

Voices

2023 Voice Over Trends Report



Intro

Each year, Voices collects insights from surveys and combines it with internal data to predict future trends in the voice over industry.

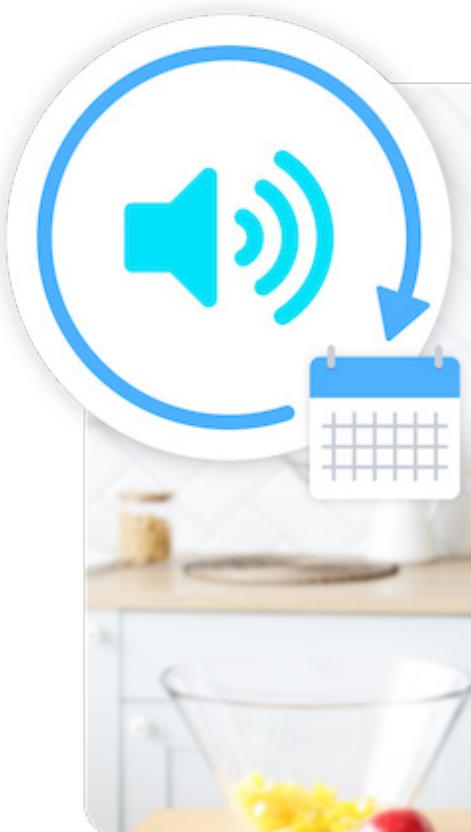
After connecting with more than 1,400 survey respondents and leveraging internal data, it's clear that content creation is front and center in 2023.

With a global pandemic behind us, content creators are primed to try and satiate the audio appetite we've grown accustomed to.

In our Annual Trends Report, we'll look at why more content is being created, what kind of content will captivate audiences and why quality audio content is integral to making an emotional connection with listeners.

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01

Audio Routines Form Daily Habits

Audio routines have become a mainstay in many people's daily lives, from listening to your favorite podcast while cooking, cycling or commuting to work.

Because of the influx of audio content and consumption, advertisers are moving from the eyes to the ears.

In our first trend, we look at why 2023 is going to be a milestone year for audio advertising.

Audio routines and experiences are becoming must-have pieces of content for big brands: audio-only series and podcasts are no longer niche pieces of content that emerging content creators are testing out.

Over the past 12 months, we've seen serious A-Listers dive fully into the audio-first medium, including Hollywood filmmaker Jordan Peele partnering with Spotify to promote his audio experience, Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, launching her podcast this summer and comedians Conan O'Brien along with Will Arnett who both have podcasts.

However, the big signal that audio-first content is the future was when Kim Kardashian's 'The System' podcast beat out 'The Joe Rogan Experience' and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex's 'Archetypes' as the most listened to Spotify podcast in the United States in October 2022.

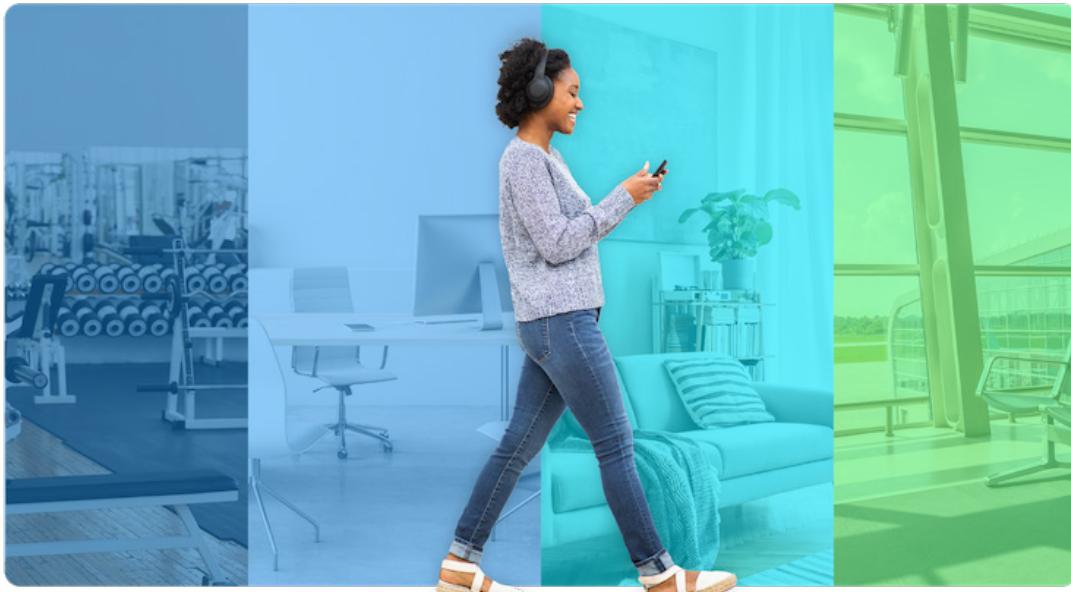
To top it all off, NBA superstar LeBron James and pop icon Shawn Mendes are leading listeners through guided meditations on the Calm app.

