

Podcraft Mixers & Audio Interfaces

Colin: Hey folks, and welcome to another episode of Podcraft. This is the show all about podcasting, helping you to create a more successful show. I'm Colin Gray from thepodcasthost.com joined by Matthew. How you getting on, Matthew?

Matthew: You know, fine. Well how I am, Colin, I've just moaned at you for ten minutes. I'm not going bored the listener with a combination of injury and perhaps even illness, but always good, always good.

Colin: I'm sure it'll all be apart from the world being at odds with your well being. Everything's fine.

Matthew: Seems to be.

Colin: Well, thanks for joining us again on podcraft. You'll know, if you've been listening along that we're doing a season just now, I'm going to say the right one, Matthew, not growth, it's the gear season. We're re recording the gear, the equipment, the podcast equipment season, all the equipment you might need for a podcast updating. It for 2023, so hopefully if you're about to launch your show, you can find all the equipment you need here, get all the advice you need to set up your gear, everything you need to record and edit and produce, actually, as well. We're going to go into software later in this season and if you're an experienced podcaster following along, you're a veteran at this, maybe you're going to find something that will help you upgrade or improve your setup. And we always say equipment doesn't make the show, but once you get into it, of course it's something everyone gets a bit interested in. Getting yourself a better mic, a better mixer, all that kind of stuff. There's nothing wrong with a wee bit of gear envy, a wee bit of gear hoarding if you're into that. As long as you've got the content, as long as you've got the planning, as long as you've got everything else in place already.

Matthew: Matthew getting into the gear, that's got a different context. Here in Scotland.

Colin: That translates. Is that only a Scottish term?

Matthew: I don't know, it might not be. Yeah. Text us if you're into gear and we'll just see what type of gear people mention.

Colin: Yeah, exactly. And we'll block certain types and invite another. So, yeah, see how that goes for yourself.

Matthew: Maybe I'll reach out to them.

Colin: The way things are going, it depends how ill you get. Okay, let's jump into this episode though. This episode is going to be all about so we've got basically mixers, audio interfaces, those devices that help you record in various ways. We got into this a little bit last time around, Matthew, didn't we? We kind of did a few of these types of devices in the recorders one.

Matthew: Yeah, I was almost tempted to lump these all in together because you could do that, but I thought that audio interfaces and mixers have enough that they maybe warrant just getting the light shone on them a bit on their own. Would you agree with that?

Colin: Yeah, I think so, I think so. And we'll probably notice. Might not be a long episode, so we'll see how we go, but we'll dive into it. We'll talk about the interfaces, the mixers you might want to use as a podcast, or why you might want to use it, who they're suitable for. And since this one might be a bit shorter, I'm going to chuck in a growth tip as well. I'm going to do this through the rest of the season just to celebrate the launch of our new growth course as well. I mentioned last time around, we've just launched a new growth course called Growth Essentials. All of the essential tips you need to grow your podcast audience. If you want to check that out, you can go over to thepodcasthost.com growthcourse imaginatively, but I'm going to chuck in a growth tip, take one of the lessons from that course, and we'll include that right in the middle of the episode as well. So stay tuned for that. You'll get a wee tip on how to grow your audience as well. All right, shall we jump into it? Matthew all about mixers.

Matthew: Let's go.

Colin: Okay. Right, who needs one of these? Why might you want to use them? It's kind of definitely not for everyone, is it? But why would you want to use one if you do?

Matthew: Yeah, one of the most obvious factors, I think, is if you want to be at your computer, you want to use your computer. Maybe that's because you really like a certain type of recording software or a certain type of Daw or editing software. You just want to be at the computer. And therefore you could look at linking a mixer or audio interface in USB form. Well, there's other workarounds, too, which we'll get into, but that's probably one of the main factors that I could think of. Anything else con.

Colin: So the idea being that you can plug any mic into your computer, doesn't matter what it is, because USB mics, obviously, we talked about a bit. So is this you talking about more pro mics or other kind of gear as well?

