



## Illumina Created a Podcast to Grow the Genomics Market

*This transcript was lightly edited for clarity.*

Chris: My guest on this episode is Paul Bromann. He is a Scientific Liaison at Illumina and just as importantly for this episode, he is the host of the Illumina Genomics Podcast. Paul, welcome to Life Science Marketing Radio.

Paul: Hi, Chris, thanks. Nice to be here.

Chris: It's fun to talk to another podcaster. To get us started, what I want to talk about today, just for the audience is your journey into podcasting at a Life Science Company, which is ... I don't know if it's unique, but I haven't found any others like yours. Tell us about your podcast and its format, to give people an idea of what you're doing.

Paul: Sure. We're basically, we're doing about 15-minute interviews with what we call key opinion leaders. These are scientific experts out there who are using our technology and many of them are using it in kind of interesting, innovative, creative ways. We basically wanted to develop a channel, so that we could tell those stories to reach out to a different audience than we typically market to. Basically, what I do is I just visit with scientists in the field and we have a conversation about their research, what they're interested in, and in general how they use our technology. I'm not featuring particular products or particular ... We don't even mention the name Illumina in our podcast. I'm just trying to give them a platform to tell their story about how they use our technology. Once we do that, I say we, but it's actually just

me. I come back and I edit that content and we publish it through all of the places that people get their podcasts. Through iTunes, through Google Play, you name it.

Chris: Yeah and what were ... I mean, you mentioned a little bit kind of what the point was is to get people to tell those stories, but do you have kind of a bigger set of goals for what this could accomplish for Illumina?

Paul: For sure, so we have an existing customer base right now that is typically what we would call a high throughput user. These are people who are running really large-scale, genome centers around the world. They're running a lot of sequences through and they're also multi-million-dollar accounts, more or less. What we'd like to do is to try to branch out now to people who are not necessarily using genomics currently, but whose science would really lend itself well to genomics approaches. We're trying to take someone who is basically naïve to genomics, of the science behind it and the technology, and kind of open the door to them, so that they can see what the possibilities are for them to leverage genomics in their research. That's really the idea that we're trying to take a kind of complex story and a kind of complex technology and really boil it down to fundamental elements that sell biologists or an evolutionary biologist might be able to comprehend to see how that approach might fit into their scientific research. We're basically trying to get another level of scientists out there to discover the power of the technology and try to enable them to understand how it fits into their labs.

Chris: Yeah, I love that. When I was a Marcom Director for Mass Spec at Thermo, I had sort of the same challenge and I wasn't a podcaster at that time, but some high-level mass spec is pretty complicated, too.

Paul: Right.

Chris: As a marketer and in my job now, I'm always trying to encourage people because a lot of content you see is directed at people who already know who you are, they know what this stuff is, but it's rarely directed at people who could be using your technology but aren't. I think maybe podcasting is an ideal casual way to kind of soften those people up because otherwise, you're counting on someone in their network doing some kind of research related to them. Somebody has to be the first person to reach out and say, oh, you know what? We could do this a different way.

Paul: For sure. Yeah, I totally agree. It is pretty informal and it gives us a lot of advantages I think and one is that, as you said, our audience can be a bit naïve when it comes to genomics and in genomics in particular, like a lot of the sciences out there, there's a lot of jargon, there's a lot of language that's really only known to practitioners, so the podcast kind of gives us a way to explain that in a non-threatening way and just make the connection. We do a lot of marketing, like you said, to people who have already drunk the Kool-Aid, let's say, and we kind of talk to them a certain way, but other scientists might want to know that that's fine, but how does this impact me? What does it mean for me? That's one of the things we try to do.

The other thing I think that it gives us is an opportunity to educate, so becoming a scientist obviously is a multi-year journey. You go through graduate school and a post-doctoral fellowship and assisted professorship, so with the podcast we can target a kind of a younger audience, let's say a graduate student or a post-doc who's doing their work at the bench. Because it's in audio format, you don't need someone's eyeballs constantly focused on what you're talking about. Between incubations or taking the subway or doing whatever, we can kind of use that opportunity to sort of get a message out to those folks. That's kind of the idea behind it.

Chris: Yeah, that's a completely, I mean, I'm always pushing that idea that, and I think it helps people realize that you don't necessarily need images, particularly when you're telling stories about what people are doing and what their goals are. You don't need pictures of instruments or pictures of data to communicate the idea that they're making progress on a problem and what the problem is. I mean, we all have those conversations in a cafeteria without any visual aids, ...

Paul: Right.

Chris: ... so perfectly legitimate to do it with just audio and it happens, I like to say this all happens when their mind is open to digesting those ideas. They're not going to be interrupted if they're riding a train to work or they're just driving or they're out for a jog or they're even working at the bench, they can still process that information better than and with less chance of being interrupted if they were sitting down watching a video.

