



## Xiaomi beats Samsung to become the top global smartphone brand in June 2021

According to new figures from Counterpoint Research, Xiaomi has registered solid growth and has overtaken Samsung in the second quarter of 2021 in terms of market share. With the new figures, Xiaomi has become the world's top smartphone seller for the first time.

Xiaomi smartphones accounted for 17.1 per cent of the global smartphone market by volume. With 15.7 per cent and 14.3 per cent market share, Samsung and Apple came in second and third,



respectively.

With 12.7 million phones shipped in Q2, Xiaomi surpassed Samsung to take the top spot in Europe, up 67.1 per cent year over year. Samsung's shipments fell 7 per cent to 12 million units in the same time period, despite it remaining the world's largest phone vendor.

The demise of Huawei, which continues to exit the European market after losing access to Android and Google services in 2019, seems to have aided Xiaomi's growth. Due to supply constraints, Samsung's sales have decreased, while Xiaomi's sales have increased in India, Europe, and China.

According to another report from Canalys, Xiaomi also registered 94 per cent growth in the Bangladesh market and rose to 5th among the top 5 smartphone vendors in the country in Q2 2021. Realme leads the chart in Bangladesh with 20 per cent unit shares.



## Google unveils new Pixel 6 phones with custom chips

Google on Monday unveiled a new flagship Pixel smartphone powered by its first mobile chip to put artificial intelligence in people's hands. Pixel 6 models set for release later this year, with superfast 5G wireless capability, will debut Google's own Tensor chip crafted along the lines of processors it made for data centres to enable computers to think more as people do.

"It's basically a mobile system on a chip designed around artificial intelligence," Google devices senior vice president Rick Osterloh said during a briefing at the company's headquarters in Silicon Valley. "We're really excited about it. We're setting the stage to really grow the business."

Google's Pixel line has captured scant share in a global smartphone market dominated by Samsung, Apple and Chinese manufacturers. Pixel phones have been seen as a way for Google to showcase the capabilities of its free Android mobile operating system, setting a standard for other smartphone makers.

"We've always thought about our hardware products in the context of driving computing forward," said Google chief executive Sundar Pichai. "Our custom Google Tensor chip, which has been four years in the making and builds off of two decades of Google's computing experience, does exactly that."

The Pixel 6 hardware and software

mix ramps up the smartphone's ability to understand what people say in another step toward a future of "ambient computing," according to Osterloh. The phrase refers to being able to access the internet or computing power conversationally at any time as portrayed in the 2013 science fiction romance film 'Her'.

"It's basically this notion that you should be able to naturally interact with computers all around you," Osterloh said. "We see the mobile phone being the centre of that for the foreseeable future."

The smarter chip was also put to work improving photo and video capabilities in a nod to hot trends in sharing images and short-form snippets online, a demonstration showed. An array of sensors for photography are in a band on the back of the smartphone, with the Pixel 6 having a 6.4 inch, edge-to-edge screen and the Pro model is slightly larger.

Google's shift to Tensor comes as the world faces a global chip shortage that has hobbled the production of products ranging from cars to computers.

"In some ways, it's fortunate in that we kind of control our own destiny," Osterloh said of the chip crunch. "We think we can manage through it and see it getting better toward the end of the year."

The Pixel 6 release date and pricing were not disclosed.

### EDITOR'S NOTE

## Closing the gap, and others

A recent study has shown a significant gender gap in the use of mobile phones, the internet and mobile financial services, with women lagging behind in all parameters. Bangladesh is no exception to this trend. While we keep going on about going digital and achieving gender equality in all fronts, how can we develop, as a country and a nation, with the existing gender gap in the most basic component of going digital?

In this issue, we take a closer view on the findings of this study conducted by GSMA, along with everything tech, automobile and pop culture.

Nahaly Nafisa Khan, *Sub-editor*

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# Zoom to pay \$85m as part of class-action settlement for allegations of privacy violations and zoombombing

Zoom has settled a class-action lawsuit for \$85 million, which accused the firm of inappropriately disclosing customer data through third-party software connections with multiple digital platforms. The tentative settlement [PDF] was filed over the weekend and is awaiting approval from the court.

