

THE X-FRONTS 2021 REVIEW:



9-15-2021 - Written By: David L. \$Money Train\$ Watts – Journalist/Web Host/Editor –
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The X Fronts is a full day of virtual presentations from indie networks, podcasters and fresh voices who will expand your thinking about the possibilities of podcasting.

**Advertisers,
(re)meet podcasts.**

There are a small group of networks that everybody knows, but that's just the tip of the iceberg.

As the podcast industry matures, more independent creators and publishers are drawing huge audiences in niche listener markets, and brands are jostling to be heard.

The X Fronts bridges the gap between these shows, and advertisers ready to engage.

Writing New Worlds: A Profile of Welcome of Nightvale's Jeffrey Cranor

Featuring:

**Jeffrey Cranor, Creator, Welcome to Nightvale & Nightvale Presents
Gisele Regatao, Professor & Creator, Celestial Blood/Sangre Celestial**

From this X-Front 2021 Nightvale Presentation I learned that fiction podcasts are timeless and are just as an important when they aired originally and even if people are discovering those podcasts years later. Jeffrey said he still gets lots of new downloads and subscribers of his 2012 and 2014 fiction podcasts.

Jeffrey was overly optimistic about the future of podcasts because podcasts are portable. Consumers can take and access their favorite podcasts on their phones, tablets or laptops. So, podcasts are always available 24/7 to its fans.

Network Presentations From:

Sonar Network

Featuring:

**Michael Mongiardi, President & Co-Founder, Sonar Network
Marianna Miniotis, Vice President, Sonar Network**

Sonar emphasized that they specialize in comedy, fiction and storyteller podcasts. Listeners should connect with Sonar's podcast hosts and create a unique podcast community. Sonar has won 30 Canadian podcast awards.

Sonar presented a visual ad demo that highlighted their podcast talent promoting a fictional product/sponsor called Floss Box. I didn't think this Sonar demo was effective because it rarely mentioned the Floss Box by name in the first two minutes. And then it took around three minutes before the hosts clearly explained this was a subscription service that sends one flavored

floss to clean their teeth. This fictional demo took way too long before one learned that Floss Box was letting one floss with mint, liquor, pastrami, etc., flavored floss. They should have created an actual Floss Box demo product for the podcasts hosts to use or had them flossing their teeth and acting like they are experiencing the unique floss flavors. Or how the promotional product has a dual function of cleaning one's teeth and being a breath freshener as well. I did not think this visual ad demo from Sonar was effective as it could have been to promote Sonar's podcast stars efficiently, smartly and creatively because they waited so long to bury the lead that Floss Box had flavored floss.

Loud Speakers Network

Featuring:

Chris Morrow, CCO, Loud Speakers Network

Berry Sykes, Creator, Podcasts in Color

Loud Speakers Network hyped up their brand slogan of being the home of addictive audio. LSN specializes in multicultural appealing podcasts and highly diverse podcast hosts. LSN says it had 52 million listeners in 2019 and on track or projected to have 72 million listeners for 2021. LSN has been featured in the NY Times, BuzzFeed and other national media outlets.

LSN pairs the best ads for the best podcast shows. Bevel has placed podcast ads that run simultaneously on 15 LSN shows which has helped Bevel grow its brand. LSN is pushing into new advertisers in the growing market of mental health by having Talkspace, online therapy, match up with many LSN shows. Other noteworthy aspects of LSN's presentation were their podcasts securing major brands, Square Space, Hello Fresh, Target, Staples and McDonalds.

LSN has also successfully created branded entertainment podcasts with State Farm in 2016 to create a Colorful Lives podcast to promote the challenges and accomplishments of Black women. The LSN sponsored podcast Colorful Lives was heavily promoted nationwide by State Farm at the 2016 Essence Festival.

LSN created a podcast called Insecurities for HBO which was the official podcast of Issa Rae's HBO and HBO Max show Insecure. And LSN also created sponsored podcasts with retailers Target and Bed Bath and Beyond.

One thing I did notice during the LSN presentation is that Charlamagne the God, who is on one of LSN's most popular podcast shows The Brilliant Idiots, was only mentioned once and that was in a reference to LSN co-founder Chris Morrow working on a Charlamagne book. I thought LSN spent zero time during their presentation promoting its diverse podcast talent of its podcasts.

Simplecast Presents: Harnessing The Power of Growing Podcasts Audiences

Featuring:

Caitlin Van Horn, Associate Marketing Director, Podcasts, Simplecast

Maribel Quezada Smith, Co-Founders, BIPOC Podcast Creators

Maribel said the most important thing to know about the indie/niche podcasting industry is that authenticity of a host earns loyalty with an audience. And many times, the indie/niche podcast audience is more heavily invested in supporting the creator of the podcast than the podcast show itself.

Caitlin said indie/niche podcasts do not have the same pressure to keep growing its audience rapidly to prove its success or viability. These podcasts are not designed to out-pace their small but loyal audience to achieve a larger number of listeners who are less invested in the success of the indie/niche podcast.

Maribel said indie/niche podcasters have to know who their audience is and what they want and how to connect that to advertisers. It is highly possible and measurable to show that small and loyal niche audiences can have a bigger impact on a brand than a broader and larger audience of podcast.

