episodic and more consistent, but another reason why a lot of people start is because they just want to have a platform to connect with the guest.

Kevin: Exactly, yeah, networking opportunities, for sure.

Pat: Exactly. I have a lot of people who come take my course. When I ask them, "Why do you start?" They're like, "I just needed to have something to use to connect with people in my industry." It becomes an amazing platform for that.

Kevin: Yeah, remote working has become so popular. So many people are not in offices anymore. And so, corporate jobs used to be the thing in the '80s or whatever, but you'd go and you'd see a hundred people during a day. But now, you might not. You might work out of a Starbucks or your home office. And so, just being able to connect with other professionals who are in the same line of work or something like that, that's a fantastic reason to start a podcast. We also have a lot of story-tellers, people who are just . . . true crime podcasts are huge, or comedy podcasts are huge. Tons of different reasons.

Pat: Now I know some people also are thinking about starting a podcast to make money, to make a living. How possible is that? I'm curious your thoughts on that. I obviously know it is possible, and I've helped many do that, but is it realistic?

Kevin: I think it's realistic. I don't think it's a good reason to start a podcast.

Pat: Why do you say that?

Kevin: Okay. I think if you say, "I want to be a podcaster," that's not a great reason. This happens quite often. People will write under support or I'll meet them at a conference, and they'll say, "Hey, I want to be a podcaster." "Fantastic. What do you want to talk about?" "Well, what should I talk about? I heard true crime is big. Should I do that?" "No." You shouldn't be a podcaster because you want to be a podcaster, just like you wouldn't be like, "I want to be a radio personality." You would say, "I am passionate about sports," or, "I'm passionate about journalism," or I'm passionate about something like that. That would be the medium in which you would execute what you're passionate about.

           The same thing, if people come and they say, "Hey, I want to make a great living, but I don't want to work hard. I heard podcasting is the thing to do." That's the red flag that it sets off for me. If that's the motivation behind it, you think that podcasting is a way to get rich and not do a lot of work, it's not the right place to do that. But, if you

are willing to do the work, and you are passionate about it, and you have something compelling and interesting, and you have value to add, then podcasting is a fantastic channel to do that on. You can certainly make a good living doing it, but it's going to take a lot of work, just like making a good living in any career is going to take a lot of work.

Pat: Absolutely. I think monetization is definitely possible. I've obviously had a lot of students who have generated all kinds of different kinds of income and have used different income streams to support their life in one way or another. What are the requirements for monetization? I think a lot of podcasters coming in do want to make money and support it. Most of my audience, they're not coming in with, "I just want to get rich quick." Podcasting is not a way to do that, but they want to build an audience, build a tribe, build fans, and be able to support them and generate an income as a byproduct of serving them, but is there a requirement? Are there specific, for example, niches that, well, it's impossible to make money in? Or is there a certain number of . . . I get this question a lot. "How many listeners do I need in every episode to begin to make money?" How do you answer those questions?

Kevin: Again, I come back to your why. Like, why are you podcasting? If you want to earn money to cover the cost of your podcasting, we can accomplish that pretty easily, and we don't need a large audience to do that. We can get into all the different ways you can monetize a podcast. I'm not sure how relevant that is right now, but it's not like the YouTube model. It's not where I'm just going to throw podcast episodes up on the internet, and then someone is going to start sending me checks.

Pat: Right, right. It's not AdSense.

Kevin: Right. It's not AdSense. The dynamic ad models that exist for podcasting right now are not super healthy or great, and so there are a few, but they do require you to have a decent size audience, like a

thousand or more, and still then, you're probably getting maybe ten or fifteen dollars a month, not much.

Pat: That's for ads?

Kevin: That's for dynamic ad insertion. Again, that's me being pretty optimistic about it. The reality is usually a lot lower than that, because most people aren't doing a thousand downloads per episode. But, what's more compelling, what I encourage people to do, is look at affiliate marketing. I know you teach a course on that, but I think affiliate marketing and podcasting go hand in hand because what you're doing in podcasting is, you're creating relationships, and you're creating trust. People are listening to you in their ears. They're forming a relationship with you, and they're starting to trust your opinion. If you have a product that you are excited about, and whether it be a product that relates exactly to your podcast or not, maybe it's just . . .