Matthew: Yeah, definitely. So, like multiple mics? If I wanted to plug multiple mics in the computer, an interface or mixer would be a good option for that, too.

Colin: Yeah, we've fannied about with this before, haven't we, trying to plug, like, two USB mics in. We've got an article on this. It is possible, but what's it like, Matthew, to actually get going?

Matthew: Yeah, there's like seven or eight different ways you could do it. None of them are you. If you want a couple of mics running into your computer, get something like an interface. So, again, we'll get into the actual recommendations towards the end of the episode. What about Colin with mixers? I mean, there's another factor here, isn't there? Like, we talked about this a bit with podcast recorders, but you could go down that as live route to cut down on your editing. Can't you potentially, this is kind of.

Colin: The main one for me. I think if I'm recording more than one person at any given time, I'll end up often just using the Zoom. The Zoom H Five we talked about last time around, zoom H Six, just that's good. Couple of the other types as well. The other brands other brands are available, but we like the Zoom. So zoom. H five I'd use for a couple of people. H six for more. But if I had more than a couple of people and I want to kind of turn it into a wee bit of a live broadcast, potentially, or even just like sometimes it just actually gets people really enthusiastic, I find. Like, if I have some people in the office recording and I can actually play in some sound effects, like I can play in the theme music and I can play that as we're recording, it goes right into the recorder, into the recording itself. Some sound effects as we're going along as well, be able to kind of bring in maybe even some videos or something from the computer. You can play the audio from that back into the recording and hear people reacting live to it. There's something about that kind of live production aspect that really is most easily done on a proper mixer, like, say, the RODECaster or something else. One of the ones we talked about last time around. We'll talk about a couple more as well later in this episode. So.

Matthew: Yeah, I like that.

Colin: I do like that. It's kind of a messing around thing sometimes. It's a bit of a novelty thing sometimes, being able to play in that music. But I do find it can get people enthusiastic. It can raise the energy. So, yeah, there's definitely something about that. Do you do that at all, Matthew? Have you ever done.

Matthew: I do see why some folks might find it appealing. So you can do your show as live, or you could do it literally live, can you? So you could have your music coming in, you could play your transitions there in real time. Maybe you've got a pre recorded interview you want to cut to. In theory, it makes a lot of sense that you finish your episode, you just top and tail it and it's ready to go. There are caveats to that. I think you need to be pretty well practiced to be able to do that well and not to require editing, but in theory, it's a good idea.

Colin: And you can do it, like you said, you can record pretending you're live. So as a pre recorded one, you're going to edit it afterwards, but you just play it in, cuts down a bit on your editing, potentially, if you do it well. Or you can actually broadcast live. So if I am doing a live broadcast, like a webinar or a live podcast broadcast, or whatever you want to call it, then I can play stuff in straight away and you can get the audience riled up as well, get a bit of energy going, get some music in there, all that kind of stuff. I think people like hearing the theme music kick in and then you speaking into it as if it is the podcast that they listen to every week. So, yeah, definitely someone to consider there. But it does take a bit of practice. I've screwed that up many a time. Although that maybe just adds to the audience engagement. It's shown you're human.

Matthew: So this does obviously sound similar to what we covered last week with the digital recorders. What would you say are like the key differences between mixers and interfaces and things like digital recorders?

Colin: Yeah, the digital recorders tend to have a built in mic, makes them all in one. You can take them out and about, take them to an event, you don't have to plug something into them. But as a result of that kind of portability, it means that they maybe have less flexibility, less options, less power in them, less kind of configurability, all that kind of stuff. So there's something around that just the fact that when you get a mixer, you tend to just have a lot more options, like the sound pads and stuff like that. Although some of the little recorders are getting that in there nowadays as well, aren't they? Yeah. What about you, Matthew?

