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Welcome to media masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined down the line from central London by Georgie Holt, UK managing director of Acast, one of the world's biggest podcast companies. Georgie is responsible for growing both content and commercial opportunities, building on its 100% year-on-year revenue growth. Acast's content catalogue is one of the world's most extensive, with more than 300 million listens each month on platforms from Apple Podcasts and Google to Spotify. Georgie joined Acast after a 20 year career spanning some of the world's most prominent news and magazine brands. Recently, she was the publisher and executive director of two of the UKs largest, Cosmopolitan and Stylist. Georgie, thank you for joining me.

Thank you so much. I listened to that and I think are you talking about me? Is that me?

Yeah, I felt like a total loser reading it, frankly. And also, you're like one of the biggest names in podcasting, I'm flattered that you bothered to appear on this humble contribution. Do you have any tips for me?

I love your show. It's absolutely brilliant, but I mean, just keep doing what you're doing. It's a great place to experiment as well with new formats, bonus episodes, try new ideas, test and adapt. That's why I love podcasting. It's just such an opportunity for people to try new things and try to reach new audiences and continue to grow them. But your show's great. I don't think you need to change much.

Thank you. Well, to be honest, I'm not interested in new ideas or any form of innovations. I'm actually quite lazy. So I won't take that advice, respectfully. Tell us, I mean, the podcast business has exploded, especially in lockdown. It seems like every celebrity is launching a one-to-one chat with their celebrity friends. You know, do you see a bright future for podcasting? I mean, I was worried that podcasting would decrease the listenership 'cause I actually listened to a lot of my podcasts on my commute and three days a week I worked from home. I'm working from home right now. Do you think podcasting listenership is going to go up or down? Where do you see the future going?

Absolutely continue to grow. I think the pandemic proved people's love for podcasts is kind of unconditional and not attached to a particular sort of set of events or time of day. And we just saw that so many celebrities, big names were suddenly having a lot of time on their hands and podcasting because it adapted so quickly to the limitations that lockdown created, so remote recording quickly became sort of the absolute constant through which we were seeing podcasts created. It enabled an amazing creative playground for lots of really established voices on other platforms to try podcasting for the first time, and to great success. And we're just seeing exponential growth in listens across the Acast network. I think we were up 56% year on year and that trend continues into 2021. So we see an absolutely stellar future ahead for podcasts and actually the pandemic brought more people to the medium and gave people an opportunity to connect, to have a sense of intimacy with the host and feel part of a community and something bigger, which I think we all felt such a sense of loss around during that pandemic period, that opportunity to feel part of a community, to feel part of a conversation. I think it made people really realise the power of podcasting and everything they offered to both the creator, the listener, and probably the advertiser too.

For those of our listeners that aren't familiar with what Acast does behind the scenes, could you paint a picture of what a typical client or partner journey would be? What does Acast do — if I could put it as directly as that?

We are the global power source for independent podcasts and we day-to-day host, distribute and monetize podcasts across the Acast networks. So that's around 30,000 podcasts in total reaching upwards of 300 million listens a month. And we ensure that our creators can access the widest audiences and our advertisers can access the widest possible marketplace. So we really see our purpose as ensuring that the creator economy can continue to flourish and grow. And we remove all barriers to entry for podcasters to begin, to start to experiment in the space, find and grow new audiences. And we ensure that those creators can then monetise those audiences with advertising. So really it fundamentally is about giving everybody the access that they deserve and ensuring that that creator economy continues to flourish and grow.

I mean, Acast's helping thousands of podcasters to grow their audience. I mean, normally I would ask this with an academic detachment, but obviously with a selfish interest for me too, how would you go about doing that?