I listen to Accidental Tech Podcast. The guys on that show are talking about Apple products and technology, but they did a host endorsement, like a host-read ad. It was an endorsement for RX Bars. They were talking about how great they were, and how good they make them feel, and how they have all these natural ingredients. Well, you know what we have a massive box of in our office right now that everyone is eating and loving, is RX bars, because I trust the guys at Accidental Tech Podcast. If they said they tried them and they like them, they made them feel good and gave them energy and weren't loaded with sugar, then I will trust that. It has nothing to do with Apple products or technology. It was just a great endorsement for a product that turned out to be great.

Pat: What made you enjoy that endorsement and take them up on that offer, versus oftentimes, we listen to podcasts and we're just like, ugh, not another mattress. I don't need that right now. What made it organic and make sense for you with that particular show?

Kevin: Well, in my mind, there's a huge difference between a commercial or even a host-read ad and an endorsement. When a host of a podcast that comes on and starts talking about a product, and they put a personal experience behind it, I'm much more interested in hearing that. The hosts also do a great job, sometimes, of making the ad reads, themselves, entertaining. So, they put their own personality in flair or personal stories in there. Other ads that I like . . . The guys at ATP, the Accidental Tech Podcast, do a great job with this. They talked about Fracture prints. They were talking about how they have these Fracture prints of their kids all over their homes, and now it's a beautiful new way of displaying photographs around their house. It's personal connection.

I mentioned the Conan O'Brien podcast. He does a great job of doing . . . He does non-endorsement ads. He hasn't tried all the products that he's selling, but he makes them hilarious. They're super entertaining. And so, every ad spot that he does, every host-read ad spot that he does on his show is a comedy bit. Why am I going to skip over that two minutes of comedy? Because I'm listening to this podcast to be entertained in the first place, and when the advertisements are just as entertaining as the podcast content, I'm sure to listen. And so, I might not need a new comforter right now, or I might not need a new mattress, but when I do, those messages are in my mind, and Conan made it . . . The Casper mattress sounded funny and entertaining. I might go check out Casper.

Pat: That's so cool. I love that. Even if you don't have, quote, "sponsors" yet, maybe you're just starting out, you could still do the same kinds of reads and endorse products as an affiliate. I love that idea. Anybody can get started right now doing that, just finding products that you've probably used before, finding an affiliate program that promotes that. They might have one built-in. Obviously, if you're promoting things on Amazon, you can do it through Amazon Associates. If you're going to be mentioning these products and maybe recommending them anyway within the content that you have for that episode, then you might as well. Right? I think those are some big ideas, and obviously we've talked about getting more clients,

getting more students for your courses, getting people to know you a little bit before hiring you as a coach. I think that's another big opportunity. If you do any coaching or consulting, it's like your podcast is sort of a mini non-personalized coaching session. Now people want personalized stuff, and they'll pay you for it.

Kevin: At Buzzsprout, we are like a hundred percent all-in on the affiliate marketing model. What I love about the whole idea is it shifts the risk from the brand. It would normally pay you on a CPM model. They'd normally pay you an upfront fee to go ahead and talk about their product, and then they would hope that they're going to get more customers that are going to pay them back whatever they spent, plus some. Right? They're taking all the risk in that equation.

The affiliate model shifts it. You're taking the risk. So, I'm going to talk about your product on my podcast for an hour, and if I approach the sponsor directly, maybe that's worth a hundred dollars. Maybe I could sell it for a hundred dollars, but I'm going to forgo the hundred dollars right now, and I'm going to talk about a product that I really believe in, and I think I can get enough people to buy that product that the commissions are going to bring me more than a hundred dollars. I love . . . I mean, maybe it's just the entrepreneurial mindset I have, but I love the idea of, hey, I will take more risk, because I believe in my product, and then I will get more reward for it.

