

**Esports and Podcasts: Developing HAMK Gaming Academy's
Brand with an Esports Podcast**



Bachelor's thesis

Bachelor of Business Administration

Autumn, 2021

Juliet Aittomäki

International Business-koulutus

Tekijä Juliet Aittomäki **Vuosi** 2021

Työn nimi Esports and Podcasts: Developing HAMK Gaming Academy's Brand with an Esports Podcast

Ohjaaja(t) Victor de Bruin

TIIVISTELMÄ

Opinäytetyön tavoitteena oli luoda asiakkaalle ohjeistus podcastin kehittämisestä, joka tukee ja vahvistaa asiakkaan brändiä. Asiakkaalle luotiin heidän tarpeisiinsa sovellettu pohja sisältöstrategialle. Opinäytetyön toimeksiantajana toimi HAMK Gaming Academy, joka tarjoaa elektronisen urheilun opintoja sekä tutkimustöitä Hämeen ammattikorkeakoulussa.

Opinäytetyön teoreettisessa osuudessa käydään läpi sisältömarkkinoinnin keskeiset asiat, sillä podcastit kuuluvat sen piiriin. Seuraavaksi käydään läpi podcastien historiaa sekä suomalaisten podcast-kuluttajien kuuntelemisen tapoja. Lopuksi käydään läpi elektronisen urheilun perusteita ja sen suuren suosion syytä.

Opinäytetyö oli toiminnallinen. Tutkimusaineistoa kerättiin eri sähköisistä lähteistä, sekä hyödynnettiin kirjoittajan omaa kokemusta toimeksiantajan kanssa.

Kehittämistyön perusteella voidaan todeta, että toimeksiantajan podcastilla on hyvät mahdollisuudet kehittyä kannattavaksi. Toimeksiantajan täytyy tulevaisuudessa olla aktiivisempi yleisöään kohtaan, sekä luoda suhdetta kuuntelijaan. Ohjeistusta tähän on annettu opinäytetyön toiminnallisessa osuudessa. Toimeksiantaja oli tyytyväinen kehitystyön tuloksiin.

Avainsanat podcastit, elektroninen urheilu, sisältöstrategia, markkinointi

Sivut 32 sivua, joista liitteitä 0 sivua

Degree programme of International Business

Author	Juliet Aittomäki	Year 2021
Subject	Esports and Podcasts: Developing HAMK Gaming Academy's Brand with an Esports Podcast	
Supervisor(s)	Victor de Bruin	

ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis was to provide instructions how to improve a podcast, which supports the brand of the client. Based on the needs of the client, content strategy instructions were delivered. The commissioning party was HAMK Gaming Academy, which offers esports studies and research projects at Häme University of Applied Sciences.

The theory part of this thesis first covers the basic concepts of content marketing, what podcasts are part of. Next, the history of podcasts and listening behaviours of Finnish podcast consumers are covered. Lastly, the concept of esports and the huge growth of esports business is gone through.

This thesis was practise-based. Research material was gathered from multiple online sources, as well using the knowledge the writer has gathered while in close contact with the commissioning party.

The results of this thesis indicate that the podcast of the commissioning party has good possibilities to become successful. The commissioning party needs to be more active towards its listeners by creating a relationship between the podcast and the listeners. Instructions to this aspect have been given in the practical part of this thesis. The commissioning party was pleased with the results of this thesis.

Keywords podcasts, electronic sports, content strategy, marketing

Pages 32 pages including appendices 0 pages

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ABBREVIATIONS

AM: Amplitude modulation

CTA: Call to action

e.g.: exempli gratia (Latin, meaning: "for example")

FM: Frequency modulation

FPS: First-person shooter

HAMK: Häme University of Applied Sciences

MB: Megabyte

MOBA: Multiplayer online battle arena real-time strategy

PC: Personal computer

RSS: Really simple syndication

RTS: Real-time strategy

SEO: Search Engine Optimization

SWOT: Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

TOWS: Variant of SWOT

VoIP: Voice over IP

1 INTRODUCTION

Podcasting has become extremely popular during the past years. As consumers have become more demanding on content, podcasts can bring great value for them as being content which is on-demand. Many companies, operations and individuals have taken part in the making of podcasts, due to the easy access of producing and distribution.

This thesis aims to help HAMK Gaming Academy maintain and create long-term successful podcasts. HAMK Gaming Academy's desired aspects of this thesis were competition analysis, understanding what a good podcast is, possible distribution channels for the podcast, marketing action proposes, search engine optimization and actions for the future regarding consistency. The first podcast was published in June 2021 and is available on Spotify under the name HAMK UAS. The topic selection came from HAMK Gaming Academy.

This thesis is practice-based due to creating guidance for the client.

Due to podcasting being a new operation of HAMK Gaming Academy, there is a need for researching and planning future actions. The main goal is to create guidance for HAMK Gaming Academy on how to proceed in its podcasting operations in the future.

A strong interest in marketing and esports by the author concluded in the acceptance of this thesis topic. As well, podcasts were a new area where the author has not researched and took it as a challenge. The author has been involved in HAMK Gaming Academy's operation by taking their course and doing other activities with them.

The research question for this thesis is:

How can HAMK Gaming Academy create a long-term and successful podcast as part of their operations from the marketing point of view?

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 What is content marketing

Content marketing institute (n.d.) defines "Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.". Difference from traditional marketing where marketing happened offline,

most content marketing actions is done online. The content can be anything from visual to audio visuals. The most important thing to understand about content marketing is not about the company's opinions, it is about the audiences' desires. The audience determines if one's content will succeed and bring value for them. Without relevant and interesting content, the audience will not keep their interest and will not buy or use the company's products. (Forbes, 2021)

The importance of the content increases massively when the aim is to stand out from the mass. Due to the reason of digitalization's massive growth, the power is not anymore in the companies' hands. Users nowadays know that they can decide what they view, and the audience determines will one's content be relevant. There is too much content available on the internet, which has created specific niches and niche marketing. Niche marketing has allowed marketing straight to the ideal target audience and for the audience to find suitable content. (Forbes, 2021)

2.1.1 Benefits of content marketing

Content marketing's popularity has grown over the years. One key character for the growth is the free content for the audience. Usually, content is shared through social media platforms, where the viewer does not need to directly pay for the content. As well companies have benefitted financially, due to content marketing being extremely cheaper than traditional marketing. Instead of paying traditional marketing fees such as physical material fees, they only need to pay e.g., social media marketing costs, which are lower than traditional fees. (HubSpot blog, 2021)

Content marketing aims to create a relationship between the company and the target audience. In content marketing, the customer feels like they are getting more than just the product. It is not anymore only about selling products to the audience but about building relationships with the customer, making them feel like they belong and creating a valuable experience for them. Building a trustworthy community around the brand is important, which also increases the need for unique content. (HubSpot blog, 2021)

Money is business done, and it is important for every company or non-profit to have small expenses. Content marketing is cost-beneficial, and it is determined as the most cost-effective marketing strategy. (Caliston, 2021)

2.1.2 Cons of content marketing

Like any other strategy for marketing, it has its disadvantages. Content marketing's biggest problem is the time spend on it. It can take time to find out what the audience wants to see and to test what works. Content marketing is a long process that needs to be structured and well planned. Always creating unique, creative, and valuable content takes time and requires skills. (nibusinessinfo, n.d.)

Some target demographics may be difficult to reach via content marketing. For example, the elderly, people in developing countries and nations with high levels of censorship.

2.2 What is content strategy

Content strategy is the key to successful content marketing. The first is to create the content strategy and then create brands content marketing plan based on the strategy. This strategy dives deep into the actions performed, which are creation, publication, and governance of useful and usable content. It gives the user roadmap where to aim their marketing. Content strategy defines the following aspects:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- Who are we trying to reach?
- What type of content we are publishing?
- How is the content supporting the brand?
- Why is our content different from others?
- How will we execute and promote our content?