There's lots of ways in which we help grow shows. So we have an incredible content team who work with our podcasts day-to-day providing them with promotional opportunities within the podcasting ecosystem, working with partners like Apple and Spotify, to ensure that those shows are being marketed effectively across those platforms. We can also help with content development to ensure that that show and that format is absolutely right for the audience they intend to reach. We help share trends and ideas, which we see will be successful or are being successful in the kind of category that they are currently producing their work in. So there's lots of tools that we use to ensure podcasts are a success. And it's a really enjoyable process because it is quite a nascent format and to see people explore it or come to it for the

time and see them find that audience and create a success and actually then go on and create a brand. We're seeing so many podcasts now become brands in their own rights with extensions around live tours, merch, books. It's really starting to become the sort of epicentre of creators' universes in terms of the podcast being the brand that enables them to do all of the other exciting things we see them do.

I mean, you've identified that podcasts are perfect for comedy. You search for likable people to engage in comedic conversations. I mean, I'm a huge fan of 'My Dad Wrote A Porno.' As you were saying about expanding into merchant touring and so on, I've seen their HBO special and no spoilers, I'm on season five. But they do seem to be a kind of podcast trailblazer.

Absolutely. They continue to be, their community of listeners is so dedicated and they're doing such experimental and interesting things in the world of podcasting. And absolutely, I think, set the agenda and started to show other creators what was possible. And you're right, comedy is a brilliant format that translates so well to podcasting. I think it's that intimate relationship and that ability to use what comedy is fundamentally about is the use of words in a very clever way or way that is surprising and exciting and allows the listener to really sort of play with a theater of the mind and doesn't need to sort of have the visual element. They can go on their own journey with that comedian or start to feel like part of their family. As we see with one of our absolute giants 'Shagged Married Annoyed,' hosted by Chris and Rosie. Their show is just huge. And we love working with them and their team. And that podcast has become a brand, they're about to go on tour again this autumn, they have the book, they essentially feel like an extended member of most people's families. And I think they found particular success during lockdown because of that, you felt that you were sort of entering into their kitchen every single week and hearing the sort of standard trials and tribulations of most families during that time. And it was told in such an entertaining way and made people feel like they weren't alone and just a great show. And I think comedy has found such success in podcasting and continues to do so.

In a sense are you a bit like a record company where you're searching for new artists or how do you know what's going to be a success and what's not? There was that guy who turned down the Beatles, wasn't there at Decca Records? Do you think, well, that's a surefire winner or do you try and incubate podcasts and see whether they take off, what's the actual process? Is it like a venture capital model where you back 10 podcasts and five will succeed, but you just don't know which five it is?

It's a very curated process. So we have a team within our content division, which are always looking to sign and work with new talent. And then also a team that ensures our more established podcasters continue to grow and evolve their shows. And what we're always thinking about is podcasters for the future and audiences of the future as well, because as any good company should be doing, it's about thinking who's going to be listening in 12 months, 24 months, the next decade, which audiences do we want to try and inspire about the world of podcasts and bring them to this brilliant medium, to discover voices that we know that they're going to love. So we will have, and we do have a list of sort of priority audiences that we want to engage with

podcasts. And we will seek to find creators who would be interesting to those audiences. So we think about diversity inclusion and want to make sure that the podcasts we are sort of backing and working with our catering, not just for the existing audiences, but for the new audiences who will find podcasts next week, next year, or in ten years to come. So that's really exciting to sort of think about where those audiences are right now, how we can engage with them and who are the talents that are really making a name for themselves, perhaps on another platform that we might want to talk to them about bringing to the world of podcasts. So it's brilliant. And I am pretty much inundated most days with great ideas and great names for people who probably have found an audience on social media and are looking to kind of expand their universe and network into podcasts. So it's a really exciting time and I love to do it. I don't want to be a medium and none of us want to be a medium that is retrospectively fixing, as so many have had to do, issues around diversity and inclusion. We want to make sure that we're building the podcast ecosystem of the future, *now*. So it makes perfect sense that we sort of identify those audiences of the future too.

