An Introduction to Podcasting

A Communication Roadmap to plan your Audio Shows

Maria Paschoula, Communication Advisor

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A/ INTRODUCTION

The following manual is an attempt to learn more about **podcast**, a communication tool that gains increasing space in different fields of our daily life (media, science, academia, politics, civil society organizations etc.) throughout the last years. We will try to approach this trend and **develop a strategy roadmap for its use in the context of the MSF "Urban Spaces" project**.

Before that, it is helpful to understand what we are talking about. Here is a few basic information!

What is a podcast?

> "An episodic **series** of **spoken word digital audio files** that a user can **listen online** or **download** to a **personal device** for easy listening"
>
> *source: Wikipedia*

In simple words podcast is an audio show produced in order to communicate and engage with a wide or a more targeted audience. More specifically, these audio (and in some cases video files) are used to share narratives or personal stories, information, instructions or advice on a wide range of topics. In the past they were also met and described as "audio blogging". One could say that in a sense podcasts simulate to radio shows although there are differences lying between the two communication channels.

What is the basic difference between a podcast and a streamed program (i.e. radio show)?

A podcast is available either online or offline since its main characteristic is that can be downloaded (while online) as a file, stored and used even when someone is offline (not connected to internet). On the opposite, a streamed show requires for the listener to be online (internet access) in order to have access to it. This applies, for instance, to live radio shows (live streaming) or radio on demand (streaming).

It is also interesting to find out a couple of historic information while exploring the fascinating podcasting world!

How did the word “podcast” come up?

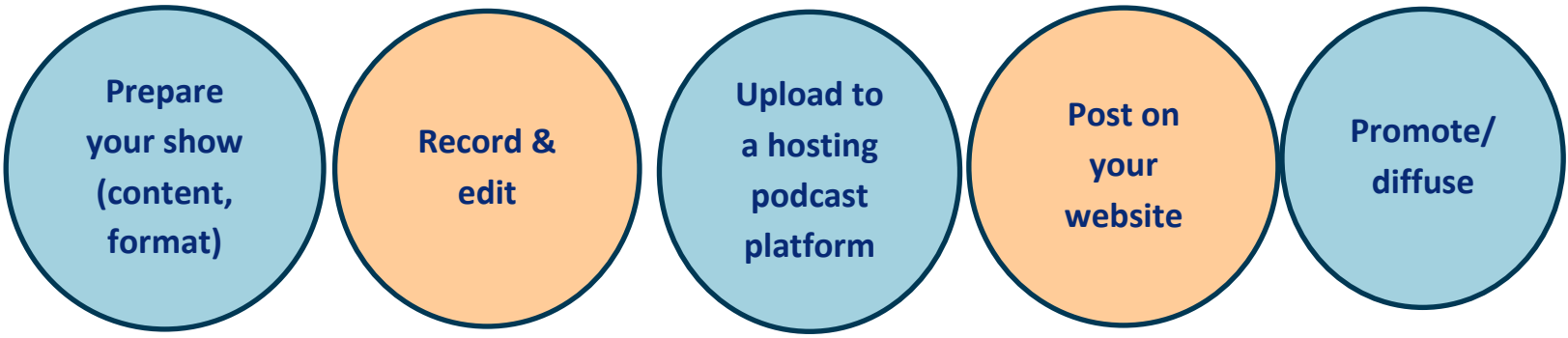
The word is actually a combination of two words: *iPod* and *broadcast*. The term was first suggested by “The Guardian” columnist and BBC journalist Ben Hammersley, who invented it in early February 2004 (Wikipedia).

Why is podcast a booming trend in communication?

Podcasts appear to gain ground due to a number of reasons. The fact that - according to studies and statistics - audiovisual communication prevails over written communication, along with its availability both online and offline (portable files), the time flexibility for producers and listeners alike (no need to stay tuned in real time) as well as the content customization (reach different audiences on targeted thematics) portray among some key factors for podcasts’ upgrowth.

