

Your response

| Question | Your response |
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| Question 1: Please provide us with evidence and information in relation to the impact of BBC Sounds on the UK market. We also welcome stakeholder views, and any supporting analysis, related to the future development of BBC Sounds and the impact that this may have on the wider market. | N |

Introduction

ITN welcomes the invitation to submit evidence to Ofcom's call for greater understanding of the market impact of BBC Sounds. While ITN's business is predominantly operating in the audio-visual space, several of its divisions have started to produce speech-based podcasts.

ITN holds a unique position in the broadcasting landscape producing the news programmes for the UK's commercial public service broadcasters; ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5. Each of these programmes also maintain a digital presence and in recent years have started making podcasts.

ITN Productions also creates content spanning TV production, commercials, sports content, educational content, as well as running a post-production facility, and has started making podcasts for a number of clients.

This breadth of experience in content production gives ITN the ability to consider market developments from the perspective of a publisher and a producer of audio materials.

The aim of this submission is to share ITN's current view of the market and to highlight a number of potential future issues.

ITN is interested in a thriving podcast market where there are numerous clients to win commissions from and a multitude of platforms for audiences to be able to access ITN-produced content.

Why is ITN in the podcast space?

Several ITN divisions have entered the podcasting space in recent years as a result of natural editorial development of existing programmes. Podcasting also presents a purely commercial opportunity to win work from new clients and to create new business opportunities.

ITV News started making podcasts following the 2019 general election. The first podcast was the Westminster based Calling Peston hosted by political editor Robert Peston and the ITV News political team. Each episode takes an in-depth look at the big political stories of the week. Following on from its success a number of other podcasts have been launched including: the Royal Rota, ITV's royal podcast, Will Trump Win? analysis of the US election campaign, Acting PM a weekly podcast with political correspondent Paul Brand and a guest exploring what they would do if they were the Prime Minister and a number of regional news podcasts as well.

Channel 4 News also has a weekly podcast hosted by presenter Krishnan Guru-Murthy called Ways to Change the World, which secures around 35,000 listeners per episode. Meanwhile, 5 News political editor Andy Bell hosts How Did we Get Here? – a podcast providing context and deeper understanding of a big news story and with some episodes reaching over 20,000 listeners.

While podcasting is a relatively new area of content production for the company there are advantages of ITN's various brands and divisions being in the space. Each of the newsrooms are working to reach new audiences, build relationships with them and deliver information in the most relevant way. The newsrooms are acutely aware that audiences want choice in how they consume news and

information. Podcasts are being used as an additional opportunity for journalists to add depth and analysis to the story-telling they are already delivering to their audiences.

ITN Productions is also increasingly working in podcasting. It has won a number of commissions from Audible including: Jon Snow Behind the News, Exoplanets with Danielle George, Slay: How to Succeed in Your Career, Escape from Jonestown. As well as recently winning commissions from Radio 4 and Radio 5 Live – both of which will also be available on BBC Sounds.

As a modern multi-media company podcasts offer a strong new commercial opportunity with the ability to reach new and diverse audiences and the ability to discover fresh talent.

Podcast successes

While the newsrooms, that are publishing podcasts, may not have the same platform as BBC Sounds to guide the audience to their content they are punching above their weight and delivering notable successes. Channel 4 News' Ways to Change the World was listened to 500,000 people when a clip of Jameela Jamil talking about the Kardashians went viral and was viewed 22m times on social media. The same interview was nominated for the best moment at the 2019 British Podcast Awards following. Recently ITV News podcast Will Trump Win? was the first recommendation for US election podcasts on Spotify.

Distribution and commissioning

Platform choice

The news programmes made by ITN distribute their podcasts through Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Acast and filmed versions of many podcasts are also available on YouTube. In some cases the audience is accessing podcasts through over 30 different platforms. ITV News podcasts are published through the Global.com player.

Distribution on these platforms have allowed podcasts made by ITN's divisions to reach new audiences. ITV News and Channel 4 News' podcasts have built up returning audiences and both programmes are interested in exploring new podcasts and to keep working in this area.

Lack of access to BBC Sounds as a distribution platform has not deterred relevant areas of ITN's business from entering the podcast space. However, some divisions have to work harder, when they initially enter the market, compared to others.

The advantage of BBC Sounds is that lesser known names and new content already have a captive audience that can be directed to content they may not have found through their own searches. When a producer doesn't have the power of that platform or a large following on other digital channels they are forced into finding other ways of promoting their content which may not be as effective.

One area ITN will continue to monitor is whether any growth of BBC Sounds has a detrimental effect on other platforms. The success of ITN's podcasting business depends on audiences being able to access the content produced from a variety of platforms and the potential to grow the audience. Any potential of BBC Sounds becoming a market leading platform could limit the audience's choice.

BBC Commissioning

While the BBC continues commissioning for BBC Sounds and BBC Radio, ITN Productions will also continue pitching for opportunities to make content and win business. By commissioning third parties to make content for the platform new talent and ideas are given an opportunity to access BBC Sounds audience. As the podcast market continues to grow it will become increasingly important for the BBC to continue to commission the best ideas – from both in-house and independent producers, such as ITN, in a fair and transparent manner.

Conclusion

There are currently many opportunities for the different areas of ITN's business to expand their podcast offering. However, for the market to continue growing that relies on no single platform having dominance. The podcasting sector is unique as content distribution is rarely tied into one single platform meaning that many podcasts are monetised through advertising.

While BBC Sounds may not currently be the leading distribution platform for podcasts, that may change. The service does hold a significant position as a UK platform compared to other mainstream platforms which are global. BBC Sounds benefits from cross-pollination from other BBC services and already having over 3m users. If it was to achieve a market leading position, the next logical set of questions would be about whether third party content should be made available through the service.

If this was a strategy pursued by BBC Sounds the main considerations for ITN would be: how the BBC would propose to choose the best third-party content, how prominence would be balanced between BBC and third-party content and the ability for third-parties to monetise their content through advertising. Without finding answers to these questions the business model for podcasting would be at risk of being destroyed.

As noted previously podcasts from ITV News, 5News and Channel 4 News have been successful with strong audience figures, nominations for awards as well as being highlighted for listeners on platforms without being available on BBC Sounds. The ability to reach large audiences external to the BBC's walled garden is crucial if the podcasting market is going to continue to develop commercially.

As both a producer and publisher a pluralistic distribution market where audiences can find content in as many places as possible is an ideal situation. BBC Sounds should be just one piece of the jigsaw rather than the complete picture and any future policy moves should further stimulate the market.