Episode #46 - Alan Wick - Making Sense Of Finances & Why Money Doesn't Equal Success Transcript

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Podcast Introduction and Mission

Welcome to the Startup Support Surgery podcast, where we light the entrepreneurial spark in medics and healthcare professionals. Join me, Dr. Jo Watkins, GP, business coach and co-founder of The How People, on a journey to discover where your medical know-how meets the business world.

This will help you find some clarity on how to balance work, passions and family so that you can gain more freedom and control over your life but also continue to help people, which is actually why most of us went into medicine to start with.

Embarking on this entrepreneurial adventure is not easy. It is a roller coaster of emotions, but it's hugely rewarding and exciting in the process. Drawing in on my 20 years of blending medicine and business as a GP, I am here to share experiences, insights and lessons.

Expect lively chats, expert interviews and real life stories from medics who have taken their own path. Let's break free from traditional healthcare norms and explore more innovative ways of making a real difference to people's health and wellbeing, along with paving the way for a brighter future for us as healthcare professionals.

Oh, don't miss my free PDF called From Stethoscope to Startup, which is an 11-page guide in the show notes full of practical help and advice. This is your roadmap to kick-starting your journey with us.

Enjoy the Show. I am delighted to be welcoming one of my business heroes, entrepreneurial friends and general legend, Alan Wick, to the podcast today.

Alan has been starting, growing and selling businesses since flares were in fashion, literally, and somehow he's still at it. He tried very hard in the 1970s to be a rock star and then he followed his family's love of business and founded, scaled and sold five companies that generated over 250 million in sales and has won several Queens awards along the way.

He's worked in over 30 countries and raised millions in business funding. These days, Alan helps purpose-driven entrepreneurs grow businesses that balance commercial success with long-term sustainability.

And as you will hear, he bases this on the quadruple bottom line of purpose, people, planet and profit, which he will explain to us.

Introducing Alan Wick

He works with B Corps and Better Business Act movements, promoting business as a force for good. And he really is the ultimate gentleman. I'm so excited to welcome him to the podcast.

And Alan's random fact, not only did he used to be in a rock band and was a drummer in the 1970s, of which there is lots of photographic evidence that I love, but also I loved this, that you and your beautiful, amazing wife Ruth, who is also a dear friend of mine, both grew up in same house at different times.

That's extraordinary. Yeah, it is an incredible coincidence. I think if you saw it in a movie you wouldn't believe it, but really meaningful for us both.

We're both second marriages. Uh, we met in 2009. we were introduced through her brother and a friend of mine and when I heard her And we both had been split up from our first spouses for a few years, so sort of ready to meet

someone new.

When I heard my friend say, would you like to make this lovely woman, Ruth Polden? I thought, well, that name's familiar. I sort recognize her surname, but I wasn't sure why or where from.

Anyway, we got chatting on the phone and we discovered in our very first phone call that her parents had bought my family home from my parents in 1968 when I was 13 and then she was at that time eight or nine years old and she'd grown up in that house and her dad was still living there and so when we met we had already had this in common and I missing that home.

I was sorry we left there because all my friends were there at that time and it was amazing to go back and to meet her dad and revisit the house that I had been to for 40 years.

That is just incredible. That's a beautiful story. It doesn't surprise me one bit. Having met you both in real life and having had you in my life for the last five years, there's something very special about your relationship.

So I'm not surprised to hear that, but that is gorgeous. Thank you for sharing that with us. Alan, I adore you. We've been in the same business group for a long time.

I think you're absolutely wonderful. I feel very privileged that you are here to talk a little bit about money, finances, the running of the businesses that people within my community are doing.

So thank you so much for your time. sort of startup stage that a lot of people are at in my world. So, so tell us a little bit about, I guess, you know, where you are now, the type of People you work with, and we'll start with that.

And we will go from there. Okay, well, um, i work With people who own businesses at all stages, some are pre startup, but they decided they want to start a business.

Some are startups in early stage and some are much more developed and relatively large SMEs and by that I mean businesses that are maybe up to a few hundred people that still very much an entrepreneur led feeling.

So I love working with speedboats, not ocean liners. I loved working the entrepreneurs themselves or people who are thinking about it because it's a world I understand from my upbringing to then going into business very, very young and really that's all I've done in my life is work in business or with business owners.

