

Downtown Seattle Association

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

With new episodes published twice per month, the Seattle City Makers Podcast presents a conversational look at the people and issues impacting downtown Seattle and the city at large. Think of it as a dinner party for two, just without the meal. Downtown Seattle Association (DSA) President & CEO, Jon Scholes, sits down with a diverse set of guests who tell their stories, lessons learned, status of their sectors and their outlook on Seattle's challenges and opportunities. Like many downtowns in 2021, the media climate in Seattle on urban issues was steeped in stories of closures and often framed recovery as lagging. The Seattle City Makers Podcast sought to take a largely Seattle-based audience deeper into the issues driving downtown's revitalization with people who were (and are) impacting many of our economic drivers. What is more, the podcast also provides an avenue for DSA to amplify Scholes' perspective and increase exposure for the DSA. There is additionally a symbiotic benefit for DSA and guests when the two brands are connected in a conversation focused on the city. Each podcast episode is promoted across all direct communications channels with the organization's membership (i.e., newsletters, daily news digests, website updates) and multiple social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.

INNOVATION

The Seattle City Makers Podcast offers a dependable examination of the diverse sectors and people driving downtown's continued revitalization and is the only such source for that subject in the market. Every two weeks, listeners have access to perspectives about issues impacting this city. The consistent cadence of episodes also allows for the organization and Scholes to have broader, repeated exposure beyond membership communications and media interviews. A new approach to promoting the podcast that has proven to be helpful in the growth of the audience and reach is producing short video clips for each episode. These clips are uploaded to social channels with text treatment, giving followers snippets of conversations that might be timely for current issues, generally provocative or entertaining.

OUTCOME

Season Two of the Seattle City Makers Podcast produced massive growth in listenership. With nearly 11,000 downloads in 2023, there was a 92% increase across all platforms. On Apple Podcasts, there were more than 10,600 episode plays, representing nearly 73% growth compared to 2022. In addition to expanding the overall number of plays in Season Two, the podcast has grown in audience size with the subscriber base increasing by 85% in 2023. These numbers point to amplified exposure for the organization and Scholes, and successfully producing content regarding downtown stories that might not have otherwise reached thousands of people in our community. The new social media promotional approach of incorporating video highlights of each episode is driving elevated engagement. There are more than 77,000 plays of the video clips on Instagram — a 69% increase over the audio promos over a static image used in Season One. The podcast has been established as one of the scheduled communications vehicles. And there is room for continued growth and potential revenue streams through sponsorships, which the DSA's membership team is exploring.

EXECUTION

The DSA Communications & Marketing team, podcast producer, an audio/video production company and host all contribute to the Seattle City Maker Podcast. The team developed the general format; initial list of potential guests; length and frequency of episodes; design of a podcast graphic; and how we would deliver and promote the podcast. The producer and host work on guest outreach and scheduling, aiming to be a week or two ahead of the twice-monthly publishing schedule. Once the audio and video are recorded, files are uploaded to a sharing platform and the production company provides a clean version of the conversation. The host will then record an episode intro, setting up context of the episode for the audience, providing a few biographical notes regarding the guest and some topics covered in the episode. The host also records an episode close, giving a closing thought on the conversation and updating the audience on something new or interesting happening downtown. The production team edits

those elements onto the episode, takes the written description and publishes the episodes at six a.m. on the scheduled date. This whole process from recording to editing and publishing can be accomplished in as little as three days.

REPRESENTATION

One of the goals since launching the podcast was to elevate a wide range of voices and perspectives on issues impacting downtown. To that end, the DSA has stressed diversity of sectors, gender, race and viewpoint. At the time of this submission, 30% of our podcast guests were BIPOC.

REPLICATION

There is a low barrier to entry for podcasts due to the few pieces of equipment required. This is a relatively simple solution for downtown organizations looking to amplify their perspectives and increase visibility for their leadership. A few key considerations: Microphone quality: In an audio medium, quality microphones and a quiet setting are a must. Host: Having a host who is curious is a great start, as they're predisposed to asking questions. The host also should be a listener, this keeps the episodes sounding more like a conversation and less like a down-the-line interview. Prep: The host and producer develop pertinent notes, media coverage or general thoughts on the issue/guest. Having a little biographical information on the guest is a great way to ensure the episode has a conversational feel. Promotion: Have a social media plan for how you'll promote the podcast and do it across multiple platforms. Consistency: Sticking to a predictable schedule for publishing episodes is essential to keeping and growing listeners.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

The primary challenge to producing the podcast is scheduling guests. The aim is to set up multiple recordings a week or two ahead of scheduled publication dates, and it can be difficult to find times that work for guests who tend to have packed calendars. The host, producer and the Communications & Marketing team have a list of potential guests to help mitigate scheduling issues. The podcast team reviews the list and discusses additional guest options during weekly communications meetings. A related challenge is ensuring the true to the goal of presenting a diverse range of perspectives and voices is held. This is also addressed as a reminder during the weekly communications meetings.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Website: <https://downtownseattle.org/news/seattle-city-makers-podcast/>

Podcast: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/seattle-city-makers/id1604292146>