(Terekeet, 2021)

In the strategy, it is run down where the company stands in the marketing now and what would be the desired position to be. This is done by determining the target audience and creating actions based on their behaviours. Even though the target audience would be determined, and the content is brilliant, there is no use for it if the marketing actions are not fulfilled. Marketing needs to be consistent, good quality and to the right channels. It is important to measure is the content improving operations and does audience consume it. The way of measuring success needs to be determined already before publishing the first content. (Terekeet, 2021)

2.3 What are podcasts

The word "Podcast" was mentioned for the first time in 2004 in a Guardian newspaper article. The part "Pod" was borrowed from Apple's digital player iPod and "cast" comes from the word broadcasting. Even though

the “Pod” idea became from Apple’s product, the definition is not related to the company in any way. (International podcast day, n.d.)

A podcast is an on-demand audio programme, which one can listen to anywhere or at any time from a digital device. Most podcasts are produced in an audio format, but video podcasts exist as well. Audio files become podcasts when one uploads them to a platform where there is a possibility to subscribe to the podcast. These channels can be multi-audio purposed platforms e.g., Spotify, iTunes or platforms specifically meant for podcasts such as Pocket Cast and Overcast. Most podcasts concentrate on a specific topic, for example, lifestyle or educational. (The podcast host, n.d.)

The majority of podcasts are original content made for that specific purpose, others can be re-uploads of e.g., radio shows. The popularity of podcasts has hugely grown in past years, due to the accessibility and the variety of options in one’s interest. (The podcast host, n.d.)

Additionally, the production of the podcast is easier nowadays with cheaper equipment, accessible software’s, and faster internet connections. (Voices, 2020)

Podcasts have wide variance between each. Aspects affecting differences in podcasts are:

- Topic covered. Podcasts can cover any topic imagined. Some podcasts are more educational, and others are meant to be mainly entertaining.
- Length of the podcasts. Podcasts can last from a couple of minute episodes to longer in-depth episodes.
- Type of format. Podcasts can have a solo speaker or multiple people hosting them.
- Frequency of posting. Episodes can be published daily, once a month or even once in a quarter, podcast creator decides.

(The podcast host, n.d.)

The possibilities of podcasts styles are endless. It is important to understand what aspects the audience expects from the podcast for it to be successful. In Podcast Insights (2021) research tells, there are over two million podcasts in the world. To succeed with podcasts there is a need to be unique, structured and well-thought-out.

2.3.1 Research by Radio Media: Podcasting in Finland

In February 2020, Radio Media, a Finnish association of trusteeship in the radio industry conducted a survey of Finnish persons podcasting behaviours. The survey had an overall of 1 043 participants from the ages 15 to 64. 21% of the participants had listened to a podcast during the past week, the biggest group of listeners were 15-29 years old. (Radio Media, 2020)

557 people who had listened to more podcasts in the past 6 months, were asked more detailed questions about their podcasting behaviour. In a week all the 557 people listened average of 2.59 hours of podcasts. The most used device for listening to podcasts was a smartphone with 81% of the total, other devices were computers (27%), tablets (10%) and smart speakers (2%). (Radio Media, 2020)

The most popular time to listen to a podcast was between 15.00-22.00 o'clock. 61% of the responders listened to their podcasts in Finnish. (Radio Media, 2020)

The most common place to listen to podcasts was from home. Podcasts are commonly used as background noise during other activities. People listened to a podcast during housework and travelling. However, every third told that they only concentrated on the podcast without other activities. Common motives from the listeners of podcasts were to entertain themselves, learn something new or relax. (Radio Media, 2020)

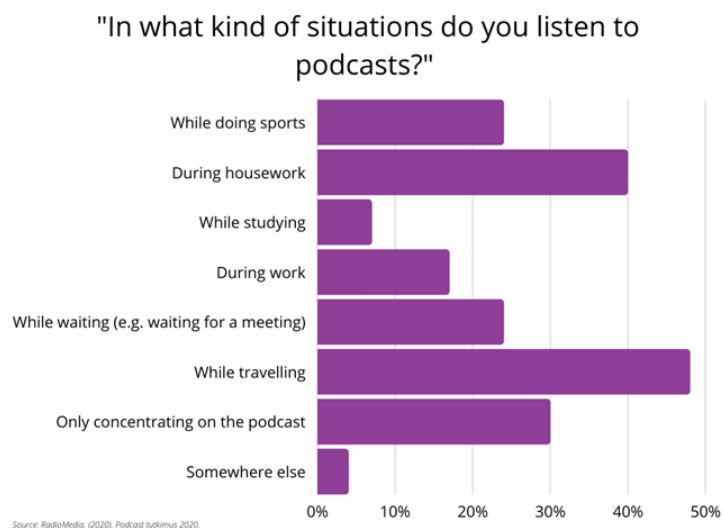


Figure 1. In what kind of situations do you listen to podcast? (Radio Media, 2021)

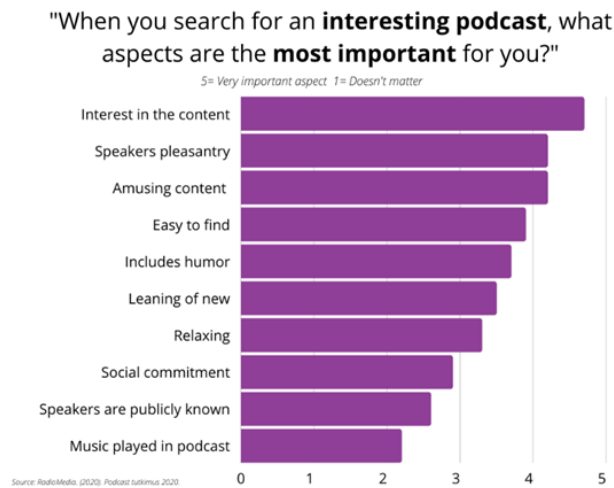


Figure 2. When you search for an interesting podcast, what aspects are the most important for you? (Radio Media, 2020)

The top three characters for the listeners in a podcast were interesting content for themselves, pleasant host/speaker(s) and entertaining content. Most listened categories for respondents were entertainment and amusement, news and relevant topics and relationships. (Radio Media, 2020)

Users found new podcasts most commonly from audio platforms e.g., Supla and YLE Arena. As other alternatives were from social media or by searching on the internet. The last option to find a podcast was through advertisements, which can also be seen in the number of emotions towards paid marketing of podcasts. 66% of participants had neutral opinions towards paid advertisements of podcasts. 21% felt negative and only 13% were positive about paid marketing. It needs to be noted, that ways to find new podcasts hugely vary between age groups. (Radio Media, 2020)

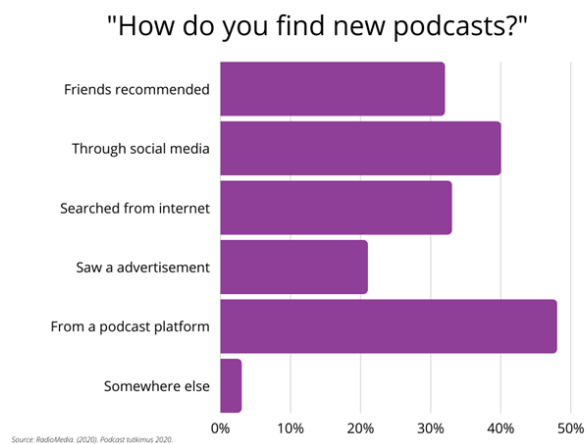


Figure 3. How do you find new podcasts? (Radio Media, 2020)

2.3.2 Pros and cons of podcasting for a brand

Due to globalization, users are more demanding on content and want it whenever they desire. That is why podcasts have grown rapidly during past years. Podcasts can be listened to whenever, wherever and can be a small distraction for the listener. A podcast is much less distracting to the listener compared to reading a blog or viewing a video. As well measuring the performance of a podcast is much easier compared to traditional audio like FM/AM radios.

Even though podcasting has many advantages, it also has drawbacks. Podcasting can take time, skills and resources. Podcasting is not free but can be done with low budget equipment and marketing. (Shift, n.d.) Podcasting, as any content creation, needs a lot of failures and successes. Content needs to be tested, what works for the audience and what does not. Long-term dedication and schedule are some of the key factors for a successful podcast. Episodes need to be published frequently to keep the interest of the audience. If the podcast comes out only some and then, the audience will not be interested to wait for the content. Content needs to be published on their demands. As it was said in the part of Content Marketing's theory, the audience determines the success of the content. (Shift, n.d.)

