

Encompass Health Uses Private Podcasting to Keep Employees Engaged During COVID-19

It is the year 2020. Employers are navigating through an unprecedented time—a time where remote working is the norm, and employees are frightened for not only their health but their jobs. Now more than ever, employees are expecting to receive communication on the status of their company. And they need to hear it from their top leaders—in a transparent, authentic way.

Heather Hodges, VP of Professional Development at Encompass Health, was needing a quick and secure way to get important updates and learnings to their global workforce.

Encompass Health specializes in inpatient rehabilitation, and home health and hospice services. Over 80% of Encompass Health is a mobile workforce—employees who are constantly on the road, traveling from patient to patient. When the COVID pandemic hit, podcasting quickly became the perfect solution to get important COVID-19 updates out to their employees.

“[Encompass Health] is an email company. We also create videos and webinars so those are other avenues for communication. And while webinars can be quick and instant, videos are high production. They take a bit longer to create, produce, curate and make sure they are vetted properly before they go out. That’s one of the reasons the podcast medium is so great—because it’s so easy to record, produce and edit to drop and go out.”

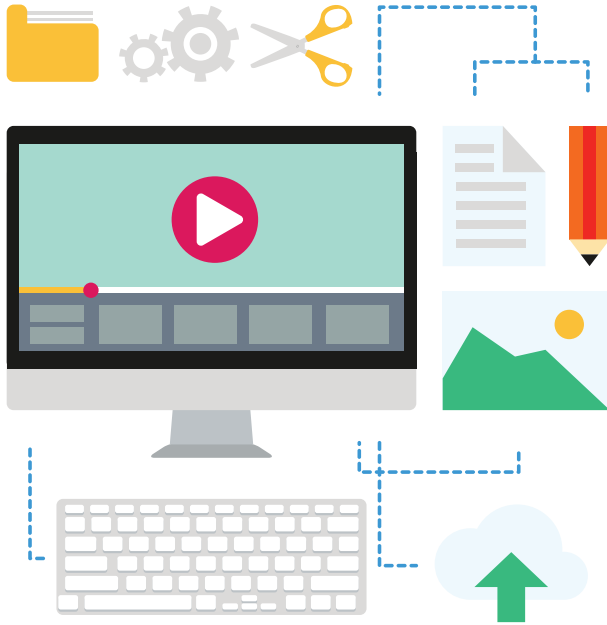
Encompass Health is one of many companies who is using private podcasting to disseminate information to their dispersed employees due to its security, reach, engagement, analytics, convenience and more.



“Our first [communication] roadblock was security. [Security] was the [original reason for] ‘No’ from our leadership to podcasts. We have proprietary information that we didn’t want to share with the world—podcasting is to the world. With uStudio, [we] started exploring the secure and encrypted aspect of having only our employees on the podcast. When we found that, it eliminated that roadblock.”

Encompass Health’s COVID shows include updates such as where to find personal protective equipment (PPE), information on branches with extra masks, and how Encompass employees can be safe when going into COVID-positive patients’ homes. But their use cases for podcasting doesn’t just stop there. Although detailed clinical information might not be as pertinent to Encompass’ administrative office workers, these roles still love to hear updates on professional development, health and wellness and other news from executive leadership. These topics include how to eat healthy when you’re in the car most of the day, how to reduce stress during COVID-19 and more.





"We were able to instantly start recording, editing and publishing [episodes] even within the same day if we needed to," Heather said. "It's so valuable to have that clear consistent message internally. Everyone is getting the straight, clear information [from the] inside-out."

With so many messages surrounding today's health pandemic externally, it is extremely valuable to have concise messaging internally. Through a podcast, Encompass' executive-level leaders could directly dispel any COVID-related rumors to their employees and explain their strategies for moving forward. And for those updates that might be sensitive or hard-hitting, employees can hear not only the words but the tone of their leaders, which is important when communicating change during a crisis.

"Our COVID podcast just started to organically grow to the point where now we are going to be doing COVID-19 podcasts at least once a week in addition to our leadership development, clinical podcasts and our sales podcasts."

"When you can hear directly from your CEO, or your president, or your top clinical person from the company, 'This is what's going on, this is where we are getting PPE, these are our strategies, this is where we are going forward'... it [is] priceless to be able to have those voices give that information through podcasting."

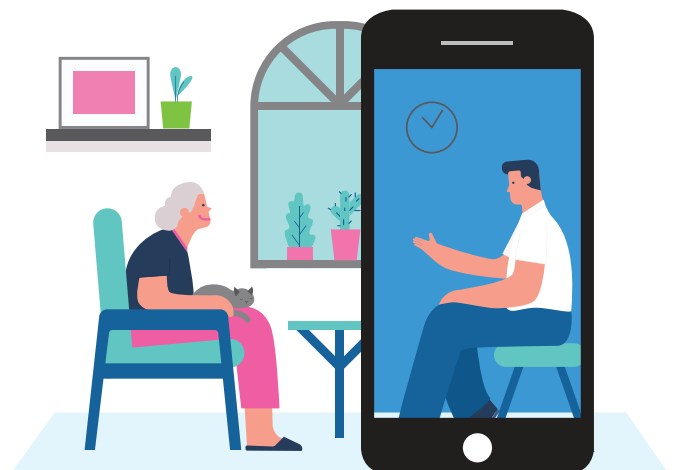
Clinicians at Encompass have on average a 18 minute drive time between patients, so Heather strategically structures her podcast episodes targeting these roles to be 15-20 minutes in length.

Podcasting isn't just a medium to share teachings or important information. It can be used to inspire, motivate and connect as well as Encompass learned in their "Facetime for Nana" private podcast episode.

One of Encompass' clinicians in the Northeast was heartbroken when, due to COVID, nursing homes were shutting down and not allowing visitors inside. This compelled the employee to start a fundraiser to raise money for iPads so nursing home residents could FaceTime with their loved ones during the pandemic. Although her original goal was \$600, within days she managed to raise enough to buy more than 20 iPads for nursing homes in her area. Encompass' "Facetime for Nana" episode highlighted this situation for the rest of their workforce to hear.

"It brought tears to my eyes when I heard about it - it's just so compelling. And it inspired so many other people to do good as well," Heather said in her podcast interview. "It was just fascinating to see how that one act of kindness, that one story, sparked so many other stories."

When it comes to delivering difficult information, Heather claims that you need to focus on authenticity. Any storytelling that is involved within your podcasts need to be true. This can help to improve employee trust and engagement within your company.



One of the tactics that has been super helpful for Encompass' podcast program is performing a series of internal interviews with employees and vice presidents all over the country. Heather claims it has been wonderful to hear how employees are tackling difficult challenges, helping their community and more.

"You can hear from your leaders, you can hear from each other and be supported by each other through podcasting."



As a result of Heather's podcasting strategy, Encompass has increased their podcast release cadence and therefore given their employees more opportunities to consume important material.

"The more often you release [episodes], the more likely [employees] are to listen. Otherwise, they get out of the habit [of listening] if you only drop one podcast a week. [Employees] tend to forget and then have to get caught up and maybe by then it's old information. That's something that we have learned as we are now releasing 3 podcast [episodes] a week."

"We just want information right now. And [when you get] clear, concise, compelling information that you can trust, then you're going to listen to that, especially from your leadership."



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