Pat: Well, there isn't even that much risk to begin with, compared to the risk of doing a brand deal, and then you not selling enough to then not continue that relationship moving forward. Versus, like you said, it's just like if you make money, the company makes money, and then the person gets the product that they wanted. Everybody wins in that case. The risk is, maybe you don't sell any. Well, nobody is hurt. No harm, no foul. I love that model. I think affiliate marketing is where all podcasters should start, even in episode one, perhaps even talking about a particular product that you use. As long as it's done authentically and organically, and you share stories behind it, like you said, you mentioned stories a couple times. This is what podcasting, I feel, is meant for. It's for these stories that are told.

I'd love for you to get into, actually, the story of Buzzsprout and where it came from, how it started. There are a number of podcasting hosts now available. Buzzsprout has become one of my favorite, in particular, because it's just so easy to get started with. I don't know if user interface, user experience, was something that was just very purposeful, but that's very obvious when you get into the product. Just how simple it is to set up everything, compared to some others. But go over like, how did Buzzsprout get started? What's the origin story there?

Kevin: Sure. It was back in 2009. We're a software shop. We build software, and we have a couple different products, Buzzsprout being the biggest and the one that we're most actively involved with right now. But we've been building software for years. It was around 2009. We had a content management system, which is just a . . . It's a software tool that helps people create websites. So, think of Squarespace, or Wix, or there's a couple big ones now. We have a smaller one, and it was focused mostly on people in the non-profit space. If you had a non-profit, and you needed a website, you could come and sign up online and have a website up in a couple hours.

As these non-profits were at different conferences or speaking at different venues, they were recording these things, and they wanted to put them on their website. And so, over and over, we would have customers asking us about, how do we get this audio content online? And so, we were faced with the question, or the decision, rather, of, do we build this as a feature into our existing product, or do we build it as a standalone product? This was probably the luckiest or wisest, however you look at it, decision that we ever made. Because we decided to build it as a standalone product. We thought it was too big of a feature to try to stuff into another product.

As you mentioned, we wanted to make it really clear and really simple, and so I forgot to mention. Years before this, we tried . . . There were already some big players in the market doing this podcast hosting. We tried for years to help people. We tried to write

guides. We did video tutorials for them. We got on the phone with them and we'd say, "Hey, go to this website, and sign up here, and here's how you upload, and here's how you do your settings." People were still struggling. They just weren't getting it. It was too difficult. We said, "There has to be a simpler way to do this."

We were thinking about the problem. We thought we could envision an interface that would make it easy. And so, that's where the idea came from, and that's where we got excited about it. We said, "Since the product is focused mostly for non-profits initially out of the gate, it has to be super simple," because what happens oftentimes in these non-profits is you have a lot of volunteers who come in. A volunteer will come in, and they'll volunteer for six months or something, and then their schedule gets too busy or life happens, and they might switch out for a different volunteer. And so, if it takes days and days or hours and hours even to train new volunteers to be able to upload content to go on to this website, like audio content, then that's not going to work for them. It has to be something that somebody can sit down with very little or no training and kind of figure it out in a very short amount of time.

And so, that was our test case. That was the model and the target customer that we were building it after, and it just turns out that that really resonated with a lot of people who were saying, "Hey, I'm a podcaster, but I don't know how to build a website," or, "I don't know what all these crazy RSS things mean or all that code that it generates. I just want to be able to . . . I can do email. Can I just email you the file?" So, that's how our interface started. It's like in order to upload a podcast, it has to be as easy as dragging an attachment into an email. If it can't be that simple, then we've failed. And so, that's where we started, and it's just gone from there.

Pat: That's really cool. I just think it's incredible that you built it specifically because everybody was just complaining that everything was so hard. I mean, this is why we create things. Right? This is why my SwitchPod exists now and other things. I think a lot of people, when they come up with an idea for something like this, they see a market

need and have a potential solution in mind. How are you able to move quickly and actually execute on this? I'm curious to know what those initial conversations were like and planning processes. How long did it take you and your crew to go from idea to the first version, and what's it been like since then to continue to grow the company?

