



**Don't just  
jump on  
the**

**BANDWAGON**

# Jumping On The Bandwagon

by Anna Gunn

There is no doubt that, as the old Chinese curse goes, we live in “interesting” times.

And in these “interesting” times, we as podcasters can find it difficult to navigate the maze of current trending topics. Add to that the never ending “can’t win” conundrum, summed up in these three conditions:

1. Not addressing the topic? Clearly, you’re oblivious, uninterested, ignorant, not proactive, etc;
2. Addressing the topic, but not doing anything concrete about it? It’s obviously just virtue signalling;
3. Addressing the topic, and backing it up with actions? That’s just jumping on the bandwagon.

Before we go any further, let me address something straight off the bat: in this article, I am in no way advocating for you, the Human Being (who also happens to be a Podcaster), to not take a stand, or be quiet and passive in the face of tragedy and adversity. By all means, please acknowledge the developing situations, take a stand, and do whatever you can to help those in need.

It’s this last definition of “help” that I want to discuss with you, the Podcaster, in the rest of this article.

## What’s this bandwagon we’re jumping on?

This expression is used to define a set of actions or behaviour that people take on, just because everybody else is doing the same at the time. But the thing with bandwagons is that as quick as they are to come around, they’re even quicker to disappear - and you can be left with egg on your face if you’re not careful.

To be clear, I am not just talking about the “soft” trending topics of the day, such as which celebrity did what, which sports team won yesterday, yada yada yada. I am talking about the harder hitting, far more pressing and divisive issues of our time.

#metoo #blacklivesmatter #saynotowar

## ... and how is this relevant to my podcast?

Whatever your brand, or the topic of your podcast, some basic facts are common to us all: you have a microphone, and you can amplify other people’s voices. You pick themes and topics to discuss, either alone or with guests, or simply share your love of a chosen hobby. You crave to be and stay relevant for your listeners. And you (... should...) strive to be authentic.

As we all do.

But social pressure grows in difficult times. Some would even have you believe that “silence is violence” (and even this expression is dripping with social pressure). And if your podcast isn’t themed around news or current events, you may be scared into believing that not mentioning the hot button topic of the day could result in lower downloads, a drop off in audience retention, and a possible loss of advertiser revenue (see condition 1 above).

Let me step up onto my soapbox for a paragraph:

As content creators, we are all responsible for the media and content that we put out into the world. I have previously written extensively about Ethics in Podcasting in the first issue of this magazine, but here’s a quick recap: the power we hold should be regarded with consideration, and wielded accordingly. We, as those who are in charge of who we put in front of our microphones, need to be careful about whose story and voices we choose to amplify - especially at a time when there’s bound to be more noise than signal.

Jumping onto whatever the latest bandwagon might be definitely falls into the category of “proceed with caution”.

### **Navigating the waters**

There’s another immediate distinction that needs to be made here: some topics are obviously more important and consequential than others. Situations that threaten the human condition cannot - and should not - be compared to some celebrity saying something tone deaf. Again.

But once again, in this extremely online world, where clicks = revenue, social media and clickbait would have you believe the exact opposite: everything is drama, even if 99% of it is engineered. So the first thing to do when you feel emotionally moved on any topic, is stop and check in with yourself. Are you being manipulated into feeling that way?

In neurological terms, “social pain” is felt as real pain - and the Human Being wants to deal with it as quickly as possible, i.e. NOW!

As Humans we have a natural desire to be heard, and to show ourselves to be on what we believe to be the right side of history (unless you’re purposefully running disinformation campaigns, in which case this article isn’t for you).

If we can signal to our potential guests, our sponsors and our listeners what we stand for on these bandwagon topics, we often do so quickly and as fast as we can book in our next relevant guest.

*“For fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” - Alexander Pope*



The biggest piece of advice I can give you, the Podcaster? Unless you're a *real* expert on the matter, never rush into any trending topic without first having slept on it. Give yourself a 24-hour embargo before acting on it, and use that time to think about the topic, and ask yourself some variation of the following questions.

So you have made it this far, and decided that <insert topic here> is a cause that you, the Podcaster, wants to take on. That's cool.

This list of questions will help clarify your intent and enable you to plan your next steps:

### **Why do I want to do this?**

Try to be honest with yourself here. The immediate answer might be a resounding "Duh, isn't it obvious?!", but dig deeper and remember what we said about social pain. What is it about this topic that has moved you to take action? Write it down. This will help connect you to your audience when communicating about the topic.

### **Does this feel authentic to me and my (personal) brand?**

Or, to put it another way: What connections do I have to this story? Is my personal brand connected to this? Again, write down your answers, and check back often to make sure you're not going off on unneeded tangents.

### **Do I really need to do this?**

Yes, I know we already answered this question right at the top. But this is a really tough internal question, which is why it needs to be constantly revisited. Are you just virtue signalling? Or are you supporting and highlighting the topic in any meaningful way?

Remember there are many ways to support a cause. For example, you could set up a donation button on your website or social media (and it goes without saying: make sure the proceedings get to the people who need them); you could personally donate to the cause; if you're good with research, curate and publish a list of sources where people might find credible information. By doing these instead, you are showing strong support without adding to the noise out there.

