**\chapter{A Post-Script to *A Guide to the Business of Podcasting*}**

The podcasting field advances at a rapid pace. Indeed, even in the six weeks since this report was submitted for final edits, there have been several major developments. The following three are of greatest significance to my research:

* the imminent inclusion of podcasts on Google Play;
* the success of “The Message,” a podcast produced by General Electric for Panoply;
* the conclusion of PRX’s latest fundraising campaign for their podcast collective Radiotopia.

**Google Play to Include Podcasts**

The announcement that Google will, in the following months, offer podcasts on Google Play Music, a native app on its mobile operating system, Android, is highly significant for the potential growth of podcast audiences. As my report notes, “Android users — whose numbers are far greater than iPhone owners ([1 billion vs. 470 million](http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2014/06/26/there_are_twice_as_many_android_users_as_ios_but_ios_users_spend_double.html)\autocite{smartphones}) — remain an untapped audience for whom podcast listening remains difficult. Apple device downloads of podcasts outpace Android downloads at a rate of [5.4 to 1](http://www.libsyn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/PRLibsynNetGrowth021915Final.pdf).”\autocite{libsyndata}By including podcasts in Google Play’s streaming service (which can reach iOS users as well), Google will not only tap into the underserved Android audience but also [expose non-listeners to podcasts](http://recode.net/2015/10/27/google-brings-podcasting-to-play-music-swinging-at-apples-dominance/), potentially converting them into fans.\autocite{recodegplay}

As [Re/Code’s Mark Bergen reports](http://recode.net/2015/10/27/google-brings-podcasting-to-play-music-swinging-at-apples-dominance/), Play Music will also curate podcast suggestions for listeners based on factors like “time of day” and “common activities and moods.”\autocite{recodegplay} Should Google do this successfully, it will fill a hole currently plaguing the podcasting space: a technological solution to podcast discovery.For Google, podcasts add value to Play Music for their listeners, who have the option to subscribe to the service for an ad-free experience (although ads won’t be stripped from podcasts, as most ads are “baked-in” to podcast formats). In the words of Elias Roman, a product manager for Play Music, “Podcasts allow us to do everything for our users. It makes us a more complete concierge.” (It’s interesting to note that Pandora, which is now offering “Serial” to its listeners, plans to [unroll a subscription service next year](http://variety.com/2015/digital/news/pandora-rdio-acquisition-1201641583/).\autocite{varietyPandora} Providing podcasts, it seems, is one way platforms seek to add value to listeners, incentivizing them to convert from free users to paying subscribers.)

This news, coupled with the inclusion and/or expansion of podcast content by other music streaming services such as Spotify, Pandora, and Deezer, suggests that the podcasting space will soon open up across platforms, potentially placing Apple’s relative monopoly on the format at risk.

**“The Message” & Branded Content**

The success of “The Message,” which [hit #1 on the iTunes charts in November 2015](http://www.niemanlab.org/2015/11/how-did-the-ge-branded-podcast-the-message-hit-no-1-on-itunes-in-part-by-sounding-nothing-like-an-ad/),\autocite{niemanMessage} has brought the conversation about branded content in podcasting to the fore. “The Message” is a fictional podcast produced by General Electric (the company came up with the original concept, hired the creative team, created spinoff websites, etc.) and distributed by Panoply, the podcast network owned by The Slate Group. Shannon Bond at *The Financial Times* reports that the podcast has generated interest from brands interested in “recasting themselves as ‘storytellers’” -- so much interest, in fact, that Panoply has created a unit for branded content within the network.\autocite{ftSlateBranded} GE’s chief creative officer [Andy Goldberg explains](http://www.niemanlab.org/2015/11/how-did-the-ge-branded-podcast-the-message-hit-no-1-on-itunes-in-part-by-sounding-nothing-like-an-ad/): “I don’t consider it advertising. It’s a podcast show that just happens to be produced by a brand instead of a network. I’m not saying, ‘Hey, go out and buy a jet engine.’ It’s a science fiction story to connect listeners with what the GE brand is about, without selling the GE brand.’”\autocite{niemanMessage}

[Nieman Lab’s Laura Hazard Owen warns](http://www.niemanlab.org/2015/11/how-did-the-ge-branded-podcast-the-message-hit-no-1-on-itunes-in-part-by-sounding-nothing-like-an-ad/), however, that while the strategy has worked remarkably well with a fictional podcast, the path is more fraught for journalistic outlets producing non-fictional podcasts\autocite{niemanMessage} (see: StartUp episode #17 “[Words about words from our sponsors](https://gimletmedia.com/episode/17-words-about-words-from-our-sponsors/)”\autocite{gimletPodcast}). As I note in my report: “Many podcasters I spoke with maintained that while this murky ethical territory must be navigated carefully, both native ads and branded content offer meaningful potential for revenue generation. The most important mandate for podcasts is to be as transparent as possible in order to maintain credibility and avoid alienating audiences, their biggest assets.”

**PRX Fundraises Again**

Public Radio Exchange (PRX) concluded its second major fundraiser for its podcast collective Radiotopia on November 19th. While the effort offers some [vital lessons for running a successful fundraising campaign](http://blog.prx.org/2015/11/the-coin-the-quilt-and-the-superfan-radiotopia-fundraising-lessons/) (including partnering with a company, in this case Slack, to aid with stretch goals and attracting donors), in the context of my research, it is more interesting as an illustrative example of how podcast companies can earn revenue under a “premium” operating philosophy.\autocite{PRXblog}

While this year’s campaign did not garner as many backers as PRX’s [record-breaking Kickstarter campaign last year](http://knightfoundation.org/blogs/knightblog/2014/11/14/radiotopia-sets-record-for-publishing-and-radio-funding-on-kickstarter/) (19,642 contributors as opposed to 21,808)\autocite{radiotopia}, it was remarkably successful in its primary aim of attracting recurring donations ([82% of all contributors signed on as recurring donors](http://blog.prx.org/2015/11/the-coin-the-quilt-and-the-superfan-radiotopia-fundraising-lessons/)\autocite{PRXblog}). Indeed, this was exactly why the campaign was conducted on CommitChange, a fundraising platform designed for non-profits. The shift [from Kickstarter, which facilitates one-off donations and requires a Kickstarter login, to CommitChange, which lets PRX accept recurring payments and establish a database of Radiotopia donors](http://www.niemanlab.org/2015/10/how-prx-and-radiotopia-are-rethinking-the-public-radio-pledge-drive-for-the-podcast-era/), is part and parcel of a larger strategic shift for PRX: creating a community of listeners who can sustain growth over the long-term.\autocite{niemanPRX}

Acting essentially like a membership or subscription service, the campaign emphasized how donors can become integrated members of the Radiotopia community, receiving updates and extra content, invitations to storytelling workshops, and opportunities to evaluate pilot episodes of new shows. As PRX’s Director of Marketing, Maggie Taylor, explained in a blog post: “It gives us an opportunity to consistently connect with donors and fans, further cultivating and strengthening our community. It also means we will never start at zero again.” With its campaign, Radiotopia has eliminated the dependence on an intermediary like Kickstarter or iTunes and established a direct, potentially sustaining, relationship with its listeners.

**Other updates of note**

* Since submitting my guide, Sarah van Mosel has announced she will leave her job as VP of Sponsorships at WNYC to join Acast as its Chief Commercial Officer.
* Gimlet has announced it will launch a second funding round on Quire (formerly Alphaworks), the online investing platform for US accredited investors.
* Bill Simmons left ESPN’s Grantland (which was subsequently shut down) and has begun a podcast network at HBO called “Channel 33.”