

The Podcast People

From 'How lie detectors work' to 'Are dogs a shark's favourite meal', How Stuff Works offers a range of fascinating topics for the curious mind. The Stuff You Should Know podcast turns it into bite-sized chunks of listening pleasure.

If you've ever wondered how things work, you are not alone. This is why the Stuff You Should Know podcast consistently sits in the top rankings on iTunes and Josh Clark and Charles 'Chuck' Bryant have become household names in the Podcast world. This podcast averages 5 million downloads a month. That is a whole lot of listeners.

Stuff You Should Know is a shoot off of How Stuff Works, an edutainment website that aims to give its target audience an insight into the way in which well...everything...works. The site uses various media in its effort to explain complex concepts, terminology and mechanisms, including photographs, diagrams, videos and animations, and articles, while the podcast uses banter between the co-hosts to do the same.

Josh and Chuck are both Staff writers for How Stuff Works, although both the site and podcast cover work from other writers also. Josh was selected to utter the initial words of the first ever Stuff You Should Know podcast five years ago. He is not exactly sure what those words were but suspects the line was 'Hey and



welcome to the podcast,' as this is the way each episode has begun since. The inaugural topic was 'How Grassoline Works'. 'I talked a lot faster then', explains Josh, '...as someone at iTunes said "Everyone wants podcasts of five minutes." In later conversations they said, "They'd like them a little longer now."' Now the hosts talk until they run out of things to say. 'We take five minutes to say hello now,' laughs Chuck.

The podcast originated as a way of taking the articles on How Stuff Works out to a different audience without having to rewrite everything. Josh had never listened to a podcast but he linked up with Producer Jeri Rowland and they gave it a try. He believes one of the reasons it worked was that there was no pressure to succeed. 'It really came out of this low pressure experiment of trying to figure out how to get these really great How Stuff Works articles out there to people who hadn't hear of How Stuff Works yet or weren't reading

but were still interested in information and knowledge,' Josh explains.

The podcast was not an overnight success but once unsolicited listener mail started arriving it seemed they were on to something. After Chuck joined as co-host he introduced a listener mail segment and all of a sudden they started hearing from a lot more people. Chuck used to respond to every single mail. A few months later the podcast was rated number one at iTunes. 'This was huge,' says Josh, '...but we were still so new at this that we didn't know what that meant.' What it meant was that a whole lot of people tuned in and the podcast was bumped into the major league. The guys modestly attribute this to luck but they have managed to keep the momentum going since then so there must be something more to it. 'We got kicked up there and just sort of stuck around,' Chuck explains, although he can no longer answer every mail. This is the price of popularity.



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Josh hosted for a while with rotating guest co-hosts until Chuck took the seat. 'I always put it in spectacular terms like there were fireworks and birds singing but you really could tell, right from that first moment, that it was different and it was what everyone had been looking for,' explains Josh. The two have now been on the podcast together for around four years, creating over 450 podcasts, and they have developed

a casual speaking style that works as they springboard off each other. Part of the appeal is that the guys sound like they are having fun along the way.

Whatever the attraction is, it works on a broad audience with no core demographic. 'It really is all over the map,' says Josh. They cover so many topics that there is something for everyone. They often get stories of people who share their listening, ranging from a father and son travelling around the opal mines in Australia to a teacher and student who share that common bond. 'That's the cool thing about iTunes. It is global and it's not like you have to tune in at a certain hour on a certain day. I've always thought that our core demographic is people who are internet savvy and people who are curious. That runs the gamut' says Chuck.

The podcasts are always based on a How Stuff Works article. Josh and Chuck read the article several times and once they have come to grips with the topic they do independent research to seek additional information. They do not collaborate until recording the podcast. They are quick to point out that they are not experts. 'We try to tell people we are not experts and that we are just good at research and we have curious minds,' says Chuck. Their standard response when a question becomes too in-depth at fan events is 'I don't know but I will go and look it up and I encourage you to do so too.' They remind people of this throughout the podcasts and are quick to make corrections when they do get it wrong. 'I think our mission is to give people a good entry in to a topic, a good overview, and we encourage everyone at the end of every show to go out and read the article and do their own research', explains Chuck.

They record four weeks at a time and when it comes to choosing topics Josh chooses two and Chuck chooses two. They try to keep them varied. 'It's really

pretty easy', says Chuck. 'It's whatever looks interesting and whatever we haven't covered. It's not very scientific at all.' Both believe there is no danger of running out of topics in the near future, and they both keep running lists of possibilities. Chuck chooses a podcast about cannibalism as his current favourite as it is something real, not fantasy. 'It's not made up like zombies,' he explains, 'Cannibalism is real and interesting.' Josh confesses that the topics do become a bit of a blur as there are so many. He changes his mind often but temporarily he cites his favourite as 'Do you really stay conscious after you are decapitated?' 'It was really grisly but fascinating,' he admits'...because the answer is yes, for maybe 4 seconds.' 'It'd be great to do a really quick interview,' quips Chuck.

The guys do keep an emergency episode in reserve which is one they are not entirely happy with. 'It's basically under glass and if something happens, if one of us is in hospital and we can't do the podcast, this is the one that gets released,' says Josh. If you hear anything on pet detectives, you know this point has been reached.

Both guys admit that it is hard to retain all of that knowledge and Chuck confesses that Josh retains more than he does. 'It is immediate stuff', says Josh. 'The stuff from two years ago is now gone... We are living examples that the brain has a finite capacity.' This may be why, despite being fluent on a range of topics, they are not often asked to join quiz teams. They have organised two trivia nights where an all-star trivia team took on anyone who came out and formed their own team. The all-stars were beaten both times. 'Maybe news like that got around...' ponders Josh.

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