Kevin: Oh, gosh. It's been a long time, so I'm going to try to remember back, but I think the first version of the product, I think we spent about six months developing. I remember feeling at the end of that like we took too long. It wasn't because we were missing a market opportunity or anything, but I think we built too much software without putting it out in front of customers and getting some validation about what we were building. Were we on the right track? Were we on the wrong track? Did we need this? Did we not need that? I remember having that feeling. We launched with the ability to upload a podcast and promote your podcast—we had a few small promotion tools in there—and track your podcast.

I think we could've just launched with just the ability to just upload your podcast and get an embeddable player, and give them an RSS feed. If we launched with just that, it probably would've taken half the time, and we probably would've gotten better feedback sooner to be able to figure out where to go with the product next or what the market really needed.

Pat: That's really cool. How do you . . . and I know this because I'm in software, as well. How do you manage customer requests in terms of, oh, it should do this, it should do this, because this is . . . I'm trying to get to those who are creating new products of any kind, software, courses, programs of any kind. Feature creep becomes a real thing, especially from your customers who are like, "Oh, it should be this way. It should be like this. No, it should be like this." What's your process or procedure for taking in those feature requests, which are important to just kind of acknowledge, but then how do you prioritize? How do you manage that?

Kevin: Yeah. Are you familiar with the guys at Basecamp?

Pat: I am.

Kevin: Okay. We have followed their methodology for a very long time. And so, a lot of the stuff that I'll tell you how we work will mirror a lot of the way that they do things, and we've learned from them, and they, in a lot of ways, have mentored us. We've attended a bunch of their workshops and stuff like that. I take no credit for this, but I'll share with you how we develop. I just wanted to make sure I'm giving proper credit before I do so.

But all feature requests that come in, they run through the filter of no by default. We want to build simple software that's really easy to use. It's a joy to use. It's not overloaded with features that does a million different things. We want to figure out, what are the core problems that we're trying to solve, and we want to solve them perfectly. That means that we might not be the perfect fit for everybody. There are going to be some podcasters out there that say, "Hey, I need this." For example, a feature that we don't have is, we don't have the ability to do a private podcast. We can't lock down an RSS feed with a password. It's not a problem that we are saying that we'll never solve. It's just a problem that we're not solving today, and we're happy to refer you to one of our competitors that has that feature that we think they do a great job with if that feature request comes in. But by default, everything is run through the filter of no by default, and we don't keep track.

We don't have a list of somebody requested this, somebody requested this, somebody requested this. We just keep it in our minds. The partners all monitor support requests. Everything that comes in and out, we're in and out of the support box all the time, so we know exactly what our customers are asking for. We know all the pain points, but it's also no by default, and there is no list. And so, what that does is it means that the only requests that are kind of top of mind for us are the requests that are coming in consistently. Like, oh, I hear that a lot.

We also work in these six-week work cycles. Anyone in the company, anybody from our support team to our designers to our developers to the partners of the company, if something is going to get done on our product, it's going to start as a pitch. That means somebody is going to sit down and they're going to say, "Hey, I use our product all the time to push podcasts up, and here is a problem that I run into," or, "Here is something that could be more efficient or more effective way if our software did this." They're going to write it up in a narrative format, and they can do some sketches or whatever, and they're going to pitch it to the partners of the company.

Then they're going to put it out in a public form, and we use Basecamp as our project management software that we do that with. It goes out. Everybody sees it. Everybody can comment on it. "I love this idea, or here's a way to improve that idea, or I've had . . ." Somebody from our support team might say, "Yeah, customers write in about this all the time. People would love this." And so, the pitch gets improved, improved, improved. Then every six weeks, the partners of the company sit down, we evaluate all the pitches, and we figure out, what are we going to work on for the next six weeks?

And so, we don't have the five-year plan. We don't have the three-year plan. We don't have the one year plan. We have the six-week plan. Every six weeks, if you're a Buzzsprout customer, you'll see that roughly every six weeks, hey, new things roll out roughly every six weeks. And so, we're constantly iterating. We're constantly building new features. We're constantly improving old features. Some of it is front-facing, like customer-focused stuff. Some of it is backend, making sure that our servers are running fast, and our caches are up to speed, and all that kind of stuff, but yeah. That's how we work.