Paul: Our podcasts are about 15 minutes in length and that's about the average time that it takes most people around here to get to work. I get a lot of

feedback that people sort of listen to us on the way to work or on the way home. If I can say one more thing, really for me, kind of the big thing about the podcast, why I think it's really important, is that we get some credibility by featuring the people who are actually doing the innovative work in the field, so it's one thing for us as marketers to develop content, develop a story, and push that out, but it has a lot more impact and it's much more compelling if that story's coming directly from one of the key opinion leaders in the field. That's what I really like about it.

Chris: Yeah, absolutely. I had a previous mentor who was always saying, "Let's shine the light on the customers and just bask in the reflection."

Paul: That's a great quote, yeah. I think I'll use that.

Chris: Yeah, so how did you personally get interested in this idea of podcasting?

Paul: That's an interesting story. I'm part of a scientific affairs team and we also do a lot of video pieces. Some of them can be only five minutes long and we also do a very large documentary series, but one of the series that we did was called Science Mondays where it featured me and other members of the team talking about some of the leading articles that were recently published at the time. It was the same idea as the podcast in that you want to tell a story about how the technology is being used. The difficulty is that that content went out over YouTube and, as you know, YouTube has just tons of content and it's really difficult to attract the right set of eyeballs to the right set of content. There's just so much noise out there.

We didn't get a lot of traction with that series and I think also part of the reason is that, let's be honest, nobody really wants to hear Paul Bromann discuss the latest research that's been published in Nature. No one cares, right? Who's going to listen to it? We were brainstorming on how we could resuscitate that video series and we just decided that there was no way, it just wasn't going to happen. We did a little further research and we thought, hey, we don't have a podcast at Illumina and there's actually not that many podcasts on genomics, so why don't we give this a shot because there wouldn't be that much competition for ears out there. That's how we got started is really an effort to replace a video series that just was not getting much traction.

Chris: What kind of experience did you have creating anything like a podcast, I mean, aside from the video? Was it hard for you to get started?

Paul: Yeah. I don't think it was. It wasn't really that challenging, but again, I'm fortunate enough to be working in a fairly large institution where we have an information technology team that could really help me on the back end, so there's some technical challenges getting it set up. You need to have a web page and the content needs to be hosted somewhere. You need to have a file that users will interface with. Some of that was challenging at the beginning, but really not that overwhelming and it didn't take that long. Once that was set up and out of the way, it's really not that big of a challenge to get it going.

Chris: In many companies for many kinds of novel initiatives like this the technical problem isn't the challenge, it's convincing your manager that this is worth doing. How did you do that?

Paul: What's the return on investment, that's always the ...?

Chris: Yeah.

Paul: Yeah. One of the nice things about a podcast is essentially it's almost free. The cost of doing it and publishing the content is, it's really very little. It does almost cost any money at all. Beyond that there are a lot of market studies out there showing the impact of podcasting across a number of different markets. We accessed a little bit of that data out there showing that, you know, podcasts, podcasting's really growing. The audience space is really growing. The audience that you reach with the podcast tends to be younger, tends to be more educated, tends to be more affluent, and that kind of ticks all the boxes in terms of who we'd like to market to. Basically, a lot of the market data that supported experimenting with the use of podcasting, as well as the relatively inexpensive, you know, the amount of resources to get started really weren't very much and I'm also blessed with managers who encourage creative thinking and thinking out of the box, so all those three things came together and I got the green light to go ahead.

Chris: Yeah, good for you. I'll mention one other thing and that is the people who listen to podcasts. If there's someone who's willing to subscribe to a genomics podcast, they're really into that topic.

Paul: That's for sure. That's definitely true. In our YouTube series, Science on Monday, we could track the analytics of that and basically people are clicking

on the video and after a couple seconds, they're basically somewhere else already, whereas people are listening to our podcast, they tend to listen to all of the content and they tend to come back and repeat. We kind of are experience exponential growth in the listeners for the podcast. I think one of the reasons is people will get into one and they'll kind of explore more content that they might not have realized was of interest to them, so we don't get that same kind of traction when we feature a video on YouTube.

Chris: Yeah and it builds over time and, then again, part of the magic is most people I assume are subscribed on their phone, which is always with them.

Paul: Right.

Chris: I mean, you could subscribe to a YouTube channel, but it's not quite the same as having a subscription to a podcast on your phone where you click on an icon, essentially the cover art, and every episode every made is there.

Paul: Right.

Chris: As you get new audience or subscribers, they have more and more content to listen to. They can go back through the whole library and it gets better and better.