Podcasting is a very time-demanding operation. It is said a minute listener hears, be ready to work on that minute for 5-15 minutes. Anyhow, it can still be faster than creating video content. Before starting a podcast, it should be considered is there time and resources for it. As in any other work, a half-done job is never a good look. It is not an easy job to do, but with scheduling, quality equipment's, determination and measuring it is possible to make a successful podcast. (Shift, n.d.)

2.4 What is esports

Electronic sports, as known more commonly; esports is a form of competitive gaming that uses information technology as a platform. Esports is played solo or in teams of professional players, depending on the game. Typically, esports games are played with a PC or a console. In esports, there is main game categories, which have several genres under them: First-person shooters (FPS), battle royals, Multiplayer online battle arenas (MOBAs) and real-time strategy (RTS). (SEUL, 2019)

Esports is meant for anyone with interests and can be played alone or/and in a team via the internet. Playing can be one's hobby or it can be someone's profession. One's playing can be defined as a sport when the playing becomes competitive, and goal orientated. (SEUL, 2019)

Esport teams work the same as any other sports team. Teams or esport players most often have an organization behind them, for which they play.

Players usually have a contract between the organization and the player. Teams have their coaches, managers and analysts who help the team to improve skills and compete in tournaments. Esports have their game-specific tournaments arranged, which can vary from small competitions to big world championships. These tournaments can be sponsored by the game developer or some other organization/company. Tournaments usually have their own prize pool, which the winner will receive. These tournaments can be most often viewed online or being present at the tournament venue by buying a ticket. (British Esports Association, n.d.)

Esport consumers can be categorised into four different types based on their behaviours and viewing type. Young gamers are extremely active playing video games and follow esports. Sports fans follow competitive sports from various sources and are interested in international competitions but can also follow their own countries teams. Gaming enthusiasts play themselves but do not follow any specific team. Gaming enthusiasts are active users of various online platforms and use betting services or other online purchasing behaviours often. Hardcore fans are extremely active in online platforms, and mostly consumes their content online. They also do double the number of online purchases compared to other groups. (Toivonen, 2020)

2.4.1 The rapid growth of esports

The growth of esports started in 2016. During the past years, esports has grown into the knowledge of consumers, companies, and investors. Between 2018 and 2019, the esports industry grew by 12.3%. In the year 2020 esports had 220.5 million occasional viewers and 215.4 million esports enthusiasts following the industry. It is estimated esports to have a total of 577.2 million viewers and revenue of 1617.7 million US dollars by the year 2024. (Influence marketing hub, 2021)

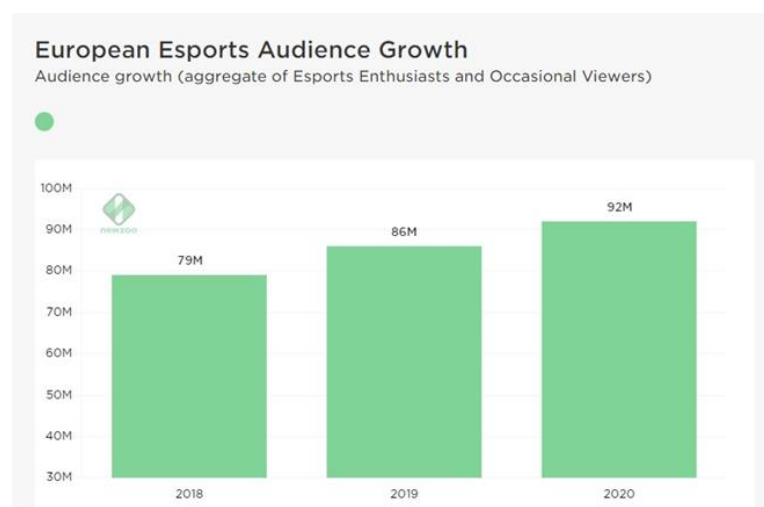


Figure 4. European Esports Audience Growth. (Influence Marketing Hub, 2021)

One key factor for the growth of esports has been live-streaming platforms, such as Twitch (72.3% market share of watched hours), YouTube Live and Chinese Douyu, Huya, Zhangji, Huomao and PandaTV. Especially after the Covid-19 outbreak caused people to stay at home, live-streaming esports and viewing it came even more popular. Between 2019 and 2020 viewing of live streams grew by 11.7%, which was caused due to the circumstances of the pandemic. Twitch's hours of views in Q1 2020 were 3,114.1 million hours, which grew to be 6.34 billion hours by Q1 in 2021. (Influence marketing hub, 2021)

The outbreak of COVID-19 also caused some damage to the industry when all live events needed to be cancelled. Cancelling in-person events meant less revenue from e.g., ticket sales. Due to Covid-19, the revenue of the esports industry was downward, reaching numbers of 947.1 million US dollars. It was predicted in early February of 2021 to hit 1100.1 million US dollars. Even though the revenue went down from the prediction, esports had the most viewers than ever before. The year 2021 is estimated to be larger revenue, reaching numbers of 1084.1 million US dollars. China is predicted to be a huge key player in the numbers in the future, growing from 2020 185.5 million viewers to 214.3 million viewers in 2024. As well, China is estimated to generate a third of the worlds esports revenue (Influence marketing hub, 2021)

Revenue of the esports industry is built from sponsorships, media rights, merchandise and tickets, publisher feed, digital and streaming. Sponsorships cover the biggest part of all the revenues in the industry. (New zoo, 2020)



Figure 5. 2020 Esports revenue streams | Global. (Newzoo, 2020)

While esports viewing and live streaming has grown extremely, also has the prize money of tournaments and player earnings. The most favourable year for esports was 2019 when the covid-19 pandemic did not yet affect

the markets tremendously. The total of tournaments held that year was 5,643 and the total prize pool money of all tournaments of esports was \$237,477,686.24 US dollars. The top earner as an esports professional was Finnish “Dota 2” video game player Jesse “JerAx” Vainikka, with a total income of \$3,163,536.20 from tournaments. Overall, Jesse Vainikka holds second place for the most money earned as an esports professional player with a total of \$6,470,548.78 US dollars. But the recent years of the COVID-19 pandemic have shown, how important live events are for the industry. In 2020 total prize pool money was \$120,576,993.44, which was nearly halved compared to the previous year. Tournaments played decreased to 4,647. This also caused the best yearly income for an esports professional to be only \$510,586.52 from tournaments. With that kind of income in 2019, the player would not even reach the top 40 of yearly most paid professionals. (Esports earnings, n.d.)

Despite the fact, the numbers for a couple of past years haven’t been outshining, it is believed that esports will continue its growth in the future. Compared to other sports, esports has survived the COVID-19 pandemic well, when the audience is flexible to change their consuming habits. As well, the sport even though being team-orientated can be played straight from home, which has been ideal during the pandemic. (Influence marketing hub, 2021)

2.5 HAMK Gaming Academy

HAMK Gaming Academy is an esports and other related topics operation under HAMK University of Applied Sciences. Operations offer courses and other activities for the students. Their operations were launched in 2020, and already has students from 10 different degree programs. (Suomi Esports, n.d.)

HAMK Gaming Academy (n.d.) describes themselves “HAMK Gaming Academy connects HAMK with local, areal and national partners. Esports is built around competitive gaming, but the business environment has multiple approaches that all can be connected to the different degree programmes of HAMK, from business administration to smart and sustainable design”. The target group of HAMK Gaming Academy are students from HAMK. As HAMK Gaming Academy is one of the project implementations of HAMK, a student cannot directly apply to HAMK Gaming Academy. The student who studies at HAMK can take courses and be part of the operations. (HAMK, n.d.)



Figure 6. Our approach to esports ecosystem development. (HAMK, n.d.)

The ecosystem of HAMK Gaming Academy is created for students to turn their co-creation into thesis's, projects, and traineeships. On top of that, they offer esports and technology-related courses for students. Today, a student can choose from 8 different courses in Finnish or English, which will be implemented in their studies. Courses have three different entry levels: Rookie (open), Semi-Pro (requires rookie-level studies) and Expert (requires additional knowledge and studies). Besides these, HAMK Gaming Academy participates in local events organizing such as Hämpton Games (local esports tournament) and Bitfest (HAMK's seminar). (HAMK, n.d.)

