Welcome to Podcast Analytics 101: A Brief History and Introduction. I'm Jacob Kramer-Duffield, Ph.D. I'm going to be walking you through this. So some backgrounds. First of all, thanks for signing up for this course. We're going to walk briefly through the background of podcast analytics today. I'm going to start by talking briefly about history and structures of medium and how they have gotten us to this moment.

Podcasting is a pretty unusual communicative medium. Like radio or television was in fact invented at a particular time and place, but unlike them it was not a technical breakthrough, but rather a simple technical change in open web standard: a few lines of code in other words. The RSS .92 Standard was released on December 2000. Unlike the previous RSS standards it allowed for the inclusion of media files. That's it. That's podcasting.

There's a very interesting and weird story to be told about the early days of podcasting, but that's a whole course in itself. The way RSS works is that rather than Apple or any other podcast app hosting the files themselves, they point at an RSS feed which is refreshed whenever a new content is added to it. Content is then hosted by either its producer one of several services that specialize in hosting Libsyn for instance.

Beyond the technical functioning of the protocol, what's important for our purposes is as much about what the RSS standard doesn't include as what it does. Most of the file receives very little information about the client the user. The most important and useful being the IP address and the user agent, which describes the software being used to download the file. Whether it's the Apple podcast app, Mozilla, a Wi-Fi connected dishwasher or whatever else. The two of these together the IP address in the user agent are generally used to determine unique users. To the consternation of many and the relief of others, this is not remotely on the level of the personally identifiable information that we all give and long been giving with every website with visit every app we download. Because for those podcasts producers who host their own files or contract with someone who does but do not otherwise have user profiles of their listeners. There's far more about users that they don't know then that they do.

Why do we think of Apple when we think of podcasts? After the release of the iPod, Apple was very quick to incorporate RSS into iTunes and the iPod and though podcast had existed in form prior the name stuck podcasts were for the iPod. And so the Apple user universe, well-educated, urban, upper middle-class, upper income became in large part the podcast listener universe.

So also a note about data here. Apple doesn't know your podcast listening habits through RSS. But they do for the podcast app and iTunes, which are tied to your larger Apple profile. And while they're telling us more than they used to it's not a lot about the people doing the listening podcasting was in its early days at the same time as web advertising was getting creepier and creepier and web video kept trying to happen, but it was a medium that was not vulnerable to automated monetization.

So who would choose to invest resources? The answer for the most part is threefold. One, some early startup money that tried to figure out the space. They didn't. Two, independent producers doing passion projects. And, three, public media. In terms of the development of the current commercial model public media led the way. The value proposition for public radio stations was clear. While their audience was previously limited to the people within range of the radio transmitter while a particular program was being broadcast. It was not possible for anyone at anytime anywhere to listen to their shows. And since the shows were already paid for by a combination of member support underwriting in the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. And even though the marginal cost of bandwidth wasn't zero. Each new listener was better conceived as both a marginal benefit to a mission-driven organization and a potential new member or contributor. In the early, pre-Serial days, the biggest hit podcast were, with a few exceptions, the biggest shows on public radio.

Because of the discussed ambiguous analytics, monetization lagged behind, but when it arrived it was not in substantial because this is a demographic niche. A high income, higher education, Apple demographic that has substantial overlap of the public radio demographic that is very valuable. Even given the limitations of underwriting rather than advertising shows like This American Life with broadcast audiences in the millions and digital audience is also in the millions were able to substantially alter their fortunes. And that's why This American Life able to invest in the creation of Serial and further define the very question of what podcast can sound like.

So that's a mountain stream to represent streaming without biasing and in favor of any particular streaming platform. And just as the mountain stream gradually roads the mossy rocks under its flow, so to does steaming year by your erode the old download and listen later model through a combination of better broadband, more streamingcentric apps and new users who are never habitual habituated to life with the iPod. Streaming force also delivers far deeper broader richer data than RSS and so a land rush is now on to establish a foothold in streaming listenership both to build new habits and to build better audience profiles.

It's in this light I argue and we can understand the recent public radio consortium acquisition of podcast, which you read about. Beyond more basic business concerns, this consortium will now have direct access to a large body of users with an incentive to push more into their sandbox. Opportunity to learn and to set new standards for what they track.They also have the opportunity to potentially work with other app and content producers to set uniform standards and align around if not rankings then something like them across multiple platforms. Again public radio took the lead in podcasting and no small part because with the content already produced and paid for by a combination of member support, CPP funding and grants each marginal listener minus the cost of bandwidth was a pure benefit. Another pair of ears for the content and another potential supporter or member. While commercially focused podcast producers have been setting more the agenda of late, that fundamental dynamic hasn't really changed. For commercial producers, each bit of content needs to pay its full freight and keep the lights on. For public media that's less the case.

This diffuse and confusing NPR local station dynamic, which again that's a whole other course, has to date kept public media from fully capitalizing on that advantage and solidifying listen to relationships through the fully audio ecosystem. But now they can. And so after a long lead in, I want us to move to this present moment and think about where podcasting is going beyond just advertising support. The excitement of the podcast boom of high cpms, which is cost per thousand downloads and growing audiences, I think, has blinded many folks to the full value of an audience. An audiences value is not simply the solution to the above equation, even as objects of economic leverage. Thinking just about how they can drive revenue through podcast ads is limiting.

Lack of analytics and audience data has been both a blessing and a curse for podcasting. It's so far kept the advertising landscape from getting swallowed whole in the manner of other digital media, but it's also kept podcasters from realizing the true values of their audiences. Podcast listeners are very deeply engaged, but the inability to track their movements, even from one podcast to another let alone from podcast to web content if you're a publisher. Or direct conversion to live events, if your podcast only producer. Or to lifetime customer value if your a business. Or to campaigns or fundraising or membership, if you're a non-profit makes it difficult to quantify just what that engagement means and what it's worth. But it's worth a lot. You know it. And so the first step in moving beyond the basic metric of the CPM is building metrics that are appropriate to different organizations and their goals and that can actually start to quantify that stuff.

It's very easy to take whatever is given to us in terms of analytics and say this is what we know or if you're doing a survey of the audience to be solicitous of advertising partners. Or to ask your audience what those advertising partners want to know. Both of these aim too low, both to the short and long-term detriment of podcast producers.

Here's an example. Let's say you're producing a weekly podcast that 40 minutes long and has an audience of 20,000 people per episode, downloads practice. What the current CPM based environment says that this is a marginal show. It's maybe worth it for podcast Network to sell ads against, but most definitely don't quit your day job. But let's zoom out of it. For a publisher on the web 20,000 weekly visitors who are engaged on site 40 minutes a week is not insubstantial share of their most deeply engaged court audience. The base of traffic that literally literally keeps the lights on.

For a newsletter 20,000 weekly opens and a full read through, puts you in the driver seat and for a mission driven organization 20,000 weekly engage might be the entire audience. We don't know is no longer really sufficient. You need to know and you need to ask. And so as we build a new set of metrics around audience engagement.

These are the parameters that we should be paying attention.