And so, its not that we don't listen to customer feedback. It's that we listen to customer feedback, but we have to run it through the filter of, no, we want to keep our software simple. So, we don't want every feature. Of course, there's a million things we could do, but if we did a million things, we wouldn't be great to the people that we want to be great to. If we hear it enough, then we'll remember it, and then

somebody has to pitch it in our company, and people have to get behind it, and then the partners have to approve it. Then six weeks later, it'll be in the product.

Pat: That's really cool. How often are those pitches? Do they come in at a regular basis, or what's the planning process like for that?

Kevin: Yeah. They can come in at any time.

Pat: They can come in any time.

Kevin: Yeah. It's just part of anybody's normal workflow. We all try to keep forty-hour weeks around here, and we all have about forty hours a week worth of work to do, but every now and then, you'll find yourself on a Thursday afternoon at 3:30 and it's like, hey, I kind of hit a good stopping point for today. I have my own personal list of, here's the two or three pitches that have kind of been on my mind. I might pull one of those and write it up.

Pat: That's really neat. I like that. Who are the decision-makers related to those pitches?

Kevin: The partners of the company are myself, Tom Rossi, and Marshall Brown. We started trying to make it a group decision. We would have a company meeting. We would put all the pitches up on the board. We would say, "How many votes do we have for this? Or how many . . ." It was just total chaos, did not work at all. It was bad for the culture because people would feel offended, or people would be like, "I don't like that because of this." Then somebody would take that personally because it was their idea, and so we moved away from that. Highs and lows, fun while it lasted, but not super healthy in the long run. For the past eighteen months or so, it's just been Marshall, Tom, and I who would get in a room together, and we'll look at all the pitches, and we'll just kind of duke it out.

Basecamp, what they call it is they call it the betting table. They'll take all their pitches, and they'll throw them on the betting table. The

partners will figure out, what do we want to bet on for the next six weeks? And so, we do something very similar to that. That meeting is fine. If the three of us are arguing, well, it's just the three of us. None of us are taking it personally. We all make sure our interests are in line. There's no egos at stake, and so that meeting can be aggressive and fun and lively conversation, but we all walk out patting each other on the back. It's great.

Pat: That's really cool.

Kevin: It's really healthy.

Pat: That's really cool. Thank you for letting us in on that. That's really interesting. With my software company in the podcasting space, as well, with the Smart Podcast Player and some other things we're going to do with it is just . . . I'm always curious to see how companies, especially in the software space, sort of iterate and manage a lot of the features that are coming out. That's just really cool. I love the idea of the betting table. So, yeah. Big shout-out to the guys over at Basecamp. DHH is one of my favorites.

Coming up, I'm sure these things were on the betting table. What are some of the latest features of Buzzsprout or perhaps even upcoming ones that have gone through that process and are sort of in development or have just recently come out? I'm curious.

Kevin: Okay. This one, I am super excited about. We have just launched an affiliate marketplace inside of Buzzsprout. And so, what that is, is it's for any podcasters that are interested in stepping into affiliate marketing. This is the easiest way to get started in affiliate marketing. We partnered with five brands, one of them being Buzzsprout, but the other ones are Allswell. It's a mattress company. Buffy is a comforter company, Instacart Express, and Knockaround. Knockaround are these affordable, stylish sunglasses. They're ten or fifteen dollars for a pair of really cool sunglasses.

And so, any Buzzsprout podcaster can log in, click on the affiliate marketplace, find one of these brands, click and activate their affiliate code, and then they can mention them in their podcast, and we will automatically drop their affiliate link in their show notes, and we'll do the affiliate disclaimer for them. We'll show the company logo on their podcasting page for them and everything. Anybody who clicks through that, then they automatically get a commission. It's not the end all, be all in affiliate marketing, but it's a fantastic way for you just to try it on your podcast and see if it will work. If it does, then go out and find your own affiliates, and then start doing it that way, and build your affiliate marketing network into your podcast.