B/ Basic Podcasting Stages

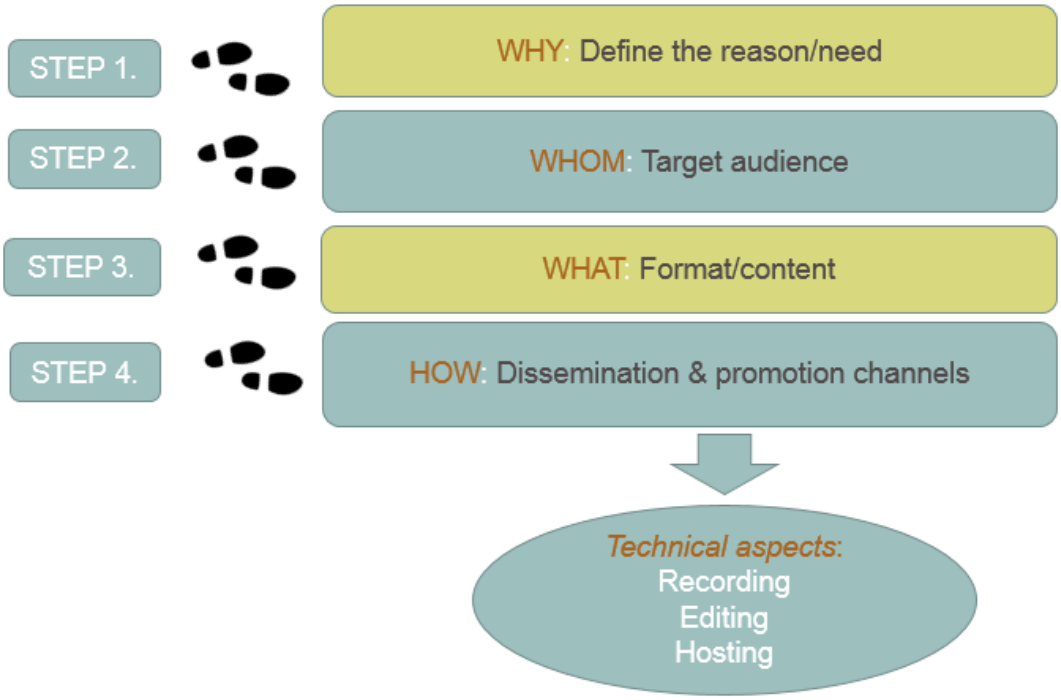
From conception to promotion



Podcast platform/player/directory: a platform where a podcast is posted & made available for online listening or downloading

C/ Developing your podcast strategy

If you think to add podcasts in your communication strategy, there are some key steps to take before you walk this new path. In the next pages you will find out more about them.



Let's take it step by step

a/ WHY: define the reason or need for podcasting

By identifying why you want or need to podcast, you ultimately define the starting point of the podcasting process. Here are some indicative questions:

- Do you want to try a new tool or way to share information or communicate your ideas and stories?
- Is your audience (potential listeners) tired of getting too much written information?
- Are you looking for channels to reach "difficult" (inaccessible), targeted or wider audiences?

More specifically, do you need to podcast in order to:

- Inform?
- Entertain?
- Inspire?
- Mobilize/engage?

Your show may respond to more than one need. Just be sure that you find a common space between your own and your potential listeners' needs and expectations.

b/ WHOM: who are your potential listeners?

Identifying your target audience and knowing to whom you want to address your show is of major importance as it defines some key elements, such as the content, the format, the structure etc.
A profiling exercise for your target audience includes:

The main characteristics: social, professional, cultural. Are there any particular features you need to take into account? In communication audience profiling is often approached and analyzed based on two main axes:

a. **Demographics**=> age, nationality, educational/cultural background, location
b. **Psychographics**=> values, beliefs, attitudes, sensitivities, current needs (i.e. protection against COVID19 for pops stranded in a refugee camp or guidance on legal procedures for asylum seekers), specific interests (i.e. recreational activities for students in quarantine)

The situational context: place & timing (refugee camp, public health crisis, conflict zone) / are there any restrictions? If yes, which are they? The sooner you define them, the better solutions or alternatives you may find.

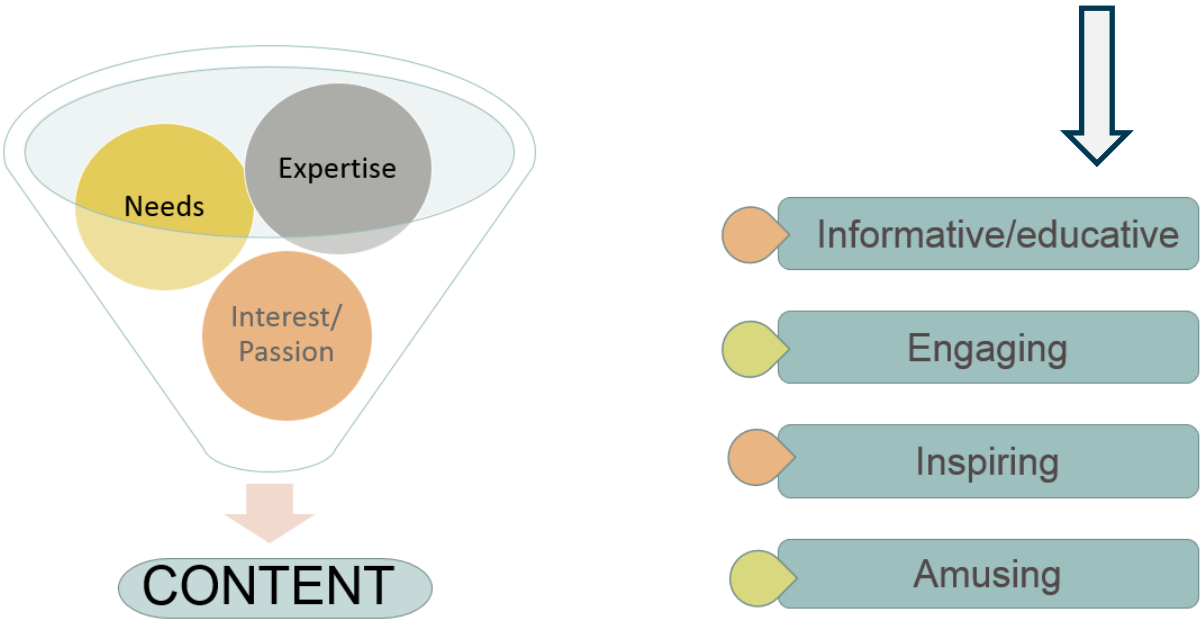
Accessibility: how can you reach your audience, directly or indirectly? Is there a mediator or focal person you need to go through?
Example: a focal person of a refugees or migrants group, a teacher of a primary school class, the fieldco for the field team on an MSF mission?
In such a case give the right instructions to your focal person and ask for feedback to make sure your show reached its destination and target!

C. WHAT: content and format

a. Content

What will be the ingredients for your podcast recipe? A podcast show-like any produced communication material - is usually a mix of needs, interests and expertise. You try to express and/or

meet specific needs based on common interests (yours and your listeners) by using your expertise. Upon this mix, your podcast can get



Get into your listeners' shoes but don't forget to also feel comfortable in them!