Now I remember as a kid, I used to get bored all the time because there wasn't a lot to do. And I remember when Channel 4 got launched and I thought, wow, there's going to be more choice. Now I have the opposite. I haven't been bored in years because if anything, I've got sort of 20 seasons on Netflix of stuff to watch and podcasting or audio books, I've got newspapers, there's always stuff to do, movies to watch, and then there's the housework. Do you think podcasting sort of has become part of the content ecosphere now? Because I mean, it is one piece in the jigsaw, because your competitors aren't just other podcasts now, it's Netflix, it's iPlayer, it's the Wall Street Journal. It's all of those kinds of things.

Absolutely. We're definitely part of the mainstream now in terms of consumption. And what I love about podcasts is people find the time, it's about finding the time to listen to a podcast because I don't know about you, I will often watch an on-demand TV channel, and I might be scrolling through my phone at the same time. I might be cooking or working and sort of second screening with the TV, when I'm listening to a podcast, I am really immersed. And if I miss a minute, because I've been distracted, I'll go backwards and listen to it. So what we're finding is because it's, so one-on-one because it's so leaning, it has to be sort of around your time and how that fits into your day and people finding the time to do it. So I absolutely think it's part of the mainstream, but I think it still operates in a really unique way that you want to spend the time listening to a podcast because you're being inspired, entertained, informed. Whereas some of the on-demand TV that we're watching all of the time tends to be a little bit more leaned back. So I find that I will discover podcasts because they'd been recommended to me because I like the host because it's captured the imagination of someone else and they've been writing about it in the news, and it's just so much opportunity. And I think that's where the breadth and depth of podcasts is so important because there's always something for you. And once you find it, that's where the love begins and the magic happens. And that really deep and meaningful relationship starts to take place with that host or that show. And that's where the sort of everlasting love that we find people get with podcasts really begins.

How creative can you be? Do you make regular suggestions on how a podcast could be improved or do you shape at the beginning? I mean, do you go to sort of the guys at 'My Dad Wrote A Porno' and say, you know, Belinda might do this, or you could try this. Because you do want to improve things and help them improve, but you also don't want to sort of tinker with the magic formula. Sometimes you see TV shows that get to sort of season five or six and they make changes and therefore they are worse.

It's an interesting question. I think we talk to podcasters more about development. So the editorial concept will nearly always come from the creator themselves. And we will then work with them, once that show is established, or they're looking to grow an audience in a new area. We'll help them develop that. And perhaps move that idea forward. And really in terms of creativity, it's becoming such an exciting space to test creative ideas and we're seeing more and more established podcasts and new podcasts enter the space and try new things. So you're seeing audio dramas, for example, become such a sort of central part of the podcasting ecosystem. We're seeing large scale investments from movie studios and A-list Hollywood talent to test a new story or an idea in podcasts that probably has the ultimate ambition to translate into on demand TV or into a movie, we're seeing established publishers try new formats, bulletins, mini-series, bonus eps, cross-pollination between podcasters. So they're kind of uniting and bringing new ideas together. So it really is a format through which you can experiment because ultimately podcast audiences are really, really forgiving. They don't expect a sort of polished studio production. I think we saw that particularly demonstrated during lockdown where we saw very high profile people simply record a conversation across zoom and you could hear people walking in the background, family, pets, the sound quality isn't amazing. But it's the power of the content itself. Not necessarily the finished product that attracts and keeps audiences engaged. So, so much opportunity for creativity. And we're probably still not seeing the ideas that are coming in a year's time and we will all be blown away by them. So I feel really energized by all of the ideas that we are seeing being developed. And I'm sure more formats that we haven't even thought of start to appear in the next sort of 12 to 24 months.

What kind of insight do you get from the data from the metrics? You know, are there any regional differences within the UK, Ireland and beyond? Do you see gender differences? Do you know that certain podcasts will play well in certain regions? Do some people listen to everything sequentially in order, and then other podcasts, people will always listen to like one in three? I have some podcasts where, you know, I do count myself as a regular listener, but I don't listen to every episode. I might listen to every one or third episode, depending on who the guest is.