Between March and May of last year, 14 lawsuits were filed against Zoom, which was consolidated into a class-action lawsuit. According to the lawsuit, Zoom allegedly misled customers about its encryption capabilities, shared user data with digital platforms without an agreement, and had insufficient security and privacy safeguards, resulting in unwanted and unauthorised

interruptions of Zoom meetings by outsider participants, popularly termed as Zoombombings. The US Department of Justice last year made zoombombing a crime, with anyone who do it facing fines or penalties on several state and federal offences.

If authorised, the \$85 million would be allocated so that users who paid for an account between April and October 2020 would be entitled to the greater of 15% of the money they paid to Zoom for their main Zoom Meetings subscription or \$25. Other customers who did not have a paying account, on the other hand, may be able to get up to \$15.

Although class members paid Zoom \$1.3 billion in subscriptions, the



plaintiffs' lawyers argued the \$85 million settlement was appropriate given the litigation's severe risks.

Zoom has committed to making certain adjustments aimed at boosting security, bolstering privacy, and safeguarding user data in addition to paying the \$85 million fine. By alerting users when a meeting host or another

participant uses a third-party application during a meeting, the firm has committed to deliver in-meeting notifications to make it easier for users to understand who can see, save, and share Zoom users' information and material.

For a year, Zoom will not incorporate the Facebook software development kit (SDK) for iOS into Zoom meetings and will request that Facebook remove any US customer data received through the SDK. The plaintiffs have also demanded that Zoom pay its legal fees, which would amount to an additional \$21.25 million in the settlement motion.

Zoom will have disputed any wrongdoings charged in the case if the settlement is approved.



# In conversation with a marketing communication mind, Indraneel Chattopadhyay

OISHEE EERADA MAUDUD

Indraneel Chattopadhyay, known as 'Neel', a self-taught marketer, currently works as the Head of Brand & Creative Communication, Nagad, the mobile financial service that won people's hearts in less than 3 years. He has recently earned the title of "The man of Nagad, best employee of the year 2020-2021" for his stellar performance at work. He has worked with innumerable renowned brands at home and abroad. Today, we hear from one of the brains behind extremely successful marketing campaigns.

## What is a typical day for the Head of Brand & Creative Communication for Nagad?

For my role, I have to put myself in many different shoes at different times of the day. As a firm believer in teamwork, I and my team help develop brand strategies, create marketing & communication plans & creative content, and the other departments and teams. Since we have an in-house creative team, we sometimes have to act as a creative director as well. In Nagad we all share a great environment of teamwork and friendliness. Being a young and vibrant mind, our management always welcomes ideas with substance and newness. And personally, whenever I work with any brand, I eat, sleep, and breathe the brand.

A major part of my job has been supervising the production of content such as digital, print, outdoor activation & visibility, audiovisuals, etc. I and my team also brainstorm with the copywriting team for most of the major communication and TVC ideas. If needed, we work closely with the creative team to come up with headlines and scripts as well. For example: "Deshi Nagad e Beshi Labh".

## You have extensive experience in the creative field. How do you think your experience in the creative field helps you in your current role?

Massively. I started my career as a copywriter and visualiser for Interspeed (affiliated with Ogilvy & Mather) in Bangladesh. I had multiple designations because I wanted to learn everything about communication in business. Slowly, I got into rural marketing, activation, and event management. I walked through all avenues of communication. Gradually, I grew up as a 360-degree communication person.

After Interspeed, I moved to Head Office Communication, a promising boutique agency at the time, as a communication strategy planner. Then, I

moved to the PRAN-RFL group and later to Otobi as their communications manager. A year later, I moved to Unitrend Limited, which is affiliated with the McCann Worldgroup. In 2014 I moved to Canada and did graduation in Interactive media design and digital media strategy followed by a job in a digital media firm in Toronto. I have worked at a wide variety of brands, from DHL to Pond's, Lipton, Standard Chartered, Lifebuoy, Lux, Polar Ice Cream, Ispahani, Warid Telecom, Westlake Tires, Lakeshore Medical, etc. I have also worked for a leading newspaper called Bhorer Kagoj as a feature writer. That training significantly helped me later on in writing people-focused content.

