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# Why Another Podcast App

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8-10 minutes

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The market for podcast apps on the App Store might be saturated. Why make another one?

Promoting my new app, available on the App Store, I'm reminded of how many podcast apps there are now. Searching the term "podcast" yields a wall of similar looking apps, just screaming for yet another unique selling proposition.

**I love podcasts**

Podcasts first clicked with me, when I discovered the Stack Overflow podcast, back in 2008. This periodic conversation between Joel Spolsky and Jeff Atwood, about the progress of building their site, really opened my eyes.

Listening to human voices at close range, over headphones or device speakers, can create an intimate bubble.

I have fond memories—strangely enough—of long wintery walks with the dog listening to John Gruber and Dan Benjamin chatting about Apple stuff on the original Talk Show, of wiping the boarded floors of my pad to The Book Review, or Pavel Mayer elucidating C++ on CRE, while I was sitting in front of the fire place, laptop on the floor.

Today, with all of us carrying connected audio devices, capable of playback and recording, in our pockets, audio is big. Voice control. Recording. Listening. The Daily promptly became a household name during the 2016 election campaign, reaching five million unique listeners every month. Pioneers, like Radio Open Source, 99pi, This American Life, or Radio Lab, are still going strong.

> Podcasting continues to grow year after year.—Nielsen

Podcast labels—publishing and production—are a thing now. Radiotopia, Wondery, Headgum, Gimlet, and Pineapple Street Media, among others. Shoutouts to my compatriots: Metaebene, Viertausendhertz, hauseins, and Pool Artists—with the splashy WIMAF podcast.

Print publications understand how podcasts bond readers to writers, getting them closer to their brands. Not only newspapers, like The Guardian and The New York Times, also magazines—Monocle, The New Yorker, and more recently New York Magazine, which just premiered The Cut on Tuesdays, a new weekly with Gimlet—publish splendid audio. In Germany, Die Zeit got the memo.

Digital natives, Slate, Vox, Recode, and The Verge, are already there.

SoundCloud, Spotify, and Deezer have integrated podcasts into their offerings. Amazon produces podcasts—for Alexa—through its audio book company Audible. But these products are chimera, for something to call itself a podcast, it must provide some kind of public feed.

After merely mirroring their signals into the podcast space, following early adopters like NPR or WYNC, grand broadcasters like the BBC are getting serious.

Stitcher cultivates a collection of podcasts, an alternative to the original iTunes. Apple, inventor of the iPod, in 2001, was among the founders of podcast land.

exactly 17 years ago today steve jobs got on stage and introduced the original ipod with literally the cringiest commercial ever made— @juanbuis

I forget how I initially listened. With iTunes and iPod, I guess, casually moonwalking out the door in baggy pants.

## Apps are made of priorities and compromises

Came iPhone, of course, I began with Apple Podcasts and later Downcast, which I used for quite some time. Then came Instacast, which I liked, but as it turned out, didn't scale to hundreds of subscriptions. I had to return to Apple Podcasts. I kept trying Overcast, but stuck with Apple Podcasts in the end—apparently made by developers who aren't into podcasts.

Recently, I checked Pocket Casts again and, despite its complexity, it might be an option—if there wasn't another alternative. 💡

Apps are made of priorities and compromises. From time to time, I try some of the newer ones coming out, but find most of them confusing. I won't wade through a tutorial to listen to a podcast. After a decade of podcasts on iPhone, I have not found an app I really like.

## You're holding it wrong

My way of consuming podcasts might be unfit for the available apps. How do I listen to podcasts? I don't walk the streets with headphones and I don't have a commute. I listen at home, walking around the house, doing chores, while shaving or in bed before sleep, without headphones, using the internal device speakers—another reason why I prefer larger devices. For pausing or resuming playback and skipping I use the watch, with the phone in my pocket or placed somewhere near by. I never use AirPlay or listen over the stereo. Podcasts are near-field audio for me, they are personal. When another person enters the room, I pause the playback. I quit listening on walks, preferring sounds of nature, the city, or company.

Constantly trying out new podcasts, my subscriptions level around one hundred podcasts. Three of my longtime favorites, maybe slightly off the beaten path, are Scriptnotes, Longform, and the New Yorker Fiction podcast.

## What do I want

- Access from all my iOS devices
- Audio and video playback including streaming
- Browse and read show notes while playing
- Comprehensive queue
- Control Center and Apple Watch controls
- Good search for shows and episodes
- Informative lists leveraging landscape mode
- No sign up
- Snappy clear user interface
- Use the app offline

And what we all want, of course, is a full battery. Especially relevant for hard working background apps, like podcast players, updating feeds and downloading audio files in the background.

## Biting the bullet

Can I shift priorities and combine compromises in a way that lets me build a better podcast app? Probably not, such an app would exist by now, wouldn't it?
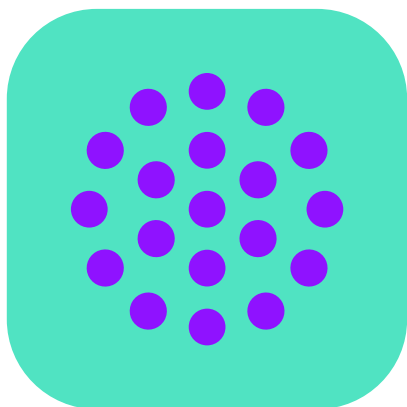
The user interface of a podcast app is challenging, it has to communicate two narratives in parallel, information and playback. It's different from something like Netflix in that way, since the video app doesn't let you browse, while you are watching. With an audio app you can be listening to one thing, while you're looking at another—a player and a browser. Additionally, a good podcast app, while focusing on audio, must integrate video playback.