It is important that your podcast catches your listeners' interest but do not forget that you should also feel comfortable and confident with what you present and offer to your audience. DO NOT pick a topic just because it might be a current trend; adapt the trend to your capacity and field of expertise!

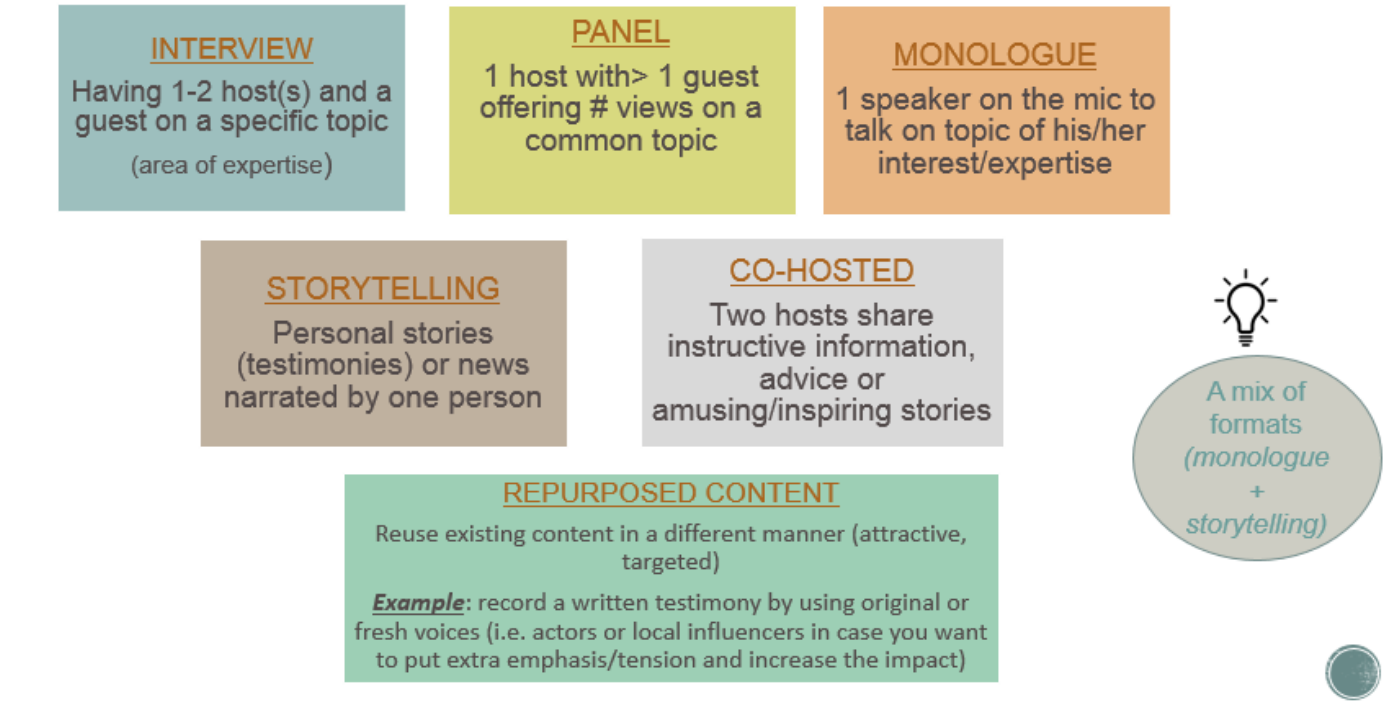
b. Format

Why the format of your show is important?

Because without a strong format, your podcast will seem a bit untidy and thus difficult for the listeners to follow it. So, it is important and helpful for you and your audience to decide on the best possible format that will offer your show **organization** and **consistency**.

Once you pick the format, you know how to structure your show and your audience knows what to expect when it opens each new episode avoiding, therefore, any risk of confusion. In communication, consistency enforces the engagement and increases the reliability. It works exactly the same way with your favorite TV or radio show! You choose it because you like-among others- the nice sense of routine it offers you.

What are the most usual podcast formats?



Before you choose your podcast format, keep in mind some key *strengths* & *challenges*

INTERVIEW	
Strengths	Challenges
Popular & favorite format	Time-investment: search of topic/ guest, preparation of questions, brief of guest.
Expertise & variety of ideas can be expressed	
Allows naturalness, little mistakes or slips of tongue; listeners expect and enjoy a loose conversation style	
During the show: the host has less to do compared to the guest, the protagonist	High dependence on the guest; fluency, capacity of expression apart from expertise. A bad guest can risk the whole show

Simple Tips for a successful interview

- Find an interesting topic & guest
- Identify the common space of interest between your guest and the audience
- Prepare an outline of the interview (questions) and share with your guest in advance to allow better groundwork and a structured discussion
- Brief your guest on the show (target, audience, recording practicalities)
- Make a short and clear introduction (theme+ guest profile)
- Avoid closed questions: answered with “yes” or “no”: the success of an interview is predominantly based on its guest’s openness & sharing of knowledge/information
- Make 1 question/time: if you combine 2 or more Qs in 1 you risk too long and complicated answers that will be difficult for your audience to follow
- Minimize distractions: set off your phone, lock your office/room, choose a quiet room, avoid checking e-mails or doing other tasks while recording (remotely)

