

**How to start**

# a WhatsApp fact-checking podcast

*By Africa Check and Volume with the support of the  
International Fact-Checking Network*



# Introduction

Misinformation is like a mushroom: it's based on crap and grows well in the dark. There's widespread fact-checking of content on open social media platforms, like Twitter and Facebook. But "dark" platforms, like messaging app WhatsApp, pose a particular challenge.

Africa Check and South African podcast company Volume partnered in 2019 to create a new, innovative approach to podcasting with the goal of debunking misinformation on WhatsApp. The outcome was "What's Crap on WhatsApp?": a short fact-checking voice-note show based on and distributed through WhatsApp. The project was the winner of the International Fact-Checking Network's 2019 Fact Forward Fund.

**This handbook explains how you can start your own WhatsApp voice-note fact-checking show in nine simple steps.**

## 1.

### Buy a device and sim card

# BUY A DEVICE

Purchase a phone or tablet.

A device with large internal memory and a large central processing unit is recommended.

This will reduce the chance of the device crashing as subscribers and submissions increase.

# COVERAGE

Buy a sim card from a mobile network with good coverage in your area.



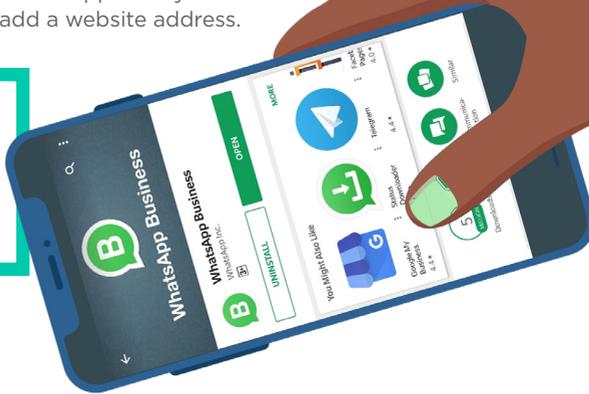
Insert the sim card and set up your new device.



## 2. Download WhatsApp Business

Download the WhatsApp Business app onto your device. Personalise your profile and add a website address.

SET A GREETING MESSAGE



Greeting messages are sent to new subscribers or to a subscriber who has not contacted you for **14 days**.

This message can welcome new subscribers, explain who you are or direct people to other platforms.

### Example:

-  Hello! Thank you for messaging "What's Crap on WhatsApp?"
-  If you're a new subscriber: send us your name and save us as a contact on your phone.
-  If you've sent us a message to fact-check: thank you! We receive hundreds of messages every week and will log your submission.
-  You can also listen to previous episodes of the show on our website: [www.whatscrap.africa](http://www.whatscrap.africa)

SET QUICK REPLIES

The WhatsApp Business app allows you to send pre-written messages to subscribers.

These can be friendly greetings, answers to commonly asked questions or a link to a fact-checking resource.

You can set quick replies to send GIFs, images and videos.

To set up quick replies, navigate to settings, business settings and quick replies.

To use a quick reply in a chat, type “ / ” and select the shortcut from the list.

### Example of quick reply when user subscribes:

-  Thank you! You are now signed up to receive episodes of "What's Crap on WhatsApp?"
-  Is there something you'd like fact-checked? Forward it to us!
-  You can listen to previous episodes of the show here: [www.whatscrap.africa](http://www.whatscrap.africa)

### Quick reply when a message is submitted to be fact-checked:

-  Thank you for sending us this message to fact-check!
-  We will add it to our list of claims to consider. We can't check everything but your message helps us understand how false information spreads in Africa.
-  In the meantime, here are tips and advice on how to fact check information:

### 3. Promote the WhatsApp number and add subscribers

**YOU CAN NOW PROMOTE YOUR WHATSAPP NUMBER.**



You can do this by sharing the number online.

You can also generate a personalised WhatsApp link, using a website like Postcron.