We've entered into a new era of content and it's anchored by voice.

Out of the almost 1,500 content creators surveyed, nearly 50% said their focus in 2023 would be online audio ads.

Compare that to 2021, where 40% of our survey respondents said they were incorporating online audio ads.

That's steady growth and a positive sign for things to come for the audio advertising industry in 2023.



This shift in attention is due to a combination of factors:

1. The convenience and portability of audio experiences; whether it's the car, gym, work, living room, airport or your bed. The ease of audio is winning out over the more attentive video content.
2. Users are reaching their capacity for visual content and are shifting to audio, and with that advertising money is following.

From our previous Client Trends Report we know the following to be proven and true:

- 81% of listeners have taken action after hearing audio ads during a podcast. These actions include researching a product online, connecting with the brand on social media, and talking about the brand with others.
- 82.4% of podcast listeners spend more than seven hours each week listening to podcasts and 22% listen to over 22 hours of podcasts per week.
- 35% listen to more than 10 different podcasts per month

Due to the amount of time listeners are spending on their audio routines, the advertising world is moving to where the most captive (and responsive) audiences are.

The growth in audio ads also is impacting the video game industry.

According to a study by AudioMob and YouGov, 75% of mobile gamers prefer audio ads over video.

This is probably because mobile gamers have been flooded with in-game visual advertising.

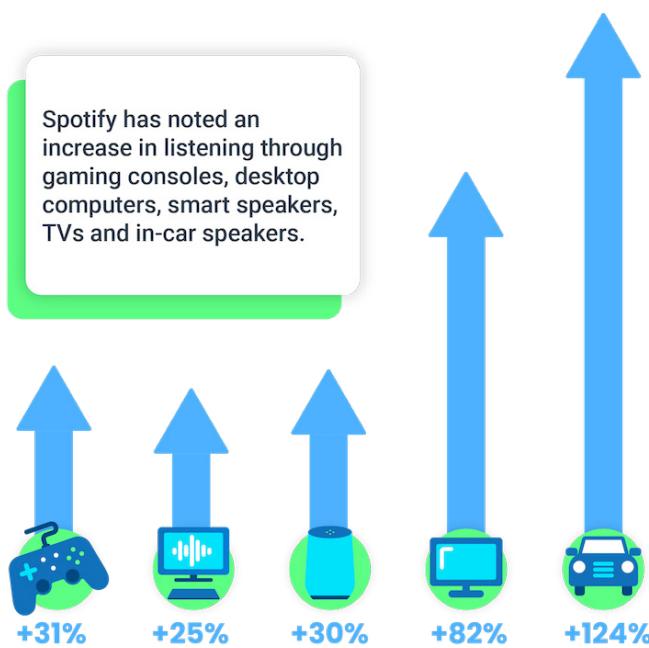
Which as many may know can be very distracting, irrelevant and flat out annoying. Audio ads within mobile gaming creates a more calm, controlled and curated experience that leaves users more apt to engage with the advertisement and ultimately the product being advertised.