To make operations and HAMK's brand stronger, HAMK Gaming Academy has implemented its podcast to its operations. The first podcast was published in June 2021 and is available on Spotify under the name HAMK UAS (HAMK Gaming Academy, 2021)

3 RESEARCH METHOD AND OBJECTIVES

This thesis is done in qualitative research method. Data collected in the theoretical background search was a combination of different sources. This thesis discovers new ways for HAMK Gaming Academy to work on its podcast. The thesis is built around marketing activities, which are mostly based on human actions, and cannot be measured so well in numbers.

As the author has been involved in the operations of HAMK Gaming Academy for a while as a student, there is closely observed information. Information like this cannot be found from sources other than experiencing those. This kind of information will be used in the planning of

content strategy. As well, the author will use their professional knowledge to have the best desirable outcome for the guidance of the client.

3.1 Research objectives

This thesis aims to help HAMK Gaming Academy to maintain and create a long-term successful podcast. HAMK Gaming Academy's desired aspects of this thesis were competition analysis, understanding what a good podcast is, possible distribution channels for the podcast, marketing action proposes, search engine optimization and actions for the future regarding consistency. Podcasts should be a path for HAMK Gaming Academy to increase its brand's attractiveness and open new possibilities for collaborations. Based on these requests, the content strategy method will be used to analyse the actions needed for improvement. Content strategy investigates the position of the podcast in the market now, what is the desired position and how to execute it. Content strategy will not give a view of what kind of content should HAMK Gaming Academy produce for their podcast but will advise on how to find content ideas and optimize those.

As HAMK Gaming Academy is not looking for profits from the podcast, tools and methods mentioned in the content strategy are cost-efficient and mostly free.

The theoretical background went through the fundamentals of the topics and statistics, which will help analyse and create guides for the podcast's future. The end product for the commissioning company is researched market position, tools options for the future and recommendations on how to proceed with the podcast as a support element of the HAMK Gaming Academy brand.

4 PLANNING CONTENT STRATEGY

4.1 Podcasts operating in the university environment

Competition for E-sport podcasts in the university environment is extremely low. Based on the research, what was conducted for this thesis, from 22 universities of applied sciences in Finland, 18 schools had their own podcast made by students, staff, or research unit operation in the university (Arcada, 2017; DIAK, 2021; Haaga Helia, 2021; HAMK UAS, 2021; Humanistinen Ammattikorkeakoulu, 2021; JAMK | Liiketoiminta, 2021; Karelian Podcast, 2020; LAB Focus, 2021; Laurea-ammattikorkeakoulu, 2021; Metropolia, n.d.; OAMK, 2021; Samk, n.d.; Savonia, 2021; SeAMK tutkii ja kehittää, n.d.; TUNI, n.d.; Talk Turku AMK, 2021; XAMK, n.d.). Other universities did not have information about the available podcast.

None of the UAS in Finland have their podcast in esports when this research was conducted.

As well, universities in Finland, 12 out of 13 had their own podcast, but not related to the topic of esports. (Aalto University, 2021; Hanken, n.d.; Helsingin Yliopisto, n.d.; Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2021; University of Eastern Finland, 2021; University of Oulu, n.d.; TUNI, n.d.; Turun Yliopisto, n.d.; Vaasan yliopisto, n.d.; Åbo Akademi, 2020)

This gives HAMK Gaming Academy podcast a major competitive advantage for being the first one on the topic.

UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES	Podcast	Esports podcast	UNIVERSITY	Podcast	Esports podcast
DIAK	Yes	No	Vaasa University	Yes	No
Haaga-Helia	Yes	No	Aalto-University	Yes	No
HUAMAK	Yes	No	Helsinki University	Yes	No
XAMK	Yes	No	University of Eastern Finl	Yes	No
HAMK	Yes	Yes	Jyväskylä university	Yes	No
JAMK	Yes	No	University of Oulu	Yes	No
Metropolia	Yes	No	Uniarts Helsinki	Yes	No
OAMK	Yes	No	Hanken	Yes	No
Samk	Yes	No	University of Turku	Yes	No
Savonia	Yes	No	University of Tampere	Yes	No
SeAMK	Yes	No	Åbo Akademin	Yes	No
TUNI/TAMK	Yes	No	University of Lapland	Yes	No
Laurea	Yes	No	LUT	-	-
LAB	Yes	No			
Arcada	Yes	No			
Karelia	Yes	No			
TURKU UAS	Yes	No			
Novia	-	-			
VAMK	-	-			
KAMK	-	-			
Centria	-	-			
Lapland UAS	-	-			

Figure 7. List of Finnish universities of applied sciences and universities podcasts.

4.2 Podcasts outside of university environment in Finland

Esport podcasts are not a new thing in the Finnish podcast market. Even though, when searching the internet, results are scanty. Examples of active Finnish podcast on the market is #esportspodcast, Pelaajat.com. Finnish esports news source and community Pelaajat.com operates their podcast, which most common topic is professional esports personas in the Finnish esports scene. (pelaajat.com, n.d.)

Other podcasts needed a lot of work to find. This is not ideal for a podcast and can seriously affect the performance of the podcast. Here comes the role of good planning, SEO and many distribution channels, which aspects we will go through later in the content strategy part. A common problem with the Finnish esports podcasts is podfading. Podfading is when a podcast gets less published and updated over time and eventually stops from publishing (Urban dictionary, 2006). A bundle of episodes are posted and full radio silence after that, without any follow-ups.

4.3 TOWS Matrix of the current position of HAMK Gaming Academy's podcast

For analysing the starting position of the podcast, TOWS Matrix will be used. TOWS Matrix is a deeper take on SWOT Matrix, which defines the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. TOWS links these elements together to create further actions. TOWS gathers internal elements of strengths and weaknesses and compare those into external elements of opportunities and threats. (FourWeekMBA, n.d.)

HAMK GAMING ACADEMY PODCAST		EXTERNAL FACTORS	
TOWS-ANALYSIS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>S-O: Strengths to opportunities</i> • <i>S-T: Strengths to threats</i> • <i>W-O: Weaknesses to opportunities</i> • <i>W-T: Weaknesses to threats</i> 		Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibilities to grow outside the university environment • Be the leader of esports podcast in the university environment • New students coming to HAMK all the time 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of funding (Gaming Academy) • Podfading • An organization with faster actions taking over the competitive advantage of being the first one on the market • Un-interesting topics for the audience
INTERNAL FACTORS	Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funded and supported operations (Gaming Academy) • Operators have a strong passion • Under well-known brand, HAMK • Possibility to have student interns to help • Known first once in the university field • The base of people who are interested in the HAMK Gaming Academy's operations 	S-O <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get help from students with the podcast production e.g. interns • The strong brand behind helps in growing the podcast • Persons who are already interested in the operations can spread the word • Being the first one in the market gives competitive advantage 	S-T <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Podcast as a support element of operations, strong operations helps in the continuing of funding • Students as help in resources can avoid podfading • Passionate operators know the field and know how to find relevant topics • With enough manpower, the podcast can be the leader of the market
	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio silence, e.g. after the first podcast episode • Frequency and scheduling • Communication with the audience • Not enough resources • Not enough active marketing 	W-O <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Channels to communicate with the audience e.g. Twitch • New students can help in production and keeping content relevant 	W-T <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough manpower and unwell structured operations lead to podfading • If the operations are slow, competitors can take over your audience

Figure 8. TOWS Matrix, HAMK Gaming Academy Podcast.

Strengths to opportunities tell what strengths can be contributed into opportunities (FourWeekMBA, n.d.). Research conducted in part "Podcasts operating in the university environment" showed us HAMK Gaming Academy's esports podcast is the first one of its kind published in the Finnish university environment. With good planning, enough operators who have passion and funding of HAMK Gaming Academy, the podcast can reach a wide audience in the university environment. Additionally, it gives excellent keys to reach a wider audience domestically in the future. As HAMK has new students joining the school frequently, they can be good resources helping in the podcast production. It gives HAMK Gaming Academy more manpower to keep the podcast operations running smoothly and gives the students value in the experience.