Matthew: Yeah, but I mean, I suppose what you're saying is, like most mixers, just a mixer on its own is not going to do anything, as it needs to be plugged into something. And likewise an audio interface, whereas you could take a zoom H five out and do everything with it. Like a mixer on its own is just an inanimate object, isn't it?

Colin: Yeah. These are Mike plugged into. Yes, indeed.

Matthew: There was a photo in our Slack channel recently. You were cleaning out the old office and you found, was it your first mixer?

Colin: Yeah, it was like an old behringer one, I believe. And it was, yeah, it must be like 15 years old by now. It was a terrible old thing.

Matthew: It looked like something that was pulled out at Chernobyl. Just really old and bulky and irradiated.

Colin: Exactly, yeah, totally aged looking as well. It was a good mixer in its day, but, I mean, I bought it secondhand, I think it was already ten years old by the time I bought it, so it was nothing but trouble. We talked about it last time, the reason not to use a mixer. This was a total prime example of it. Every time I tried to record something on it, something was off, something was wrong, and I had to adjust it and change the knobs and the settings and the buttons every single time. So there was always a 1015 minutes fanning around, period before I could hit record with that thing. It was more trouble than it was worth.

Matthew: Do you remember as well, like, this is maybe going back sort of six, seven years ago, so nowadays we've got a lot of high end, double ended recording tools and stuff like that, but if you go back a bit, a lot of people were using mixers for the famous mix minus set up, weren't they? Like, that was quite a big thing for doing your remote calls where you had to set up your mixer in a certain way so that you couldn't hear your own voice being sent back to you and all that. It was pretty straightforward to set up, but it's just funny to think that wasn't actually that long ago that we had to do stuff like that.

Colin: You say it was straightforward to set up, but it was like it went wrong all the time, every time I would forget how to do it exactly. And it was just it should have been straightforward. And you're right, the steps were not hard, but for some reason, half the time it just didn't work. It was really annoying. But yeah, that's just disappeared, hasn't it? Just echo cancellation, essentially. There's a button right in front of us in the recorder. Echo cancellation. Like, just about every call setup has that built in, doesn't it? And it's not always perfect, of course, but it works pretty well. So, yeah, technology stopping us having to mess around with Mixers, all good.

Matthew: You can get a mixer in USB form, or you could get the more analog versions and then you could actually link that with your digital recorder too, can't you? So making it a bit more of an analog set up, you don't need the computer, you could still have it somewhere on the go. But I would say that is much more of a musician set up than you wouldn't really see a podcaster turning up somewhere with like an analog mixer, would you?

Colin: I would imagine. I don't know, I've not looked into the kind of analog mixer world recently, but all of the ones that we use these days, that we've even reviewed, they're all USB as well, aren't they? Like, they can function on their own, they can record out to a standard analog output, you can put a digital recorder into it. A lot of them actually have SD cards built into them as well, so you can record direct to that. You don't need a recorder, but nearly all of them can output to USB as well. And I'm sure there's still analog ones around, like you say, but I can't imagine why a podcaster would want one that doesn't have a USB output these days when there's so many good ones that do.

Matthew: A lot of my sort of pals in the sound design world, like I've got any pals. A lot of people I know in the sound design world, they like things like mixers for the tangibility of faders and stuff like that. So I know in software you get your digital faders and that, but I know people like that. Like I say Tangibility, they like to be able to slide faders up and down. And again, this is for advanced audio production. This isn't just for your standard speech show or conversation. This is if you're doing highly produced stuff, maybe dramas, maybe bringing in lots of musical elements. That's more the kind of sound design, really.

Colin: In that case. Yeah, I would argue actually, half the time I would just want to sell a tape, my faders down. Like, you only set it and forget it, don't you? With the RODECaster that I've got in the office here, every time I do a little test on the levels and stuff. But actually, if I could just glue it where it is for that mic, then that would be perfect because it means that I think about it again.