I travelled all over Bangladesh for my jobs. As such, I had the opportunity to inspect rural and semi-urban areas closely. I keenly observed the people: their lifestyle, purchasing habits, food habits, style of talking, etc.

I started my journey from Ishwaripur, a remote village near Sundarban. I later travelled all over India as a student, painting portraits, meeting people. This entire journey, full of ups and downs, has taught me about the vastness of people's lives. I understood how diversity in people and inclusion are important. All these roles at different types of companies helped me learn and grow



as a complete marketer.

## What challenges do you think are present in the industry for marketers at present?

Market segmentation is a bit tricky in Bangladesh. Demographic segmentation often leads to inaccurate targeting. This is because the listed income of many people differs considerably from their actual income.

Rather, you need to look at their lifestyle and preferences. Psychographic segmentation is the way to go. For example, think about a bus conductor buying imitation Nike shoes and an affluent boy buying original Nike shoes. Both of them have bought the symbol of the brand. As surprising as it may be, there is no difference in their brand preferences. Similarly, a folk tune or jingle you include in your advertisement to attract rural people can also attract opulent people living in urban areas. The consumption patterns are the same.

Thus, if you want your brand to attract the mass, you need to be inclusive in your communication. That is what we aim to achieve with Nagad's advertisements too. We try to provide some wit relief instead of being solemn as everyone loves humour. In the name of aspiration, many

become detached from people. But I want to get close to people through easy, friendly communication. I want them to love and relate to my brand.

## For everyone aspiring to have a career in marketing and branding, what are the must-haves? What soft skills are important in today's workplace?

Travel as much as you can. You get to see people closely and learn about their lifestyles. I believe practical knowledge is better than theoretical knowledge. Marketers should be fun-loving and welcoming towards people. It is also important to continuously learn and update your knowledge about the world.

Also, learning to be presentable is important. You need to be a good orator to be a good creative director. People need to be convinced by the picturization you're trying to portray through your words and presentation.

Spend time developing skills. Participate in your university clubs, newsletters, and activities. And be open to new ideas.

## What do you think many young aspiring marketers are doing wrong nowadays? What should they do instead to have a great headstart to their marketing career?

People often do not continue learning after getting certain degrees. Many people abroad do courses on the side. All kinds of knowledge are connected. Often when I recruit fresh blood, I see they lack knowledge about the outside world. They should keep themselves on top of what is going on in the world, current trends, etc.

They could spend time nurturing their creative side too. There is no rule saying that a professional cannot sing or paint. It can inspire them.

I believe that aspiring marketers should not limit themselves to an office cubicle. Marketers should spend time in markets and outdoors, even in places like tea stalls. There they can observe the local language, behaviour, opinions, and more. If you do not understand the anthropology of the market you are catering to, your marketing will not be as effective. It will not touch people's hearts.

Furthermore, coming up with data-driven, well-thought-out ideas is important. We tend to be instinctive instead. But doing the necessary homework properly and researching well for an idea is critical.

## In a country like Bangladesh that is low in digital readiness, how would you advise fintech -or any tech companies for that matter- to advertise to achieve better user acquisition and user adoption?

Most people nowadays consume digital content. The timespan of digital content is very low. You have to hook people in the first 5 seconds, or else they will skip it.

Moreover, we should be responsible regarding what we promote when producing digital content. We need to keep in mind that many impressionable teenagers have phones now and may view our content. Being culturally appropriate and inclusive is also crucial.

## After hectic days at work, how do you unwind? How do you maintain a work-life balance?

If you do not think of your work as 'work', rather as your passion, you will get the most fun out of working. Or else, you may end up stressed.



