

What LegalZoom Learned Over 7 Years of Podcast Advertising

The company continues to up its ad spend

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An interview with:

Rion Swartz

Senior Director, Marketing and Brand Management
LegalZoom

Many brands are starting to explore podcast advertising in hopes of reaching the channel's captive, engaged audiences, but some have been there from the very beginning. LegalZoom, a tech company that helps people create their own legal documents, has been advertising in the space since the "Wild West" days of 2011 and has developed its strategy over time. eMarketer's Caroline Cakebread spoke with Rion Swartz, LegalZoom's senior director of marketing and brand management, about the evolution of podcast advertising and how the company approaches the channel today.

This interview is part of an upcoming eMarketer report, "Podcast Advertising 2018," publishing later this week.

eMarketer:

How big a role do podcasts play in your ad strategy?

Rion Swartz:

It's become a larger share of our overall audio budget over the years. When we started in 2011, it was around 5% to 6%, but recently it's gone up to 20% to 25% of our overall budget.

eMarketer:

What was behind the company's decision in 2011 to start investing in podcasts?

Rion Swartz:

Historically, we've been a heavy advertiser on terrestrial radio. When podcasts started emerging, we recognized they were a natural extension to radio. Both are driven by big personalities that have large audiences.

It's a medium where you can really utilize the host's personality, to get them to understand what LegalZoom is trying to do, what we're all about, and then relate that to their audience in a way they're used to hearing. In some cases, it's even better. You're not at the mercy of people changing stations.

“You’re not at the mercy of people changing stations.”

eMarketer:

How has the space changed since you started investing?

Rion Swartz:

It was kind of the "Wild West" when advertisers started targeting podcasts. It was hard to find sales reps for each podcast—you had to do a little Sherlock Holmes work just to figure out who you could contact to talk about placing an ad. It was rare when someone reached out to you to offer advertising.

As podcasts have become more advertiser friendly, networks have emerged. We’ve transferred a lot of the work to our agency, Veritone One, to make it easier for us to manage. These days we have them doing most of our buying.

eMarketer:

Do you focus on placing ads in podcasts that have a similar audience to who you're trying to target?

Rion Swartz:

We’ve found that subject matter doesn't necessarily matter—it’s the mass scale podcasts that deliver better results. People like Joe Rogan and Adam Carolla get millions of downloads within a short time frame, and they dive into strange topics, but they have such large followings that by casting a wide net, we get our potential customers in the mix.

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eMarketer:

Do you find that one type of ad works better than another?

Rion Swartz:

We’ve tested live reads vs. prerecorded mid-rolls, and the live reads perform better by far. It’s not in a cluttered commercial pod—it's in the host's voice, and it's directly adjacent to the content.

Audiences trust podcast hosts. When a host says good things about an advertiser, the audience is likely to believe them because most hosts will want to believe in a product before they're willing to endorse it.

eMarketer:

How are you measuring results of podcast ads?

Rion Swartz:

We do a lot of modeling, but podcasts are extremely hard to model because listening is delayed, and people are in environments like cars where they can’t immediately respond. We include a promo code in the script when we write audio copy and look at response metrics.

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