Pat: That's really cool. Five companies, plans to add more down the road, I'm sure?

Kevin: Yeah, plans to add more and plans to be able to let people kind of set up their own affiliate partners within Buzzsprout, so you'd be able to click "add a custom affiliate partner," and you would upload their logo. You would drop in your own affiliate link. That way, again, we just want to make it easy, because oftentimes, you might talk about an affiliate during your episode, but then you publish it, and you forget to put the link in your show notes or something. Those are things that computers are good at. Computers don't forget. As long as you tell me, "Hey, I mentioned Instacart in this episode," we can automatically drop your link in for you. We can do your affiliate disclaimer in there for you.

Pat: That's really neat. I like how you're thinking about how to support the podcasters that are on your platform. This is what I love about ConvertKit, email service provider that I often talk about. I advise . . . They really, really care about helping their users. When you help your users, they're going to stay with you longer. I think that's a really smart idea. *[Full Disclaimer: As an affiliate, I receive compensation if your purchase through this link.]* What else is coming up?

Kevin: What else do we have? We just rolled out multi-users. We called it Team Members. For the longest time, since Buzzsprout's launch, you

would have one username and password to log into your Buzzsprout account, and now you can add multiple team members, and they have different permission levels. You can have an administrator, who can do everything. You also have an editor, who . . . and the editor can't do certain things. They can't delete your podcast. They can't delete episodes. They can't change your billing plan, things like that. But now, you don't have to share logins. Sharing logins is a bad idea. Most people, when we first started out, for years and years and years, were kind of doing their own thing, and they were fine just having one login. But now as podcasts are getting more popular, we're seeing more people work with editors, work with teams of people. There's a lot of companies that are podcasting, so they need to be able to create different logins for different people, and so we just rolled out that feature.

Pat: Nice.

Kevin: I think the last one that's kind of big during this cycle is . . . You're familiar with Auphonic, right?

Pat: Auphonic?

Kevin: Auphonic.

Pat: Auphonic, yeah, yeah, yeah. I often recommend that to my students who want to just level out and normalize their audio.

Kevin: Right. Auphonic is a fantastic tool. We recommend it. One of the things that we'll do in Buzzsprout from time to time is, if we see a tool that a lot of people are using to accomplish a certain goal, we'll figure out, what's the Buzzsprout version of that? What that verbiage means to us, is it means, what's the eighty percent version of that tool? Headliner is a really cool way to be able to take a clip from a podcast episode and create an animated waveform and upload a custom background image behind it. You create a video, and then you can upload that video to Instagram or YouTube, and you can use it as different ways to market your podcast.

The drawback to a tool like Headliner is that it's just another step in your workflow, right? Now not only do I create the episode and I create my show notes and publish and then update my blog post and all that stuff, but now I also have to go out to Headliner, and I create this separate thing. We don't want to compete with Headliner, because Headliner is this amazing tool that does all these amazing things, but there is a Buzzsprout version of that, which means for eighty percent of the people, we don't need the ability to have complete customization over what this video looks like or to be able to have transcription text at the bottom of it or something. There's just a simpler version of that that we could just build into our tool and just give it to our users so that people who are just starting out or people who just don't have the time to add this extra step in their workflow can still take advantage of things like that. That's why we have this tool in Buzzsprout, called Visual Soundbites. It's our eighty-percent version of what Headliner does.

And so, we're doing something similar with the Auphonic, the idea that people would upload audio to us, and it might not be leveled properly. It might not have their true peak set correctly or the number of audio channels set correctly. Even leveling between speakers might not be exactly right. Auphonic does a great job of doing all that, plus more. They also have noise reduction features and stuff like that. We're not going to get into all that, but for eighty percent of people, all they need are kind of those main things. Let's get the loudness right. Let's get the true peak right. Let's get the leveling between channels correct. Right? And so, we're building that into Buzzsprout, so now you don't have to go out and have another step in your workflow. Again, it's just about making it easy so that users can focus on creating quality content and not having to worry about all of these steps in my workflow and making sure I'm getting them right.