Business Purpose and the Quadruple Bottom Line

And so I have a real understanding and empathy for owners, business owners at whatever stage they're at. And I feel very honored to work with the most amazing, talented people who trust me with what's going on with their businesses, what is going with with lives, their ambitions, dreams, hopes, and then helping them achieve whatever happiness means to them.

That may not mean lots of money. It may mean a comfortable lifestyle. In some instances, I've worked with business people who've got their businesses up to a certain size.

They thought it was their dream to be making millions, but then discover that they're unhappy. when they get there because they don't like all the responsibility and having teams and people to manage.

Even though there may be a lot of money, they do not like the pressure. And they have actually asked me to get involved to reduce the size of the business because then they will be happier.

So I do believe that growth is good, that bigger is better. I am after joy, happiness for people's lives, whatever that means to them. I think that's a wonderful place for us to start because I thing business as a word is quite scary for for especially coming from a medical world.

Often we haven't grown up necessarily with business people around us. Some people have but quite often it's this kind of scary thing that tends to be all about money I people are people almost there's this there is a bit of an issue for for medics around pricing and charging and all of that I think comes from coming from this very different background but people often have judgments around business and money but what you're focusing on and what I try and really ripple down to anyone I work with is this concept of success.

Success looks different for everybody. For me, success looks like being able to pick my kids up from school every day. That's success in my eyes. It's not about money, is it?

And this purpose success piece, you must see that such a variety of people and a such variety what that looks like for people. And you've described people, this growth not being the be all and end all.

Do you see that a lot? People have made different decisions as they've gone along and almost undoing all of that when you come into their world sometimes.

It varies enormously, but I think the point you make is a really important one, because I would argue that coming from a caring profession of going into medicine to help other people, to be of service to other, people to want to see patients get better, I'd say that's no different from the best, most sustainable businesses that I've been involved with.

My own businesses and those of my clients come from a sense of service. So I think it's more closely related than might be seen from the outside in a rather shallow dragon's den apprentice point of view.

That gives the wrong impression of business. You know, there are people like that, fine, that's for them, That's what they want. But from where I'm coming from is the four P's, quadruple bottom line, which is purpose, people, planet and profit.

So profit is part of the story, but it's only one part. And so I think if people are focusing on being of service to others, whether it's literally providing services or products, actual physical goods, then there's really little difference.

Oh, by the way, yes, there has to be a profit and loss statement, a balance sheet, cash flow, et cetera, because there is money. flowing through the business.

So I think if that's grasped and faced up to, I need to know that as well as serving others, then there's a good balance. Okay, so let's have a look at that quadruple bottom line.

So, purpose, people, planet, and profit. And these are the four things that you look for in businesses you work with or that help businesses that work out for themselves.

Because I'm very upfront about my beliefs and it's all over my websites and social media, I tend to attract, if I can use the word manifest, entrepreneurs who already believe in business being a force for good.

So that many of my clients are B Corp. already certified or they believe in that idea, that principle, those concepts. So the quadruple bottom line is a way of capturing that in a nice easy way, but broadly it's about businesses are forced for good.

Why Knowing Your Numbers Matters

And so I don't go out into the world wanting to persuade anybody of anything. If they want Dragon's Den, they wanna apprentice, if they wanted to sit on a Ferrari and point to their house in Mayfair, that's for them.

But that is not what I believe in, what makes me happy. And therefore by definition, I'm not working with people who want to achieve that, then I am not for that.

Wonderful. So let's look at the people that I work with, people who are maybe listening to this in my audience, who

have that very, very sort of pre-consumptive, early stage developing a business.

How important is the financial side? Now I have to put my hand up here and say that, I can't even look a spreadsheet. It just makes my brain It gives me a headache like I've never had about anything else.

Give me text and post-it notes and all of that, but a spreadsheet I'm useless at, as Polly Crook, my co-founder and the Howe people, will advocate. So how important is it to know our numbers at this early stage?

As important as blood is to the body. Yeah, it's that straightforward. Yeah. Okay. Cash is blood. Blood is cash. No blood, no life. OK. no cash, No business.

And 75% of the three quarter of a million businesses that have started here in the UK every year go out of business by year three. The statistics are scary.