Matthew: What then if your music was playing and you wanted to fade it down and speak?

Colin: No, but I'm talking about just my voice. Yeah. So, like, my voice one, so my mic input, my number one, which is my mic on that side, just glue it down. Because I'm always the same mic, I'm always the same mic technique, same position, same mic, same voice, all that kind of stuff. But you're absolutely right, you have different people. This is the benefit of it, isn't it? Like, I have different guests in and they'll sit further away, or they'll sit closer, or they'll have a bigger voice or a smaller voice, and that's when the adjustability comes in really powerful. It's much more customizable and you can adjust as you go, like you say on the fly. So you have somebody that gradually it quite often happens, doesn't it? You've got somebody in person, they're not too used to microphones. And they start all up

close to the mic. And then suddenly, just during the recording, they start to relax and go back. And then suddenly, they're further away from the mic and you're, like, trying to.

Matthew: Turn up the volume.

Colin: And you end up having to actually say to them, look, come on, get back towards the mic. But actually, you can make those micro adjustments so you don't have to interrupt their sentences and stuff. So, yeah, definitely someone are in it for that. Yeah, indeed. Cool.

Matthew: Well, I'm excited for this growth tip. What you got for all right?

Colin: Oh, OK. Right. So like I said, we've launched our growth course. You wrote a lot of it as well, Matthew. I mean, you collaborated on this. It was kind of an evolution of one we launched years back as well, which the video on it was awful, wasn't it? But we've upgraded that now to be a lovely, shiny new growth course. Growth Essentials. Again, if you want to go and check it out, go over to Forward Slash Growthcourse. But one that I like one, really underused one. People are always interested in SEO for podcasting, aren't they, Matthew? And it's something that's quite underused, I think, as well. SEO meaning search engine optimization. So, yeah, good point, good question. What does that mean? It means how you get found. So rather than you going out there and pushing your podcast to other people, you want people to be able to find you really easily. And one of the best things, one of the most underused things for growth, I think, is actually setting up your podcast really nicely to be found when people are searching in questions. So one of the lessons in our course is all about question research, how you can actually get in there. You can find out the questions that your audience are asking and really start to optimize your content around that. Because if you know the questions that your audience are asking, then firstly you can create great content that really speaks to them. You know exactly what episodes to create, gives you content ideas, helps you create ones that really engage with people, really draw people in. But equally, you can put those questions, and this is the SEO part, into the headers for your episodes. So on Apple Pods, on Spotify, your episodes are named these questions because those questions are what people are asking. That's what really draws people in. But equally, they'll be typing that into search engines, whether it's a podcast directory or whether it's Google. And that's the big one really, because if you can publish your episodes with those questions and the titles, not only will you be found in the directories for podcasting, but when people type into Google, your podcast will show up there as long as you have a website set up for your podcast. So the idea is use a few tools to do a bit of research, a couple of ones that I love, and again, I go into loads of detail on this, how to use them in the course, but Quora is a great one. Get into quora. So Quora.com I believe it is. Go on there and type in your keyword. So something like for us it would be podcasting. Type in podcast and it shows up all the questions that people have asked about podcasting or with the word podcast in it. And that gives me loads of clues about the types of things people are searching for. Another one I love as well is answer the public. So Answer the Public is a website which gives you all the questions people are asking around a keyword. If I type in podcast, it'll show me all of the why questions, all of the what questions, all of the how questions, all of that stuff that people are asking around our topic. So it tells you what the real people out there, your actual audience are searching for, so that you can design your content around that. Put that into your episode titles, put that into the pages on your website and that really draws people to your show. There's a couple others in there as well, buzsumo, even Twitter as well. Great ways to use it. But if you fancy getting more on that, go over to Forward Slash Growthcourse and you'll find out more about how to use that in our growth course. All right. Cheers, Matthew. Never did anything next. Never did anything, no. You give me the space to talk there facilitating.

