THECR NETWORK

Podcasting 101

HIGHLIGHTS

1. **Interested in learning from podcast best practices?** Between Jim, Shannon and Dori, over 20 best practices were disclosed!
2. **Want to know some of the biggest challenges shared by our speakers?** Three challenges were shared, along with a few solutions.
3. **Thinking of starting a podcast?** The 3 speakers each offered their advice to help get you started.

OVERVIEW

➢ **Background Shannon Abram.** Shannon is the Director of Marketing at TheCR. Shannon's podcast is entitled *"Conversations with Community Managers,"* which was initially created by Jim and a colleague on 7/16/2009. It was originally called *"TheCR Quick Chats."* Jim and Shannon rebooted the series on 6/16/2015.

• **Background Dori Gray.** Dori has been a Community Manager at Medidata for the past 4 years. After her first year, she got the idea to do a podcast that would offer an audio content-type for employees to learn about other employees.
  • The idea behind the podcast was to learn from others in the organization. As a software organization and no real background in this field, Dori wanted to learn what others did and how their roles came together for the company's mission (clinical trial software that saves lives).
  • Dori decided to interview one employee each month, learn about who they are, their background, how they came to the company and then end with a fun lightening round where they are asked questions that have nothing to do with work. The lightening round helps others to get to know a speaker's personality.
  • She chose background music for the podcast online called *"Happy Background Music"*, which she fades in at the beginning and the end of each podcast.

BEST PRACTICES

- ➢ **Explore Shannon's 3 tips for success.**
    - *Research your guest.* Shannon explained that they take the time to research their guests, which she highly recommends. She tries to keep the podcast very informal, but she does creep their LinkedIn page, Instagram, articles, etc. Sometimes the tidbits of their personality that have nothing to do with community are the best part of the conversations. It's so vitally important to know a little bit about the person before you begin chatting with them.
    - *Limit the questions.* All of Shannon's podcasts generally have 3 questions, 4 max. The third and/or maybe the 4th question are always the same. Gating yourself like this provides flow to the conversation.
        - Having any more than 3 or 4 questions in a 45-minute podcast (edited to 20 minutes) would make the conversation stressful, less organic, rushed and very robotic.
    - *Don't over think it.* You definitely want to know a little bit about the person and have a framework for the discussion. At the same time, if you over think it, the conversation will feel over-engineered. That's not fun to listen to in a podcast.
    - *Don't try to be perfect.* Less perfect actually makes a better podcast.

- ➢ **Consider Jim's tactical podcast suggestions.**
    - It's very difficult to, in Jim's opinion, do one-on-one podcasts. Jim recommends at least 2 people as hosts. It makes it a little easier to think on your feet and a little easier to create the follow-on conversations that happen organically. For instance, as one person is asking the question, the other host can formulate another question.
    - Not every answer that your guest gives is going to be a great answer. It can take a while for your guest to feel comfortable and interesting. Right up front, Jim will tell his guest that if they start down a path that they don't like, they can stop and start over. That's the beauty of editing.
    - If you ask a question and the answer falls flat, feel free to ask the question later in the podcast when your guest is feeling more comfortable. They may be able to provide a better answer. It can all be fixed post-production. Let your guest know that you might use this tactic so they are not surprised by the same question.
    - Always try to make your guest look great. That should be your end goal whether or not you are talking with executives or a new hire. Post production is a life saver. This is where you can fix the "uhms" and "ahhs."

BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

- ➢ **Make the podcast "sausage".** Shannon offered to walk participants through any one of these tools:
  - • *Uber Conference.* Shannon uses a free version of this, which doesn't require any special mics. However, they do encourage people to dial in on an actual phone or mobile device and not their computer audio, which can sometimes be glitchy.
  - • *Audacity.* This is the tool that Shannon uses to edit her podcasts. It's also free. Shannon has never done any audio editing prior to this, meaning that it requires very little experience to use.
  - • *Canva.* Canva is also free. Shannon uses it for all her graphics. It is very easy to use, which is good because it's important to have a logo and/or a badge for your podcast series. iTunes will pick this up when it picks up the feed.
  - • *Bluberry.* TheCR runs on WordPress and Bluberry is a WordPress plug-in for podcasts. It isn't free, but the fee is nominal. Bluberry can post the podcast for you, which takes all the guesswork out of the backend.

- ➢ **Consider Dori's podcast format.** If Dori finds someone interesting in the company or has a suggestion for an interview, she'll reach out and invite them to be interviewed. She'll then send a few links of older podcasts to give them idea of what to expect.
  - • Find a date and time that works for both of you.
  - • Dori prefers to do her interviews in person. Fortunately, she has many people in her office working there and/or visiting.
  - • Dori also does quite a bit of research on her guest prior to the interview. She investigates everything that he/she does within the community (blog posts, participation, how he/she uses the community, LinkedIn, Google, etc.) Everything that she learns about her guest makes its way into her questions.
  - • Dori will then write a draft of all her questions. Once she gets started, it's easy to think of follow-up questions, even without a journalism background. Fortunately for Dori, this comes naturally for her.
  - • Dori will send the draft set of questions to the guest and ask for feedback. Everyone is different. Some people don't want to see the questions, some people really want to prepare and others fall somewhere in the middle. However, Dori doesn't send them the lightening round questions. Those offer an element of surprise and are a fun, spontaneous way to end the interview.

BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

- Book a spot for the podcast. Dori purposely uses a room without windows so that the guest doesn't get distracted. It also keeps the guest as a surprise. No one knows until the podcast is aired.
    - Book the room 30 minutes before you need it to set up and do a sound check.
- Dori also uses Audacity, as well as the QuickTime Mac recorder. She keeps the QuickTime tool recording as a backup in case something goes wrong with the primary audio source. This one she turns on before the guest arrives (it helps to capture any fun tidbits that might add to the podcast). Audacity is turned on in front of her guest.
- The interview itself is a conversation. The questions are a guide, but it's not a script that they have to follow. Listen to your guest as there may be more appropriate questions to ask. Take notes, but also be sure to look them in the eye when talking.
    - Remember that the podcast is about your guest. As much as you may want to interject with your own stories, don't. People love to talk about themselves.
- Next comes the lightening round. Some people suggested doing this at the beginning instead of the end of the podcast, so Dori sometimes mixes it up. It depends on the guest as the lightening round may help ease their nervousness. Plus, it gives you insight into your guest right away.
- Once the podcast is recorded, Dori will listen to it in its entirety taking notes to create a description and show notes. She will list links to everything that was discussed, as well as the guest's Twitter handle, etc.
- She'll then prepare a short introduction to promote the podcast (30 seconds).
- Dori then edits the podcast on Audacity. Don't be afraid of this step. Dori was a novice in the beginning and simply Google'd what she didn't know.
- Dori's advice is not to worry about sounding "dumb" while interviewing. People have remarked on the insightfulness of her questions. She is not afraid to admit that she might not know what they do and how it contributes to the organization overall. The way she looks at it, if she has a question, others in the company are probably wondering too.
- Go with the flow. It's engaging to listen to a conversation between 2 people, but not a scripted conversation. The more you do it, the more comfortable you'll feel.
- Don't be afraid if it veers off topic in a direction you didn't expect. If you are both having a good time and the person is giving good answers that contribute to a meaningful two-way conversation, people will be engaged. Your listeners don't know your original plan and whether or not you veered off course. All they know is that it's an interesting conversation.

LESSONS LEARNED

➢ Shannon stated that a podcast – from start to finish including recording – takes about 2 hours to complete.

➢ Dori was very nervous on her first podcast. She brought a small glass of wine for herself and her guest and this has become a tradition now for each podcast, even though she is no longer nervous. When she interviewed the President of her company, she used champagne.
  ○ Dori also offers her guests community branding swag.
    ▪ These 2 things offer a warm and welcoming environment to begin a discussion.

➢ A lesson learned the hard way for Dori was sound quality. Now, she always goes into the settings on her computer under preferences to check that the source is correct and that the microphone is set properly. Make sure that you plug in the microphone *before* you open Audacity (another lesson learned the hard way).

➢ If you're on the road, there are hand-held podcast devices that are quite effective and even have bi-directional mics. Jim said that it's like holding a microphone and talking with someone or you can sit around a conference table and put it in-between you. You can record onto an SD card, which can be used on your computer. Just turn off the audio and go through the process Shannon described above. That's what Jim used to record Rachel back in 2006. It's a compact, hand-held device that works well and gets the job done inexpensively (about $200 on Amazon). You don't need all the fancy equipment.

➢ Start small. It doesn't have to be grand or intimidating. Twenty minutes max with the goal of 3 takeaways is more than enough. Shannon offered participants the chance to be a guest on her podcast to experience the process and learn.

➢ Dori hasn't had to worry about acoustic tiles or anything else in the room to help with sound. She doesn't have a problem with echoes. She does recommend having a good microphone to help combat any sound problems.

➢ Dori was asked if she uses the Jive video content type to post the podcast. It's the best option available for being able to offer a download for listening. It's not the same as a podcast, but in all her show notes, she has the "click download to listen on the go." She wishes there was a better solution, but it works.

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LESSONS LEARNED, CONT.

➤ Dori's goal for each podcast is to learn what each person contributes to the company, how they ended up at the company, why what they do is important and how it fits into the bigger picture. So, some questions are asked at each interview. For example, who they are, where they're from and what they do. Another question is "What's your favorite thing about working here?" As well: "What would be one thing that others would be surprised to learn about you?"
  - Shannon added that she asks who they are, where they work and the kind of community they work with. She always ends with "What's your super power?"
  - Shannon almost only interviews members of TheCR Network and it's literally her job to make members look good. Her goal is to expose member accomplishments. The benefit is some personal professional development since the podcast can be linked to the member's LinkedIn profile, etc.