Why? They all ran out of money. It's a surprise. They don't see it coming. And the reason for that is that they're in love with and naturally and quite unstandardly with the service they want to provide, with a thing they are probably very talented at.

And profit, money and cash, to your point, Joe, about spreadsheets is, I just don't want to go there. I don' t want look at it. And I'm here to say, you have to look it, or then don t go into business.

If you don''t want somebody with you or alongside you, who is with you as a running mate, a bookkeeper, an accountant, but somebody who's constantly showing you your blood pressure, you know, the cholesterol levels in your body, I mean it.

I can make a direct comparison with the things that are basic to you, as the doctor, to medical people. It's exactly the same with a business. You have to know.

So we have to be knowing the money situation that we need to monitoring. And then if we don't want to do it ourselves, we either need a collaborate and co-found with somebody that loves that, which is what I've done in the past, or we had to have a bookkeeper or accountant or somebody, we need to get that financial literacy and understanding which is where your course, which we will be linking in the show notes, comes into it because it's a very, very straightforward, straight-talking methodology to…

educate founders. A lot of medics that I work with are highly qualified individuals who have these ideas of how to run a business and then they go out and they feel like they need a different qualification or a diploma or different letters after their name to make them an expert in what they're already an But people don't then feel like they need to invest in learning about sales, learning, about marketing, and learning.

about finances. And this is what you're empowering founders to become financially literate so that they understand their business. Is that correct? I wouldn't even go as far as to say financially literate.

It's understanding enough. That's all. Understanding enough to feel comfortable. I mean, I'd love them to be friends. Even better if they're best friends, but a minimum is being comfortable with speaking about numbers with somebody who does enjoy it and then they understand the language.

The comparison I'd make is learning enough to drive a car to know what the speedometer means or the fuel gauge or rev counter or what gear the car is in, but they don't need to understand how the engine works.

OK, great analogy. I love that the car analogy goes through as well, doesn't it? I think it's a great one. So good. We need to understand enough. we need know our numbers.

What about this concept that, again, people struggle with at the beginning, talking about the money that's needed to actually start a business? It's difficult to get that first cash flow in the business, isn't?

Funding a Startup and Choosing the Right Model

So should we all just be you know, trying to put a product into market and then reinvesting the money from that product or service back into the business, or should we be investing our own money?

You know this is something I talk about with people within the program, but what are your thoughts on that sort of pre-startup financial needs? Yeah, great question.

I think it depends on the goals. It depends what a potential entrepreneur is trying to achieve massively. And again, no different from, if I can use this analogy, let's try this and see if it helps, that it's a very different preparation for walking around the corner and going to a shop to buy something from running a marathon.

and I've just given two extremes, but somewhere in the middle might be I want to have a good lifestyle, I wanna earn a certain amount of money. Well, that needs to be worked out.

In the same way that we know how far it is to walk around the corner, we now how long a marathon is or we want a climb a hill or climb mountain, the decisions of where we're trying to head and what we are trying achieve, will affect what decisions I need to make now.

To your point, a product launch or a software as a service launch requires far more cash upfront than offering a services that I'm doing from home. kitchen table and I can earn some money from day one, totally different.

So that again comes back to needing to be really clear about what we're trying to achieve and then getting help from somebody to work out exactly what your question was, Joe, about how much do I need and therefore, well, where will that money come from?

Is it loan? is it my own money? Do I an investor? There's no rules around that. It depends on what I'm trying to achieve and the type of business I am trying start.

Yeah. And I think a good example of that would be at the beginning of of my sort of journey into the how people and now the the coaching and mentoring doctors, I knew that I wanted a digital business with online courses and memberships and a platform that meant I could work from a computer wherever we were in the world, whether we're traveling, weather in Canada, where they were here.

So using a piece of software that could grow with me was very, very important to my initial business startup. So I invested in Kajabi, the platform that I use, and you use for your courses.

There are lots of other platforms available. But I invest in that. At the time, I thought, what am I doing? I don't have the content. I haven't got this all worked out.

But I made the decision that that was a good investment because I needed to learn it and immerse myself in it because i knew what I wanted to achieve.

And that's that sort of example, isn't it? I probably bought it too early, but it was with the knowledge of the fact that it would be able to grow with me.

So that decision, I guess, is important, Yes, exactly that. Great. What I would like to go on to now is about networks and community and the importance of having people.

