



SUCCESS STORY

Southern Cross Austereo (SCA) amplifies LiSTNR podcasting platform reach by 5x with Elasticsearch on Google Cloud

Region
Australia

Industry
Media and Entertainment

Solution
Elasticsearch, Google Cloud Platform, Vector Search, Generative AI



LiSTNR's enhanced search helps to boost subscribers by 20%

- LiSTNR improved its search, driving its growth in Australia's booming podcast market. The platform's enhanced user experience has helped to increase subscribers by 20% to 1.8 million.



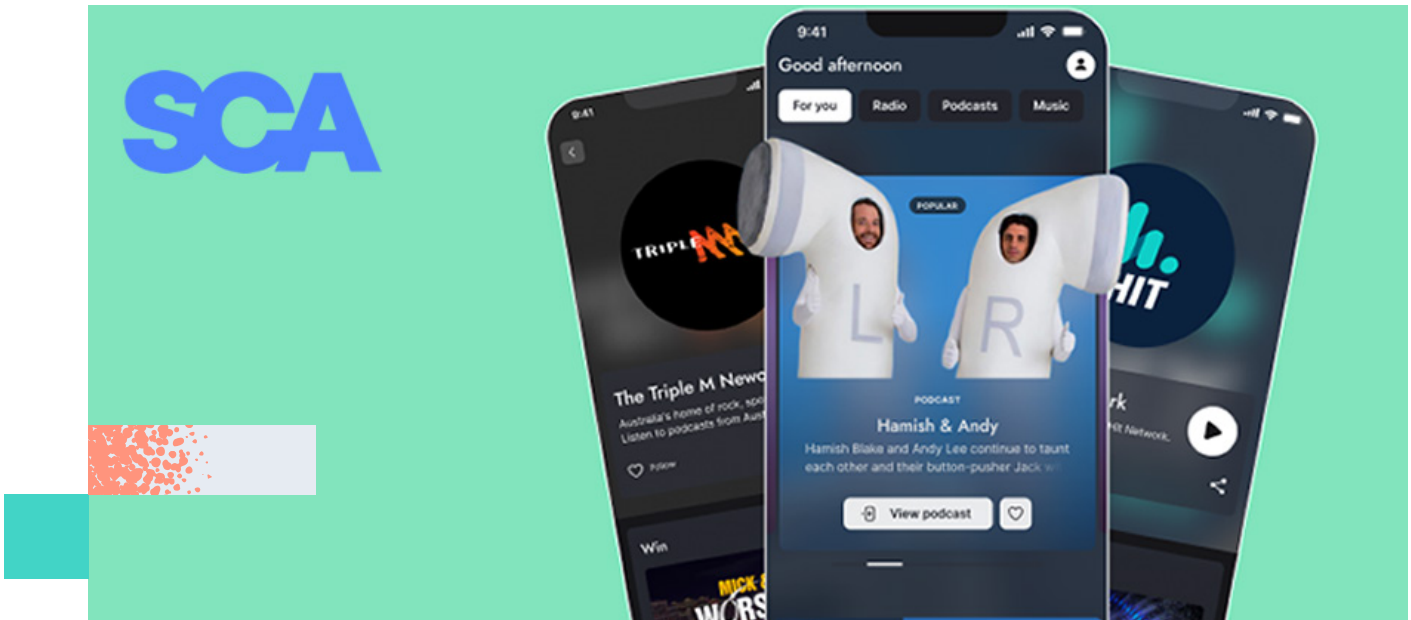
Elasticsearch on Google Cloud achieves significant reductions in zero result searches for LiSTNR.

- Southern Cross Austereo's migration to Elasticsearch on Google Cloud significantly improved search accuracy and reduced "zero result" searches on LiSTNR across more than 900 podcast channels and 99 radio stations.



Elasticsearch and AI: LiSTNR's strategy for future-proof podcasting and increased listener retention.

- LiSTNR is staying ahead in the evolving podcast industry by building a search app with Elasticsearch and AI to personalize podcast recommendation, creating a future-proof platform for advanced capabilities, including vector search and generative AI.



Southern Cross Austereo (SCA) gives its LiSTNR podcasting platform a boost with innovative search features powered by Elasticsearch on Elastic Cloud via the Google Cloud platform

Australians are some of the world's most avid podcast listeners. As many as 33% of the population listen to episodes on a weekly basis. That's a greater percentage compared to the U.S. (31%), reflecting a surge in interest across all age groups, including the valuable 40-64 age bracket.

One of the platforms leading the race to produce content and attract new listeners is LiSTNR, owned by [Southern Cross Austereo](#) (SCA). LiSTNR, boasting an impressive 8+ million monthly listeners, stands as Australia's #1 digital audio network and the top commercial podcast network*. It is an unrivaled digital audio network, reaching more than 95% of the population through its radio, television, and digital channels.

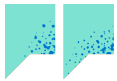
Since its launch in 2021, LiSTNR has amassed 1.8+ million subscribers from its 900 podcast titles and hundreds of thousands of episodes, and its 99 radio stations. These include chart-topping shows such as Hamish & Andy, The Howie Games, The Briefing, and Crime Insiders. Now the number one podcast network in Australia, the platform has widened its appeal with partnerships that include content from the BBC, Wondery, SiriusXM and ESPN.