Matthew: I went for a pee. No, it's all good. Looking forward to trying it. I need more listeners. I've got barely any always.

Colin: We all want more listeners. Cool. All right, mixers. What are we going to recommend, then? What are the ones you are recommending these days? When it comes to mixers and interfaces, what do you recommend?

Matthew: Yeah, so on the interfaces front, I'm going to point to the one I'm using right now. It's the focus, right, scarlet two I two listeners to the show will be familiar with me talking about this wi box, which I've had for many years, like twelve or 13 years, and it still works touch wood. So it has two XLR inputs and it's just a simple USB connection in the computer. Very simplistic. There's like hardly any knobs and dials on it. So it seems to be one of the most famous audio interfaces out there, doesn't it? I've rarely, if ever heard anyone say a bad word about it.

Colin: No, I mean, I think they're just solid. Great quality, aren't they? Great preamps in them, so they make any mic sound great as well. Again, going back to the keeping it simple thing, like you say, less knobs and buttons to mess up and have to adjust every single time, weren't they less power, less configurability, like no sound pads to play music in. Can't really bring in like a phone or anything like

that, or calls quite so easily, but I mean, it's still possible with a bit of wiry jiggity pokery if you want to, but yeah, really just for one person or two people into one computer. A is that the kind of use case?

Matthew: And they do have a range, so they've got the two I don't know if it's called the two I one, actually. Probably not the focus rate scarlet solo.

Colin: It could be one person.

Matthew: One.

Colin: Yeah, totally.

Matthew: So if you want to use XLR, but going to your computer, you would use something like that, or you could go up, it's got a four input one. It's probably got an eight track too.

Colin: If you need loads of people eight or whatever.

Matthew: Yeah, but the focus rate range is great. If this thing doesn't break, I'll just have it forever. Have you got an interface or mixer up there that you use? I know you use the RODECaster, but we kind of covered that already.

Colin: Yeah, totally. At home. I've got so in the office here I use USB mic primarily plugged into my computer, so that's the rode podcaster. But I also have the RODECaster over on the desk for recording more than one person. So yeah, I've got a couple of rode mics plugged into that. So I do like the RODECaster a lot. It works well, it's expensive, so it doesn't really suit everyone. We're kind of lucky we do this for a living so we can kind of justify it. But there's a load of stuff in there like being able to bring in a phone call from your iPhone or whatever it is you use. That's kind of sometimes quite handy. I have used that in a pinch and it just works. And it's really handy being able to use it as USB interface. Bring in a couple of mics for a live broadcast. Really nice as well. At home though, I do use an XLR mic with the PreSonus audio box, the USB 96, I believe you got that these days.

Matthew: You got that up there? Yeah.

Colin: Do you remember it? It was in the office years ago. We got one to try out. You liked that one, didn't you? I think you gave that one a good review. Was it yourself?

Matthew: Yeah, I reviewed it. Yeah. I like that. I was just going to say, if I didn't have the focus right, that certainly be one that I'd be interested in. Yeah. So you quite like it too?

Colin: Yeah, it's classic. It's kind of one of the main kind of equivalents to the focus right, isn't it? Maybe a little bit cheaper, potentially because the brand name is not quite as, I don't know, popular, potentially, but it works really nicely. It sounds great. I can't even remember what mic I've got plugged into it, to be honest. One of our various XLR ones that we've tried out and tested. But it sounds good, that's what I use.

Matthew: It just if I remember correctly, I found it a tiny wee bit noisier with dynamic mics. Really? I found if you had the gain up to a decent level, you did get that tiny wee bit more noise floor. I found again, that's me really holding on it because I'm literally reviewing it. Have you ever seen the video as well? We often talk about the sure SM 58 and its indestructibility, but this is the audio interface version of that because there's a video on YouTube, somebody drives over it with like a truck and it's fine. I don't know where all these people are that need their gear to be like fireproof and truck proof and that, but if you are one of these people, then that might be a good option for you. Just be more careful.