Pat: I love that. I mean, this is why I love you guys, because my job is to make things easy for everybody listening and to work with companies like you who are helping support that, too. It's just very,

very cool and just a clear partnership here. That's amazing. To finish off here, Kevin, and thanks for the background on Buzzsprout and sort of telling us a little bit about the insider info, and what's coming up, and the releases. I appreciate that. But speaking of what's coming up, I'd love to talk about the future of podcasting. It's changing quite rapidly, as we've talked about, now. Where do you see podcasting headed in two years, five years from now? Where's it at? How has it changed? What could we prepare for?

Kevin: I mean, I hope, in a lot of ways, it stays exactly the same.

Pat: Why? Why do you say that?

Kevin: Well, I think there are . . . I mean, I love podcasting. Podcasting is the last oasis on the internet where things are open and free. There's not a lot of big tech involved in podcasting right now, in terms of tracking and privacy. I never feel good about going on to Facebook. I just feel like, gosh, you've just violated so many people's privacy. I just don't know that that's a great channel anymore. Facebook, in a lot of ways, has replaced blogs, which were fantastic. I loved blogs. We talked about that in the beginning of the episode, the idea that it had an RSS feed, and I'd connect directly with the reader. What has happened in the video space? There's not video blogs anymore. I can't subscribe to somebody's individual video blog. If I want to do video content, I have to go to YouTube.

There's been pros and cons, again, with that ecosystem, but it's very much Google's rules, and you play by their rules, and you live by the environment that they've created. Podcasting is not like that. Podcasting is open. I can create a show that is just for me that's a passion project that maybe nobody listens to, except my friend, or I can create a show that is super important and spreading a massively important message that everybody needs to hear, and it's downloaded by hundreds of thousands of people, and I make a big business out of it, but I can do whatever I want. I have full control. It's open, and it's accessible.

Now, it's not to say that there's not problems with it. Obviously,

discoverability needs to be improved. We need to make it easier for people to listen to shows, the idea that my mom still would have no idea how to listen to a podcast on her phone. We can get better at those things. I do want to see advancements in the podcasting industry, but I don't want any one platform or company to come in and just own podcasting. I think that would be . . . I'd be really sad. The idea that I would have to listen to a certain number of ads before I could listen to the podcast, that's not exciting, especially if it got to the point where it is with YouTube where I can't skip the video content, or they've taken control over the players or something. It's likely that it could go that way, but that's what I think . . . As a podcast listener, as somebody who is interested in supporting the podcast ecosystem, I would be against that.

Pat: Yeah. It's, like you said, one of the only sort of open platforms right now. I often tell my students like, "Hey, this is your show. At this point in time, you can do whatever you want. Just don't use music that's not yours, and be nice to people." But, it's still pretty wide open with what we can do in our control. That's why a lot of people are asking about Anchor and if they should get into Anchor because it's a free platform, and it's easy to use, but I worry about things like that, because I've seen it happen to . . . What was it? SoundCloud when they were big into the podcasting thing, and then they went bankrupt.

I mean, these bigger companies . . . We all know, or a lot of us know, Anchor got purchased by . . . Is it Spotify? But at some point, that product is going to need to make money. Right now, it's free. So, a lot of times, we've seen with these free platforms, like Facebook, like SoundCloud, like YouTube, well, they inject money through ads, affecting the experience that listeners and creators have. I worry about that in the world of podcasting, for sure, too.

Kevin: Yeah. We certainly don't need it. Like I mentioned earlier, we need better ways to discover new podcasts, and we need easier ways to consume podcasts and stuff like that, but we don't need a YouTube of podcasts. We don't need a Netflix of podcasts. These are kind of like false problems that big money is coming into the industry and saying, "Hey, we need to solve this." But, I think they want to solve it for their

benefit, not necessarily for the benefit of the podcasting ecosystem as a whole or for independent creators. Right now, I can launch a show, and I can decide who I want to host it with, and what I want to say, and how I want to promote it, and how I want to monetize it. I can do all of that really well, really effectively.