Strength to threats goes through strengths that can help in overcoming possible external threats (FourWeekMBA, n.d.). Operations of HAMK Gaming Academy are funded and supported by HAMK. With the podcast being a good support element of HAMK Gaming Academy's brand, it can help HAMK Gaming Academy stay valuable of being funded. One extremely huge threat for the podcast is podfading, the end of production. Even if the plan is well structured, it needs resources to execute it. Students as interns in the production can ease the amount of work from staff. If there are persons frequently creating, producing, and marketing

the podcast, podfading can be avoided. Uninteresting topics for the audience make the podcast irrelevant and decreases listeners. Persons in the operations should be passionate about the topic and ready to be open-minded with upcoming trends. Relevant content should be researched tirelessly all the time. Not many people want to hear the news that is old and heard.

Weaknesses to opportunities determine what external opportunities can be used to eliminate weaknesses (FourWeekMBA, n.d.). New students can help in the creation of the podcast and bring valuable knowledge. Communication with the audience can be an extremely different factor from all the other podcasts. Do not only make them feel like they belong, make them belong.

Weaknesses to threats go through the possible threats for the operation and how can those be avoided (FourWeekMBA, n.d.). The threat of another podcast taking over the competitive advantage of being the first one on the market can be avoided with quicker actions and a structured plan. Uniqueness does not matter if the production is poor, or the podcast comes out some and then.

4.4 Determining the target audience for the podcast

HAMK Gaming Academy aims mainly their content to the students of HAMK. As a secondary target group, there are other universities students. In the future, other groups interested in esports and international expansion can be considered.

In 2020, HAMK had 8 838 students overall. 7 410 of the total studied bachelor's degrees, 702 studied master's degrees, 576 studied vocational teacher education and 150 studied professional specialisation educations. In total 4 251 students identified themselves as a man and 4 584 identified as women.

The biggest age group of HAMK students was 20-24 years old with an amount of 2 553 students. The second age group was 25-29 years old with an amount of 1 713 students and the third age group was 30-34 years old with an amount of 1 275 students. (Vipunen, 2021)

Information about what language is spoken mostly by the students at HAMK was not available at the Vipunen database. In any case, the podcast will be produced in the Finnish language for now.

With this information, the main target audience can be determined for HAMK Gaming Academy's podcast. The target person would be a student of HAMK and interested in esports. Because of the largest age group, the target person would be 20-24 years old. The person can represent any gender group and there was not any outstanding gender group in HAMK.

Due to the podcast being produced in Finnish, the person should understand the Finnish language.



Figure 9. Target Audience.

4.5 Characters of a good podcast

As with any content one produces, it cannot please everyone. People have their interests and tastes, which affects will they consume one's content. There is no one defines what is a good podcast, but there are key elements that a successful podcast should have in it:

Good production quality. It is extremely important to have a great podcast quality. Due to podcasts usually being only audio, quality plays a key role for the listener. Great production quality includes good equipment, knowing how to edit content, and hosts pleasant voice. (Search engine journal, 2020)

Structured theme and content. The theme should be decided in a way that supports the content and vice versa content should support the theme. The theme should be somehow around one subject, even though the content would change in every episode. Theme can be decided by what is trending now or finding own niche, which will have a loyal audience. Content publishing and marketing should be coherent and scheduled many months beforehand. (Search engine journal, 2020)

Consistent content. Content should have a specific goal: why, how, when and where. It is particularly important for the listeners to have information, when is the podcast coming out. Scheduling episodes will also help creators with planning edits and producing times. (Search engine journal, 2020)

Passionate hosts. People speaking in the podcasts should be passionate about the topic. It is obvious for the listeners if the host is not passionate about their topic. Additionally, the host and guests should have broader

knowledge about the topic than a basic consumer. (Search engine journal, 2020)

SEO friendly. Channels, where the content is distributed, will be search-engine based. That is why SEO friendly topics and descriptions are important for the best reachability of the audience. Keywords will help the audience find the podcast. (Search engine journal, 2020)

There will be mistakes. For the podcast to be successful, it needs to be always active, even if there were only 3 listeners. First episodes are usually always practice. A couple of episodes produced on some platform, will not make the podcast a huge success. (Search engine journal, 2020)

4.6 Podcast distribution services

For the most efficient distribution of the podcast, HAMK Gaming Academy/HAMK could use third party distribution services. The distribution service allows the publication of podcasts to many audio platforms e.g., Spotify and Apple Podcasts at the same time. These are usually third-party services, but there is some owned by audio platforms for instance Anchor by Spotify. These platforms offer in addition other tools for better podcasting such as analytics, creation, and scheduling.

Comparison of distribution services will be done of Anchor by Spotify, PodBean, Transistor and Libsyn. Services vary in pricing from being free or with monthly memberships. To keep the budget low as possible, the cheapest available memberships from these 4 different services will be used in the comparison. Many of these distribution services do not have the aim on the Finnish market, which means there is a lot of available podcast platforms to be distributed through the services, but those are not relevant for HAMK Gaming Academy's podcast.

Looking into the list of top podcasts of Finland in June, all of them distributed their content to Apple podcast, Google podcast, Podtail and delivered their RSS feed. 43/50 distributed their content to Spotify. (Suomalaiset podcastit, 2021)

4.6.1 Anchor by Spotify

Anchor promises unlimited features free for everyone. Anchor service provides tools for podcasting such as analytics, performance tools, donation handling, sponsorship and collaborations handling, recording of the podcast, editing episodes and music integrations. Anchor provides its mobile app for its service users. (Anchor, n.d.).

For now, there was no information about multiple logins possibility.

Anchor distributes podcasts to Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Breaker, Castbox, Google Podcasts, Overcast, Pocket Casts and RadioPublic (Anchor, 2018).

4.6.2 PodBean

PodBean offers limited features with its free membership. Limits for the free user are 5 hours of total storage and 100MB monthly bandwidth. PodBean offers a very limited number of tools with their free membership. In the membership, you will get a mobile app, basic statistics, and a podcast theme. Multiple logins need an enterprise account, which is \$99 and up per month. (PodBean, n.d.)

Podbean distributes podcasts to Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, Pandora, TuneIn, iHeartRadio, PlayerFM, Listen Notes, Stitcher, Podcast Addict and Deezer. As well, PodBean offers social media distribution to linked channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Tumblr and WordPress. (Adam Enfroy, 2021)

4.6.3 Transistor

Transistor does not offer free membership; the cheapest membership is \$19 per month. Membership includes unlimited creation of podcasts but limits podcast downloads from listeners to 15,000 per month. Other tools are provided such as live customer service, analytics, and a built-in podcast website. Multiple logins are limited to 2 users. With the cheapest version, Transistor's watermark will be displayed on the in-site player. (Transistor, n.d.)

Transistor distributes podcasts to Spotify, Apple Podcast, Google Podcast, Podcast Addict, Breaker and Player FM. It also distributes the podcast automatically to dedicated podcast search engines: Listen Notes and The Podcast Index. (Transistor, n.d.)

4.6.4 Libsyn

Libsyn offers their cheapest membership with the prize of 5\$ per month. The monthly storage limit is 50 MB but there are no download limits. Libsyn offers a great variety of tools in this membership such as episode scheduling, listings and publishers. The downside comes from additional extra fees if there is a need for extra tools such as statistics is +\$2 per month and domain rights is +\$2 per month. (Libsyn, n.d.)

Libsyn distributes podcasts to Spotify, Google Podcast, iHeartRadio, Deezer, Amazon Appstore, Play Store, App Store, HTML5 Boilerplate, Soundcloud, Radio.com, Pandora, Apple Podcast, Overcast, Pocketcast, Podcast Addict, Stitcher and TuneIn Radio. In addition, Libsyn shares social

media posts to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Tumblr, Blogger, WordPress, and YouTube. (Libsyn, n.d.)

4.6.5 Overview of the distribution services

	ANCHOR	PODBEAN	TRANSISTOR	LIBSYN
PRICING	FREE	FREE*	19\$/Mo.	5\$/Mo.
STORAGE BANDWIDTH	Unlimited	500MB 100 GB/Mo.	Unlimited	50 MB/Mo.
DOWNLOADS /AUDIENCE LIMITS	Unlimited	Unlimited	15,000/Mo.	Unlimited
STATISTICS	YES	YES*	YES	+2€ per month
DISTRIBUTION PLATFORMS	8	15+6**	6	17+7**
OWN APP	YES	YES	NO	NO
CREATION TOOLS	YES	NO	NO	YES

*=Limited usability
**=Automatic social media sharing

Sources: Anchor, n.d., PodBean, n.d., Transistor, n.d., Libsyn, n.d.