Yeah, we'll get all of that data. So we'll be able to ensure that a podcast or creator can understand where those audiences are listening, how long they're listening for, which episodes are particularly successful, they can test new days of the week, new times of the day to see when a particular show might perform best. Obviously we see people go back to the beginning of a catalog, which may be six or seven seasons long. So we'll see people find podcasts in all different sorts of ways, but the data can really help inform a creator about best practice, editorial that perhaps, or guests that

have performed really well for them. And maybe think about evolving their show. A lot of brilliant shows that are regularly topping the charts didn't always start in the format, you know it for today, they started somewhere else and used data to evolve an idea and an audience. So it allows people to kind of, I guess, put together the art and the science and produce a show that, editorially, is really interesting. It's very credible, but also keeps an audience engaged.

How does it work in terms of the other publishers? Like, I run a small reputation management practice and there's quite a few of us. And I sometimes collaborate with them. And other times there's some enemies, other times there's frenemies. How does it work with the other publishers? And in particular with BBC Sounds, they're going huge on podcasts. Is it the case of a rising tide lifts all boats or is it like The Godfather where whoever runs BBC Sounds, I think it's Jonathan Wall, will he wake up with a horse's head in his bed cause you're out to get them. What is the actual sort of tone of how you collaborate if at all, with the other people in the space?

Oh, absolutely friends. Absolutely. BBC is one of our favourite and best partners. We love working with them. We host and distribute a lot of their podcasts and work with them on monetisation outside of the UK. We're incredibly proud to do that. And obviously they produce some of the best podcasts ever created. We work really closely with Apple and Spotify. And it's so funny, you should use that rising tide raises all boats, exactly what our CEO says all the time. So you must be tuned into him in some way, but it's a very friendly place. I think there is a sort of an unconditional understanding that podcasting is unique and it's very special and we all want to make sure that it succeeds. We perhaps have different routes through which we believe that might happen. We absolutely believe in the open ecosystem, which means if a podcaster works with us, we want that show to be available on every single podcast platform out there. We want to make sure that the advertiser can ensure that its brand messaging or a sponsor messaging is heard on every single platform, which is not always what other platforms want. Some of them want you to subscribe. And that's how they are looking to kind of build out their podcasting ecosystem. But we're very much about the open ecosystem and it's about access to the biggest audience possible and the biggest marketplace, but we're all good friends. We all want the same thing, which is podcasting to be a success long-term.

I've sort of put you on the spot of what Acast does. Can I make that personal and say, what do you do? You know, as one of the leaders in the business, what are your responsibilities? How do you juggle them? What does a typical day and what does a typical week look like?

This question is always the one where you're like, what *do* I do? My job is to make sure that everybody at Acast has an amazing experience. So that is our podcasters, our advertisers and most importantly, our Acasts. So that really is what I get out of bed to do every single day and the purpose through which I look at my job and my week can vary dramatically from one week to another. I can have a week that's very much focused on our podcasters, our creators or very focused on our advertisers or our relationships externally with other partners and our sort of ways that we are

developing relationships long term, strategically. So it's never the same day. I love my job. I love podcasts. I love the people I work with. They're so inspiring. They make me want to work harder and be better. And I feel really lucky to have made my way to podcasting. It's a really, really beautiful place to work. It's full of brilliant, clever people who are so passionate about podcasts and the success and the creators that they work with and the advertisers that we work with. And I've never worked in such a positive industry, an industry that really, really believes that this medium is special and unique and needs to be treated with care and needs to continuously innovate and grow. And it really is a joy, I feel lucky to be working here.

It's a business cliché question almost like what keeps you up at night, but what are the challenges of the job? What does keep you up at night? If you wake up two or three o'clock in the morning, what are you musing on?