You mentioned people is one of your quadruple bottom lines. And I think when I in my community, I talk about those people being the people that you want to help, but all the also the People that You have around you supporting you and you have in your world.

How important how important are relationships and people in business? Yeah, hugely. I'd put it on a spectrum, though, that the spectrum at one end where it's a service business that is entirely dependent on the people that are

in the business, whether they're freelance, contracted or employed, where they are full time or part time, but what the outside world is going to experience is people showing up.

and delivering something, a service. So under that end of the spectrum, people are absolutely crucial. And what I teach is around recruitment, hiring processes, minimizing the risks of hiring people who aren't a good match or good fit.

I'm a proponent of values-led interviewing. of being really clear about what the core values are of my business, describing them, putting a lot of work into what that is and defining them.

People, Networks, and Co-Parenting the Business

And then when I'm interviewing somebody, making sure that I'm asking questions and looking for evidence of their own core values and beliefs, because you can teach skills, but you cannot alter beliefs and values that may have been there since childhood.

So my advice is hire slowly, fire quickly under the people end of the spectrum. At the other end, let's say it's a software as a service business or manufacturing business with a factory or subcontracted manufacturing, people are still really important.

But it's less important than the physical product or the software that people are paying for. So they're important throughout, but it varies according again to the type of business that it is.

Yeah. Okay. And what about people supporting you as a founder? What about as an entrepreneur in a world maybe where you're surrounded by maybe your network and your community has been medically based or family based, or long-term friendships maybe outside of that entrepreneur community?

How important is it to have that network of people to support you? Because being a Founder can be a pretty lonely job, can't it? Crucial, crucial. There's Dr.

Robert Holden, who I'm a great admirer of. He wrote a book called Happiness Now and Success Intelligence, if anyone wants to look it up. And he offers courses in what I am about to describe.

But he had this great saying, it's like one of those annoying sayings that sound so simple and yet there's so much wisdom in it, that if you're alive, you need help.

And that's it, we need to admit it and to be aware of that. And we can't do things alone. We absolutely need people around us. If we're starting out money's tight and we needed to watch every penny, then there are communities like the one we met in, like hearted leaders, which are relatively inexpensive.

Then we give each other help. and discuss our challenges and then get help for almost no money. So that's a minimum. And then ideally, yes, I would always recommend that people have around them advisors or family friends with grey hair or whatever it is or coach or advisor or a sounding board, whatever the name is, the label, there's somebody to bounce ideas off who's objective and who is on your side.

And I use the analogy, Joe, of co-parenting, that the business is a baby. And it's not a human baby, but it is still an entity. We still conceived the business, whether it was our own name, or we give it another brand name.

It's got its own life. And so we're parenting that baby through, same idea, they're absolutely vulnerable and reliant on us from the time they were born, and then gradually as they grow up, their less and less reliance on on and they gradually take on a life of their own.

So who else is parenting the baby with us? Co-parenting. So I think that's an image that I would recommend for people who are running their own business or thinking of starting one.

They make sure they've got other people to help them co-parent the baby. Yeah, absolutely. It's funny, you should mention that I've recorded a podcast this week with Mandy Huntley, who's a GDPR and data protection expert.

And she was using the same analogy of the baby. We were laughing about the fact that your business will also behave like a teenager sometimes and you just want it to go away.

You need to be passionate about what you're doing because you need love it as much as you do a really stroppy stroppy teenager having a hissy fit. The co-parenting analogy, fantastic.

And those of you that are looking for founders, there are advantages and disadvantages of founding a business with somebody else. But try and find somebody that doesn't necessarily have the same skill sets as you.

It's almost like you can You can fill in each other's gaps, because that can work beautifully. But if you don't want to actually found with somebody, you can have advisors that are hugely passionate and supportive about your business, but they are, those aunties or family friends.

And it takes a village to raise a child. Exactly. It does. To start a business. Yes, agreed. Fabulous. Love that. So let's go on to something that I'd love to talk to you about as well, which is, you know, marketing.

You're obviously very you love figures. you are a very experienced business coach and mentor. or you've put this all together in a course. How have you found on a sort of personal level going out there and marketing yourself as an entity or getting people into your course?

I know we talked in the past about this sort launch cycle of having to show up on social media and people feeling like they have to do all of this stuff.

