

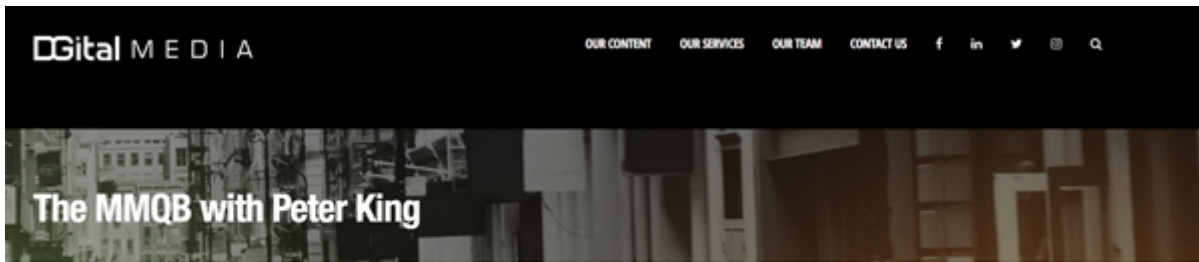
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COMPANY WATCH **DGital Media**

Radio execs' firm sells influencers on power of podcasts

By John Ourand, Staff Writer

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Last spring, a group of veteran radio executives



Peter King

"The champion model [for sportswriters] is Peter King of Sports Illustrated. He is amazing. You can't stop him." – NPR



The MMQB Podcast with Peter King is the ultimate destination for all things pro football. Each week the series will bring fans into the locker room, the press box and the front office with the biggest names in the NFL.

For an unprecedented 20 years, Peter King's massively popular Sports Illustrated Monday Morning Quarterback column has captured America's attention as the preeminent NFL news destination. Now, The MMQB Podcast with Peter King offers millions of fans a fresh, new and intimate spotlight on America's favorite sport.

approached well-known media and tech journalist Kara Swisher with a plan.



The executives had just formed a company called DGital Media that was going to produce podcasts. They needed to land a big fish to host their first one and saw Swisher, co-founder of the media site Recode

with nearly 1.1 million Twitter followers, as an ideal candidate.

At the time, Swisher was talking with a radio distributor about plans to launch a weekend radio show on media and technology. But two top executives from DGital Media convinced Swisher that bigger audiences, more advertising revenue and more flexibility were in the podcasting world.



“Terrestrial radio is not a growth business,” said DGital Media CEO Spencer Brown.

While podcasting had been around since the 2001 launch of the iPod, only a few, like Bill Simmons and Adam Carolla, had realized big success with them. In making their pitch to Swisher, Brown and Chief Content Officer Chris Corcoran used the popularity of podcast “Serial” as an example of podcasting’s promise. In fact, when she announced her podcast’s launch in July 2015, Swisher wrote, “I’ll be honest, it’s all been motivated largely by rank jealousy of that ‘Serial’ lady.”

Brown and Corcoran saw Swisher as someone with a built-in audience that would download her podcast regularly.

“She is a top influencer,” Corcoran said. “That’s how we wanted to set ourselves apart. Someone like Kara can not only bring incredible, compelling content but also bring a very loyal trustworthy audience along with her.”



Brown

In the ensuing 16 months, DGital has launched dozens of podcasts including Swisher’s. They cover sports, media, news and comedy, and include well-known names like The MMQB’s Peter King and The Vertical’s Adrian Wojnarowski. One of the most recent podcast launches was ESPN’s Tony Kornheiser.

Earlier this fall, Kornheiser decided to shelve his local radio show in Washington, D.C., in favor of a daily podcast based on how many out-of-market listeners previously were listening to his radio show via an ESPN podcast.



“I’m just trying to adapt to what listeners want in terms of on-demand audio,” Kornheiser said in an interview before his podcast launch. “If you listened to the show, we were being podcast through ESPN and through iTunes, and we had an enormous out-of-market following that was getting us that way.”

It's not difficult to create a podcast, which is the biggest roadblock DGital Media faces when it tries to convince people to partner. After all, anyone with an internet connection and a microphone can produce a podcast. Several publications and media figures have spurned DGital's advances to produce podcasts on their own. DGital's main sales pitch is to convince people that they can make the entire production process easier, from operations and imaging to sales and distribution. The company has studios in several markets to ensure high quality of the podcasts, and it has convinced many of the hosts to read the advertisements, which helps the sales process.

■ **LAUNCHED:** May 2015

■ **HEADQUARTERS:** New York, with offices in Los Angeles and San Francisco

■ **NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:** 23

■ **WHAT IT DOES:** Produces and distributes podcasts

Financial

arrangements typically are based around revenue sharing. There are no out-of-pocket costs to the talent, and DGital sells the advertising and shares a percentage of the revenue. Currently, company executives say they are seeing revenue in the high seven figures.

"We are very bullish on the podcasting trend," Corcoran said. "We know audio. We know how to monetize it. We have relationships on the talent side. We have relationships on the brand side."

Those relationships come from a long career in radio broadcasting. DGital Managing Director David Landau and Brown were former co-CEOs of Dial Global/Westwood One. Corcoran was Dial Global's executive vice president for content.

"People want things on demand," Corcoran said. "I really believe that the days of listening to a radio show with commercial breaks are over. I don't know that people are into that, especially younger audiences."

KEY EXECUTIVES:

- **Spencer Brown**, CEO
- **David Landau**, managing director
- **Chris Corcoran**, chief content officer
- **John Murphy**, president
- **Chris Basil**, senior vice president of production
- **Sean Cherry**, senior vice president of programming operations
- **Melissa Providence**, vice president of operations
- **Josefina Francis**, director of operations

SPORTS AND MEDIA PODCASTS:

- Recode Decode with Kara Swisher
- The Vertical Podcast with Woj
- The Tony Kornheiser Show
- UFC Unfiltered
- The MMQB Podcast with Peter King
- The Garbage Time Podcast with Katie Nolan
- The Vertical Podcast with JJ Redick
- The Anik and Florian Podcast
- For the Win! Podcast
- Fox Sports Network
- The MMQB Podcast with Albert Breer
- The MMQB Ten Things Podcast
- Recode Media with Peter Kafka
- Recode Replay

Digital executives believe they have hit on a growth business. They will continue to try to convince bold-faced names to launch podcasts. But they also plan to expand beyond podcasts that have a singular host interviewing a newsmaker.

- Roenick Life Podcast
- SI Campus Rush
- SI Media Podcast with Richard Deitsch
- SI Open Floor
- SI Planet Fútbol
- SI The Seth Davis Podcast
- The Vertical Podcast with Chris Mannix
- Too Embarrassed To Ask

“The marketplace is shifting pretty aggressively into doing short series,” Corcoran said, referencing ESPN’s “30 for 30” series that translates well into audio. “It doesn’t just have to be in sports. Look at what ‘Serial’ did. We want to be aggressively in that marketplace and doing short series and branded content around things. That’s where we want to head.”

Once again, Digital is looking to “Serial” as an example.

“What ‘Serial’ did was bring podcasting to mainstream,” Corcoran said. “‘Serial’ brought it to The New York Times and all these different publications that started talking about podcasts in a very serious way. It’s not just the content. It’s about selling it, monetizing it and truly making money on it.”

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