When someone clicks on this link it will automatically open a WhatsApp chat with your number and a pre-populated message of your choosing, like "Please add me to the 'What's Crap on WhatsApp?' broadcast!".

You will use broadcast lists to distribute your WhatsApp fact-checking voice-note. Importantly, subscribers must save your number to receive the broadcast message. They will not receive it if they do not save your number.



When a subscriber sends a message asking to be added to the broadcast, you can send back a quick reply reminding them to save your number.

Decide on a way to save subscribers. This can be a standard format (such as: "month/year/subscriber number") or you can ask for their name.

### 4. Create broadcast lists

Once you have saved subscribers on your device you need to create a broadcast list.

This is how you will send the voice-note to your subscribers.

The use of WhatsApp groups to distribute messages is not recommended. Users' contact information is visible to other group members.

- **Android**

In WhatsApp, click on the three dots at the top right of the screen. Select "New Broadcast".

Select the contacts you want to add to the broadcast list and give the broadcast list a name.

- **iPhone**

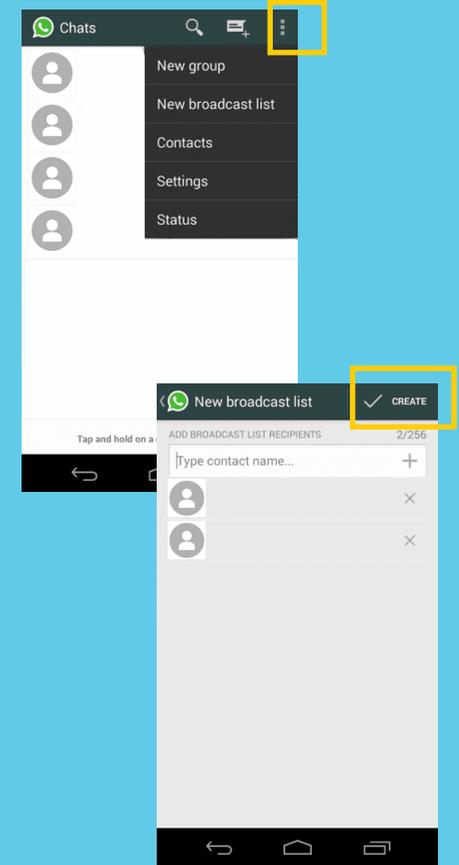
In WhatsApp, click "Broadcast Lists" at the top of the chat screen.

Click "New List" at the bottom of the screen. Select the contacts you want to add to the broadcast list.

Broadcast lists can contain a maximum of 256 contacts. Once you exceed this number you will need to create another list.

# 256

# CONTACTS



## 5. Log fact-checking submissions

Fact-checking submissions need to be logged so you can select which ones to fact-check.



You may want to consider developing a labeling system for the submissions. This can include the submission's topic (for example, politics, health or economy) and format (for example, video, image, audio, text or link).

This data can be used to ensure you fact-check a variety of submissions. It can also be used to identify trends over longer periods of time.

**LOGGING  
SUBMISSIONS**



There are a number of tools that can be used to log submissions. A list-making app, like Trello, allows you to upload the submissions and add labels. Video, images and audio can be added to the cards. Other options include logging submissions on Google Sheets.



Google  
Sheets

## 6. Write the script

Select the submissions you want to fact-check for the episode.

Fact-check these according to your organisation's methodology.

Write a script. Identify audio that you want to include in the episode, such as a clip from a misleading video or comment from an expert debunking a claim.



## 7. Record the episode

To record an episode you will need a laptop or PC, digital audio workstation software, a microphone and an audio interface to connect your computer to your microphone.

Most episodes of "What's Crap on WhatsApp?" were recorded in an insulated sound booth using a Rode NT1-A Condenser Microphone and a Focusrite Scarlett 2i2 audio interface.