How are you finding that yourself now that you've got a digital product out there in the world? How does Alan Wick like showing up social on media? with difficulty.

It's my spread. You know, you were talking earlier about hating spreadsheets. These are my spreadsheet, but I'm doing it deliberately, consciously, giving myself a challenge of somewhere I don't want to go.

I hate it. With my previous businesses, I had other brand names.

Marketing Yourself and Saying Yes to Opportunities

I have brand name like Muscle Music or Turbo Sound or Sher International and I've no problem whatsoever to point the finger and now I'm delighted to introduce to you the latest loudspeaker from Turbo.

And I'd point and then I shout about the loud speaker. Promoting Alan Wick as a brand is really hard. I'm really uncomfortable with it, which is the reason for doing it.

I love that honesty and I totally hear you. I've been very much the same hiding behind various products and promoting and pointing and channeling energy towards brands and products.

And then actually it is that discomfort. for a lot of people because people aren't sure what their products are often when they come to me. So I said, do you know the easiest thing you can do is actually just go out there as a personal brand, start posting on LinkedIn, showing up as yourself because actually people buy from people, as we know, and you are the product.

You're offering coaching services, you're a psychiatrist with a special interest in ADHD, or a menopause doctor, whatever. People are buying you. it is uncomfortable and to know that you find it uncomfortable, and I find uncomfortable means that somebody will be helped by that, I think.

Good. But one of the things you've done is say yes to opportunities and that's something I thing we both do and

actually it probably links in nicely with this, but actually you, if we trace back this evolution from me showing up as co-founder of the How People, and all of this stuff that we did with that, all the talks and the great work we do.

And we still plan on doing, but we've taken a little hiatus so that I can explore this business option that was basically people knocking on my door saying, how have you done this?

You're a doctor and how do you show up? And how you've done a website? How have done all this digital stuff? You know, so Polly and I sat down and had a conversation, and that's where we are now.

Two and a half years later, I've explored this. But you were key in this because after one of our Friday meetings, you sent me a message and you said, Oh, Joey, have been meaning to tell you about Rachel Morris, who is somebody that you'd worked with Dr.

Rachel Maurice from You Are Not a Frog. And you said you've got to get in touch with her. She's absolutely lovely. You two would get on like house on fire.

Here's her details and you sent us an email and introduced us both to each other. And we jumped on a call probably a couple of days later and she invited me to come on her podcast and we recorded a podcast.

And the way that I explain this to my community is just, it's so important to lean into those opportunities that come up, particularly within what I call your inner circle of trust, because What that demonstrated was that Rachel had an email from somebody she knew like and trusted, Alan, who'd been helping her with her business, he said, you must talk to this person.

And there was no hesitation. There was not stalking on LinkedIn. It was somebody that we both mutually trusted suggesting we should get in a room together.

And for me, that made a massive difference, because that conversation with Rachel unearthed this potential that I had with this business medicine overlap and these skills that i'd developed.

And actually, that conversation was the beginning of me starting this Business. So thank you, first of all, for doing the introduction. But how important is that sort of leaning into those difficult conversations and say yes?

And I'd love you to give me your opinion and then tell me about what happened in the summer. I think it's crucial. I Think the whole spirit of entrepreneurialism is about looking for opportunities and taking them and Taking the risk now.

It's a calculated risk. So what's the worst that could have happened in that example? You gave Joe you wasted your time. That's it. You wasted half an hour worse that can happen.

We met, we had a chat, it went nowhere. Where's the good happen? Now with other kinds of risks and other types of opportunities, there may be more measurable risk financially or emotionally.

there may be risk with that. So that's where there's a balance and that is where again we go back to the quadruple bottom line because providing there is a lens of looking at things in a balanced way between head and heart between people, planet, profit, purpose, then we're exploring everything together with the same lens, which means though an opportunity comes along, it may be great from a personal point of view, but financially it's too big a risk.

and I do some numbers or get some help to look at what the downside could be. If I can't afford to lose it, would you put in a pound to the lottery, national lottery?

Three pounds, 10 pounds. A thousand, a million. What can you afford And therefore, that balance of head and heart is what matters to work out what the opportunity risk is and what reward might be.

And there's never a right or wrong. So putting pressure on ourselves to be binary right, wrong is no good. All

business decisions are grey. all of them, they're never fully right or fully wrong.