Maribel strongly discourages her podcasters on her network from doing podcast affiliate programs because it puts too much pressure on the podcasters to reach ad targets that they cannot control. Maribel believes podcasters in affiliate programs get taken advantage of by the ad networks.

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What is a podcast affiliate?

Basically, it's a link to a product, service, or website, appended with a tracking code, so that each click, or conversion can be tracked back to your referral. ... You can promote a product or service within your podcast, earning a 4-5% commission from each sale generated via affiliate links.

Sean said he is noticing more now is indie/niche podcasts are having sales teams from 1 to 3 people to attract better advertisers to shows. But Sean also said that sales teams are typically not good at selling seasonal and fictional podcasts.

This panel was more about what makes indie/niche podcasts successful with their audiences rather than strategies that can apply to podcasts that appeal to more mainstream or broader audiences.

Network Presentations From:

Studio71

Featuring:

Craig Jordan, Head, Performance & Brand Partnerships, Studio71

Studio71 had a great visual demo of their podcasting network because it identified each of their podcasts with their logos, showed clips of their podcasts and identified the audience of their podcasts. Craig said he believes the future of podcasts is being able to simulcast them as audio and video. Studio71 showed video ad demo of their new podcasts shows. They featured lots of LBGQT+ podcasts and had Lil Nas X song playing in the background.

Pleasure Podcasts

Featuring:

Cameron Poter, Founder, Pleasure Podcasts

Karen Lee Poter, Co-Host, Sex Talk with My Mom

Caroline Rose Giuliani, Host, Sexual Polytics

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Pleasure Podcast was a sex themed podcast network and it seemed nerdier and quirker than sexy, controversial or provocative. None of their shows really jumped out at you as things you want to hear right away or ever. I thought the interaction between Cameron and Karen was staged and repetitive as Karen kept making jokes with one of their hosts about was she single and Cameron was single.

OSSA

Featuring:

Marla Isaackson, CEO & Founder, OSSA

Kanika Chadda Gupta, Host, That's Total Mom Sense Podcast

Juleyka Lantigua, Co-Executive Producer, "Latina to Latina" Podcast and "Birthful" Podcast; Founder of LWC Studio

Wanda Duncan, Host, Black Women Travel

OSSA is a women's podcast network that has over 12,000 contributors that specializes in producing and marketing podcasts which is a powerful statement about how indie podcast communities can pool their resources.

Acast Feature Session: Winning with Women in Podcasting

Featuring:

Tiffany Ashitey, Director of Partnerships, Acast

Maria Blasucci, Co-Founder, Earios

Melisa D. Monts, Producer, PANTS & Directionally Challenged

Shantae Howell, Director of Acast Creative, Americas at Acast

I didn't have any good or memorable notes from the Acast presentation.

RedCircle Creator Spotlight

Feature Talent To Be Announced

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RedCircle is a plug and play network for advertisers to pair their media spending with the most appropriate podcasts or podcast networks. What is important to indie and diverse podcasts is if they can make sure their podcasts are available in their ad buying platform and not typecast as only female, black or multicultural content.

Network Presentations From:

Earios

Featuring:

Maria Blasucci, Co-Founder, Earios

Maria emphasized that old podcast shows should be treated the same as old TV shows that are regularly binged watch on streaming platforms. This will increase the value of podcast libraries for innovative podcast networks.

Talkhouse

Featuring:

Ian Wheeler, Co-Founder & CEO, Talkhouse

Open Mike Eagle, Founder, Stony Island Audio

Justin Gage, Founder, Aquarium Drunkard

Emil Amos, Musician & Host, Drifters Sympathy

Adia Victoria, Musician & Host, Call & Response

I didn't have any good or memorable notes from this presentation, and it ended five minutes earlier that was listed.

Jordan Harbinger In Conversation with Sam Parr

Featuring:

Jordan Harbinger, Host, The Jordan Harbinger Show

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Sam Parr, Host, My First Million

Jordan said he grows his audience for his podcast by going on other podcasts as a guest, paying for media or podcast ads on other podcasts and doing swaps where he does an interview of podcaster if he is also getting interviewed later by that same podcaster. If Jordan's podcast show is bigger than another show he may want to get mentioned 5 to 1 in his favor of media exposure on another podcast. Jordan said he spends \$4 to \$5 to acquire new listeners and heavily uses chartable to make his buy decisions on paid media to promote his show.

<https://chartable.com/>

Jordan said he spent no money on paid ads on other podcasts on Year 1 of his revised podcast show on the relaunch of his podcast show. He then spent \$300,000 on Year 2 and then spent \$1.3 million more on paid ads on Year 2.

Jordan said he would not buy ads on Spotify because their CPMS are \$35 and not negotiable. Jordan prefers buying ads for his podcast on indie podcasts and indie podcast networks because they are more flexible with CPM rates.

Also, Jordan said he primarily uses Castro and Castbox to show the listener retention rates and effectiveness of his paid ads he uses to acquire users.

<https://castro.fm/>

<https://castbox.fm/>

Lastly, Jordan said "discovery" is the major problem that is still affecting the multi-billion podcast industry's growth by many current and new listeners.

Overall, I was very impressed with the presentations at The X-Fronts 2021. There is definitely a new podcast industry sense now that indie podcasts, if discovered by their niche audiences, can eventually thrive, attract larger and more mainstream podcast listeners and be highly successful business ventures.



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