Unable to shake the question, I tricked myself into biting the bullet by deleting all podcast apps from my devices. If I wanted to listen to podcasts, I had to build an app. That was in 2014, Apple had just

announced Swift. A good time for starting an app.

# P⦿DEST

The app icon was inspired by this old radio.



**Download on the App Store**

Podest is a simple, yet powerful podcast app. Its clear interface stays out of the way and puts podcast episodes center stage. Access all your episodes, subscriptions, and other podcasts from a single list—your queue. Enjoy more podcasts without losing track.

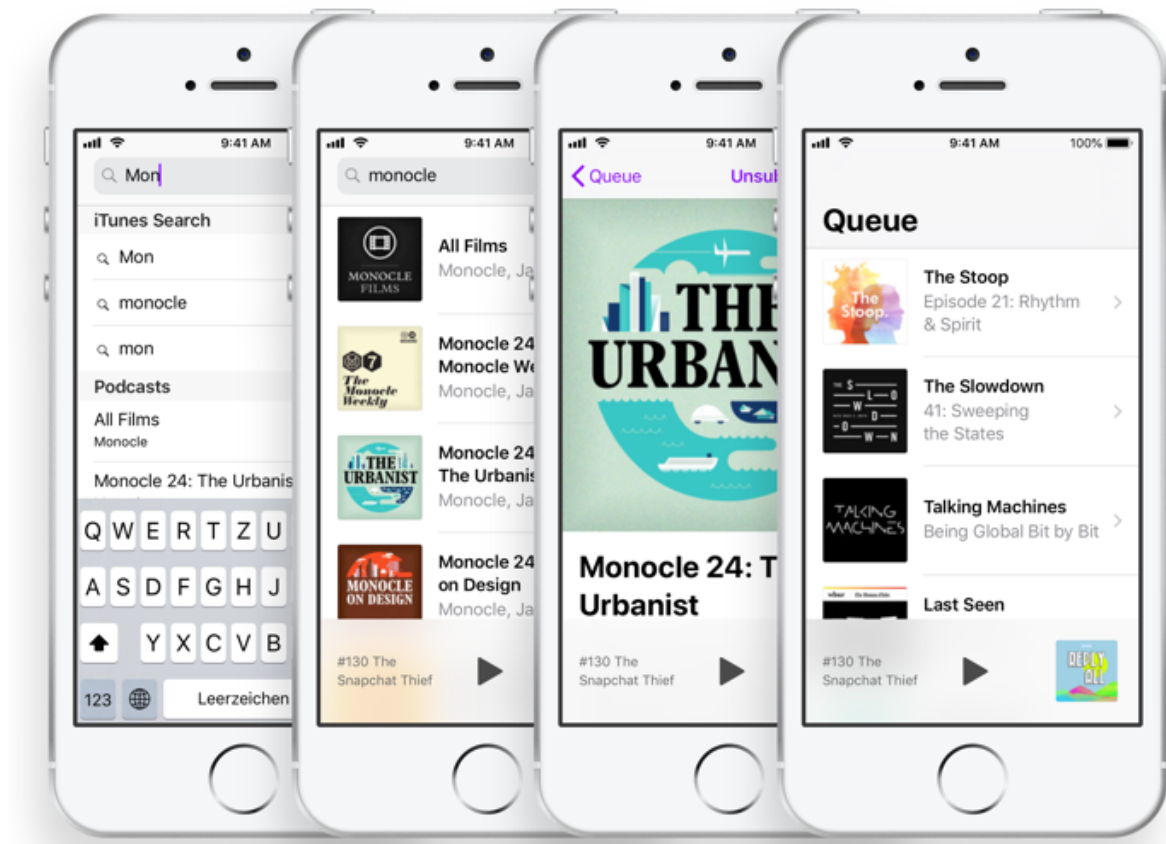> If you want a streamlined & efficient podcast player app, give Podest a try. I helped beta test it.—@a_grebenyuk

But enough of that, I don't want to repeat the pitch here, please check the App Store, download the app, and leave a rating or a review to support this indie project. That would make me happy. Thank you.

Back to the initial question. Why another podcast app? Why build something that, in some form or the other, already exists? Podest's genesis is classic open source, scratching an itch. I answered the personal need for a simpler way of listening to podcasts—something I'm truly passionate about—in the hopes that if I'm looking for an alternative podcast app, others might be too.

To generalize, if you discover a use case, not or unsatisfyingly covered by existing tools and you are privileged to invest time, you should *build all the things*, picking up new technologies along the way—here Swift. Like podcast user interfaces, those unresolved problems, of course, tend to be inherently tough nuts to crack. Breaking your project down into modules makes the time investment manageable and the final composite becomes secondary. Open sourcing components generates intermediate products, hardens resiliency through wider usage, and might be instructive for others. Reading code and contributing to open source are excellent means for learning.

**100% open source**

Podest is open source. Please leave a rating or a review on the App Store to support my work.

**There were plenty podcast players, but no podcast browser. Try Podest and tell me what you think.**