So it's about assessing what that opportunity is, getting help with it if you need to, and then making a choice. And again, that's the beauty of being an entrepreneur, running our own business, is we have agency, we do have choice, We can control.

our lives. And I believe that as entrepreneurs, we make our own weather. It's not up to others. I don't care what the economy is doing. i don' care whether it's sunny or raining outside. I care and I'm in control of my choices and what I manifest.

If I make a mistake, I'll learn from it and go from there. So just tell us, before we get your top tips, you did a talk out in West Wales, didn't you, this summer?

And was that the first time you've done a do talk? Yes.

The Do Lectures Talk and Final Advice

Yeah. So the do lectures, which I have referenced before, over in west Wales with Dave Hyatt and Claire Hyat in a beautiful farmhouse in Cardigan, they're doing some incredible stuff.

And I know you're been a big sort of fan of the Do lectures and you have been involved with them for a long time and they asked you to do a Talk this Summer.

How did that go? Amazing, amazing and huge thanks to Ruth. She was my coach for that talk, Joe, and my comfort zone is bullet points and spreadsheets, facts, figures.

She got me further and further away from that to only having photos on my slides and telling my story. And I've never told it before and been that vulnerable.

and shared that much, and I felt it was a massive risk. I feel deeply uncomfortable doing it and nervous all the way leading up to it, I'm nervous during it.

But the response has been unbelievable, overwhelming. And it wasn't just there and then that people coming up me after my talk and sharing with me their stories because I'd opened myself up with my family background and some really personal stuff and relationship with money and so on, but it was also in subsequent weeks and months to now, and it's, we're in November now and in July I did the talk.

I'm still getting people contacting me who see the Talk on the Do Lectures website and contact me and say, wow, that's really touched me, then shared something of their own story.

So it's been life changing, Joe, it has been amazing. Wonderful. And we're going to reference that below so that people can, because there's only, I've only just realised that they are live.

I have only managed to catch a couple of them and I haven't watched yours yet, shamefully, if it is available for people to watch already. Um, i will be putting that into the show notes so we can link those two things together.

and I look forward to looking at that myself and well done it's absolutely brilliant. It was great to see you there and Alice as well from our community and Rani who is a psychiatrist who I've also interviewed on the podcast so there were some fantastic talks which I will reference.

Thank you. I really appreciate your time. It's very precious. And I we have talked about all sorts of things and there's so many nuggets in there already.

But I guess what I like to finish up with is your three kind of top tips really for somebody coming into that entrepreneurial space, somebody who has decided that they're going to commit some time, money and effort into

creating something and making something happen.

So I would love to hear what your sort of three tips would be to somebody at that stage of business. Number one, have a safety net. Don't bank everything on it.

Be ready for failure. be ready to fall off of the trapeze and make sure that whatever you're doing or contemplating doing is a balance of your instinct, your feelings, and numbers, head and heart, a balance of those things.

And whatever you're uncomfortable with, let's go back to that. A baby needs certain resources for it, whether it's food or warmth or comfort, or business needs.

has its needs depending on the type of business it is. And there'll be things that you love doing that energise you. Fine, good news. But the other bits that the baby needs that don't energize you, and it's crucial to get help with that from the beginning.

So I'd say those are the things I would recommend contemplating before starting. Fantastic. It's been an absolute pleasure, Alan. You are awesome. Thank you so much for your time and for you words of wisdom.

And I think it's important for any medic going out there that's thinking about businesses in a certain way. I hope now that you've listened to this, you have realised the importance of business as a force.

Business can be something that is and is for anyone I work with, absolutely, and anyone Alan works with something that is going to benefit the human race, just like our work in hospitals.

So coming at this from a place of serving, not selling, and building something that we're really passionate about that's going give us the life that want, which is gonna be different for everybody.

Thank you so much for joining me, Alan. Absolute pleasure, thank you for inviting me Jo. I hope this episode has sparked some new ideas or challenged your thinking.

Transitioning from medicine to business is not easy. It's about adapting our skills while embracing the unknowns of entrepreneurship. for support and don't forget to grab the free pdf from the show notes from stethoscope to start up which is your go-to guide and resource for diving into entrepreneurship many thanks for tuning in i will see you next time thanks This has been a Monkey Pants Productions Podcast.