Another growing audio-first space is social audio events.

Social audio events (such as Twitter Spaces, LinkedIn Audio Events, Clubhouse, Spotify Greenroom and Facebook Live Audio Rooms) are planning to be used by 39% of those surveyed by Voices. 44% of content marketers branched into social audio in 2022, according to HubSpot; we expect that number to hit 50% in 2023.

In Spotify's 2022 study on Audio Key Performance Indicators, they noted that audio routines through connecting home devices and vehicles is skyrocketing.

Over the last year, they've observed an increase in listening through gaming consoles (+31%), desktop computers (+25%), smart speakers (+30%), and TVs (+82%). Spotify also saw a 124% increase in in-car listening over the last year.



This data is showing that audio routines are following listeners to every room and device in their daily routine; something visual mediums will never be able to do.

"We've said it before, but we're in a new, golden age of audio, with the world's music, podcasts, and audiobooks in the palm of our hands," the Spotify study states.

"Right now, there are over 70 million songs, 4 billion playlists, and over 2.9 million podcasts on Spotify."

Audio routines are being most widely used by the 13-45 demographic.

According to Spotify, usage is strongest among Gen Z (90%) and millennial listeners (86%), while over half of adults ages 35+ also access audio content by streaming.

And while we believe the right brands still should be using radio advertising to communicate to certain audiences, Spotify states that in 2022, time spent with digital audio services is 30% higher than broadcast radio.

Podcasting still reigning: 60% of podcast listeners searched for a product after hearing about it in a podcast. It's also worth noting that 44% of content marketers are branching out into a new form of audio in their content marketing strategies in 2022 – audio chat rooms.



2023 Prediction:

Look for more big names to get into the audio routine game.

It wouldn't be a shock to us to see a Justin Bieber audio experience, a Taylor Swift behind-the-scenes podcast or a Tom Brady athletic app in 2023.

And where the big names and brands are, big advertising budgets always follow.

Another trend worth following next year is the continued uses and applications of artificial intelligence (AI) voices and speech synthesis. 37% of survey respondents said they pursued AI and speech synthesis technologies in their projects. While a little more than 30% said they implemented voice-powered applications and device technologies.

With all positive developments and advancements in emerging technologies like AI and speech synthesis, one area many companies are beginning to focus on is voice and audio security applications and measures.

2022 saw AI speech and audio technology graze eerily close to sounding like real human voices. Ensuring a real human voice is at the forefront of this audio routine revolution will be vital to maintaining this trend's emotional connection to listeners.

We predict more voice protection applications, unique and groundbreaking audio experience applications and memorable and catchy audio ads will burst through in droves in 2023.

"2023 will be the year we see 'audio routines' become common language amongst our social networks. Just like we've discussed the drama in the latest episode of our favorite shows on the plethora of streaming services; we will see the same level of excitement and conversation around new audio experiences and podcasts.

I predict we'll see an uptick in memorable audio-only advertisements. Is this the year a big brand goes audio-only for their Super Bowl advertisement campaign? It very well could be.

Audio content listenership still has an incredible amount of room for growth. There are 384 million podcast listeners globally (as of November 2022) and it's predicted there will be close to 424 million podcast listeners worldwide by the end of 2022. While these are great numbers of listeners, audio content hasn't come close to its ceiling. Remember, YouTube has 2.1 billion active viewers.

As viewers' eyes begin to reach capacity, their ears will fill that audio content void." — David Ciccarelli, Voices CEO

02

Quality is Essential for Engaging Experiences

Listeners expect high quality audio. As podcasts, audio-only series and audio experience apps burst forth; the audio content that will capture an audience will be the ones with the highest quality. Emotionally connecting listeners through unique voices and sounds is a winning strategy for long term listenership.

Nearly 60% of survey respondents said audio quality was the most important consideration when hiring a voice actor. Vocal performance (43%) and cost (35%) followed behind to round out an informative top three.

Quality also directly impacts credibility.

