

Peak Storytelling Here as Podcasts, Short Form Ride New Wave

By [RANDEE DAWN](#)



CREDIT: JENNIFER CLASEN

The concept of peak TV is nothing new. But scratch the surface of original content these days, and it's no longer about television — from podcasts and short-form video, storytelling itself is at a peak. Thanks to audio, video and other new platform companies including [Gimlet](#), [Quibi](#), [Wondery](#), [iHeartMedia](#) and [Serial Box](#), listeners and viewers have more opportunities than ever to consume short form and episodic content.

“It’s a really exciting time to be someone who is in the storytelling business,” says Nazanin Rafsanjani, head of new show development at [Gimlet](#), home to “Homecoming,” which was turned into an Amazon series starring Julia Roberts, “Start Up” and “Crimetown.” “We’re really trying to push the limit of what’s possible in audio.”

New-style studios including Jeffrey Katzenberg’s [Quibi](#), a well-funded mobile video platform set to launch in 2020, and Indigenous Media, home to Jake Avnet’s “60 Second Docs” (3.66 billion total views since it began in 2012) are making (or have in the works) whole new bite-sized, mobile-ready stories — both fiction and non-fiction — queuing up for eager viewers.

But what does it mean to tell a story geared for quick consumption on portable devices?



as you want.

One of the more fascinating aspects of the explosion in content providers is how many of them are podcasts. The notion of audio stories driven by cliffhangers and mystery is a throwback to nearly a century ago when radio took off.

“Great characters. High stakes. Some degree of relatability.” That’s what works for a great podcast story, says Hernan Lopez, founder and COO of [Wonderly](#), home to “Dirty John” and “Dr. Death,” among other episodic-driven true-crime tales. “We’re known for emotionally immersive storytelling — and storytelling in audio makes people feel that they’re in the middle of the story, experiencing it with the characters.”

At [Serial Box](#), which sells episodes and “seasons” of original fiction — and has deals with the creators of “Orphan Black” and Marvel to create new tales — plotlines can be fan-influenced.

“We can tailor a story to fan reaction,” says Molly Barton, COO and co-founder. “We can up the stakes for a given character if fans provide us with interest in a particular storyline.”

Advertisers have taken notice, trying to find ways to bake in brands with the content itself. [iHeartMedia](#)’s 23 and Me partnership has spawned “Spit,” a podcast featuring such stars as John Legend discussing the stories behind their genetics; highlights are then repurposed on iHeart’s radio stations as spots.

“It becomes a retail campaign-meets-a fascinating podcast,” says CMO Gayle Troberman. “That really scales the storytelling.”

In some instances, podcasts and short-form video projects have become a new form of back-door piloting. Global Media and Entertainment’s DAX partnered with Laurence Fishburne and Larenz Tate to create the podcast “Bronzeville” when the pair couldn’t get interest in a TV series. “Bronzeville” now has a development deal at Universal Content Prods.

All of which means the new-platform gold rush isn’t likely to be over any time soon. “We’re raising the first audio-first generation since the 1940s,” says Troberman.

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