Tomorrow's Chattogram is being built  
connecting both sides of the river Karnaphuli

**Bangabandhu Tunnel**  
is being built with BSRM

COUNTRY'S NO. 1 STEEL EXPERT

**BSRM**  
building a safer nation

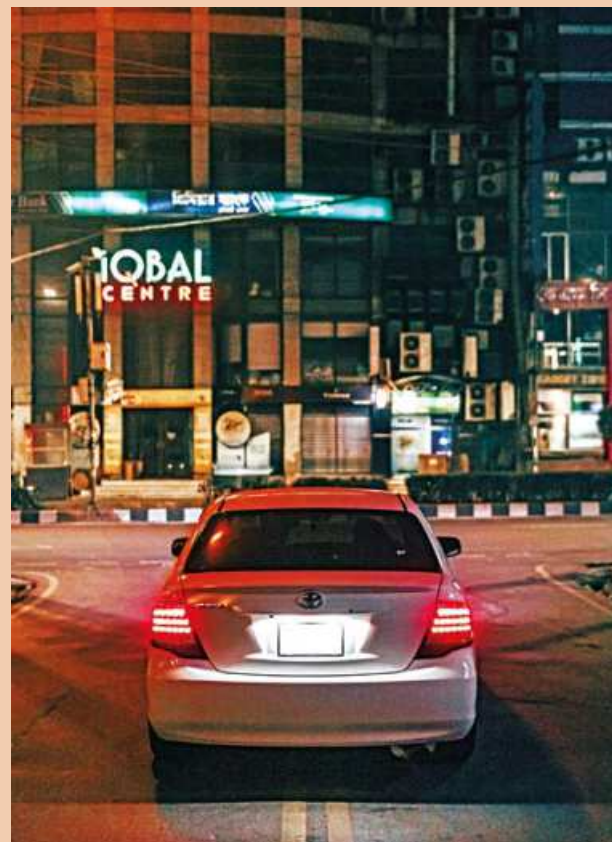




# THE AXIO'S SINISTER VARIANT

AHBAAR MILKY

The Japanese exclusive Super GT series, previously known as the JGTC (think DTM but with a dash of wasabi) was always an oddball because one round always took place in Malaysia or Thailand).



However, the 2009 season was odd in ways more than one. Team APR, a Toyota outfit decided to retire their outgoing MRS, and then transplanted its organs into a corolla Axio (which we all know and love) and weaponise the humble econobox into a race car designed to tailgate the big guns (mostly the GTR, Soarer and the NSX).

Looking back at team APR taking inspiration from dr Frankenstein, this feat was perhaps not as daring as taking to the track with a cannibalized Toyota Prius for their 2012 Super GT season. Although the super GT Axio and the road running off the Aichi mill couldn't be any different. The firepower came from a 2GR-FSE V6 from the GT300 MRS strapped to the middle of the carbon fibre bodied race car. The final product shared only the headlights, grille and mirror with its mochi flavoured counterpart.

Toyota could have left the dim-witted, CVT drone riddled Axio alone then and there, but I like to think they cashed in on the race on Sundays, and sold a livelier corolla (loosely) based on the race car the next day; the Axio GT.

Kazi Tahzid, after having his fair share of owning a standard Axio, finally warmed up to its slightly sinister variant. I had the pleasure of photographing his pride and joy when he bought it two years back, and we've been friends ever since.

I also had the absolute pleasure of experiencing the firepower of a manual and turbocharged 1NZ, that too while hauling four persons. The sense of speed is just ridiculous in a car as ubiquitous as the Axio. And without further ado, here's a crash course on the wasabi infused Axio, by Tahzid.

There's a significant difference between both the

variants. I owned both for a good amount of time to be able to tell the difference.

A standard Axio does a pretty great job at being a daily driven workhorse in Dhaka. It's comfortable and economical, and that is pretty much it. There's nothing more to crave from it. The performance of the 1NZFE with a CVT gearbox is just dull, an on-off switch pedal that doesn't do much other than making whiny noises going any faster than 60 kmph.

An Axio GT however, is a bit livelier. It is a genuine sleeper. It has a small turbo strapped to the 1NZ along with a 5-speed manual gearbox, larger front brake rotors and a few TRD goodies, making



the car feel stiffer than standard, and it is due to this stiffness that the added performance just goes along with it much more nicely. The first 2 gears are a joy to row through. The turbo spools up really quick, allowing you to feel the torque.