In a study conducted by scientists from the University of Southern California and Australian National University, two versions of an NPR podcast were shared with participants; one had distorted sound, the other was a normal edit of the NPR podcast.

The study found poor sound quality influenced how the content was understood by the listeners but more importantly greatly impacted the reliability of the podcast.

With the poor quality audio, listeners “thought the talk was worse, the speaker less intelligent and less likable and the research less important,” the scientists wrote. “As soon as we reduced the audio quality, all of a sudden, the scientists and their research lost credibility.”

Audio levels also impact the ability for listeners to stay focused and locked into your content. The University of Pittsburgh researchers did a study and determined that audio intelligibility impacts the perceived quality of audio. **Their research showed that you should shoot for average levels of -12 dBFS (decibels relative to full scale), with peaks no higher than -6 dBFS and low points no lower than -24 dBFS.**



Emotional Connections through Audio

Authenticity and engaging, emotionally-resonating voices and audio play another important role with perceived quality in audio content.

Here are several of the the current top 10 podcasts in the US (as of November 2022):

The Joe Rogan Experience, The Daily, This American Life, The Ben Shapiro Show and The Office Ladies.

In each of these podcasts, there is an emotionally engaging host or narrator that listeners have built a loyal attachment to.

In our 2022 Trends Report, we identified the need for “brands to meet consumers’ desires for more candid, honest, and human-feeling interactions in place of the standard highly-polished and perfectly poised content we’ve grown accustomed to”. This emotional, human-first strategy will continue to be important for your audio content to stand out in 2023.

20% of respondents said growing and retaining customers was their top business goal going into 2023. While 18% said creating brand awareness was their top goal. With both of these business goals, brands need to make strong, emotional connections with their listeners.

With the focus on growing and retaining customers, emotional connection to those customers will be everything in why customers stay with your brand.

Ensuring your audio content hits all the “quality categories” will be helpful as you navigate what we anticipate to be a content boom in 2023 (more on that in the next section below!).



2023 Prediction:

The audio content with the best quality will get the majority of the listeners; it's as simple as that.

Currently, there are 2.4 million podcasts and 66 million podcast episodes. There are thousands of audio routines, audio experience and audio-first applications. In order for your audio content to stand out and captivate the more than 100 million listener base, your audio quality needs to be world class.

Gone are the days where starting a podcast on a niche topic and recording out of your basement on USB microphones will cut it. Listeners are craving high-quality audio, unique and innovative sounds and audio experiences and most importantly real genuine emotional connections to their audio experience voices and podcast hosts.

In 2023, we foresee a record investment in quality audio and voice recording equipment. As the industry continues to grow and professionalize, the need for top-of-the-line equipment will surge.

We also see an audio equipment manufacturer boom; from emerging headphone providers, innovative microphone companies and cutting edge audio software advancements.

In 2023, we also anticipate new fan-favorite voices will burst onto the scene. While A-list celebrity voices will continue to be in-demand, 2023 will see a new level of celebrity for everyone’s favorite new audiobook narrator voice, podcast host and audio experience apps.