If you do not have access to this kind of equipment you can record using a microphone and a mobile phone with a voice memo recorder.

Recording directly on a phone will work too, but the audio quality will be lower.

If you don't have access to a sound booth you will need to record somewhere quiet with good insulation. This could be a car in a garage or a small room with curtains.



## 8. Edit the audio

You will need a main digital audio workstation for editing and mastering. Options include **Pro Tools** and **Garageband**. **Audacity** is an open-source digital audio editor and recording application software. It's free and available on Windows, macOS, Linux and other Unix-like operating systems.



Pro tools



Garageband



Audacity

Edit the audio and consider adding an intro and outro. Subscribers are more likely to listen to shorter episodes. It's advisable to make them shorter than seven minutes.

**Your digital audio workstation or audio editing software should have options for you to compress the audio file when you export it.**

Reducing the file size will make it faster and cheaper to send on WhatsApp. But compressing a file too much can make your audio lose too much sound quality and make it sound flat or even grainy. The ideal is to balance compression and audio quality so that the loss of quality is not perceptible to listeners.

**The best practice is to start by simply exporting your file as an MP3, which is a compressed audio-format that doesn't perceptibly reduce the audio quality.**

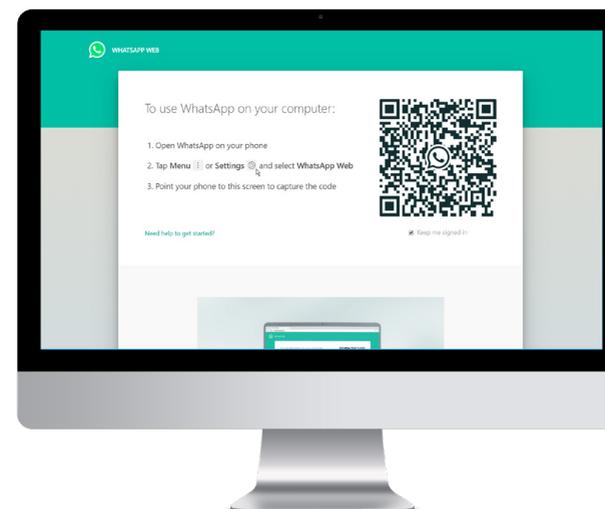
For a 5 to 10 minute episode the file size should be between 5 and 8 MB. If it is much larger than this, you can change the export settings. You could also use an online browser-based MP3 compression tool to compress the file.

## 9. Distribute your show

You are now ready to send the show to your subscribers. It's advisable to draft a message to send with the voice-note that explains what the show is about and how other people can subscribe.

**You will need to send the voice-note and message individually to each broadcast list you saved.**

**It's easier to do using WhatsApp web, which allows you to access the app on your laptop or PC.**



**Search for the name of your broadcast list. Click on it. Drag the audio file from your computer to the chat box and click send.**

**You may also want to post the audio file on a traditional podcast platform.**

The most popular platforms are Apple Podcasts, Spotify and Google Podcasts. Your podcast will also be available on third-party podcast apps that pull from Apple's directory.



Apple Podcasts



Spotify



Google Podcasts



## Africa Check

Africa Check is a non-profit fact checking organisation set up in 2012 to promote accuracy in public debate and the media in Africa.

The organisation's goal is to raise the quality of information available to society across the continent. It has offices in South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal.

**Website:** [africacheck.org](http://africacheck.org)

**Twitter:** [@AfricaCheck](https://twitter.com/AfricaCheck)

## Volume

Volume is a premier podcasting company from South Africa, focused on telling stories through engaging, innovative and highly-produced podcasts. It has produced a number of shows, including the popular award-winning investigative podcast Alibi. Volume has also produced audio content for numerous leading international organisations, including Doctors Without Borders and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

**Website:** [volume.africa](http://volume.africa)

**Twitter:** [@VolumeAfrica](https://twitter.com/VolumeAfrica)