I would personally say that this car is just perfect for Dhaka, and for anyone who wishes to daily drive a reliable turbo car with a manual gearbox. It doesn't have much power, but it has just enough for one to utilize it completely all the time instead of waiting for empty roads at night. It is fairly economical than most sports cars; You don't have to worry about things breaking down all the time, and all I had to do for the past 2 years in terms of maintenance is just the oil and filter change, except a bit more frequent than the standard naturally aspirated Axio's.

# Gender gap in mobile phone usage remains to be closed, study finds

ZARIF FAIAZ, NAHALY NAFISA KHAN

GSMA, an industry organisation that represents the interests of mobile network operators worldwide has recently published a report on the gender gap in mobile use.

The report includes updated data on the gender gap in mobile ownership (including smartphones), the gender gap in mobile internet use in LMICs and how these figures have changed, a review of the barriers preventing male and female mobile users from adopting mobile internet, and new information on men's and women's confidence performing tasks on mobile and how they could learn new tasks, and qualitative insights from India and Kenya that highlight how the Covid-19 pandemic has influenced women's use of mobile internet and access to smartphones.

The findings show that women are now 7% less likely than males to hold a mobile phone in low- and middle-income nations, resulting in 143 million fewer women owning phones than men. Women are also 15% less likely than men to own a smartphone, compared to 20% in 2019.

## Gender gap in mobile use

A 2021 report by GSMA, an industry organisation that represents the interests of mobile network operators worldwide, outlines how women's mobile access and use are changing in Bangladesh.

Women's access to mobile internet continues to rise in low- and middle-income nations, but mobile phone ownership remains stable: 83% of women own a phone, and 58% use mobile internet. While the overall gender difference in mobile ownership has remained essentially unchanged since 2017, the gender gap in smartphone ownership has narrowed for the first time

since then, with South Asia leading the way.

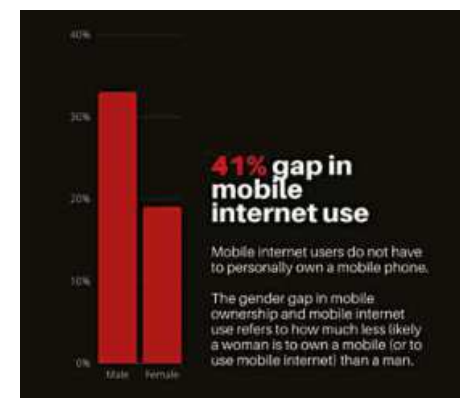
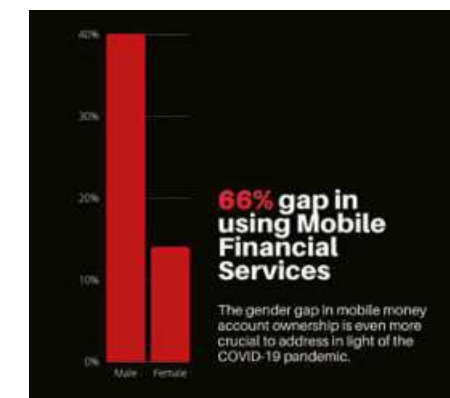
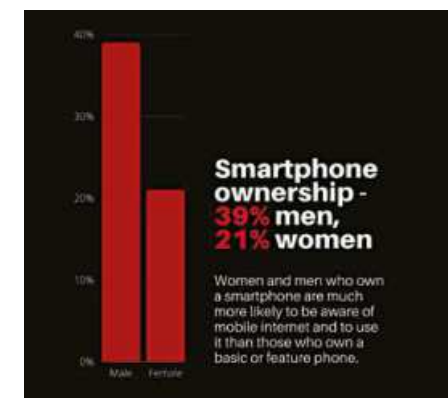
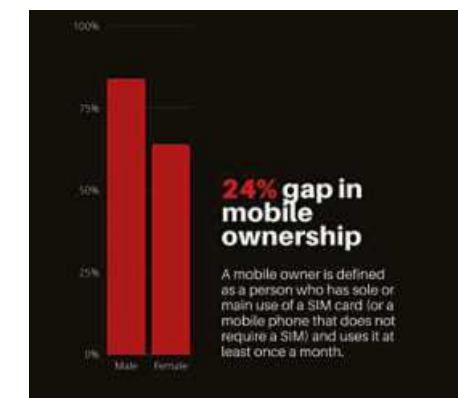
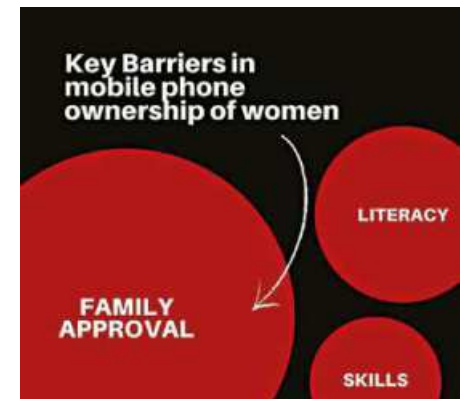
The country segregated data show that the gap between male and female mobile owners is 24 per cent in Bangladesh and the gap between male and female mobile internet users is 41 per cent. A mobile phone owner is defined as a person who has sole or main use of a SIM card (or a mobile phone that doesn't require a SIM)