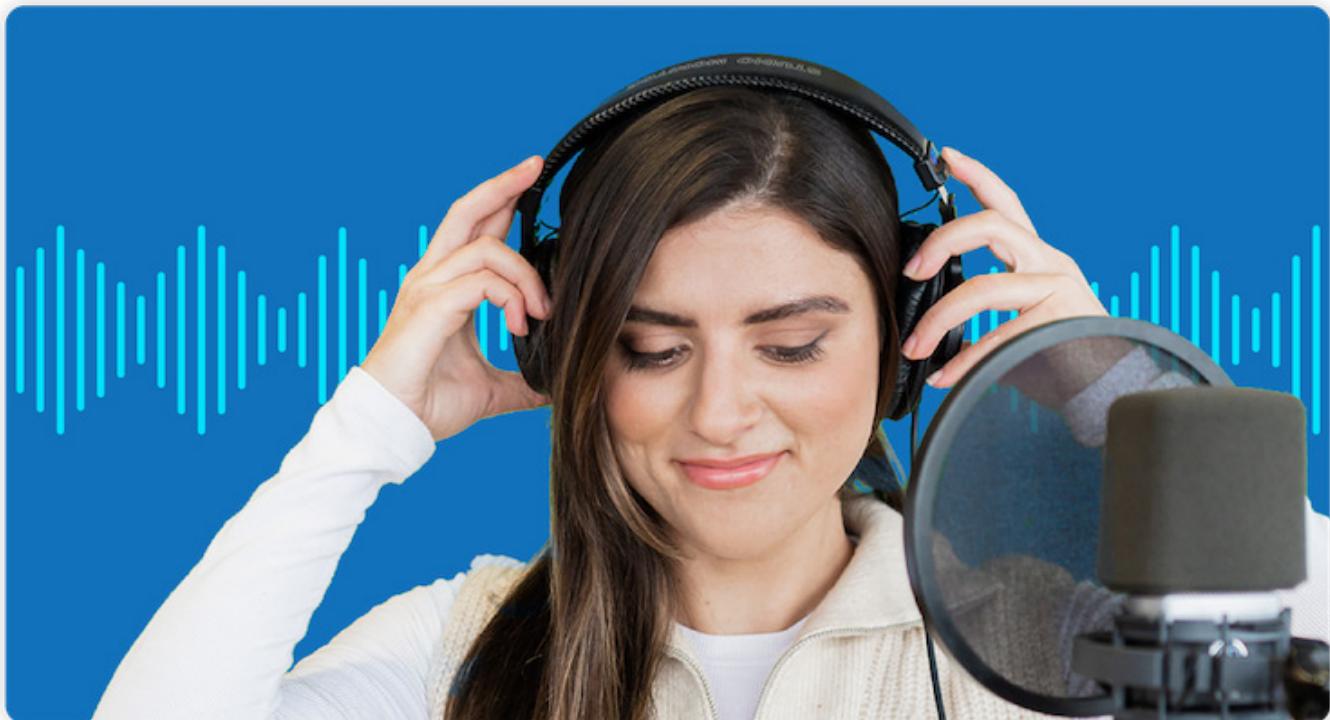
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"If we think about the movies, shows, music and audio content we love and become most attached to, all of them have two consistent factors: Quality production and a deep emotional attachment.

When was the last time you continued to watch a new show, while failing to connect with any of its main characters? Why would you continue listening to a podcast if you don't enjoy the voice and sound of it? Both of these factors are everything in the content we enjoy.

As more and more content creators and brands take audio quality seriously, I predict that we'll continue to see growth in the audio production industry. I also believe that in 2023, we will see major investments from brands using voice to form deep connections to win over customers. I can't wait to see the creative ways those concepts come to life!"

Angela Hawkins, VP of Marketing at Voices



03

Faster and Easier Content Creation Key to Meeting Demand

Almost 60% of content creators told us they will be looking to create more content in 2023, compared to 2022. We're diving into what kind of content is in demand and which strategies they will use to keep pace with consumption.

In this year's survey nearly 50% of respondents said they use Voices to find their voice actors. While a surprising 31% still don't work regularly with voice actors. There is a major market opportunity for content creators to find the voice for their brand's content through a platform like Voices.

But what kind of content will we see created in 2023? Here are the major categories we believe will be most common for most brands:

1. Written content and/or blogs
2. Video content/social media videos
3. Audio content like podcasts, audiobooks , and social audio events (Twitter Spaces, LinkedIn Audio Spaces, Clubhouse, etc)
4. Video games/gamified surveys or gamified eLearning
5. Reports, webinars and white papers





So what kind of content should you focus on in 2023?