### **Do I have something of importance to add to this conversation?**

Adding your support or your opinion to a discussion isn't wrong - unless you're contributing to the noise. With the advent of social media, everybody seems to be an expert on public health, sports regulations, cooking, human rights, and criminal law, all at once. Like I said at the top, if you're not an expert on the topic at hand, say so straight away. And remember that you are able to offer your support without making a whole episode dedicated to the subject.

### **Do I truly understand the topic?**

A quick google search isn't enough to understand or become familiar with a topic and its surrounding context. Please dig deeper than the first three pages of google; follow the hashtags on social media; find the reliable sources, and listen to the different viewpoints.

You can do this in an organised manner by listing all the different viewpoints on a topic (without initial judgement), as well as who is stating them, and their credibility. Then go through each and find out what the counterarguments are. And more importantly, listen to the fact checkers. Your personal brand of politics is going to make you more susceptible to believing some people more than others, but there are no such things as alternative facts.

Podcasting demands that you do background research - not just on the topics, but also on your guests (if you have any). If you aren't a good researcher, find someone who is, and treat them well. Good research is key in these days of more noise than signal.

### **Do I have another point of view to add to this conversation?**

In other words, what's your angle? Are you going to simply present facts to the best of your ability, or do you have something new to say? Maybe a secondary concern that you haven't seen addressed elsewhere yet, and you have the authority to talk about? How are you going to go about that in a way that's authentic to you and your brand?

And if you are considering breaking with the traditional format of your podcast to introduce this new topic, have you answered the above questions taking that into account? If not, go back and start over.

### **“Why do you hate carrots?”**

Have you ever seen someone say they love potatoes, only to be piled on with questions about why they hate carrots, and won't someone please think of the cabbages? Yeah, it's a thing: if you show your support for one thing, clearly you hate everything else. Obvs.

\*sigh\*

Keep in mind that bandwagons come around more often than we would like. If you break with your traditional format to show support for that one topic, when the next one comes around - and it will, you need to either do another “special edition”, or be ready to explain why you didn't, because that can (and probably will) be interpreted as you not caring as much about this as you did about that.

If you're struggling with this one because you still want to do it, but don't know how to work around these issues, here's a suggestion for you: keep your original podcast as it is, and start another one, either as a spin-off, or an entirely separate entity. Give your audience the option of following you to another venture, or just staying in the comfort of what's familiar to them.

The last question, and probably the most important one you should ask yourself is:

**If I listen to my podcast five years from today, and this topic is no longer relevant, am I going to be proud of what I did?**

### **A word on Copyright.**

There is a myth that we can use copyrighted materials so long as we give appropriate credit to the copyright holder (fair use, etc). This isn't always true everywhere. Please don't get caught out with this, and don't be tempted to slide other snippets of sound, or news items that you have grabbed from other places, into your podcast, without making absolutely sure you can, and have all the appropriate permissions, etc.

When in doubt, don't. And if you can't do it any other way, get advice from a qualified expert. This also applies to non-profits: you still do not have the right to use materials that are not your own.

Always strive to be as original as you can.



## On Guests, Part I: Who

Two words: Background. Checks.

In seeking to jump onto the bandwagon as quickly as possible and be part of the conversation, we as podcasters might fall into the trap of inviting guests that are simply not credible.

It is important to background check all guests, and make sure that they are relevant to the topic, preferably real experts on the subject. If you are trying to talk to or interview experts, and the good choices aren't available at the time, just wait - the rush to be the first to market isn't worth adding noise to the conversation, as well as taking a credibility hit. If you are producing well-informed content, your listeners will wait, and the rest of the world will silently thank you.

You also don't always need oppositional views to appear well rounded. An opinion does not have the same weight as a fact. A common mistake of modern media outlets is to give the "opposing views" a platform in an effort to appear unbiased, sometimes going to the point of inviting guests with extreme opinions to their shows, and letting them spout their BS unchecked. Please don't.

If you're lucky enough to have Commander Chris Hadfield on your show, you don't have to invite Flat Earther Joe from the corner shop to provide an opposing opinion, as fun as that might sound.

By all means, get other people's opinions on your bandwagon piece. Make sure you get some opinions outside of your own bubble, as we are living more and more insulated in terms of friends who think the same way that we do. But fact. Check. Constantly.

## On Guests, Part II: How

So you've decided to go ahead, got your research done, planned your episode/ new podcast, etc. You know who you want to invite on. Good.

Here's another thing to keep in mind: trending topics usually are because of their divisiveness, with two usually very definite sides. And to continue with the generalisation, one of these sides is usually traumatised, to varying degrees.

When contacting potential guests, always - always - put their needs and humanity above the story. I can't stress this enough. Be very clear with any guest what topic you wish to cover, and from what angle. Do not shy away from this upfront conversation.

At a time when there is a lot of noise out there, don't add to the confusion or trauma your guest might be going through.

## Publishing your podcast: hashtags

Publishing might be the final step, but it's by no means the least important, as the margin for error is still considerable. A couple of things to be aware of:

- » Don't use hashtags to promote it that aren't directly relevant to the topic being covered on that specific episode;
- » Don't use trending hashtags that are primarily used to spread important information about the topic - unless the information you are sharing can have an immediate effect on the outcomes.

Using the trending hashtags for something other than immediately useful content only adds to the noise, and makes it harder for other people to find potentially life saving information. Keep this in mind before you hit the publish button.