and uses it at least once a month. Mobile internet users do not have to personally own a mobile phone.

The study showed that family approval, literacy and skills are the key barriers to women owning mobile phones. It also showed that the percentage of female owners watching free videos weekly increased from 11 per cent to 20 per cent, while this percentage saw an increase from 14 per cent to 29 per cent among the male owners.

According to the report, Bangladesh shows a gender gap of 66 per cent between male and female beneficiaries of mobile financing services, which is crucial in light of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic that increased the dependence on cashless transactions all over the world.

Another interesting finding from the study shows that female smartphone users believe they are less capable than male smartphone users of learning a new activity on their own. However, after they have completed a task, their confidence in their ability to complete it again is nearly equal to that of male users.







# Buying an iPad in 2021

## what you need to know

RASHED MOSLEM

If you're in the market for an iPad in 2021, there are five options to choose from, we've got the iPad mini, the iPad budget line, the 11 inch iPad Pro, the 12.9 inch iPad Pro and iPad Air.

To understand which iPad is appropriate for you, we'll talk about the performance, the value for money and the fun factor for using those particular traits for each of the options.

### iPad Mini

Let's start with the iPad Mini. I probably wouldn't recommend the iPad Mini for anyone, it hasn't been updated in a while, it doesn't give you the full experience of using an iPad.

If you need a little device to read, a Kindle or your phone should be perfect for that.

### Budget iPad

Next, we come to the genuinely good budget iPad. It is by far the best value for money iPad you can get. Students or anyone who has budget constraints, this is the iPad I would recommend going for.

In terms of performance, the budget iPad has the A12 chip in it, which is very good. The new iPads have the M one chip in them, but honestly, you won't notice a difference in performance between the \$329 iPad and the \$1300 M1 iPad Pro.

So, for Students, this is the iPad I would recommend. I would recommend paying a little bit extra and going for the



128GB model [\$429] otherwise you will face storage issues very soon and that's annoying.

### iPad Air

The iPad Air is interesting. It's sort of like the middle of the lineup starts at \$600 and it comes in all these fancy colours. In terms of performance, the iPad Air is reasonable, it's the A14 chip so it's a bit



better than the A12 that we have on the budget iPad, and it's not quite as good as the M1 Chip that we've got on the iPad Pros.

When it comes to performance on an iPad, you probably won't notice it again unless you're really into it.

### iPad Pro

Ever since the M1 MacBook Pro and

MacBook Air came out, I haven't seen much required to use the 12.9-inch iPad Pro. If you have a 13-inch laptop that works better than an iPad pro in most situations, in that case, this will be a redundant device for you. Also, in terms of price, this is costlier than a 13-inch MacBook Pro/Air, considering the magic keyboard and apple pencil 2nd generation.

It's a pleasure to use, it's super nice, and the screen is side by side, a little bit nicer than you would get in an 11-inch iPad pro.

### SUMMARY

If you're on a budget and you want an iPad, then the budget iPad is absolutely the way forward. It will get the job done.