Here are some trends we're noticing and content mediums worth testing and investing in:

1. Short Form Video: 89% of marketers plan to continue investing the same amount into short form video or increase their investments, according to HubSpot.
2. Audio Chat Rooms: 44% of content marketers branched out into this new form of audio in 2022, according to HubSpot.
3. Gaming: The number of gamers worldwide is at 3.2 billion, unique gaming content will attract users' attention in 2023.
4. E-Commerce: A recent report by Morgan Stanley predicts that E-commerce could reach 36% of all retail sales by 2026 (up from 32% now). There continues to be more and more content opportunities within the E-Commerce space.
5. Influencer Marketing: The rise of influencers and live shopping have brands looking at unique ways to leverage this increasingly powerful medium.

But in content marketing, what works, works. While these new content mediums all have potential, the tried-and-true online video formatted for YouTube and Social Media will make up 43% of the projects that our survey respondents will be working on in 2023.

Keep in mind that 93% of YouTube users still flock to the online video sharing and social media platform for their information and knowledge gathering; while 78% of teachers in America use YouTube to help their students learn. Video content is still an important piece of the overall content strategy.





2023 Prediction:

"Knowing that 2023 will be a record year for content production is music to the ears of any content creator, marketer and advertising agency.

With the major Google Helpful Content update in May 2022, content experts are being rewarded for being masters of their knowledge base. No longer is the Google SEO battle being won by upstarts capitalizing on low hanging keyword opportunities. This is good news for experts in their respective knowledge fields. Producing high quality content for your niche knowledge base should be your number one priority in 2023.

Although across the board, we're going to see more content being created in 2023, it's important to know that quality is key over quantity after the Google Helpful Content Update. You may be wasting efforts trying to be everything to everyone; stick to your brand's lane and own it in 2023.

I predict 2023 will be the year we see brands, with long-respected reputations in their industries, begin to see a comeback. We've already seen retro revivals for brands like Champion, Nokia and Kodak in the consumer space.

Expect the same to happen in other industries as quality content floods 2023." — Tara Parachuk, Communications Manager at Voices

What Does This Mean for 2023?

In our 2023 Trends Report, we've learned a few things:

- First, content creators are expecting to make more content in 2023: We believe audio-first or audio-only content will shine.
- Second, audio routines and experiences are becoming must-have pieces of content for big brands: audio-only series and podcasts are two of the big audio trends.
- Third, in order to stand out amongst all this audio content, unique voices, sounds and audio quality are integral to forming a longstanding bond with your listenership.

But what does this mean for you and your team in 2023? In short, several things:

1. Lots of brands and content creators will be making a lot more content in the next 12 months. It will be a noisy time for your target audience, so focus in on what your brand is known for and own that lane.
2. Video content is still the most popular form of content that your audience will more than likely enjoy consuming. But you will need to start investing more money, time and staff in producing unique audio content that makes sense for your brand style and guidelines. We heavily recommend having a podcast or two on the topics your brand can speak to. Start there and expand to other audio formats when it makes sense for your team.
3. Finally, because of the sheer volume of content coming through in 2023, you will need to identify and track down a high quality unique voice (or several) to anchor your audio content and make that connection with your audience. Take some risks and find sounds and voices that really represent your brand and make your content memorable.

2023 appears to be the year content creators really put a strategy in place for their advertising and content. It's full steam ahead for brands to create strong content based on their knowledge base. Google's new updates will reward you for it and your audience and customers will be better off too.

So, what are you waiting for? Get planning with your team to create innovative, memorable and emotionally engaging audio content that will make 2023 your best year yet.

Methodology

Voices deployed a qualitative survey targeting registered client users of Voices, ranging in industries from advertising, broadcast media, entertainment, film, education, and training. The survey looked to understand current market trends and how the landscape of the audio industry and freelance talent has changed over the last year.

2,473 survey respondents answered the survey that consisted of 12 questions. 1,446 respondents completed the survey in full. There was an incentive of the chance to win one of five \$100 Amazon gift cards for the completion of the survey.

About Voices

With over two million members, Voices is the largest audio marketplace connecting talent and clients in the world. Since 2005, the biggest and most beloved brands have entrusted Voices to help them find their voice. Headquartered in London, Canada, Voices helps service clients and voice talent in over 160 countries.