How to Monetize Your Podcast

A simple guide for new and growing podcasters, from your first affiliate link to your first brand deal.

Creator Guide

onbento.com

BEFORE YOU START

First, the Thing Nobody Tells You

You don't need a million downloads to make money from your podcast. You need a clear audience, a few good offers, and the confidence to ask. This guide walks you through how to do that, in the order that actually works.

Most podcast money advice is written for shows with 50,000+ downloads an episode. That's not most shows. The median podcast gets a few hundred downloads per episode, and plenty of those shows earn real money.

Here's why: brands don't pay for *size*. They pay for *fit* and *trust*. A 400-listener show about backyard beekeeping is more valuable to a beehive supply company than a 40,000-listener comedy show. Your job isn't to get huge. It's to know exactly who listens and why they trust you.

WRITE THIS DOWN FIRST

"My podcast is for ______ who want ______."

If you can't fill that in, do that first. Everything below depends on it.

The Four Ways Podcasts Make Money

There are dozens of "monetization strategies" floating around. They all fall into four buckets. Start at the top and work down.

1 Affiliate Links `Even at 50 listeners!`

You recommend a product, include a tracked link, and earn a cut when someone buys. No approval needed, no pitching, no minimum audience.

Why it matters more than the money: Affiliate results are your first *proof*. "My listeners bought 30 units of X last quarter" is the single most persuasive line you can put in a sponsorship pitch later. You're building your case while you earn.

How to do it well:

- Only recommend things you actually use. Listeners can hear the difference.
- Pick 2–3 products, not 20. Repeat them. Familiarity converts.
- Say the link out loud *and* put it in show notes. Most podcast clicks happen hours later, on a phone.
- Track it. A simple spreadsheet: product, episode, clicks, sales. This becomes your pitch deck.

2 Listener Support

Patreon, Buy Me a Coffee, Apple Podcasts Subscriptions, Supercast. Listeners pay you directly.

The insight: This converts at roughly 1–3% of your active listeners, so don't expect to live on it. But a small paid tier does two things: it tells you who your superfans are, and it gives you a group you can survey, quote, and reference when pitching brands ("My paying members told me their biggest struggle is...").

Keep it simple: One tier, one price ($5 is the sweet spot), one clear perk. Bonus episodes or ad-free versions work. Don't promise a Discord you won't maintain.

3 Brand Sponsorships

The earlier you start testing, the better you can refine your messaging

A brand pays you to talk about them on your show. This is where the real money is for most independent podcasters, and it's where most people get stuck. We'll spend the rest of this guide here.

4 Your Own Products

The long game

Courses, consulting, a book, merch, a paid community. Highest margin, but it only works once you've earned trust, so it comes last. Your podcast is the marketing; the product is the business.

SPONSORSHIPS

How the Money Actually Works

The number everyone quotes: CPM. It means cost per thousand downloads. Industry rates are roughly:

- $18–25 CPM for a 30-second pre-roll
- $25–50 CPM for a 60-second host-read mid-roll

So a show with 2,000 downloads per episode might charge $50–100 per mid-roll. Multiply across a four-episode package and you're at $200–400. Real, but small.

The number that matters more: what the brand actually gets.

Here's the thing CPM math misses. A listener who hears you every week for a year has a relationship with you. When you say "I've used this for six months, here's what changed," it lands differently than any pre-roll ever will. Smart brands know this. They'll pay above CPM rates for shows where the host is a real authority with an engaged niche, and they'll use *conversions*, not downloads, to decide if it worked.

This is your opening. You're not selling impressions. You're selling a recommendation from someone your listeners trust.

What to Actually Charge (A Starting Framework)

Downloads per Episode	Pre-Roll (30s)	Host-Read Mid-Roll (60s)	4-Episode Package
Under 500	$25–50	$50–100	$200–400
500–2,000	$50–100	$100–200	$400–800
2,000–5,000	$100–200	$200–400	$800–1,600
5,000+	Use CPM math	Use CPM math	Negotiate

These are floors, not ceilings. If you have a tight niche, a professional audience (B2B, finance, health, tech), or proven affiliate conversions, charge more. And always sell packages, not single spots. One ad rarely converts; four in a row do.

Two things to always include in the deal:

1. A **usage clause** — can the brand reuse your audio clip in their own ads? If yes, that's extra. Charge for it.
2. A **link and code** — so both of you can see results. Results are how you get renewed.

PITCHING

How to Pitch Brands (Without Feeling Weird About It)

Most podcasters wait for brands to find them. That works once you're big. Until then, you go to them. And pitching is not begging — you're offering a brand access to an audience they can't reach any other way.

We teach pitching as a four-step loop. It's the same method thousands of creators use inside Bento, and it works for podcasts exactly the same way.

1 Curate — Pick the Right Brands

Don't pitch everyone. Pitch brands that already *should* be on your show.

- What do your listeners already buy? (Ask them. Run a poll. Read your comments.)
- What have you mentioned on air that you'd recommend anyway?
- Which brands sponsor shows *adjacent* to yours? They've already decided podcasts work. You're just a better fit.
- Smaller and mid-size brands say yes faster than household names. A DTC brand with 20 employees has a founder or marketing lead who reads their own inbox.

Build a list of 20, then multiply it. Drop that list into an AI tool and ask it for five more brands like each one — same category, same customer, similar size. You now have a list of 100 without doing 100 searches.

2 Decode — Figure Out What the Brand Actually Wants

Before you write a word, spend five minutes on the brand:

- Are they launching something? (New product = they have budget *right now*.)
- Who's in their ads? That's who they think their customer is. Does that match your listener?
- Are they already sponsoring podcasts? If yes, they have a process and a budget line. If no, you're pitching a first-timer and need to make it easy.
- Find the right *person*. Look for "Partnerships," "Influencer Marketing," "Brand," or "Growth" in the title. Founders at small companies.

This is the step almost everyone skips, and it's the one that makes your pitch feel like it was written for them instead of pasted.

3 Tailor — Write a Pitch That's About Them, Not You

The pitch is short. Five sentences. Here's the shape:

1. **One line on why them.** Reference something specific — a product, a campaign, a sponsor they already work with.
2. **One line on who you are.** Show name, topic, who listens. One sentence.
3. **One line of proof.** A number that shows fit or results: "Listeners bought 40 units through my affiliate link last quarter," or "62% of my audience are first-time homebuyers."
4. **The offer.** Be concrete: "A four-episode host-read package for $600, with a tracked code so we can both see results."
5. **An easy next step.** "Want me to send you a few ad concepts I have?" or "Would you be interested in learning more?"

What not to do:

- Don't lead with your download count unless it's impressive. Lead with fit.
- Don't send a media kit as the first email. Earn the reply, then send it.
- Don't write three paragraphs. Nobody reads three paragraphs from a stranger.

Bento AI helps you write a personalized pitch for your show!

4 Land — Follow Up, Close, Deliver, Renew

- **Follow up twice.** Most yeses come on the second or third touch. Wait 4–5 days, and keep it to two lines.
- **When they reply with a question, they're interested.** Answer it and restate the offer.
- **When they say "no budget right now,"** ask when the next planning cycle is, and reach back out then. That's a future yes.
- **Over-deliver on the first campaign.** Send them the audio clip, a screenshot of the show notes, and the results after 30 days. Brands renew with people who make their lives easy.

Bento follows up for you automatically!