If however, you have more money to burn, then the iPad Pro 11-inch would be my recommendation. It's great with an M1 chip and in most cases, it's too powerful to complete any task instantly. Lastly, that pro-motion display is super awesome to consume any video content

It's very hard to recommend the iPad Air because of the price and value associated with it. I cannot recommend the iPad mini as well because of the size and performance. Unless you want the iPad to be the only device that you carry with you, in such a case, 12.9 is quite nice and better to have because it just gives you more screen than 11-inch, which is always better.



# Getting started with your own podcast: a complete build guide

TAHSEEN NOWER PRACHI

Your fear of speaking extemporaneously without a safety net might curl you up when you think of podcasts for creating content, but surely starting one is the new way to get a more active audience engagement than ever before. If the idea of starting one of your own still sounds foreign, buckle up for a quick guide briefly assembled for beginners.

## What is a podcast anyway?

A Podcast is a series of spoken words, audio episodes, all focused on a particular topic or theme, like cycling, travel, or startups. One can subscribe to a podcast with an app whenever they want. Most podcasts today are audio-only, even though video podcasts do exist. Audio podcasts can be made visibly beautiful with the right artwork or design.

## Why start your own?

If you are a content creator aspiring to reach a vast audience or just level up in blogging, you might want to choose podcasting. Podcasting has become the 21st century's most innovative content platform that harkens back to the ancient days of oral storytelling, but now to a mass audience with greater impact, your voice.

Podcasts are direct programs, undoubtedly varying from radio shows that offer deeper engagement and compared to blog content, it is a less crowded content channel. So, there are many advantages to starting a podcast of your own—new audiences, less competition, deeper impact, and greater intimacy among them. They can connect content creators with content consumers, and they can hardly be duplicated by

other content mediums. And it takes less than you think to get started.

## Building a podcast setup

A quality podcast will mean quality equipment. So, it is the gear to get started, which means assembling some equipment to create a quality podcast. You sure can start a podcast by scraping the bare minimum, your smartphone, but will end up ruining its quality.

The most essentials are a computer and a microphone, followed by a list of podcasting gear. You will have to choose from three kinds of mics. USBs are the easiest and used for solo podcasts for their direct plug-in and easier connectivity to your laptop or smartphones. If multiple people are involved, then Dynamic and Condenser mics with professional XLR connections are the way to go.

directories. We have simplified the vast steps into four easy ones for creating a podcast.

## Create a clear roadmap

Before getting into the actual production and technical part, figure out your content and format. Choose a quality and attractive topic and justify it with an adequate description and title. Your topic and content must be appealing to the audience and something you feel confident speaking about. Also, you must possess essential knowledge or expertise in that particular niche to market your podcast appropriately.

There are formats like interview style, current show events, guests, call-in, multi-host show, and solo styles to choose from. Also, you need to set a length and frequency for the podcast accordingly.

## Pick your podcast hosting provider

After you have finished recording, editing, and producing your podcast, you can upload it to hosting sites like BuzzSprout, PodBean or Transistor. They generate the required RSS feed for you. Some hosting sites also offer a free trial period and charge when you choose to go permanent.

## Submit to directories

For every podcast episode you create, the host will provide a syndicated feed to platforms that play your podcast such as Spotify, SoundCloud, iTunes etc. For the promotion and sharing of your podcast, the sites play a vital role. Places like Soundcloud, for instance, offer a vigorous set of sharing options built-in. You can share directly to Twitter, Facebook, and more, and you can embed the audio directly into your blog posts.



Next comes the audio interface (the bridge between microphone and computer), Mixer (to control levels, inputs, outputs and more), Pop Filter/Windscreen, Headphones (closed-back ones preferably to help prevent mistakes and retakes), Headphone Amplifier (in case you have several hosts), Mic stands (to position the microphone), Microphone cables (to plug the mic into the audio interface, mixer or preamp), acoustic panels (to minimise the echoes, if any). No reason to freak out, you can always leave one or two considering your budget if you plan accordingly.