Paul: Yes, it's really amaze ... I agree. It's really amazing to look at some of the analytics. We have, the first episode that we put out a little over six months ago, we still get really good traction with that. We get a lot of people downloading that episode even today and you also get a push notification when you subscribe to a podcast, so that's kind of how I know that the content's been published. I'll get a push notification on my phone. It's really a very easy way to get the content and the other thing is obviously, you can listen to the content when you have a chance and we do know that for the majority of our audience, almost 90% of them are downloading content from either their iPhone or their Android phone.

Chris: Nice. Let's talk about the work to create it. I'm interested in finding out how much effort it takes on your part, it sounds like, because of your job as a scientific liaison, you're actually going out and talking to these people face to face. Is that right?

Paul: That's right. Yeah. I actually visit different sites around the world to engage face to face with these folks.

Chris: You would be doing that in your job anyway I presume.

Paul: Absolutely. Yeah. It's kind of a way for me to ... Like, I kind of repurpose some of the discussion that I'm running. It kind of goes back to before I was here I was a Medical Science Liaison at a pharmaceutical company and their part of the job is to build these relationships with healthcare providers who are using your product. I kind of see it in a little bit the same way, even though it's not quite the same amount of customer interaction as I did back then, but just trying to build these relationships, going out in the field, talking to folks, trying to help them to network with other people that they might not know, as well as to help them network with people within Illumina who might be interested in some of the content that they're doing. It really fits nicely in my role already, so it's kind of a nice cherry on the cake for me.

Chris: Yeah, it's nice. First of all, because you are already traveling, now the podcast is, it's a return on something you were already doing in a sense. It's repurposing your job, not just your content, but conversations you might have anyway. I'm sure there's a little extra effort on it, but it's not like Illumina said we're going to create a podcast and we're going to send you all over the world just to do that. You're already traveling.

Paul: That's right and so now when I go to a conference wherever it is, I'll reach out in advance to our sales force in the field or to our regional marketing folks and I'll ask, you know, do you have people who are doing really interesting things that you think might be interested in doing a podcast? Before I go to a conference, before I travel anywhere, I already have a list of people who are interested in talking with me, whereas before I would just go to a conference and network there. Now I kind of have a double purpose for going and I think it's a really good return on the investment because not only do we attend the conference, which we would have done anyway, but now we get marketing content that we can even repurpose in multiple ways when we get back here. I think it's a really nice fit with the role.

Chris: Right and you mentioned networking, so I will say in my personal experience with this podcast, it has been the most phenomenal networking tool you can imagine because most people are willing to speak. That's how I met you.

Paul: Right.

Chris: It's how I meet most of my guests and then I'm able to connect them. I just connected several people this week based on people I had met through the podcast. For Illumina, I'm imaging what does that do for them? Well, it becomes a sort of a, you tell me, a source of loyalty. Like, okay, Paul goes out, he knows this guy. He knows that woman working in a lab. He says, "You two should talk to each other because you're doing similar things or one of you can help the other," and that, again, reflects back on you and Illumina. Right?

Paul: Absolutely and, you know, we can do that in a multitude of ways. In addition to these podcasts, we also run expert panels where we, you know, we'll bring 30 of the top scientists in any particular field, we'll bring them together in a room just to kind of brainstorm and talk about what they're doing and how Illumina might help in those efforts. A lot of those people have attended the expert panels. They've come through our podcasting, so I'll meet someone in the field and record their story. Once I turn the microphone off, we continue a discussion about who's doing what where and that really helps. In addition, we can funnel a lot of what we've learned because it's really surprising how open scientists are in this format. What I found out is the minute you turn a camera onto someone, they sort of freeze up. They don't want to talk about anything, but a microphone is pretty inconspicuous, so people are really free to open up and talk really in great detail about what they do. Some of that we funneled back into our technology development group and we've said, you know, here's a person who's doing something interesting, you might want to reach out to them and see if we might be able to help out or if there's something here where we might like to collaborate. The opportunities for networking, they're really limitless.

Chris: Yeah, so you sort of answered my next question in both your last two answers about the difficulty of getting people to speak. First of all, not using a camera has some magical effect.

Paul: Yeah. It really does.

Chris: People don't feel like it has to be perfect or rehearsed ...

Paul: Exactly.

Chris: ... whereas that's their expectation of a video that it looks like a Hollywood movie and that just ain't going to happen.

Paul: No.



Chris: Then, you have this network of sales people and field marketing people that are referring you, but is it difficult? Do you ever run across the challenge of someone just says I'm not sure if my company or my institution will let me talk essentially on what is a corporate marketing platform?

Paul: Yeah, that's an interesting question and the short answer is I've never a single time had that. What I have run into is, for example, I'll want to do a ... I have a couple of episodes coming up at institutions that are very sensitive about their brand and so they're very, very reluctant to participate in things like this. Some of these institutions have, you know, our marketing and scientific affairs teams have reached out in the past to try to do a video, a voice of customer series. These institutions have said no, we don't want to have a video camera on our campus. We don't want to have our people engaged in that kind of activity.