At the moment, and certainly through the last sort of 18 months has been the wellbeing of our Acasters, so the the people within our organization, it's been such an unusual time. I won't say the other word because it's so overused, but I think it's probably that, I really care about them all. I want to make sure that they're happy, healthy, successful, that they are finding meaning in their work, that they're enjoying their jobs, that they are learning skills and building opportunities for themselves that will see them have long-term success in the media industry, hopefully at Acast, hopefully within podcasting, but wherever that may be, I want to make sure that they are having the best possible time, because certainly in the early years of my career, that's exactly what I had. And it's been such a difficult time. A lot of those experiences that you want to have in the media, particularly when you're young and particularly our Acasters, they're all a lot younger than me. So I am very conscious of what they may have missed out on and what we have to make sure that they still have in their day-to-day working life. So I think that's what keeps me awake generally, is to really ensure that they are having an amazing time and getting the most out of this experience and learning as much as they can. And just to make sure that as we transition back into normal life, that they're being taken care of there as well, and sort of getting used to hybrid working, none of us have really done this before to any great extent. So we're all kind of learning together and going on a journey. So that's the stuff that keeps me awake at night.

You've had an absolutely incredible career, fascinating to read about it. I mean, you moved from publishing to podcasting. I'd really like to talk to you about what the thinking was behind that leap. You've led a successful strategic and commercial transformation at Cosmopolitan. Want to talk to you about that as well. And at Stylist, you focused your leadership on shaping more truthful and respectful visual landscape women in advertising. So many fascinating things to talk about. Let's go back to the beginning though. What did you want to be when you were sort of starting your career? And what were the first steps along the way?

I wanted to move to London and I wanted to work in advertising and I wasn't really sure about how that was going to happen. And I moved to London with some girlfriends. I went for a few interviews at the time. I met some interesting people and I was very lucky to go through a graduate recruitment scheme and it was one of

those scenarios now, which I don't think would ever happen where I literally had to sell the pen to the publisher at the time and was lucky enough to get the job selling advertising space for what was then EMAP. And I was selling advertising space in parenting titles. So I was a 21 year old, pretty much fresh out of uni, fresh off I think on a plane from Ibiza, rocking up into an environment through which I had to sell Pampers advertising. And it was interesting to say the least, but what I realized in that sort of environment is I really started to understand what great people worked here. What interesting, fun, exciting people worked in advertising and started to think about that as a long term opportunity, I had an expense account at 21, that's something I never, ever dreamed I'd have and was able to go out and have a good time and meet good people and thought this is really quite cool. Started to think about the brands I wanted to align myself with. What meant something to me and sort of found my way into EMAP for the long term and sort of worked on brilliant titles, Mixmag, Kerrang!, Mojo, Empire. They were all just brilliant magazines and had brilliant editors who were so passionate about their craft and their audience. And I think that translates so well to the podcasting space. It's a very, very similar relationship that a podcaster has with their audience. They're constantly thinking about how they can engage them, how they can grow them, what are they thinking? Where are they going next? So I really count myself very lucky that I moved to London, didn't have any money, went for an interview or few interviews. Didn't get a few jobs, but sort of ended up here and really found a passion for something that I perhaps didn't know I was ever going to have, or necessarily going to fall in love with. But here I am sort of 21, 20 years later, which is extraordinary. I used to meet people who said: 'Oh, how long have you worked together?' And they'd say: '20 years.' And I think, wow, that's so long. And now here I am, knowing people for 20 years who I met when I was 21. So it's been a really interesting journey and I'm really happy to talk about the other places I've worked. So I've just worked with some brilliant, curious, and brave people over the last 20 years. And I'm very, very grateful for that.

Let's do it then. So you moved to London, you've got an expense account. That all sounds great so far, what came next? The expense account sounds the best bit if i'm honest!

I mean, can you imagine, I'm like, I can go out for lunch with someone that is from an advertising agency and I don't have to pay for it. I was like, this is extraordinary. What is this?

It's why I could never work at a bank. Because on my day one, I'd be sort of on a plane to Brazil with a suitcase full of cash.