Figure 10. Comparison of distribution services. (Anchor by Spotify, n.d.; PodBean, n.d.; Transistor, n.d.; Transistor, n.d.; Libsyn, n.d.)

Comparing all these platforms together, Libsyn stands out with its great variety of distribution channels. Transistor has the smallest amount of channels where to share content. Libsyn's distributed platforms are also the most suitable for Finnish markets. Statistics and analytics are some of the most important tools of the podcasting process to understand where the podcast stands with traffic and audience. For those purposes, Anchor and Transistor are the best choices.

The downside of these distribution channels is that they are based abroad, and might not distribute to country-specific platforms e.g., where Finnish persons listen to podcasts. Even though, it can ease the amount of work if even a couple distributions can be handled from one place

All platforms have their benefits and downsides. Based on the suitability, Anchor and Libsyn stands out with their price to value ratio. Libsyn is the only distribution platform that shares to SoundCloud, which is a popular platform for sharing podcasts. It should be considered well were to share the podcast. Do not use resources in platforms that will bring poor results. It is also important to test or ask the audience where they want to listen to the podcast.

For HAMK Gaming Academy's podcast distribution (and other HAMK's podcasts), recommended platforms would be Lisbyn or Anchor based on their features.

4.7 Podcast platforms outside of distribution services

While distribution services are a great tool for lowering the amount of Work, but they do not cover all available platforms. Especially, the Finnish market's podcast platforms are not covered fully in the services. Some channels to consider sharing which are outside of the distribution channels:

Podtail is a platform for podcast listening and has a wide variety of podcasts from all over the world. One can listen to the podcasts from their web browser without any apps. Podcasts can be submitted to their service from their website. (Podtail, n.d.)

Soundcloud is the worlds largest music and audio platform, where one can download their podcast episodes for free (Soundcloud, n.d.). Soundcloud distribution was available on Lisbyn's distribution platforms.

Listen notes refer themselves to be the Google for podcasts. Listen Notes retrieves podcasts from various sites and their total of listed podcasts on 9.7.2021 was 2,567,948. The total of searches on the page at the same time was 13,606,636. HAMK Gaming Academy's first podcast episode can be already found from this list when searching "HAMK". The problem is the lack of general keywords which makes it hard to find. (Listen Notes, 2021)

4.8 Search engine friendly podcast

Search Engine Optimization, SEO, is the process of improving sites or content visibility and reachability on search engines such as Google. Most audio platforms can be considered search engines. An example of a huge search engine with over 2 million podcasts on the platforms is Spotify. (Engaiodigital, n.d.)

Search engines have an organic ranking, which is a nonpaid ranking on the search engine. Another way is paid to rank when one pays for an advertisement, and it will appear on top of the search. SEO is an extremely wide concept, which has a lot of technical features and techniques. This thesis will take a brief look into SEO friendliness for the podcast. With small changes in the content, there is already a possibility to reach a wider audience. (Engaiodigital, n.d.)

Keywords are crucial when creating content that is desired to be SEO friendly. Podcasts content should be relevant and trendy in a way that

attracts listeners. As the target group was identified for the podcast, the creation of keywords can be done based on their searching behaviours. The main idea is to help the target person to find the podcast with as little searching as possible.

For the podcast, keywords can be included to the about page of the podcast on the platform, description of the episode or even to the title of the podcast or episode. Especially, SEO comes important when HAMK Gaming Academy podcasts episodes will be published under HAMK's name. Selecting trending and relevant keywords can help HAMK Gaming Academy's/HAMK's podcast's ranking in the searches. The easier it is for the listener to find the podcast; it will receive more audience. Keywords should be used with good taste, overdoing keywords is not a good look.

It is important to select the correct keywords, which the target audience would use when searching new podcasts. The first episode of HAMK Gaming Academy's podcast was published with the topic of using the keyword "e-urheilu". To set an example of the importance of correct keywords, words "e-urheilu" (esports in Finnish) and "esports" were compared. As can be seen in Figure 11., keyword "esports" was used more frequently in Finland than the word "e-urheilu" (Google Trends, 2021).

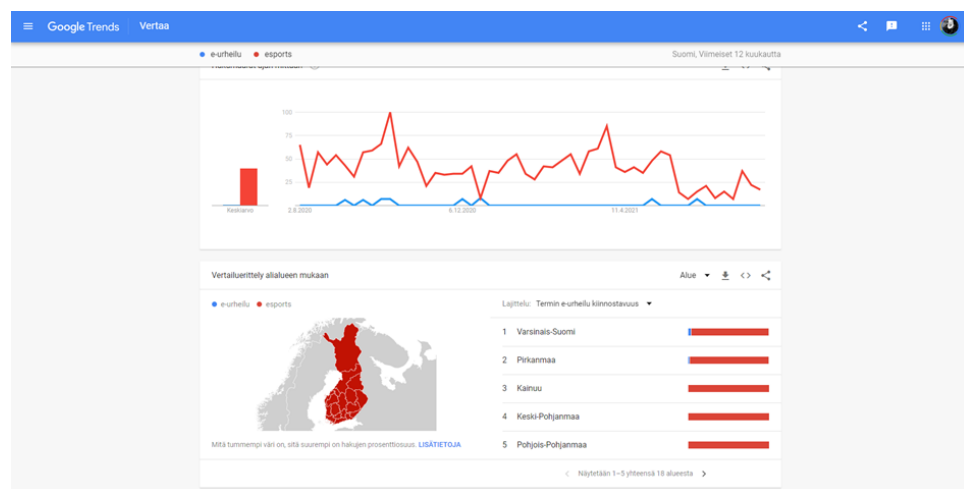


Figure 11. E-urheilu versus esports. (Google Trends, 2021)

As the target audience is Finnish speaking people, the need is to use keywords that are the most suitable for them. In this situation, it would have been more favourable to use the word "esports" due to it being searched more than the word "e-urheilu". "Esports" can be considered as a slang word in Finnish but is still more used among the community than other more official words.

This does not mean the keywords need to be changed if those work for the audience. This comparison's meaning is to highlight the importance if there is a situation where podcast does not attract traffic.

4.9 Finding relevant keywords

Internet is full of tools, which can be used to generate relevant keywords for any kind of content, in this case for podcasts. Google offers a great tool for finding relevant keywords for free, such as Google Trends and Google Ads keyword planner. Many other keyword planners can be with payment. If there is a need to get more in-depth research about keywords, the recommendation is to use a platform like SEMrush.

4.9.1 Google Trends

Google Trends is a tool for finding trending topics. Searches can be made by what is trending right now in the world or finding information about some specific topic. Google Trends offers information about what is the most searched for today, but as well offers to search relevancy of some specific keyword. (Support Google, n.d.)

In the search, one can select period, country, category and type of search of the word to get the most accurate information for the need. Information is given in graphs and numbers. Also, information about most searched similar topics is displayed based on their trending and ranking. (Support Google, n.d.)

As in the example of comparing keywords words “esports” and “e-urheilu”, Google Trends can be used to determine the best keyword between two similar ones.

4.9.2 Google Keyword Planner

Google keyword planner is a tool meant for campaign keyword planning. The site requires log-in to a Google account. Even though it is meant to be used for search-engine campaigns, it can be used for finding new and relevant keywords without creating any campaigns. Finding new keywords are based on Google’s data. The planner can be either input already existing keywords relevant to the operations or link desired website for the planner to generate new keywords based on the words used on that website. The ideal geographical location of the keywords can be also decided. (Google Ads Help, n.d.)

In this case, HAMK Gaming Academy could collect a list of suitable keywords from this tool, which can be used in the podcast’s optimization. As well, if desired HAMK Gaming Academy can use this tool for Google ad campaigns in the future.

4.10 Content ideas and tools

Content for the podcast should be always up to date, relevant and trendy. Good topic selection will drive listeners to the content. As it was seen in the part of podcasting behaviours of Finnish listeners, interesting content is the most important factor. There are several tools on the internet to find relevant topics of today. Popular keywords and content creation should go together.

