

## FEATURE

# ON RECORD

## With Attorney Podcasters

By Jeremy Conrad



**THOMAS DUNLAP**  
Host, *Black Letter Podcast*

Even before the advent of the internet, attorneys and firms turned to the media to elevate their brand, establish their expertise, and find new business, although the opportunities were available only to a select few. After all, not everyone could get published or cited as a source in a major newspaper, or appear as an expert on the nightly news, and doing so relinquished a significant amount of control to publishers.

Then came the blog in the 1990s and, shortly after, the podcast. Today, anyone with high-speed internet access and a decent microphone can get their own virtual soapbox and say what they have to say in the hopes of attracting followers. To date, there are more than two million podcasts in existence, made accessible with the meteoric rise of podcasting platforms.

And where podcasts exist, listeners follow. In 2021 an estimated 120 million people in the United States tuned in to podcasts, a number that is expected to grow by 20 million each year. Among those who have tapped into this growing market and creating whole communities of listeners? Attorneys and other legal professionals.

Here, *Washington Lawyer* features three D.C. Bar members who are leveraging their knowledge of the law to expand their reach in podcasting circles one episode at a time.

### THE EXPLAINER

Thomas Dunlap, partner at Dunlap Bennett & Ludwig PLLC, launched the *Black Letter Podcast* in February 2019. His show takes its name from the font once traditionally used in legal texts, whose illegibility to laypeople was among the early barriers to understanding the law. Through interviews, discussions, and personal ruminations, Dunlap attempts to demystify business and law for the general public.

Dunlap airs his show in two formats. He produces longer-form interviews with leaders from the industries his firm represents. Once an hour long, these episodes are now released in three 15-minute segments, the first

introducing the guest and their background in the industry, followed by a discussion about a significant challenge to their business and advice for those interested in following their route. Dunlap has interviewed IP business owners, government contractors, marijuana growers, and many others. He also produces *Monday Minutes*, shorter episodes in which he researches and discusses more quirky, offbeat issues.

Dunlap says that by packaging information in relatively brief segments, he can reach a broader audience. "It's trying to take something that's not consumable and deconstruct it into something consumable, something in everyday language and concepts," Dunlap says. "I have two high school kids, and they do not hunt through the internet to read articles or magazines. But they do watch short videos and podcasts all day." For the intellectually curious, Dunlap hopes that his show can serve as a starting point to learn more about the topics he touches on.

Initially, Dunlap says some people at his firm were concerned that he was giving away legal information for free. "That was a constant struggle I had with my partners in the past, but I think most of them agree now that there is no reason you shouldn't try to explain things, that it shouldn't be a learning experience for whomever you talk to," Dunlap says.

"We do give away information — that's part of what the podcast is about — but, for example, our firm has a trademark practice, and we can now send clients a video explaining how a trademark search works and what the value of the search is. Then we get on a call [to] talk about their case and not what a trademark is. We're trying to get the information out to people ahead of time so we can talk about their issue instead of the background law."

*Black Letter Podcast* also offers Dunlap opportunities to develop and expand upon his own interests, which are numerous. In addition to his intellectual property and commercial law practice, Dunlap, a former U.S. Army captain with an MBA, is a licensed pilot and rescue diver. He has authored numerous books and articles and appeared on television and radio as an expert guest.

"I'm interested in everything, so that's part of what I get out of it," he says. His *Monday Minutes* segments, in particular, allow him to explore interesting or odd issues, though even these flights of fancy feed back into the core of his practice. In one episode, for example, Dunlap covers the only federally regulated salad dressing; two weeks later he aired a related episode on trademark appeals work using the idiosyncratic piece as the starting point for a more technical conversation.

One of the benefits of podcasting for Dunlap is personal enrichment. "I enjoy learning new things," Dunlap says.

## THE HOBBYIST

While Dunlap's podcast has a professional focus within which he has found space to pursue personal interests, one of his colleagues has followed a reverse trajectory. Jeffrey Lippman's show *Garden Views* grew out of his podcast about the occult, pop culture, and mythology called *Garden of Doom*. The two shows continue to share a feed on popular podcasting platforms.