There's plenty of ways and opportunities to do that, and to do that easily, I don't need a one-stop-shop to be able to do that. I don't expect to be able to upload a podcast episode, and you just start sending me free money or something like people kind of think with YouTube. We don't need it. We have a great ecosystem. It's thriving. Podcast listeners are more than . . . I was going to share some of these numbers with you, but the number of podcasts that Buzzsprout serves has doubled over the last years, but the number of listeners that are consuming podcasts on our platform has increased like 3.5 X. So, the number of listeners are growing faster than the number of podcasts that are being put out there. And so, it's happening, and it's healthy. I'm just getting a little bit worried that people are coming in, and they're seeing the value of this ecosystem, and they're saying, "How can we get a piece of it?" I'm not sure that that's super healthy.

That's, I mean, again, why I say hopefully, five years out from now, what does the future of podcasting look like? I think if we do a good job as independent creators are kind of protecting the space, then hopefully it doesn't look too much different, except everyone knows what a podcast is. It's a regular habit for people, that they listen to podcasts while they're in their cars, or they're working out, or in the office, or around the house, and it just becomes mainstream, but not owned by any one platform or company.

Pat: Hear, hear. Here's to that. Looking forward to seeing what happens, but thankful to have you in our corner, Kevin, with Buzzsprout and all the amazing things you guys are offering for us. I appreciate you. I'll mention a link where you can go and check out Buzzsprout, and get some amazing podcast hosting solutions for you after we finish up here. But Kevin, any final words of advice or motivation for those who are just starting their podcasting journey right now?

Kevin: Oh, I would just say podcasting is fantastic. It is a lot of fun. If there's any part of you that says, "Hey, I think I could do a podcast," you absolutely can. The best day to start a podcast is yesterday. So, get on it. Buzzsprout can help you. If we're not the right platform for you, we'll point you in the right direction. So, good luck with your journey, and keep podcasting.

Pat: Keep podcasting. Kevin, thank you so much. I appreciate you, and we'll connect again soon.

Kevin: Alright. Thank you, Pat.

Pat: Thank you.

Kevin: Buh-bye.

Pat: Alright. I hope you enjoyed that episode with Kevin from Buzzsprout. Actually, if you wanted to get started with a podcast and use Buzzsprout as a hosting company to help support you with that, like I said, it's the easiest to use by far from all the things that I've found. Plus, if you go through this special link, it is an affiliate link. You get some extra time added on to your plan.

           What's unique about Buzzsprout, also, that Kevin didn't mention is that their pricing structure is very much based on how long your episodes are, not the megabytes that you upload, which is often a problem because we don't often optimize our files. We might be paying more than we need to. You can get more time added on to your plan if you go through my affiliate link, which is smartpassiveincome.com/buzzsprout. One more time, smartpassiveincome.com/buzzsprout. We'll also have the show notes and links at the usual spot, smartpassiveincome.com/session395, but definitely check out Buzzsprout. You can get on a free plan to check it out, or a free trial at least, and you can get some more time added on to your plan if you go through that link. Once again, smartpassiveincome.com/buzzsprout.

Thanks again, Kevin, and to the entire team there for creating awesome products, for inspiring me and my software company, related to the Smart Podcast Player, as well, and just amazing things going on in the realm of podcasting. I hope you'll join me and the . . . I don't even think there are a million podcasts yet at this point. We're so early in the journey. It's so incredible. We didn't talk about how many podcasters there were, but there's less than one million podcasts out right now. So, the opportunity is ripe for all of us to provide messages that really resonate with our audiences, to provide an opportunity to create really, really amazing relationships with our people and also relationships with other industry leaders. As well as creating something that could support your lifestyle, too, because we talked about monetization in this episode, too. Get started. I'm looking forward to serving you. We'll have more resources on the show notes page if you want to get started with podcasting and want some additional help with that. Like I said, I also teach people podcasting in several different kinds of ways, including my course, Power-Up Podcasting.

Anyway, here to serve you. Thank you so much. I appreciate you, and wishing you all the best. Hit subscribe if you haven't already, and as always, Team Flynn for the win. Cheers.

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