Guests are always an interesting feature in podcasts. Especially, if the guest is somehow a public figure. Public figures can additionally bring the podcast a lot of visibility and draw a new audience. On other hand, guest's do not need to be a public figures but should be somehow related to the podcast's topic. For the podcast, guests can for example serve as a co-host or do an interview. Partners and collaborating companies are also good guests for the podcast.

One option to find new content ideas is to ask from the audience. As an example, in the description of podcast #rahapodi, they ask for the audience to suggest content ideas by tweeting or sending an email (#rahapodi, 2021)

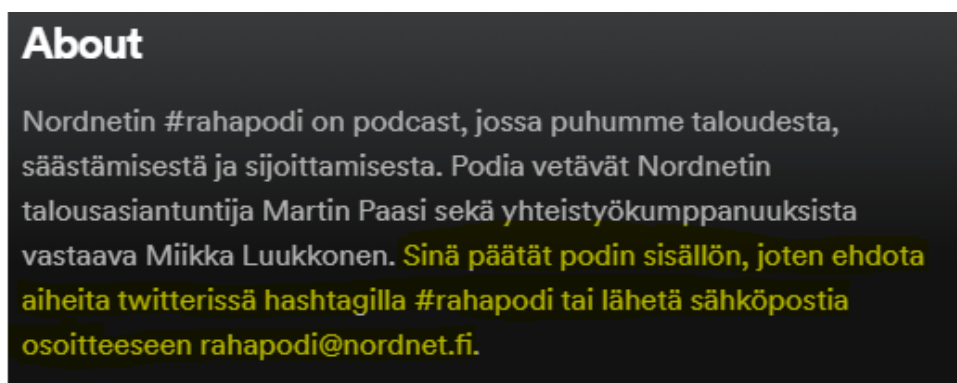


Figure 12. About. (#rahapodi, 2021)

4.10.1 Answer The Public

People are usually searching for answers to their questions on the internet. A good way to create content is to teach something to the audience. Answer The Public is an online tool for searching what people are asking on the internet. By inserting a keyword to the search, it is in graphic or as a list. (Answer The Public, n.d.)

Data is collected based on words of what, who, can, how, will, when, are, were which and why. It also gathers other data like questions asked in a

is the most important factor of the podcast. Consider them as the boss of the podcast, tell them the schedule of episodes and keep the promise.

What has been seen with the first podcast episode of HAMK Gaming Academy published in June 2021, was radio silence towards the audience after the publishing. The audience received the episode and did not hear follow-ups about the new episode. Of course, there were many factors behind this e.g., summer holiday at the school, but improvement in the communication between podcast and the audience is needed.

Communicate with the audience, when is the new episode coming out. This can be told in the outro of the podcast and/or in the description of the podcast. Calling out a frequent specific date when the podcast is coming out is a powerful action. This can be seen used in many podcasts, see examples from figure 13.

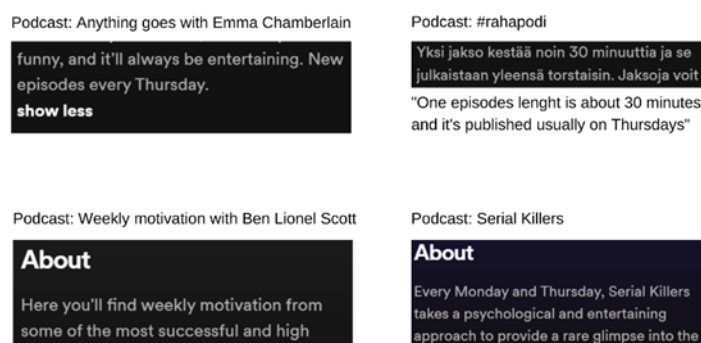


Figure 14. Examples of publishing frequency announced. (Anything goes with Emma Chamberlain, 2021; #rahapodi, 2021; Weekly motivation with Ben Lionel Scott, 2021; Serial Killers, 2021)

In figure 13 there are four randomly selected podcasts, which state their publishing frequency. The first and last podcast descriptions "every Thursday" and "Every Monday and Thursday" state the exact date when the podcast is coming out. The third podcast lets the audience know that the episode comes out weekly. The second podcast has a unique twist, where they give a vague promise when the podcast is published, "usually on Thursdays". This can give the content creators flexibility but also can give a hit on the loyalty of the audience. If given this vague promise, only time shows to the audience will the podcast deliver content weekly.

Scheduling and frequency in content can help in avoiding unfrequented episodes, radio silence and podfading. Publishing frequency for HAMK Gaming Academy's podcast with the current experience and resources could be every other month or monthly. After the scheduling and structure

are clear and tested, the episode could be published more often e.g., every other week. But this process takes time, maybe even years to reach.

When a realistic frequency for the publishing of episodes has been set, other marketing activities can be planned around the schedule.



Figure 15. Monthly publishing schedule example

In figure 14, monthly publishing frequency is used as the base. These are some main factors that come into creating an episode. The first week would be dedicated to the planning of the podcast, which includes a topic selection for the episode, scripting and possible reaching out to guests. The second week is still part of planning but recording the episode should be started at that point. In the last weeks, editing would be started. As well, all teaser marketing material and main marketing material should be created at that point. After the podcast has been published, engage with the audience, and follow up with the guests. This is only a scratch off the surface regarding the process of creating a podcast, but idea is to show how the schedule could be structured. The schedule is always unique for every content creation and time shows what works.

Due to HAMK gaming academy's podcast having a unique audience, to know the best frequency for publishing would be by testing or at a later point with a wider audience, asking from them.

Everything must end at some point but leaving podcasts hanging to the internet is not a good look. When the end of the podcast comes eventually and the content is intended to be kept on the internet, let the future audience know it. This can be for example added to the topic of the last episode; "Last episode of ...". This way future audience does not need to wonder what happened to the podcast and the job looks finished.

4.12 Social media marketing

HAMK Gaming Academy's podcast will continue marketing their content under HAMK's social media accounts and other channels operated by themselves such as Twitter, Discord and Twitch. Marketing under HAMK's accounts is not necessarily bad, due to the already existing follower base and the suitable target audience. Individuals following HAMK's social media already have an interest in the topics covered in the channels. Even though this podcast is under HAMK's operations and some social media channels, it needs to be clear to the audience what is the operations of HAMK Gaming Academy and what is the podcast about. Luckily, the name already explains a lot about the operations

All marketing activities should be included in the schedule of creating the podcast. Same as in publishing the podcast, marketing should be always active

There are various ways for marketing the podcast. All should start from podcast teasers and preview marketing material before the podcast comes out. When the podcast comes out, there should be various call-to-action gestures for people to listen to the podcast and as well easy access to find it. Other CTAs can be used in the podcast or outside of it e.g., "Remember to subscribe to our podcast". CTAs should be in every episode or social media post because those guide the listener to the right destination. Overdoing CTAs is not good, one CTA per episode/post is good enough.

When the podcast has been published and the focus goes to the next episode, the previous episode should not be forgotten. Boosting it can help the next episodes performance when listeners see the podcast content on their social media.

4.12.1 Hyperlink landing page

When a new episode of the podcast is being marketed, it is desired for the audience to have a straight link to all the available distribution platforms. This is important if the podcast audio is distributed to more than one platform, as it should be for the best reachability. This will make the viewer more likely to listen to the podcast when they do not need to work to find the right platform. Example: Apple Podcast user does not want to be guided to Spotify if the podcast can listen through Apple Podcast. A good way to share all the platforms available for the podcast is to create own landing page for the links or to use a tool such as Linktree. This comes especially important when using marketing platforms that do not support links, or when there is a need to avoid a list of all the links.

Linktree is a tool to create a landing page for several links without any coding. The popularity of Linktree has grown rapidly over the years due to social media platforms not allowing hyperlinks or links at all. Linktree offers

free services and premium plans at the price of 6\$. The free version does not allow to do special customization and display Linktree's watermark. The premium plan allows customization without any watermarks. (Linktree, n.d.).

Linktree is used by many in social media, which helps the audience to trust the link. The downside of Linktree and other similar tools is that it can harm organic traffic and tracking of traffic. Linktree's own analytics of traffic is under the pro feature (Linktree, n.d.)