➤ Kelly asked Shannon and Dori to share their biggest challenges in learning how to create a podcast.
  - Dori stated that you never know how someone is going to react to their podcast. She's had people ask to do the whole thing over again and/or demand that it be taken down.
  - Shannon said that she has had the same problem. She now states at the beginning that if their legal team needs to review the podcast before it airs, let her know. She also makes it very clear that if they are not comfortable answering a question, just don't answer it. It's not live, so everything can be edited.
    - Shannon sends the mp3 recording to the guest prior to posting. One person asked for it to be re-recorded. Another guest said that the company wouldn't allow the podcast to be posted. So, you just never know what the final reaction will be.
  - Another challenge for Shannon is that she sometimes gets afraid that she will run out of people to interview, particularly because she focuses mostly on TheCR members. People start out at the beginning of the year all excited to be interviewed, but get scared off as the time comes closer. Try to mitigate the fear and truly put some thought into the podcast schedule. One per month or once every 2 months is okay. Keep it fun vs. trying to maintain an unrealistic schedule. If you are being asked to commit to a certain schedule, that's different. But if you are the one running it, you have control over the cadence. Accept it, embrace it and set the expectation.

LESSONS LEARNED, CONT.

- o **Jim added that he and Shannon sometimes block off their schedules to create 2 or 3 podcasts back-to-back. It can be very productive to do it this way because you are in the podcast mentality. Jim said by the third podcast, they're firing on all cylinders because they're in that mindset and the focus is there. Then these podcasts are in your arsenal for the future and can be edited and published when needed.**

- ➢ **Kelly asked how Shannon and Dori measure the success of their podcasts.**
  - • **Dori stated that for her, it's how many people are listening. Sometimes your guest will do an awesome job of promoting the podcast, which is a bonus. The connections that Dori makes in the company – and helps others to make – is also very gratifying.**
  - • **Shannon agreed. She added that also for her, the most gratifying moment was when a vendor asked to sponsor the series and pay her to do them. Just the fact that someone wanted to pay for these podcasts was very gratifying. They are creating content worthy of payment.**

- ➢ **Lastly, Kelly asked Jim, Shannon and Dori what advice they would give for someone thinking of starting a podcast.**
  - • **Jim stated that if you don't think about different modalities for your community (audio, video, etc.), in addition to text and photos and what you do today, then you're missing out on a whole other segment of your audience. Different people consume information in different ways. Jim likes Dori's show notes as it might incent people to click and listen. Podcasts are critical to get the engagement that you're looking for in your communities.**
  - • **Shannon added a reminder that the podcast process doesn't have to be scary. It's just a conversation packaged in a different way. If you're nervous about starting, just start. Create a podcast with a colleague you feel comfortable with and edit it down to see what it's like. You don't have to publish it, but get a feel for the process. If you don't have stakeholder support yet, just record a podcast and make it fun and informative. Reach out to TheCR for guidance.**
  - • **Dori's advice is not to wait for the perfect opportunity to begin creating a podcast. When Dori started, she kept waiting to interview her CTO, who just kept rescheduling. So, she just went forward with someone else and although it didn't start off the series with a big bang, it was actually better. Listeners related to this guest better than if she had started out with an executive.**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ➢ Kelly asked participants to share whether or not they create a podcast currently and/or have experience in these types of programs:
  - One participant is the Host of *"Tech Talk"*, which is an internal podcast within her organization. It runs monthly and provides users (staff) with information about their technology tool and how to use it more efficiently.
  - Jim added that back in 2006 he started a conference called Community 2.0. One of the things that he was doing at that physical event was interviewing people via video. He had scheduled time to meet Rachel, who he had never met before. She was an Analyst at the time and Jim asked to interview her with his flip phone. She stated that she disliked the media portion of social media and just wanted to talk. Jim suggested a podcast instead. So, he actually met her doing a podcast.
  - Another participant pushes out webinars, but not as many podcasts as she would like. She is hoping to put a podcast strategy in place this year.
  - Kelly shared that she does not have any experience in this area. Three other participants shared that they also have limited to no experience, but recognize the necessity of reaching people in alternate ways.

RESOURCES

- As mentioned in the chat: PRX: Podcasting 101 - https://googlecp.prx.org/
- As mentioned in the chat: Yeti Pro Microphones - https://www.bluedesigns.com/products/yeti-pro/
- As mentioned in the chat: Portable Recorder - https://www.amazon.com/Zoom-H6-Six-Track-Portable-Recorder/dp/B00DFU9BRK
- As mentioned in the chat: https://www.amazon.com/Zoom-H6-Six-Track-Portable-Recorder/dp/B00DFU9BRK
- As mentioned in the chat: https://communityroundtable.com/what-we-do/resources/conversations-with-community-managers/