MONOLOGUE	PANEL
Strengths	**Strengths**
Flexibility on topic & style; decide on yourself	Polyphony, different views and ideas
Build a personalized relationship with listeners	Vivid and interesting
Practical convenience: one voice easier to record, edit or correct/re-record (in case of mistake)	Host does little: cast questions and coordinate the discussion
Challenges	**Challenges**
Full responsibility on the show	Find good guest synthesis, avoid big deviations (a too fluent with a too silent guest)
Increased confidence and fluency	Keep guests engaged & avoid overlaps
Time investment: need for good practice in case of little experience or low confidence	Time keeping: balance among speakers
	Recording/editing due to lots of voices

CO-HOSTED	
Strengths	**Challenges**
Shared responsibility of the show	Ensure good chemistry between two hosts
Switch in roles, higher interest compared to solo show	Strong coordination & good preparation

Offer a more balanced view, team spirit and feeling	

STORYTELLING	REPURPOSED CONTENT
Strengths	**Strengths**
Variety of topics (news or firsthand accounts)	Easier preparation, content already available
Direct, exciting and strongly engaging	Use of good and tested material
Suitable in case of current flow of info: news/updates and personal stories/testimonies	Suitable for shows with a historical, flash back or retrospective tone
Challenges	**Challenges**
Stricter structure, need to follow a concrete norm	Risk of repetition, need to re-introduce and revive in an interesting manner
Time consuming-demanding preparation (constant updates, research, organization)	Need for re-adaptation since original material not created based on podcast needs
Challenging consistency: keep time and content relatively diligent	
Increased practical difficulties: recording/editing from different sources	

As soon as you know the most common podcast formats, you will find yourself wondering which is the right one for your case?

In order to come up with the format that serves better the needs of your show, it is good to take into consideration a couple of things; all you need is to ask yourself or team some key-questions that will showcase what can support better your obejctives. Just bear in mind that there is not just one right answer.

Examples

What is your content about?

informative/instructive, sentimental, inspiring, retrospective

- Informative/inspiring=>interview, storytelling
- Instructive=>co-hosted format

- Retrospective/historical narration=> repurposed format

Who can talk about it?

- Yourself=>monologue
- Expert(s), specialized advice/info=>interview/panel with guests or co-hosted show

What's the style of the show?

- Funny=>easier to accomplish with a team than a one-man/woman show=>panel or co-hosted format
- Engaging/touching/personalized=>an interview, storytelling or monologue format may be more appropriate for your show

No matter what your final choice is, never forget you personal style & preference.
Try to be as closer to yourself and your capacity as possible.
As the creator of a podcast you invest time, energy and ideas.
You need to enjoy the process and the outcome…and your listeners will most probably do the same!

PODCAST WITHOUT BORDERS

If you have to deal with a wide range of topics in MSF and the "Urban Spaces" project in particular, it might get difficult to pick up and stick to one format for your podcast.
In such a case you can use different paterns/formats (don't exaggerate, though) in an organized way that will offer a sense of structure and consistency to your shows. As already said, consistency helps your audience's engagement and increases your own reliability.

- ✓ Once you define your needs and target audience(s) at local level as "Urban Space" focal persons, make a list with your topics or areas of interest.
- ✓ Based on this mapping, you can produce and organize your podcast episodes under different umbrella thematics.
- ✓ Each thematic may be served through a different but stable format (i.e. interview, storytelling)

Example

Needs: *inform, support and engage refugees & migrants reaching your country, living around your neighborhoods.*

Target audience: *Refugees & migrants groups*

THEMATIC 1/ "COVID-19"

"How to deal with COVID19"

Monologue or co-hosted shows with medical/mentalh health advice or instructions to deal with COVID-19 pandemic

THEMATIC 2/ "INSPIRATION WITHOUT BORDERS"

"Create a common Urban Space"

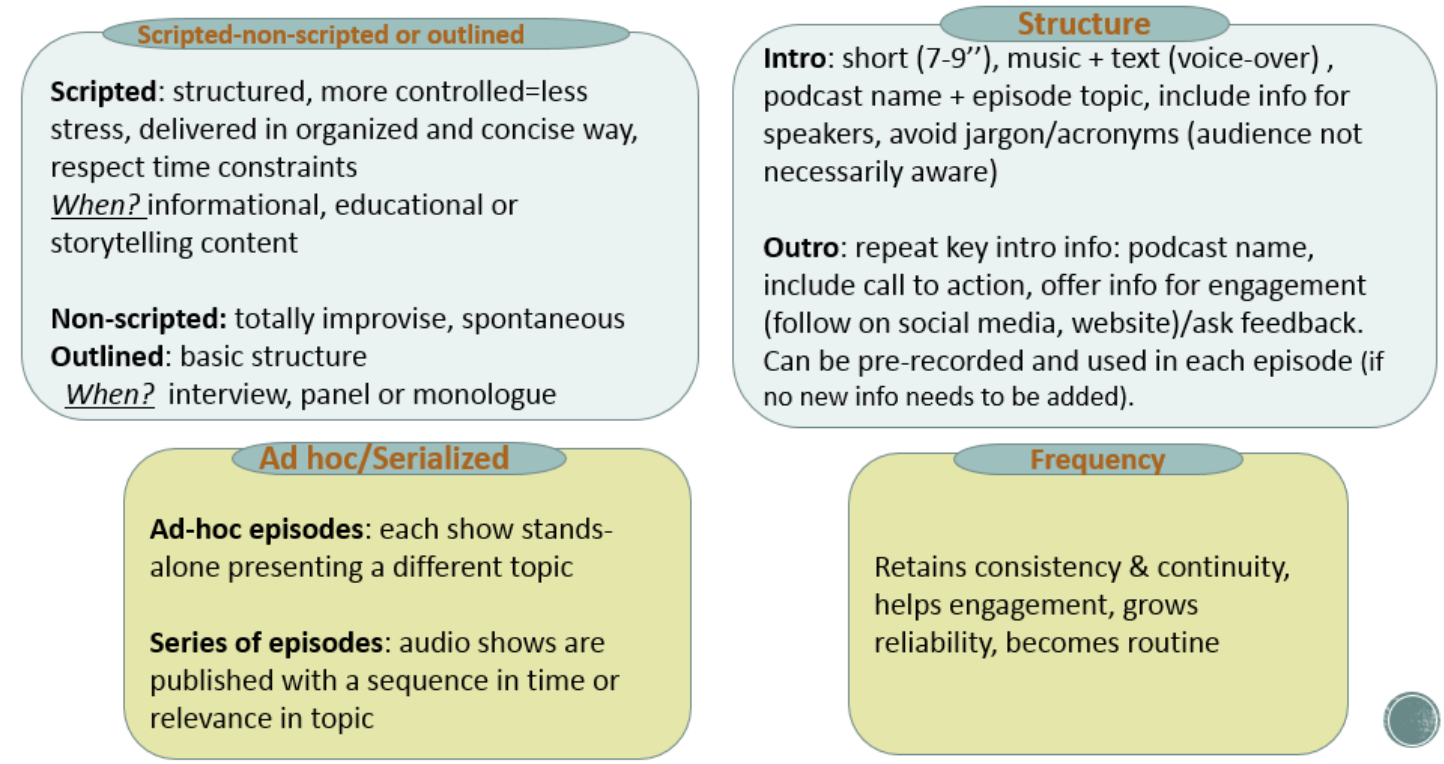
Interviews with MSFers, local project partners and beneficiaries who share their experience and ideas on easy and effective ways of co-existence (locals with refugees) and engagement.

