

# LI PODCASTERS SEEK GOLD IN CROWDED POOL

Businesses, entertainers hope to attract followers, money

BY KEN SCHACHTER

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Long Island business and entertainment figures are diving into a crowded podcast pool in the hope of gaining notoriety and spinning business gold.

One of the latest to launch a podcast is Jim McCann, chairman and founder of 1-800-Flowers.com, an online retailer that is one of Long Island's largest public companies.

McCann's Celebrations Chatter show joins podcasts hosted by Long Island business executives, including: Recalibrating Reality (Scott Rechler, chief executive of RXR Realty and a board member of the New York Federal Reserve); Mooch FM (Anthony "Mooch" Scaramucci, founder of investment firm Skybridge Capital); Long Island's Future (Matt Cohen, CEO of the Long Island Association), and The Spreading Happiness Podcast (John and Mark X. Cronin, father and son co-founders of John's Crazy Socks).

The Cronins' podcast is produced at the newly expanded studio of Farmingdale-based Launchpad Five One Six, which also hosts veteran TV newscaster Carol Silva's The Silva Lining Podcast.

Other podcasts are helmed by Long Island media personalities like The Lohdown (Lindsay Lohan, an actress and entrepreneur), and The Mike Francesa Podcast (Mike Francesa, former WFAN sport-talk host).

Merrill Loechner, founder and producer at Smith Douglass Associates, a podcast advisory firm in Levittown, said that developing a podcast can further a brand, but the path is

not always a straight line.

For instance, a podcast episode allowed one of Loechner's clients, a cybersecurity firm, to deliver a targeted message about how a state law applies to law firms.

"That one episode generated about half a million dollars in business," she said.

Other podcasts take a less direct approach, but frame executives as what Loechner calls "thought leaders."

Rechler's podcasts range far beyond real estate. His high-profile guests have included Jet-Blue CEO Robin Hayes on the future of commercial aviation and retired four-star Gen. Stanley McChrystal on Afghanistan, vaccine mandates and command structures.

Another guest, Stanford University professor Nick Bloom, addressed the pandemic-driven work-from-home phenomenon, a trend with clear implications for the office buildings of RXR on Long Island and beyond. (Bloom's assessment: 50% of workers can't do their jobs remotely; 35% will adopt a hybrid schedule and 15% will remain exclusively remote.)

McCann said that his podcast is an extension of the 1-800-Flowers' weekly Celebrations Pulse newsletter, which is emailed to 7 million potential readers, giving the audio feed a head start in attracting an audience.

"Our goal is [for] our customers to have more and better relationships in their lives," he said. And should a celebration require a gift, "I hope you remember us."

His early guests include Amanda Kloots, an actress and TV personality who co-wrote a



Jim McCann's Celebrations Chatter show joins podcasts hosted by other Long Island personalities.



John Cronin, left, and Mark X. Cronin, right, co-founders of John's Crazy Socks, flank George Andriopoulos of Launchpad 516 Studios.

memoir about the loss of her husband, actor Nick Cordero, to COVID-19.

Listeners have a bewildering array of choices. Worldwide, there are more than 4 million podcasts, according to podcastindex.org.

A study by Grand View Research found that one path to monetizing a podcast — inserting commercials — "has failed to gain traction" as listeners tend to tune out. Other podcasters are putting content or bonus material behind a paywall.

Nicole Penn, president of The EGC Group, a Melville advertising and marketing agency that has produced "hundreds" of podcasts, advises podcasters to narrow

the subject of their programs.

"The nichier the better," she said.

Broadridge Financial Solutions Inc., based in Lake Success, has taken that path, with a menu of podcasts geared to customers such as The Point, addressing issues in asset management, and Reimagining Communications, offering strategies in financial communications.

Loechner said that her clients typically use podcasts as part of a multipronged marketing strategy that could include producing live events, giving speeches, writing books or making a video.

When signing up clients, Loechner said she questions them closely about their goals because podcasts require effort

and resources.

"Starting a podcast is like starting another business — you need to have a plan," she said.

About half of the four million podcasts are inactive, she said, because of a phenomenon known as "podfade," in which podcasters lose momentum and stop producing episodes.

Loechner said she closely questions prospective clients.

"Their answers give me an idea if they think a podcast is a vanity project and will probably only last a few episodes, or if they really thought it through as a marketing tool," she said.

The financial barriers to entry are low. Penn said the podcasting format allows anyone with earbuds to tune into a medium that cuts across generations, from "millennials to 60-plus."

Podcasters, however, do not have to follow the common 30-minute format. Penn said that bite-size podcasts are gaining popularity.

"There are some that are eight minutes long," she said.

Despite the proliferation of podcasts, Loechner said the medium hasn't reached the saturation point, any more than book publishing has with the thousands of titles issued each year.

"Having a blog used to be a new and interesting thing," she said. "Now it's sort of expected. I'm guessing in another couple of years, podcasts will be viewed the same."