As the number of podcasts and subscribers continues to rise, LiSTNR has stepped up efforts to enhance the user experience, especially search result accuracy and relevance as well as podcast discovery. Leon Kelly, Head of Digital Technology, SCA, says, "Search plays a critical role in our efforts to boost listener growth and retention. It points subscribers not just to their favorite episodes, but to new content based on search intent and preferences."

Kelly was especially keen to reduce the number of 'No Results Found' pages, which are returned when a search engine fails to match a listener query to content. This interrupted the user journey and added pressure on Kelly's team who found themselves constantly stretched to fix search related issues. "We were trying to build search from scratch, but we didn't have anybody with the necessary skill sets to be able to write the queries effectively," he says.

Kelly gives the example of a podcast called Willow Talk, one of Australia's most popular cricket titles. "We discovered that you could only find the podcast by entering a close match to the title. Entering 'cricket' wasn't enough," he says.

This had a critical impact on audience figures during the Ashes test series of 2021-2022, when Australia beat England in a sequence of high-profile cricket matches. "There was a risk that we were losing listeners to rival platforms," says Kelly. "It was the moment when we realized that we had to do better with search."



We've been scaling up rapidly year-on-year. By taking advantage of our partners' infrastructure and their specialist knowledge, DevOps is free to make a greater contribution to the business."

Anthony Stenmark

Digital Solution Architect, Southern Cross Austereo

8M listeners
TURN LIFE UP

LiSTNR
RADIO | PODCASTS | MUSIC | NEWS

Source: refer listnr.com/advertise

LiSTNR is Australia's #1 commercial podcast network and has 20 podcasts in the top 50 of the Top 200.*

Game, set, and match, Elastic and SCA

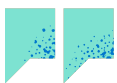
SCA was already hosting a version of Elastic to store IT-related data. Although this worked well for technical activities, Kelly seized the opportunity to migrate to a managed solution with Elasticsearch on [Elastic Cloud](#) running on Google Cloud Platform. Another crucial decision was the deployment of an updated content management system. This enabled the content team to take over search management and use their skills to add thousands of new keywords and fix issues such as misspellings.

When the new search architecture was launched in February 2023, Kelly and his team saw an immediate improvement in the user experience. Beginning with Valentine's Day, the content team curated dozens of search synonyms for romantic podcasts from dating shows to music titles. By boosting the discoverability of these episodes, the LiSTNR platform saw a dramatic increase in traffic. "We were blown away by how well Elasticsearch worked," says Kelly.

As the rollout continued, the number of 'No Results Found' incidents virtually disappeared, representing an immediate 5% drop in such incidents. "All of a sudden we were no longer getting calls to fix search data," says Kelly. "Elasticsearch is so easy to use that the content team managed to fix all our historical content in a matter of weeks."

Relieving the pressure on DevOps engineers enables them to focus on new features and enhancements to the LiSTNR app. It also emphasizes the value of moving to a managed Elastic service combined with the Google Cloud Platform. "We've been scaling up rapidly year-on-year," says Anthony Stenmark, Digital Solution Architect, SCA. "By taking advantage of our partners' infrastructure and their specialist knowledge, DevOps is free to make a greater contribution to the business," he says.

LiSTNR has also seen an overall improvement in critical KPIs, including audience retention and growth, listener acquisition cost, and lifetime listener value, translating to an 20% increase in subscribers.



The combination of Elasticsearch deployed on Elastic Cloud via Google Cloud Platform means that we can better match listeners with content that meets their preferences. This supports our efforts to keep listeners coming back to the platform and increase the time they spend listening to podcasts."

Leon Kelly

Head of Digital Technology, Southern Cross Austereo



Southern Cross Austereo (SCA) is one of Australia's leading media companies reaching more than 95% of the Australian population through its radio, television, and digital assets.

The future of podcasting? It's personal

As the Australian podcast sector expands and LiSTNR adds more content, personalizing the search experience becomes more crucial than ever. To achieve this goal, Kelly and his team are exploring the further potential of machine learning and [AI in Elasticsearch](#), including [semantic search](#), [vector search](#), and [generative AI](#).

LiSTNR already uses AI to transcribe podcasts and Kelly sees the potential to take this one step further into content recommendations. "When you start diving into transcripts you can explore the nuances of the episode, such as the tone of voice. Was it funny, authoritative, or friendly? If the listener enjoys a humorous soccer podcast, would they enjoy a lighter-hearted history title? The possibilities are endless."

In the meantime, Kelly and the Digital Team are focusing on a full refresh of the LiSTNR app that puts search at the center of podcast discovery and further boosts subscriber retention and streaming volumes.



With other systems, it's been a full-time job for a couple of people just to keep the lights on. Elasticsearch is so much more efficient and scalable in that respect. New releases and features free up our DevOps team to do high value work at a critical time when the podcast industry is evolving so quickly."

Leon Kelly

Head of Digital Technology, Southern Cross Austereo

*Source: Triton Australian Podcast Ranker, Jan 2024

Build cost-effective and secure AI apps that are accurate and relevant using Elastic's vector database, out of the box semantic search, and transformer model flexibility.

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