So I ended up working for music magazines after that sort of first step in with the parenting titles and had always loved magazines. I was at EMAP at the time where the lads mags were just starting to sort of accelerate and we had Nuts and Zoo and FHM, and it was very much lads mag culture, you had Heat magazine. So you had these magazine brands, personally not something I would read, but that we're capturing the imagination and sort of the public consciousness. And we're certainly grabbing mass attention. And it was a very sexy, interesting, fun environment to work in. And I absolutely loved magazines and what they stood for and what they said

about you as you were reading them. You'd be on the tube and you'd see someone reading a particular magazine and you'd be able to get a snapshot of who they were, the life stage they were at and proud to be reading it, proud to be seen reading it and looking at the pages of that magazine at the time, this is sort of long before digital really took off and looking for that information, inspiration, that sense of feeling part of a community, which magazines provided so beautifully and for so long and continue to do but obviously in different platforms. So that's sort of where the passion for magazines began. I then moved into news brands, so worked at the Evening Standard, the Mail on Sunday, which again was a really different environment. Some brilliant, fun people who work there, obviously the news is 24/7. The revenue at that time, moving through the newspaper industry was extraordinary. And that sort of really was my first experience of big business, big deals, big personalities that I think shaped even more about who I was or I didn't want to be. And I think gave me my values and sometimes your values are built counter to what other people are. And I absolutely knew the next steps I wanted to take were going to work at a brand that absolutely represented my values. And that was about seeing life through a feminist lens. It was about gender equity. It was about working alongside and for brilliant and inspiring women, which very much led me to Cosmopolitan and Stylist. And I think looking back outside of Acast, they were probably one of the most enjoyable and sort of engaging times in my career where I really felt that what we were doing was trying to make a difference to women, trying to ensure that they saw themselves on the pages of our magazine, on our digital platforms, on our social platforms, that they found a safe space through which feminist issues were discussed in a meaningful, funny, accessible way that they understood how they could ensure that they were getting equal access, equal rights, that there were people pushing for them and ensuring that things were changing and standing for something. And I absolutely loved that time and feel very proud to have been part of some of those teams that worked tirelessly and still work tirelessly. And I love to catch up with them and see what they're doing to make sure that the issues and challenges that women face are front and center in the public consciousness and that we are, or there are people on their side trying to make a positive difference for them.

I mean, tell us about the strategic change that you brought about there. It was editorially and commercially successful. Was it not?

Yeah I joined a time where it was probably time for Cosmopolitan to evolve. It had been built by the most incredible teams before, and it was launched by the infamous Helen Gurley Brown who apparently had leopard print wallpaper, who absolutely built a brand that empowered women through sexual freedom and ensured that they understood that they were able to and should be able to enjoy sex as freely as men were doing. And that was something that should be celebrated and shared and made to feel that it was something that was for everybody and every woman to enjoy it built an incredible brand around that sort of ethos of freedom and rebellion, but there was coming sort of at that time, a sort of change in the way that women wanted to be seen as equal to men. And it wasn't just about sex, sort of it was coming to the end of Sex In The City, I think we were sort of feeling that there was a change in the air and on the very first issue of Cosmo in the seventies, I think 1978, that very first issue, there was a headline, which said, 'How To Become Self-Made.' And that headline all those years ago became the inspiration through which we develop the new Cosmopolitan, the new ethos of the editorial under the incredible guidance of the

editor at the time, Farrah Storr, who's just extraordinary. And she wanted to create a brand through which women could become self-made. And that was about every area of her life, they could be entrepreneurial, they could be brave, they could be bold, they could develop a career through which they felt proud and seen and celebrated. And that was the change. It sort of moved away from those sort of notorious sex headlines into headlines that are about empowerment in a new way. And that was about empowering yourself and particularly yourself through your career. So that was a big change. We moved on to new platforms. We found an audience on Snapchat, we were one of the first magazine brands to move to that space and to grow big social social networks that really sort of serve the community minute by minute, rather than monthly. So we sort of went from months to moments and that editorial vision continues to be a huge success over at Cosmo. And I always watch closely what they're doing and it's a brand that still matters. And it's a brand that still stands for something and sort of 40 years on. That's pretty special for a magazine to continue to inspire women every day to make sure that they are getting what they want out of life.