Interestingly enough, when you turn that around and say like it's just going to be me. I'm going to come in. I don't have a film or audio crew. It's just me and a microphone. I'm going to talk about what your investigator talks about. I'm not really going to talk about Illumina. In every case that we've done that, those institutions have kind of turned around and said yeah, you're welcome to come in and spend an hour with this person and welcome to include that content on your podcast. It's really broken a lot of barriers in a way that a video series just wasn't going to do for us.

Chris: That's huge and I can say I had the same experience with the JGI. In fact, when Tyler Kay and I had this project called Tools of Science and we asked them about coming in to get a look at not only the Illumina equipment that of course they're using and the PacBio equipment and so on, and they said, "No, we're not, as a government institution, we can't talk about those products."

Paul: Right.

Chris: Then, we flipped it around and said I just want to talk about how your scientists are using it. Oh, yeah, come on in. And oh, and you've got to talk to this person and that person.

Paul: It's really interesting ...

Chris: ...totally changed it.

Paul: ... and it's super fascinating that, you know, one of the first things I tell folks when I sit down and talk with them is that we specifically don't want to mention the name Illumina and we don't want to mention any of the products that we carry. I'll find myself having to edit that out because they really want to talk about that. They really believe in the technology and they believe in the brand. They want to talk about it, so occasionally that slips by, but yeah, it's very interesting. It's a complete different way to talk. Once you give these scientists a platform to talk about what they're interested in as opposed to what our marketing organization is interested in, they really love it.

Chris: Yeah. Then, my final question really, I think it's my last one, we'll see, is how do scientists respond to this? What kind of feedback are you getting?

Paul: Yeah, it's really amazing. They really love it, which was a little bit unexpected because we're not experts at doing this, so we didn't know how it was going to turn out, but scientists actually love it. They use it in their own institutional web pages, they use the podcast episodes as their own individual PR. Some of the institutions will use it in their own PR. They really like the content and just recently, we've had scientists from around the world now starting to contact us and ask us, hey, I'm doing interesting work. Could you do a podcast episode on me and what I'm doing? It's definitely something we've never had happen with the video series, so that's a really exciting development for us.

Chris: That is super cool. That's a nice problem to have and yeah, it just that whole idea of using it for PR is something, I mean, you're creating content, oh, and loyalty again for Illumina. Someone's thinking you're helping them, as an academic or other scientist, build their brand.

Paul: Exactly.

Chris: It works both ways.

Paul: Networking, right? It's all about what I can do for you, right? Networking is not about what you can do for me.

Chris: Yeah.

Paul: Yeah, so that's really also part of it and we're a large organization and it's also an opportunity to show these folks that we're listening to what they have to say, we're interested in it, and it's a positive experience on both sides.

Chris: Yeah, I love it, and just to highlight something you mentioned a little while ago about talking to scientists and what they're doing. Then, sending that to your development team, like hey you should talk to these people because you might get some ideas. There's product development, there's networking, there's loyalty, there's so much value to this beyond, and as you say, without even mentioning Illumina in the content.

Paul: That's right and we're in a fortunate position that we are leaders of our market, so when we highlight the value of genomics, obviously a lot of that's going to funnel back into us, but yeah, definitely, we just believe in the science and we just want to tell those stories and make sure that other people know how to leverage that in whatever they do.

Chris: Yeah. This has been fantastic. Paul Bromann, my cheeks hurt as they often do from smiling, just absorbing all the great information here. I just think there's been a barrier to people thinking about it, but I've seen a wave in the last six to eight months about companies going they get it. In fact, I went to the Tri Con, the Molecular Medicine Conference, this week...

Paul: Oh, right.

Chris: ... in San Francisco and talked to a couple folks there. It's surprising how many people say, oh, I've been thinking about that. I just brought that up on my team this week. You can see it's starting to happen that people go, oh, we might be able to use this, so ...

Paul: Yeah, it's great.

Chris: ... your inspiration, I think, is going to push a few people over the edge.

Paul: Wow, you're too kind, but I hope it does catch on because actually from the point of view of someone who does it, it's also just a blast. It's a lot of fun.

Chris: Yeah, that's it. That's it. It is the most fun thing I ... Well, it's the second most fun thing I've done for work. I had the privilege of teaching sailing for several years, so it's hard to top that, ...

Paul: Oh yeah, we can't beat that.

Chris: ... but sitting at a desk, this is as good as it gets.

Paul: This is as good as it will get, yeah.

Chris: All right. Paul, thanks very much for taking the time to talk to me.

Paul: Thanks, Chris. It was really a pleasure to talk with you. Thanks a lot.

Chris: You bet.

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