## Steps to creating a podcast

The steps for creating a functioning podcast ranges from building a setup to submitting it to the hosts and then

## Record and edit the episode/ audio file

For a podcast that sounds organised and professional, the key is to practice beforehand by outlining what you are going to say for your recording, as it is about the audio content. Each episode of your show will be a separate audio file that can be made available in various formats, MP3 files are generally recommended by professionals.

Editing is an essential part of the process to correct any mistake, smoothen and control voice levels, adding graphics, music, or artwork- and everything. Software like Audacity, GarageBand are free to use, Avid Pro Tools is for more professional ones, and requires an annual subscription.

## Some pointers

Avoid some common mishaps by checking and rechecking your audio mixes thoroughly, using good mic technique and handling the gear tactfully. Checking everyone's headphone levels before you press record is important. Try to pick the quietest spot you can for your setup, or acoustic treatment to ensure minimum distortion.

The ideal length of a podcast is considered 20-22 minutes, varying content-wise with a weekly frequency, with a compatible and attractive name. Illustrious covers with enticing titles and artwork are more likely to attract your targeted audiences to tune in to your podcast and stick to it for more.

And there you go! Happy podcasting.





## 'The Suicide Squad' seeks redemption for DC supervillains, and director

When James Gunn was asked to direct the next DC superhero film, he didn't pick an icon like Superman, Batman, or Wonder Woman. He chose the rag-tag group of Z-list villains known as 'The Suicide Squad.' Gunn's R-rated romp brings back familiar faces like Margot Robbie's Harley Quinn in a sequel-of-sorts to the near-identically named 2016 'Suicide Squad' which saw anti-heroes join deadly US government missions to shave time off their prison terms.

And then there are some more obscure newcomers, like Polka Dot Man. "I literally put into Google, 'who is the dumbest super villain of all time?' And Polka Dot Man always came up near the top," said Gunn. "Being able to take a character like that and then give him heart was fun for me," Gunn told a recent virtual press event for the film.

Gunn's approach to choosing his gallery

of expendable rogues might at first seem unlikely to inspire confidence among money-counting Warner Bros executives. Even David Dastmalchian, the actor playing him and a self-avowed comic book nerd, initially "had no freaking clue who Polka Dot Man was."

But the first film's success suggests that plumbing the comic book world's depths for less-than-mainstream characters does not hurt in terms of movie popularity. The original 'Suicide Squad' shrugged off poor reviews to take almost \$750 million at the global box office.

Like the first film, 'The Suicide Squad' has its share of big-name actors -- Will Smith and Jared Leto have moved on, but are replaced by John Cena, Idris Elba and Sylvester Stallone, who appears as the voice of a half-man, half-shark. According to Elba, playing Bloodsport -- a "character that wasn't as well-defined as

a personality" -- allowed the actors more freedom.

"It was 'let's find a character who's obscure, who we can build as our own cinematic creation for Idris,'" agreed Gunn.

The film's blend of risk-taking and redemption mirrors the path of its director. Gunn, a cult director and writer who penned Zack Snyder's 'Dawn of the Dead' 2004 remake, hit the mainstream with Marvel's wildly popular 'Guardians of the Galaxy' films. But he was unceremoniously fired by parent company Disney in 2018 when old tweets emerged in which he made crude jokes about the Holocaust, AIDS and rape.

Warner swooped in to poach Gunn for their rival DC superhero films. After apologies and a groundswell of support from Hollywood collaborators including Chris Pratt, Gunn is back on board with Marvel too -- he is set to direct 2023's

'Guardians of the Galaxy 3.'

"You don't expect people to have your back...that was an eye-opener for me," Gunn told the New York Times recently. "When Warner Bros. comes to me on the Monday after it happens and says, we want you, James Gunn, you think, wow, that feels good to hear." Describing 'The Suicide Squad' as a 'Dirty Dozen' style war film blended with dark comic book humour, Gunn told journalists that he had "felt the responsibility to take risks" and avoid using "the same boring three-act structure every time."

Indeed, the film features a 200-foot pink starfish as a primary villain. "It does seem like big movies are the ones that people are going to see in theatres" as the pandemic eases, he added. "If they don't continue to take risks and change and try new things, then people aren't going to want to be coming to the theatres.

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