

SiriusXM's Adam Sachs on why podcasts are showing up on the radio

This is Hot Pod, The Verge's newsletter about podcasting and the audio industry. Sign up here for more.

It's only Tuesday, and it's already been a packed week for podcast news. Shortly before hitting publish on this issue of *Hot Pod*, I got the news that just about every late-night talk show host in America is teaming up with Spotify to launch a limited podcast series about the Hollywood strike. The five hosts: Stephen Colbert, Jimmy Fallon, Jimmy Kimmel, Seth Meyers, and John Oliver, have all had their shows on pause since May due to the Writers Guild strike. *Strike Force Five* will launch on Spotify and other platforms on August 30th, and the plan is for the limited series to run for at least 12 episodes.

Notably, the proceeds from the show will go to the late-night series' staffers, many of whom have been unemployed for a few months now. As is now usual with Spotify, *Strike Force Five* won't be an exclusive podcast – it'll be available on other podcast players. So will a new Spotify Original with Trevor Noah, which is due to be released later this year. The show will be hosted on Spotify's Megaphone, and Spotify will serve as exclusive sales partner.

The exclusive isn't dead, though: on Monday, Wondery announced a deal with Dr. Seuss Enterprises to launch a slate of original podcasts featuring IP from the iconic children's book author. The first podcast, *The Cat in the Hat Cast*, will launch exclusively on Wondery Plus and Wondery Plus Kids on

the Apple Podcasts app. Exclusivity is usually bad for podcasts – but parents also tend to be willing to pay for a premium membership in order to access ad-free programming for their children.

The announcement of *Strike Force Five* is unusually good timing, given the Q&A I'm featuring in today's *Hot Pod*. Read on for my chat with a longtime leader in the comedy podcast space.

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a "heavy" user in the podcast world?**

Sure, a "heavy podhead" sounds like something that should star in its own horror movie. But chances are, you probably are one. Roughly a quarter (or 22 percent) of podcast listeners tune in for more than five hours a week, placing them in the "heavy podhead" category, according to a YouGov study released this week on podcast consumption. While five hours of podcasts per week may sound like a lot to newbies, it's less shocking when you keep in mind that many listen to podcasts while doing something else – whether that be commuting, doing chores, or exercising. If someone's daily commute is roughly 30 minutes each way, they can easily fit into the "heavy podhead" classification.

Still, YouGov's results aren't too shocking: an Edison Research study from 2016 actually found an even greater chunk (29 percent) of weekly podcast listeners tune in to five or more hours. While the numbers may fluctuate from year to year, the findings are consistent. Basically, we know there's a fraction of podcast listeners with lifestyles that allow them to tune in very frequently. But there's no sign (at least in

the data) that “heavy” podcast listening is becoming more widespread every year.

Interesting enough, a “heavy podhead” doesn’t even need to consume that many individual shows – being a regular listener of two or three weekly podcasts may be enough. While the length of an average podcast episode is roughly 41 minutes (according to a 2019 analysis by Dan Misener), episodes of many chart-topping podcasts run for much longer. The latest episode of *The Joe Rogan Experience* was two hours and 22 minutes (which is on the light side for that show). YouTube podcasts can easily run over an hour. *This American Life* normally puts out hour-long episodes, though many are a little longer. While *The Vergecast* has done shorter episodes, many run well over 75 minutes (a June episode that ran for an hour and 38 minutes included a discussion of our Google Pixel Fold review and Microsoft’s legal battle with the FTC).

For some people, five hours is nothing. A writer for *The Cut* estimated she listened to 35 hours of podcasts per week, and this was back in 2017. And then there are nonstop podcast listeners, which *The Washington Post* profiled this week. Playing podcasts or another type of “background media,” such as Netflix, YouTube videos, or a stream on Twitch, can help with focus and concentration, some listeners find. Many also rely on podcasts as a substitute for daily social chatter with friends and co-workers. So, some listeners will start listening to podcasts upon waking up – and then just keep playing episodes throughout the day. While it’s unclear how *much* attention these listeners are paying to the podcasts – they’re likely some of the most loyal fans.

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