! **Organize your shows in series if they relate in topic or come in a chronological order; if not, then go for ad-hoc episodes**

PODCAST EPISODES: How to prepare, organize & title your shows

To finalize your show's content and format, you need to take a few more steps and decisions. Below you can see the main categories:

a. **Skeleton**: scripted, non-scripted or outlined
b. **Structure**: opening (intro) & closing part (outro) of an episode
c. **Organization** in terms of *time* & *content*: ad-hoc episodes or grouped in series
d. Frequency



NON-SCRIPTED OR OUTLINED: As it is pretty difficult to totally improvise even if you are experienced and confident, it is recommended to work on an outline if not a full script for your show. Both of them will offer you a sense of safety and will help you get a decent result. This way you can avoid unpleasant surprises or failed shows.

FREQUENCY/CONSISTENCY: Adding a new communication tool to your strategy, requires time and most possibly finds you a bit stressed when it comes to how frequent you are able to podcast.
TIP! Make a calendar based on your topics and time availability to see IF and WHEN you can podcast and then try to either produce them in bunches and spread in time or plan less shows. In any case, it's good to inform your listeners about your time schedule (i.e. weekly, monthly, bimonthly) in order to establish a new reliable channel of communication with them.

Giving a title to your podcast episode

Along with the content and format of your show comes the titling. What to consider before you decide on the title of your episode?

- Relate to the topic of your show (i.e. keywords or quote)
- Keep it as clear, short and concise as possible
- Give it an interesting and catchy tone; the title of your show works like the headline of a newspaper or a video teaser!

d/ PROMOTION & DIFFUSION

The fourth basic step of your podcast strategy relates to the diffusion and promotion of your show as it happens with any other new communication material. When it comes to this stage, there are a number of promotional tactics you can try. Below you can find a few suggestions;

In any case it is important to remember that promoting your podcast takes some time as you need to test a few methods before you find the one(s) that work(s) for you! So don't get discouraged and try to 1. ***Use interesting content*** *&* *2.* ***Be as consistent as possible*** (based on your own plan & capacity)

1.Prepare a good stock before your official launch

If you prepare just 1 podcast episode before you start officially launching your new tool, you actually risk the scenario your listeners to not get a strong enough taste of your show or to may not get satisfied with your first effort leaving them with no alternative option. By increasing the number of episodes for your launch day you increase the possibility for your audience to get satisfied and stay engaged with you.

2. Post your episodes on different hosting players

The more hosting platforms (i.e. Sound Cloud, Spotify, Google players, Apple players, YouTube etc.) you post your show on, the more chances you get for your show to get advertised through them. Once you upload a new episode to a player, it becomes publicized to the platform's users who search for new material. Hosting platforms also give you the possibility to share each one of your episodes to different channels (e.g. mobile apps) through the "share" option. You always need to accompany your new episode (audio file) with your logo, existing (MSF) or new one.

Note: *This method is actually suggested in case your shows are addressed to a wide, public audience. If you target a more specific audience(s) you may not need to go for plenty of hosting directories.*

3. Post on Social Media

Make use of Social Media platforms that already work well for you. For instance, if you have a Facebook page or group with a considerable number of friends/followers that shows a gradual growing trend, you may consider advertising your podcast shows there. If not, try to create new SoMe pages and push your shows through them. Just keep in mind that starting from scratch takes time and courage!