On HAMK's Instagram profile @hamk_uas, Linktree is used (Hämeen ammattikorkeakoulu, n.d.). On the @hamktradenomi Instagram account, a smart bio is used (Hamk tradenomi, n.d.). If it is seen that a new link landing page is not needed to be created, links to the podcast should be available in those Instagram accounts' link landing pages listed above.

Another option is to create own landing page, which allows one to create the desired design and the traffic following can be much more effortless. The downside is the time it takes to create one. In any way, the link landing page is important to have, when content is distributed to several platforms. The easier it is for the user to reach the podcast, the more likely they will listen to it.

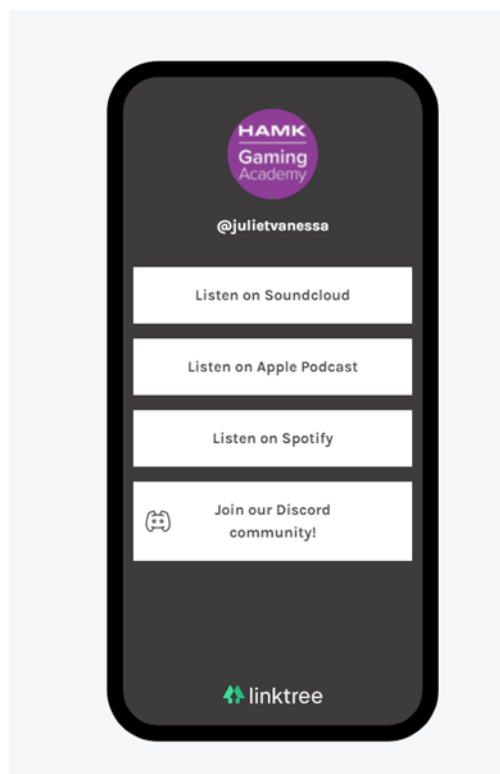


Figure 16. Linktree example. (Linktree, 2021)

4.13 Instagram

Instagram is a popular photo and video sharing social platform, with over 1.074 billion users monthly (Omnicores, 2021). HAMK Gaming Academy today does not have its own Instagram account but promotes its operations under other HAMK's profiles such as @HAMK_UAS, which is HAMK's official Instagram account with over 3,000 followers and @hamktradenomi, which is HAMK's Instagram channel for business-related degrees with over 500 followers (Hämeen ammatikorkeakoulu, n.d.; Hamk tradenomi, n.d.). In a discussion with HAMK Gaming Academy, it was informed they will not create their own Instagram account. This brings out its own difficulties when marketing content directed to a niche target audience, but it can as well help with attracting a new audience. The benefit of not having an own Instagram account is also having less maintenance and easiness of already there the following base. Even though, there HAMK Gaming Academy does not have their own account and marketing happens through other channels, the marketing should be consistent and visible on the channels of HAMK. Now that the channel is not fully dedicated to HAMK Gaming Academy, constant posting of their content is not possible.

When the publishing schedule of the podcast is clear, actions and schedules for Instagram marketing can be planned. The minimum number of posts should be one teaser story/feed post and one official post to the feed. As well, a reminder of the podcast episode at a later point is a good technique to keep the podcast on the audience's mind. To have less workload, creating basic template designs, where one can only change text and possible photos is a good tactic. These templates should follow the visual guidelines of HAMK.



Figure 17. Example of how to promote the podcast on Instagram stories.

4.13.1 Discord

Discord is a VoIP platform for computers and smartphones, where one can create their own community discussion channels. In the platform, one can create their own spaces, where they can create topic-specific channels. Own spaces can be heavily modified with different bots and codes. Discord supports voice calls, text messages and lives. Discord is free to use and very popular among the gamer community. (Discord, n.d.)

HAMK Gaming academy operates its Discord community channel with 41 members (on 11.8.2021). New podcast episodes can be posted to the Discord channel with a hyperlink to all the available podcast channels. The reason why this channel can be powerful for promoting new episodes is that the members of the channel are the definition of the target group. They already have an interest in esports and HAMK's esport operations. As well, it is a good channel to receive feedback about the podcast and communicate with the audience. Straight conversation with the listeners makes them feel like they belong to the community, which is one of the key factors when doing content marketing. This platform is also one of the few platforms where HAMK Gaming Academy has its own "account" and is not under the whole operations of HAMK, which makes it the perfect tool for engagement with the listeners.

It is highly recommended for HAMK Gaming Academy to use its Discord channel as a platform for podcast marketing. It is simple and the correct target audience is there for the content.

4.13.2 Twitch

Twitch is a live streaming platform, which focus is on video game streaming. Twitch live streams can be viewed from a browser, smart devices and multiple gaming consoles. (Wikipedia, 2021).

HAMK Gaming Academy has its Twitch channel called "HAMKGaming", with 17 followers (Twitch, 2021). Twitch is a good platform for marketing and especially if other alternative products/activities are promoted to the viewer on the side of the live streams. The audience of Twitch probably already has an interest in HAMK Gaming Academy's operations. Marketing could be done by promoting verbally the new episode on a live stream, adding podcast information to the description of the channels, or creating a marketing video, which can be played when live streaming.

Video content has been growing over the years. In January 2021, Twitch had 140 million unique visitors every month on its platform (Backlinko, 2021). One opportunity to consider on the platform is live podcasting. If there are skilled enough persons, the possibility is to create an on-demand podcast at the same time as live streaming it. It is a demanding process, which should be structured into the whole life cycle of podcasting but can

bring great value to the product. Live stream, of course, brings its own struggles when desired parts cannot be edited away because of producing content live, versus when doing an on-demand audio podcast. Live podcasting could be an opportunity for HAMK Gaming Academy when the podcast has risen audience and has enough resources to add extra elements.

The problem with HAMK Gaming's Twitch channel now is the in-activity. There is no use to create huge marketing efforts for the channel if it continues to be in-regularly used now and then. Live podcasting could be beneficial for the channel to increase the activity.

4.13.3 Marketing other operations and partnerships inside the podcast

HAMK Gaming Academy has various projects on going such as live streaming's, internships and HAMK Gaming Academy's team. Therefore, gross project marketing is a way to market relevant projects. For example, on the podcast, HAMK Gaming Academy's team can be promoted and on the live stream, the podcast can be promoted.

When the time comes, the podcast can be a place for marketing collaborations and partnerships. Small ads on the podcast are a good way to bring out partners. A short and powerful message is the key to attracting customers for the partner.

5 CONCLUSION

This thesis is created for HAMK Gaming Academy based on their needs. Therefore, there are action recommendations for HAMK Gaming Academy to have a successful podcast. HAMK Gaming Academy's podcast has very good opportunities to grow in the university environment due to being the only available esports podcast. This competitive advantage should be taken into action immediately before anyone else takes over. Understandably, the podcast does not come out every week or even every month in the beginning. Many podcasts have huge teams and full-time employees for the podcast, which allows them to produce at a fast pace. Attempting to publish at that pace without the manpower is not a good idea. Choose a realistic schedule that can be done with current resources. Eventually, when the podcasting gets flowier, it can be considered to publish more frequently.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Improvement in the scheduling and frequency of the podcast is needed due to inactivity.

As explained in the content strategy, the podcast needs to be active all the time. HAMK Gaming Academy should decide realistic publishing schedule and build other aspects such as marketing around it. This publishing schedule should be also somehow in the knowledge of the audience.

One aspect desired from this thesis was the distribution of the podcast. For this, many available distribution services were covered. These services are recommended due to less workload and easy management of the podcast. HAMK Gaming Academy should firstly decide to what platforms they want to share the podcast and then decide based on those needs what distribution channel to use. Of course, if it is seen that there is no use for these services, the podcast can be distributed “by hand” to every platform, but that will be more time consuming if there are many platforms.

What comes to the marketing channels, the podcast should be actively visible on all the social media channels. This is something that HAMK Gaming Academy operators need to discuss with the people responsible for HAMK’s social media channels. Those channels where HAMK Gaming Academy has full ownership should be an active channel for marketing the podcast and to have a connection with the audience.

To make the marketing of the podcast easiest as possible, a hyperlink for all the available platforms where the podcast is should be created. This helps the listener to find the podcast fast as possible, without any work for them. As well, making the podcast SEO friendly helps the podcast to be found.

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