



NEWS ⇌ STREAMING

# Experts Say Paid Subscriptions Could Be Bad For Podcasts

Times are changing, for better or worse

by [Joshua Hawkins](#) Published April 29, 2021 11:11AM EDT

fact checked by [Rich Scherr](#)



## Key Takeaways

- Both Apple and Spotify have announced paid subscription plans for podcasts, allowing creators to charge for their content.
- While they could help creators bring in money, subscriptions could change how podcasters and listeners approach the industry, according to experts.
- Some experts feel subscriptions and other podcasting services could lead to creators focusing on the numbers instead of what they produce.

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Paid subscriptions could lead to less podcast availability for users and less growth

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for creators, experts warn.

Podcasts have continued to gain popularity, especially throughout the past year. Now, both Apple and Spotify are offering ways for creators to make a few dollars from their hard work through subscription-based plans for listeners. While benefiting from the work you do is great, some feel this move towards a more subscription-based system could ultimately hurt the podcast community.

"One of the strengths of the podcast format is that it's not a risk to the listener," [Aaron Bossig](#), who has been heavily involved in the podcast industry for over 13 years, told Lifewire on a call. "When somebody wants to listen to your podcast, to try it out, they don't have to do anything but push a button. They don't have to pay anything. They give you a couple of minutes of their time. Maybe even an hour."

## The Weight of the Mighty Dollar

Bossig, who began podcasting in 2008, has spent the past decade running his own podcasts and helping other podcasters. During this time, he says the podcasting community has continued to grow because of how easy it is to get involved, and how little it costs listeners to give those podcasts a try.

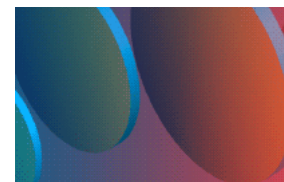
"Podcasting started out as kind of an underground radio on the internet," Bossig explained. "All people needed to do was upload a couple of MP3s someplace, put up an RSS feed, and anybody on the internet—whether they're getting it from China, Europe, or South America—all they need is your link and they can get your content."

”When somebody wants to listen to your podcast, to try it out, they don't have to do anything, but push a button.”

With companies now offering subscriptions, Bossig is worried you could see many podcasts trying to monetize their content when they aren't built up enough to do it. If this happens, it could lead to many podcasts failing to take off or listeners turning away because they don't want to regularly pay to access them.

[Federica Bressan](#), a podcaster and scientific researcher, says she's worried the normalization of podcasting and the introduction of new services could lead to podcasters feeling like they have to conform to certain parameters for their content to be acceptable.

"People consume a lot of this content, and they saw it and thought why give it to them for free? So, they built this new platform that, on the creator side, offers you like a new experience," Bressan told us on a call.

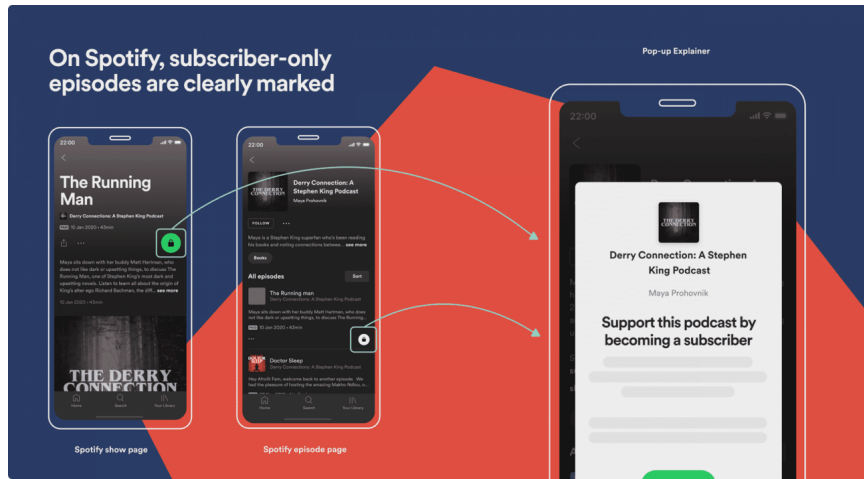
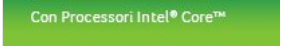


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Spotify

"[Companies like Apple and Spotify] give you a canvas and tools and a way to do things—like all the tutorials—which actually are not how to make a podcast, but how to make a podcast if you want to be in Apple or whatever other group."

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Bressan feels the way the podcasting community is shifting could lead to podcasters feeling less free to make their content the way they want. Instead, they'll try to conform to what's already been financially successful.



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longer just a part of  
strategy;

### Shifting Winds

Both Bressan and Bossig say they don't fault anyone who embraces the paid subscription path. They just feel it isn't the right path for their podcasts, or for the overall future of the community.



"People say, if your content is popular and has value for people, then they should pay for it. If there is value, why are you giving it away for free? That's one way of thinking about it, and it isn't wrong," Bressan explained.

"} "One of the strengths of the podcast format is that it's not a risk to the listener."

"But," she continued, "what they're doing is creating the conditions to encourage podcasters to give their content away in exchange for some money. And in doing this, they're working towards locking content down."

Instead of podcasting continuing as the creatively free industry that it grew to be, Bressan is worried the move towards subscriptions could stimulate the idea that creators have to keep up with other top performing podcasts. That would, essentially, turn it into a race to make the most money, something that will no doubt hurt both creators and listeners in the long run.

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