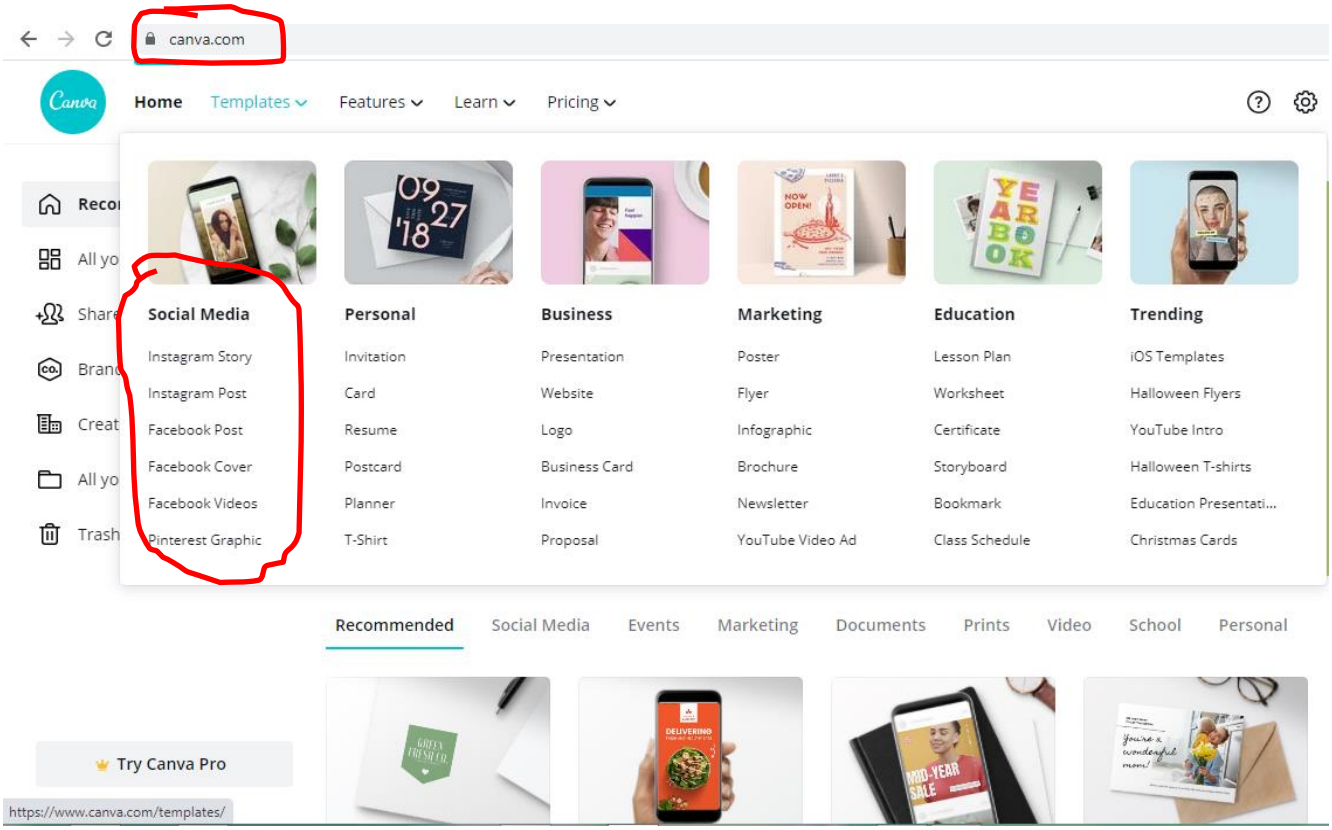
Social Media promotion needs some smart artwork to accompany your advertised product; otherwise, your effort may go unnoticed. For instance, we all know that Facebook and Instagram are predominantly based on pictures and videos, while Twitter on short and sweet texts! Here are some ideas:

a. Use interesting & good quality photos that relate to the topic of your show
Example: If your episode is about Urban Spaces activities with local communities, use a relevant good photo with a smart text that will catch your listeners' attention encouraging them to click on your episode's link. If you have a popular guest in your show or your show is based on an interesting personal story, use his/her own photo with a short explanatory text of what your audience is about to listen.

b. Create a new artwork: a box with the title of your show or a strong quote/a highlight of your show

- photo: square dimension works well in all platforms (3000X3000 pixels)
- video: max 2' (viewers usually quit longer clips)
- use free online graphic design platforms, i.e. Canva (www.canva.com)

If not already familiar with "Canva", all you need is to sign up and start using this user-friendly platform. Once logged in or signed up, you see the main menu with plenty of design options, including the one for social media artwork (see below).



When trying to promote your podcast through social media, it is pretty helpful to take always into consideration some basic rules and adjust your content accordingly. Don't forget that **all social media platforms**, require **good artwork** and need to include **the basic info of your show in the post** (name of podcast, title of episode, info for your guest+ link to your show). The same time a good tactic is to **avoid** using **the same promotional material everywhere**. In other words, try to **customize your social media promo content**.

Here are a few highlights for each one of the basic social media platforms!

- Use good artwork
- Call for audience's engagement (ask to share, comment or send their ideas)
- Mention (@) or tag your guest(s) on your show (just inform them before) and ask them to share through their pages