Lippman's contacts produced several interviews that, on reflection, seemed out of place with the initial concept for the show. "I backed into

the legal theme of *Garden Views*. I only created it because there are [*Garden of Doom*] episodes that sort of didn't fit in," he says. "I interviewed one of the most famous anti-Scientologist advocates, and I interviewed a man I've known since grade school who has been in Hollywood for the past 35 years and has held every kind of producer job there is. It seemed to me that those interviews didn't belong with discussions about giants and vampires."

Lippman pursued an increasingly diverse range of interview subjects, including a retired New York police detective who was involved in the apprehension of the Son of Sam killer and investigated the World Trade Center bombings, a young Black conservative, an air traffic controller, a retired general, and a pair of belly dancers — one of whom sits on a UNESCO counsel for the arts. He reached a turning point when he secured an interview with a cryptocurrency expert, which gave him a chance to learn more about an area of the law where he had little experience.



**JEFFREY LIPPMAN**  
Host, *Garden Views*

Realizing that there might be an audience for interviews with professionals, Lippman has spoken with lawyers about their work, though the exchanges sometimes allow him to indulge his more esoteric interests. In one episode he interviews an estate planning attorney about dragons in mythology and pop culture, while an episode on space law occasionally takes a detour into talk of aliens and UFOs.

"I'm not disparaging my original show," Lippman says. "These are still topics that fascinate me, and I've spoken to some of the smartest people I've [ever] encountered as a result of pursuing them. However, the *Garden Views* platform almost subconsciously allowed me to merge these two significant aspects of my life."

Lippman says the new topical focus has helped him produce content that has a wide potential audience and allows him to continue his professional education as an attractive fringe benefit.

## THE ACADEMIC

Jonah Perlin's podcast, *How I Lawyer*, has a much more singular focus. He says that his podcast is intended to establish permissionless networking systems. "I wanted a chance to connect lawyers who have had different career paths to people just starting their career and people who are recent graduates," he says.



## FEATURE

Perlin, who teaches legal practice and advanced legal writing at Georgetown University Law Center, launched his show in December 2020 when pandemic restrictions closed up opportunities for Perlin's primarily 1L and 2L students to interact with lawyers in the District. "I had students asking me, 'How am I ever going to learn what lawyers do?' And all of my traditional advice in that regard didn't really work in a pandemic," he says.

"At the same time, I was starting to get a little stir-crazy and interested in taking online classes and joining online communities, and I felt like I was learning a lot," he adds. That's when the idea hit him: "What if instead of having my students go out and have coffee with individual lawyers, I interview lawyers from across the profession each week, ask a standard set of questions, and record them so that anyone can listen to them anytime and for free?"

One advantage of this form of networking is that students and new attorneys don't have to make the contacts themselves. "The second advantage of contemporary technology is that it's not only permissionless, but [it's] also around asynchronously, forever. So, for example, the first time I needed to tie a bow tie for a wedding, I went on YouTube and watched a video that had been posted eight years earlier," he says. "The same should be true for learning about legal careers."

Though Perlin employs a consistent focus and format, it doesn't mean that his podcasting experience has been without surprises. Initially, he thought that his show would only appeal to law students and young attorneys, but he now knows that a significant segment of his audience is established senior attorneys who tune in because they enjoy hearing the stories of others in the profession.

In addition, he has avid fans who aren't attorneys, but are simply interested in learning about the legal profession. "[The] audience that I'm interviewing for is still those junior lawyers; that hasn't changed, but I know the audience is a little bigger," he says.

Another development involved LawPods, a legal podcasting agency that Perlin promotes at the beginning of his podcast in return for its editorial services. "That has been an absolute game-changer because I edited the first 50 episodes myself, and this is my unpaid side hustle. That was unsustainable given my full-time job," Perlin says. "LawPods has made it sustainable because now I can focus on the parts that I love: reaching out to people, interviewing them, and publishing and marketing the interviews."



**JONAH PERLIN**  
Host, *How I Lawyer*

Direct monetization can remain out of reach for many podcasters, and calculating a specific return on investment may not be possible, but that doesn't mean that podcasting doesn't have significant benefits.

"People in the 21st century who have audiences will benefit," Perlin says. "I think that's true for me, for my students ... for all professionals. I think that we live in a world where your reputation and your audience have a lot of value." 📌

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