What came next?

I went to Stylist. So I moved from Cosmo to Stylist and that was an important move. I felt that at that time I was probably leaning towards the older end of the Cosmopolitan audience. I wanted to make sure that I was giving my best to that brand at the time. And I felt that maybe I was moving slightly out of the audience demographic and moving into a different type of demographic. And I worked for an incredible mentor and leader at the time, Ella Dolphin, who went to go and work at Stylist. And we spoke and I went over to work for her again, and that brand, what it does for women can not be underestimated. It absolutely sees life through a feminist lens. It champions women's issues. It makes taboo topics accessible. It talks about things that perhaps were only said in whispers in a pub over a glass of wine, and it puts them on the front cover of that magazine, but it still manages to be joyful and entertaining. And I think really captured a moment through which women wanted to be spoken to and wanted to kind of have that community of like-minded women around them. And it was really one of the first big freemium success stories, you know, they were publishing and I think probably continue to publish around half a million copies every single week, which for a magazine brand was unheard of. And, you know, you would be on the tube and every Tuesday morning you would see every woman on the carriage reading a copy of Stylist. And those brilliant poster covers that they used to do, which were an absolute statement of intent and everything they did was bold and brave. And I absolutely loved being part of it. And you mentioned at the beginning around that truthful representation of women in advertising, and I think that's one of the proudest things that I worked on whilst I was there.

I keep saying what came next, but what happened after that?

So I spent time at Stylist, leaving there having completed a project, which was called 'Love Women,' which really focused on ensuring the truthful representation or championing the truthful representation of women in advertising. I think that the reality we found through lots of research we did at the time was that women were

suffering a crisis of comparison, that there was a comparison culture going on. And they say that comparison is the thief of joy, but comparison was actually truly impacting their mental health. And we were seeing that a lot of that was coming through comparison through the women that were being represented in advertising, that they couldn't see themselves in those campaigns. And we would regularly turn away ad copy and stylists that didn't feel representative or inclusive or overly sexualized or put women into firm gender roles. And we felt that that was enough. And we wanted to really start to talk about that openly and force change through. There's an amazing quote that says 'in a world that profits from your insecurity, loving yourself is a rebellious act.' And we wanted women to love everything about themselves. And it is such a difficult journey. It is incredibly hard to do, and it's even harder when the images you're shown in the media and in advertising don't show that. So that was a huge part of what we did and wanted to do was to really sort of challenge the industry to improve the way it represents women. And it has improved. It's not perfect by any stretch. There's still a lot more to do, but you've got brilliant brands like Dove who are doing fantastic work in a more inclusive and representative way in which they show women in advertising. So I felt like I'd completed something incredibly important and was looking for that next challenge and had always loved podcasts. I mean, since Serial, I was addicted and had wanted to think about exploring a career in that space. There were lots of people I admired very much in the industry. Ross Adams, our CEO, was very much one of those people, I'd met him about 15 years previously at something called the media business course, which was really just, a 40 hour party for young people in media where we will pretend we were working, but really we were just having a good time together and I'd met him then, and I'd been so impressed by his passion and drive and had watched his career closely. He had gone on to become the CEO of Acast. And I think it was on Christmas Eve. I saw a job advertised on LinkedIn at Acast and I sort of read the job description and I thought, wow, that is truly my dream job. And I applied, went through the interview process, met some amazing people like Joe Copeman our SVP of sales. So during the interview process, I just thought I have to work here. I really, really, really want this job and sort of threw myself into the interview and thought, well even if I don't get it I've learned so much about podcasting and it sort of just championed my passion for it and empowered my passion for it even more and was lucky enough to get the job and sort of still pinch myself I think 18 months later that I made it and I made it to podcasts and I get to work in an industry that I genuinely still love and still listen to podcasts relentlessly, I'd say that was the primary sort of content consumption that I do is listening to podcasts. And I love it. And I feel very lucky.