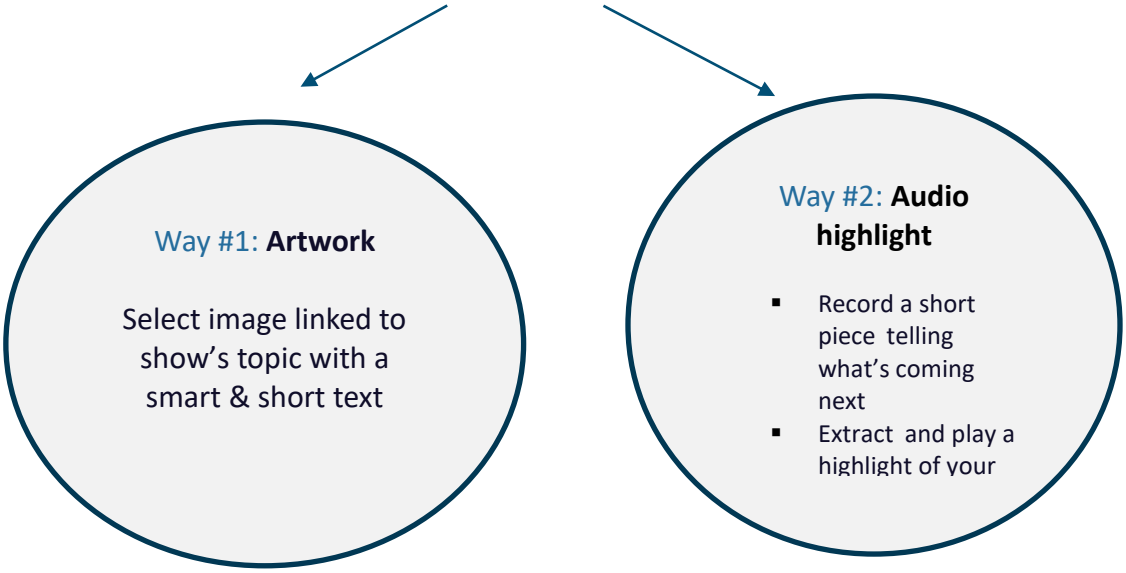
- ✓ Good visual stuff (strong pic or video)
- ✓ insert episode's link in your bio
- ✓ use hashtags (#) linked to your episode's topic

- ✓ Focus on short and sweet text (140 characters limit)
- ✓ post a few tweets before the official launch using teasers (interesting quotes or the catchy title of your show)

- Explain to your connections how your show relates to them

4. "Coming Soon" approach

On some Social Media platforms, like Facebook or Instagram, you may try a pre-launch communication strategy to create some buzz around your coming podcast episode! How?



In order to go for a pre-launch promo, it is necessary to:

a. Be 100% sure you have got your podcast episode ready; otherwise you may find yourself in the strange position to have advertised a show that will never be aired exposing yourself unnecessarily.

b. Ensure the resources - time and capacity - to support a strong social media presence

5. Advertise through E-mailing list/newsletter

List your target audience and create a short message to send including:

- intro text (describe briefly your new tool)
- mention the name of the podcast
- mention the title of the episode, your guest(s) and the link to the show
- close with a call for engagement (invite them to share with their own connections and send feedback)

6. Call your connections for engagement

Ask from friends, followers, colleagues, families, shows' guests, project partners or local communities to share your Social Media posts or e-mails with their own connections through their own pages or channels. In this way, you multiply your potential listeners and fuel a growing engagement!

7. Invest on word of mouth/connect with your local communities

Try to reach out to your existing project partners or local communities you are working with in "Urban Spaces" and inform them for your new communication tool. Make clear to them what they have to gain by listening or promoting your podcasts. It's important to understand that podcast is an easy and pleasant way (a kind of radio show) to gain new information and/or knowledge, to develop new skills, to get inspired or even entertained!

8. Use mobile apps

If mobile applications (i.e. WhatsApp) is identified and already tested as a potential channel of information sharing, try to use it for the promotion of your podcast shows. You have two options:

a. send the link to your show with a short text (podcast name, episode's title and guest name if any) either by copying paste from your site (where your podcast have been posted) or by using the "share" option/button found for each new episode on hosting platforms
b. Attach the audio file & accompany with a short text with basic info about your show - **Just make sure in advance the application's size limit**! (normally the show cannot exceed 10-15 min)