Colin: Exactly. Don't lay your audio interfaces on the ground. Yeah, it's quite handy but yeah, no, it works. I've got a condenser mic plugged into it actually. So yeah, it sounds good. Don't need to have the gain up too. High. What else? You used that Boss one that you've talked about before. Do you use that one still at all?

Matthew: No. So a reviewer, Dev, actually did just like, do two reviews of the Boss Gegcaster Five and Boss Gegcaster Eight, and really liked them so much that we basically asked to buy one of them off the company. So, yeah, cool.

Colin: Nice. Yeah, sound good. Going to go and have a look at that. Never tried them out. And of course, we should add the RODECaster pro Two. I never remember the Blooming names of the things, the Road names are terrible, but that one and a Mackey mixer we mentioned in the last episode, too, are both worth a look if you have the budget for them, definitely much more expensive. The focus rate. What's the focus rate these days? Like 120 or something like that.

Matthew: It's been like about 120 for the past ten years, isn't it? So I'm going to safely say it's still at that price.

Colin: Yeah, totally. I think the PreSonus might even be less than that, might even be under 100. They're just a nice kind of cheap way to plug a really good XLR Mic into your computer, really simply. And two, if you need them, obviously. But if you do have the bigger budget for the kind of expanded options and everything, then do check out the RODECaster, the Mackie. Good devices, but pricey. So, yeah, make sure they're worth it for you. You're going to use it for something worthwhile. All right. Anything else on this, Matthew?

Matthew: No, I'm just looking ahead because we're able to give a teaser because this is a structured season. So on the next episode, we're talking about mobile recording with smartphones or tablets. Is that a subject that wets your appetite?

Colin: Well, yes, actually more and don't slap me, but more for video than podcasting, actually, because I'm doing a lot more stuff for doing more stuff for, well, teaching podcasters on YouTube. So it's more how to record good quality audio to go along with a video for YouTube videos. But potentially even if you record it well, something I've been trying a bit of recently as well is when recording YouTube videos, making sure the audio is good enough that it's completely standalone. So actually being able to repurpose some of the audio clips from the YouTube videos, it's kind of the opposite way than a lot of podcasters do it. We tend to take an audio episode and then try and repurpose it to YouTube, but I'm trying to go the other way, potentially thinking it might be kind of a more engaging way. But yeah, if I get the audio right on the video, then I can repurpose it to podcast.

Matthew: So, yeah.

Colin: Interested to hear what you've come up with recently in this, because I've not looked into it in a wee while. So, yeah, good stuff. Let's look at that next time around.

Matthew: Yeah. And I'll point. The listener to the show notes. You'll find them at Forward Slash Techseason. You'll find all the show notes for every episode that we cover in this gear season. And then we've got a link to the Resources page as well.

Colin: Colin indeed. You can find that over at Forward slash resources. Thepodcasthost.com resources. And if you do have a minute, if you want to go and check out the growth course, I'd love to love you to take a look. Obviously, we put that out just a few weeks ago. Brand new version, loads of tips in there. I think we've got 40, 50 plus tips in there. Different tactics with full instructions, full rundown a video guide to it, a text version, and all the tasks you need to follow to get those growth tactics into play for your podcast. Everything from five minute tips up to longer term tactics so you can choose whatever suits you at any given moment and just do something to grow your podcast audience. That's over at Growthcourse. Thepodcasthost.com growthcourse. All right, that it for today. Matthew, I think that'll do us.

Matthew: Seems to be. Seems to be. I see in your calendar you've got a meeting with me now. Exciting times for you. Back to back, Matthew.

Colin: Back to back. Matthews that's exactly oh, that's a terrible image, actually. Back to back doing some kind of twerk motion. That's exactly what jumped into my head there. I don't know why. Right, let's move on. Okay, thank you for joining us. See me next time if I'm not in therapy. See you then. Cheers.