

News

Legal podcasts generating growing audiences

ANN MACAULAY

A podcast can be an excellent way for lawyers to share their ideas on a global platform and market themselves as experts in their area of law. This form of digital media allows podcasters to make low-cost episodes of any subject and length while offering listeners the opportunity to receive that information whenever and wherever they choose.

As strong communicators, lawyers seem ideally suited to the medium. But they haven't jumped on this particular bandwagon in a big way, at least not yet. Peter Aprile found the legal podcast landscape in Canada lacking and launched Building NewLaw with colleague Natalie Worsfold in March. Aprile, senior tax litigation lawyer with Counter Tax Lawyers in Toronto, wants to "learn from other creative, hard-working and obsessive people pushing to do better."

Currently averaging 325 listeners each episode, the podcast appears well received. "Our guests have told us that they have really enjoyed the BNL podcast experience and reported that BNL was a great way for them to reach new, and sometimes unexpected, audiences."

With blogs becoming somewhat commonplace, "a podcast is a great way to stand out," said Husein Panju, who hosts Lawyered, a biweekly podcast series that takes a critical look at current legal issues in Canada. He has 500 to 600 listeners each week, mostly in Canada, and a growing international following.

Since a podcast can take several hours a week to research, network, record and edit, being a guest is a good alternative. Panju, who has worked as legal counsel for every level of Canadian government, most recently for the city of Mississauga, Ont., invites lawyers to speak about their areas of expertise, allowing guests to showcase themselves as legal experts. Some of his previous guests have "gotten attention and client referrals from



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people who've heard them on an episode." Most shows "are open to lawyers who reach out and volunteer to be a guest, espe-



Panju

cially if you have a specialization in a unique area."

Former criminal lawyer and current University of Calgary law professor Lisa Silver started

her podcast a few years ago as an offshoot of her blog, Making Connections. Her interest in the historical background, context and connections in the Criminal Code led her to start creating five- to 10-minute podcasts about each section of the code. A podcast "seemed like a self-contained way to present the *Criminal Code* and because it is from section 1 to section 849, it made sense to have a series of episodes." She's now up to section 50.

After hearing feedback from two students who listen while ironing or exercising, Silver knew she was on to something. "That made me realize there's a generation of people who listen rather than read."

Michael Spratt believes that everyone has expertise in at least one area and something interesting to say. The defence counsel at boutique criminal law firm Abergel Goldstein & Partners in Ottawa couldn't find a podcast that dealt specifically with criminal law policy or the "intersection between what happens in our courts and what happens up on Parliament Hill." That prompted him to start The Docket Podcast two years ago. "It struck me that since I'm in court every day and I'm very close to Parliament Hill and I'm slightly nerdy on all of those topics, that I might be a good person to have that conversation or fill that void."

Spratt said public discussion about criminal law policies and what happens in courts can be driven by sensational cases, often misunderstood and even used for political gain. "It's important that as criminal lawyers we do everything we can to educate the public about a very important aspect of our democracy." Although "there is money to be made, there is gold in those podcast hills," Spratt has turned down requests from advertisers, saying he doesn't do podcasts to make money or grow a client base. "As lawyers involved in this work that has public importance I think there's an obligation on our

part to try to have a larger conversation with the public about these issues."

Spratt's wife, Emilie Taman, a law professor and former federal prosecutor, became his co-host last year. They did an after-show podcast about the Netflix series *Making a Murderer*, discussing strategy, evidence and what happened in court. They were joined for a few episodes by Taman's mother, former Supreme Court Justice Louise Arbour. That podcast expanded their audience to include up to 10,000 listeners in Australia and the United States.

The couple have the type of

discussions on the podcast they have at their dinner table, including personal things that happen with their family. "You get to know your host in a podcast I think a little better than you do people that you listen to on television or the radio," said Spratt. It's a "more intimate way to receive information. You're in people's ears as they're jogging or going to sleep or as they're cleaning the house so you develop a bit more of a relationship."

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