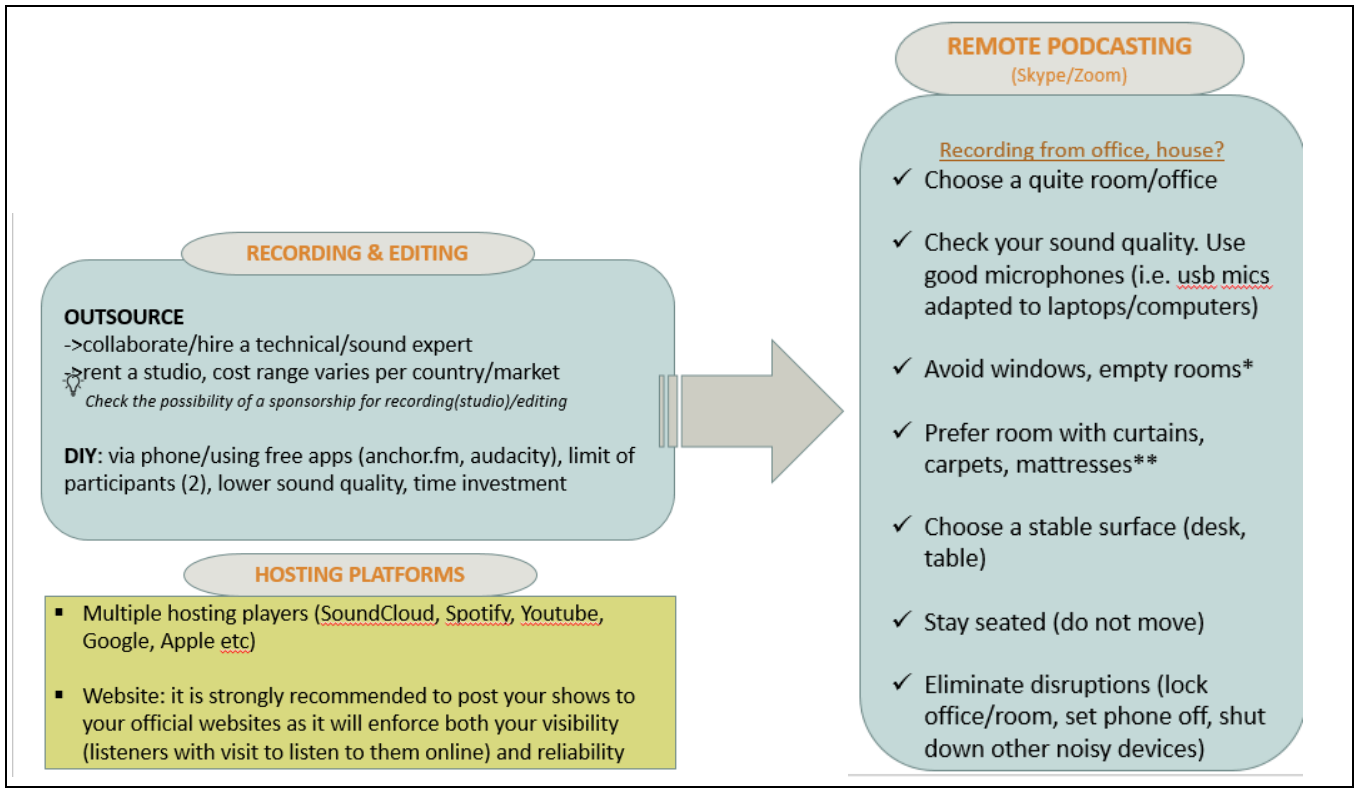
8. Check the statistics

Numbers rarely fail! Try to check regularly the number of downloads in hosting players your show is published, the number of visitors to the website page it is posted and the statistics of your social media platforms used for the promotion of your podcast episodes. All these insights - although not a 100% index - can help you understand what works well and what is not satisfactorily responsive and should be probably improved.

4/ TECHNICAL ASPECTS & TIPS

A fundamental part of the podcasting process is the technical one; it includes the recoding, the editing and the hosting of your show. Although it touches a practical aspect that requires the expertise of a sound/technical specialist, here we will share a few very basic information and tips.

The recording of a podcast simulates to this of a radio show taking place in a studio with the required sound checked and sound proof environment. The same time, it can be done in a remote way using the recording option of particular platforms (i.e. Skype, Zoom), an exceptionally popular method in times of COVID-19 pandemic that physical distancing is strongly recommended or for organizations, like MSF, which bring together people and voices from around the world. Technology offers also DIY (Do It Yourself) options through free online platforms (i.e. anchor.fm). Below you can see some key-information and tips for each one of the above cases.



*Sound-reflective surfaces/materials: allow echoes or reverberations
** Sound-absorbent surfaces/materials: improve the acoustic in a room/office, reduce echoes or reverberations

5/ FAQ

How do I name a podcast?

When a new podcast is "born" you need to give it a name as it happens with every new communication tool (magazine, website, newsletter). What is important to take into account before you decide:

-avoid a too generic, get a specific name
-link it with your brand
-include the word "podcast"
-keep it short and easy to pronounce and remember. Examples: "The MSF association podcast" or "The Urban Spaces podcast"
-check domain availability: search if your podcast name is already taken on your hosting platform(s)

What is the ideal duration of a podcast?

There is not just one proper or specific answer. It depends predominantly on your topic and content of your show as well as on your target audience. If you can develop an interesting and well-structured topic in 10 or 20 minutes, then this duration is the ideal one for you. If you have an audience with limited time availability or attention capacity, you should keep it short and sweet; if you target listeners with a demonstrated interest in your theme, then you can go longer but still tight.
In any case, it is recommended to not keep your shows long and exhausting as it will discourage your listeners who is possible listen to it while doing other activities (reading, driving, exercising, working etc.) In short, there is a wide time range from some minutes to an hour or more. Just adapt to your case and get yourself into your listener's shoes!

Is it a good practice to split a podcast episode in small parts, the so-called shortcast?

Breaking a podcast audio show in smaller parts is a practice used in podcasting being known as shortcast; it actually stands for a shorter version of a show that includes the highlights with the rest content following into also smaller pieces. Although it might serve well in terms of time management and flexibility, there are a couple of risks that may lie there. First, it is possible for someone to listen to the first part (shortcast) but miss the next one(s) just because he/she forgets or ignores to come back; in other words, it might a bit difficult to keep the audience attention if your show goes public separated. Also, in some podcast players free subscription is allowed for a particular number of downloads; if an episode is uploaded in pieces, then a subscriber/listener may miss the opportunity to get them all downloaded as soon as the limit is passed.

Should I use music in my podcast show? If yes, how?

Music can give a special tone to your podcasts used in the intro (opening) and outro (closing) of an episode; it can also be used in between as a sort of passage/bridge or even distinction between different parts of the show. It is important, though, to **pay special attention** to: a. usage rights b. volume (to not cover voice over) and c. relevance with topic/context

How do I retain consistency in my podcast plan if struggling with time or resources?

Facing time or human resource constraints is something usual in working life and, thus, a challenge you may encounter while trying to develop your own podcast plan with consistency. If that's the case, a good practice - applied in a communication strategy - is to use a calendar and confirm your flexibility upon the desired frequency of your shows. Write down a list of the topics you want to present and examine how it fits to your time availability and resources. Then, you decide on the number of episodes you can produce; you may need to prepare them in bunches or separately and spread them in time accordingly. By doing this exercise, you ultimately find out how often your podcast shows can go public (i.e. weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, bi-monthly etc.) No matter what the result is, it is good to inform your listeners about it for the sake of consistency.

Useful links and references:

www.podcastinsights.com
www.canva.com
www.castos.com
www.anchor.fm