

ONE OF RADIO'S BEST MANAGERS OPENS A PODCAST STUDIO



Gary Spurgeon

Gary Spurgeon spent 40 years in the radio business, working for Renda Broadcasting, Radio One, and, most recently, Salem. From 2014 to 2016, he was voted one of *Radio Ink's* Best Managers in Radio. In late 2019, after leaving Salem, where he'd been working on special projects, Spurgeon jumped over to podcasting: He opened a brand new podcasting studio in Jacksonville called Studio Podcast Suites.

Spurgeon rented a 12-by-12 room from Regis, invested about \$12,000 in new equipment, and now sells studio time for \$68 per hour.

Radio Ink: What's your plan to get the word out about your new studio?

Spurgeon: I've had seven customers in my studio in the first three weeks, and I had an additional 10 lined up in week four. I'm marketing with Google

Ads, some Facebook, and I've done Instagram. In addition, I have a LinkedIn strategy that I'm doing – it's proprietary, and it's been very fruitful. I've been doing mini tours, where we meet and have a conversation. Nobody else is doing it, so I have a unique niche here in Jacksonville.

I see two studios happening soon. The business model I've written up is almost like broadcast radio, but it's not minutes, it's hours – I sell by the hour. I do batch studios, so if they want to do more than one hour, there are discounts based on what they want to do. I think there's an opportunity to open more studios here, then expand.

Radio Ink: What types of businesses are coming to you?

Spurgeon: I've had a wide variety. I've had ad agencies come to me – they said

they have a whole host of clients that need this. Here they have a studio to go into and be comfortable.

From an affordability standpoint, it's more cost-effective than some of the broadcast facilities in town. I've had real estate people, financial people, and investment firms come in. Who knows where it goes from here?

Radio Ink: Once people record, do they know what to do with the audio?

Spurgeon: I ask them that question before they come in: "What level of experience do you have?" I had someone come in the other day and ask me how to go from A to Z. I said, "Yes, come in, and we'll record your podcast." I then get them on a hosting site, which is the most important thing.

Once you get on a site, you have to make sure you have a quality broadcast.

The show has to be edited so you have an open and a close with strong content. I provide them with checklists and planning guides to show them what's important.

I'll be tapping into a friend of mine on the programming side of the business who may help me out, and I will offer additional services if people need consultation on how to make their product sound better.

A lot of the things we do on the radio from a broadcasting standpoint are what these people have to understand – how to talk, and say things, maybe using an aircheck. There's a need for that, and a few people have already asked. I help them get hosted, explain how to do it, get it distributed to all the major outlets. It doesn't take as long as most people think once you get into it.

Radio Ink: Who do you use to host?

Spurgeon: I'm using Buzzsprout. There are so many out there; I like Buzzsprout because it's relatively inexpensive and easy to use.

Radio Ink: What's the most common question you get?

Spurgeon: "Can I get advertisers on my podcast?" I say it doesn't work that way, because you have to get critical mass first. Hosting services like Buzzsprout have affiliate programs, and once you get approved, you can run ads, and do them live or prerecorded. They give you your own 1-800 number so if someone buys the product, you get a percentage – they offer seven or eight of these companies. You can get advertisers tomorrow. But can you make money? That's a different question.

Radio Ink: Is podcasting more exciting than radio right now?

Spurgeon: What it's coming down to is that you can pick and choose your content. You can find a decent podcast about anything you're interested in. I bought all my studio equipment from BWS, but everything was on back order. The company said the demand is very high, and it's not just from broadcasters. There's an explosion out there.

Radio Ink: What else are you offering?

Spurgeon: I also offer video and live video streaming. I run all my audio through the streaming mechanism – it's broadcast quality. A group of four guys came in, and they had never done a podcast before. They had some prior radio experience, so I showed them how to run the board. They wanted to take a call, so I connected their cell phone to the board via Bluetooth. I said, "Slide these up, hit the record button, and go to it."

One great thing about the RodeCaster Pro board is that it has hotkeys on it, so you can put sound effects on it. About an hour later I walked in and asked how it went, and they said it was amazingly easy. I explain the process so everyone is comfortable doing their first podcast.

coming in. I then go down and pick them up. They also have conference rooms, they have phones, I can use their WiFi and computers – it's turnkey. All of it's included in their price. Instead of my trying to find 1,200 square feet, this is a better option.

PBJ: What worries you most?

Spurgeon: I can't tell you that at this point. It's an interesting model. The podcasters own their content; I only have to be concerned about whether they hit the record button.

The worry initially is whether the average Joe wants to invest \$65-\$70 in an hour. The person trying to do this from home has the challenges of the phone ringing, kids yelling, dogs bark-



Inside the Podcast Suites studio

Radio Ink: How do you see things progressing over the next six months?

Spurgeon: Once I get to 35%-40% of my time filled in this studio, another studio will be built. My first month was November 2019, and I hit my budget. I've done a conservative budget for the next 15 months – conservative in the fact that I know where I want to go. It's all based on inventory. I'm charging \$68 an hour, but with additional services, it goes higher. I'm coming in low and think the number will be \$75-\$100. Businesses seem to have no problem with the numbers I'm throwing out.

PBJ: Is the rent expensive through Regis?

Spurgeon: The reason I like Regis is that it's in a very nice facility with a reception area. It has a beautiful lobby where their people greet my customers

ing, etc. It messes up their podcast.

The biggest concern is companies that offer cheap podcasting services: "Here's a microphone, go ahead and do it." You can buy a package now for \$400 or \$500, but the quality is not there, nor is the ability to coach people.

I don't think podcasting is a fad. I don't think we have tapped into how explosive this will be with businesses. I talked to a company owner the other day who wants to do two podcasts a week – one for his business, and one for his internal people, which he will do as the CEO, to keep the employees informed. They don't want to put a studio in their office, they don't know about audio, etc.

I'm tracking everything right now. I have a CRM, I do drip e-mail campaigns. How long my lifetime value to the customer is, I can't tell you now. I'll know more in six months to a year.