What's top of your to do list at the moment? And I obviously don't mean to take out the laundry or renew the car insurance. I mean, where do you want your job to go? What change do you want to bring back in the medium to long-term? Five years from now, it's a terrible interview question, but you know, where do you see the company as a result of the change you're going to make in your leadership?

In five years time, I want to be able to have a glass of wine with you and talk about the fact that we ensured the success of the creator economy, that we created a medium and an environment through which people with great ideas, people with

something to say, and to share with an audience were able to do that to, to access a medium, where there are so little barriers to entry to find an audience, to grow an audience and create work that they are fairly rewarded for. And that podcasting is absolutely seen as the most inclusive, democratic, welcoming media out there. And that we see new voices find a platform and find an audience that grows and find success on other platforms that perhaps had podcasting not been available, they would never have been able to find because there are barriers to entry in other media channels that just don't exist in podcasting. So it's about the success of that creative economy. It's about ensuring creators are fairly rewarded for their work, working with smart advertisers to ensure that they understand the importance of supporting that creative economy and giving those advertisers brilliant new ideas, creative ways of working with us, new formats. So that's what I hope for. That's why I hope in five years time that we will create the future of the media and content industry, today. And didn't have to retrospectively try and do it, that we see a lot of other media channels now trying to do, I think that's where I'd want to see myself in five years.

What advice would you give to someone listening to this that's starting out in their career, hugely inspired by your success? What are the skills they need to acquire? What are the soft skills as well? What type of opportunities? How do they need to go about climbing that ladder of success? It's so difficult now these days to get on that first rung of the ladder.

It is hard. And my advice to anyone is if there's an industry you want to work in, tell someone you want to work in it, find someone on LinkedIn, find someone on Instagram and message them and tell them that you're interested because that's where it can all start. I think it's really important not to wait for it to come to you. I know it's easier said than done, but most good leaders of good companies, LinkedIn and Instagram messages will always be open to people who want to understand more, mine certainly are. And for me, it's also about really finding the curious, brave, and bold people in an environment through which you might want to work and staying really close to those people because that's where success tends to happen. That's where big leaps forward tend to be made. So it's partly about being active and leaning into an opportunity, but also about finding people who are going to move forward with you that are going to inspire you and make you want to work harder and be better. And to stay really close to those people. I found that a lot of my career choices have been, where are the people that I want to work with going? What are they doing next? How can I stay with them and grow with them and learn alongside them? And I've been lucky enough to find those people in my career. And I've sort of stuck very, very close to them and we'll continue to do that. But if someone is thinking of starting a podcast as well, not just pursuing a media career, the absolute best advice I can give you is just start. You have to start. Everybody started at some time or another who found huge success in podcasting and a lot of the formats that you know now weren't the formats that they were when they started. So just start, give it a go, learn, adapt, try new ideas, try and find and grow an audience. And yeah, you probably will know pretty quickly if an idea is working, if it's not, and you can try something new and find your platform and your voice, but as we've seen during lockdown, something as simple as just recording a conversation or voice notes, makes a great podcast. So my advice to anyone thinking about starting one is to start. Stop thinking; just start.

Just get on with it, as it were. I don't expect you to answer this question because A, it's rude and B, it's none of my business but what's next for you? Will you become sort of the global podcast supreme? I don't know how you become a Bond villain level, a global domination in podcasting. Or are there other areas of the media that interest you? Or might you do something completely different that's not in the media?

I mean that as a huge question, I love podcasts. I love podcasting. I love Acast. I would love to stay here. I would love to grow my career here. I'm also very interested in the future of work and working culture. So I definitely will flex that muscle. And I seek to find an outlet through which I can talk about good work culture, good working practices, bringing your values to work in the workplace and ensuring that those values are given space to be seen and to be understood. So I very much can't see myself leaving podcasting for a very, very long time. I feel very energised and excited about the future. So who knows, who knows what it all ends up looking like? But it's certainly an industry I think I found a home in.

Georgie, that was a hugely interesting conversation. Thank you ever so much for your time.

Thank you so much. I've really enjoyed it.