

RANDOM

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COMMUNICATIONS WITH A PURPOSE

THOUGHTS

Podcasting for Everyone

In March, the Columbus Computer Society asked me to talk to the group about podcasting. That same week I discussed the topic on *TechByter Worldwide*. If you have information to share—information that other people want to have—podcasting is a natural for you. This month and next I'll explain what podcasting is all about, why you might want to try it, and how to create a podcast.

Podcasting is not what happens when you become annoyed with your Ipod and toss it out the window, nor is it a way for farmers to plant peas. Podcasting is simply another way for content providers (those who know something about a particular topic) to provide that knowledge to content consumers (those who want to know something about a particular topic).

I place podcasting on the media landscape in the vicinity occupied by websites, Web radio, blogs, and streaming media, somewhat removed from what we

call the *old media*—books, newspapers, and broadcast). Why do we need another medium? Simply because it fills a need.

As I explained to the Columbus Computer Society, we can hear a couple of dozen radio stations in Columbus. Rush Limbaugh and his ilk appear all across the dial. Ohio State University's FM station used to offer classical music all day, but recently started broadcasting the same NPR morning and afternoon programs that are on the college's AM station and on the Columbus Board of Education's station. So now we have 3 stations in the same market running the same programs at the same times. If there is logic here, it escapes me.

This is a bad time for broadcasters to annoy listeners, because we can opt out. Instead of radio, we can play a CD in the car or at work; we can carry an Ipod wherever we go; XM and Sirius provide more than 100 stations—many without commercials—and some of the listening devices can record programs for later use; real and faux radio stations stream audio on the Internet; and we can download podcasts and listen to them when it suits us.

The *old media* face a troubling future. Newspapers seem to understand the problem more than radio and television. In 2007, the *New York Times* scrapped its paid service and made everything available for free via the Web. International broadcasters such as the BBC provide podcasts of many spoken programs.

In many ways, podcasting offers the best of all worlds for everyone.

Podcasting's Advantages

Although podcasting shares some attributes of broadcasting, blogging, and website presentations, it is none of these. It is an amalgam of all these media. Until 2006, I hadn't paid too much attention to podcasts. *What could they possibly have to offer a broadcaster?* That opinion changed when WTVN decided to replace local programming on Sunday morning with programming from the Farm Bureau and Fox Radio News. That change left *Technology Corner* without a home.

Instead of looking for another radio station to victimize, I investigated podcasting and, after 2 years, I've decided that it's better than broadcasting. That's not just putting spin on it, either.

To broadcast the program, I had to get up at 6am on Sunday and drive to the radio station. Because the program ran an hour (of which my content was 17 to 22 minutes), the program cost at least 2 hours of every Sunday morning. Of the 25,000 people who were tuned in, only a few hundred were really listening, and those who were interested in the content had to be ready to listen at 8am on Sunday and they needed to be within about 150 miles of Columbus.

Now that the program is a podcast, I can record the audio whenever I like (usually Saturday morning) and listeners can listen whenever they like. The podcast is usually about 20 minutes long and includes no newscasts, sportscasts, commercials, or jingles. I don't have to drive anywhere and anyone on the planet who has an Internet connection can hear the program. I've also noticed that website traffic is about 50% higher than it used to be, probably because of the program's worldwide reach.



There's something magic about a big transmitter that sends your voice out for people to hear 150 miles away. But there's something equally magic about preparing a podcast that's listened to throughout the world.

I grew up in a small town in northwest Ohio. If I didn't like what the local radio station was playing, I could listen to stations in Columbus, Dayton, Fort Wayne, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, Windsor, and Cincinnati; at night, I could add stations in Minneapolis, Boston, New York, Nashville, Saint Louis, and sometimes Dallas. And that station in Del Rio, Texas, with a 500,000-watt transmitter across the border in Mexico. Every signal was different.

Today, many of those stations are still audible but they all have the same programming, the same commercials, the same sound. Podcasts bring back the variety.

Podcasting: Easy and Inexpensive

Podcasts are easy and inexpensive to create. You don't need a \$500 microphone, a \$6000 digital audio console, a \$10,000 digital recorder, a \$50,000 transmitter, or a \$500,000 array of towers and antennas. You do need a decent microphone (\$50 to \$100), a computer, an audio editing program (free to \$300), and a website (\$100 per year). And content. If you're not a *subject matter expert* on anything, your podcast probably won't attract a lot of listeners.

If you're on a tight budget, choose a dynamic cardioid-pattern microphone. If you have a more flexible budget, select a condenser or electret microphone with a cardioid pattern. You should invest in 3 other relatively inexpensive items for the microphone: A desk stand, a wind screen, and a pop filter.

If you try to hand-hold the microphone, you will hear noise during the podcast. Your ring may clink against the microphone's shell or you'll move the microphone enough for the cable to creak. Eliminate these sources of noise by putting the microphone on a desk stand and then placing the desk stand on a thick paperback book or on a foam mouse pad. The goal is to avoid transmitting any unwanted vibrations to the microphone.

Many microphones come with a wind screen, a foam covering that protects the microphone from the sound of wind. It will help to eliminate the popping sounds that are caused by plosives—P, T, B, D, and the like. If one doesn't come with the microphone, purchase a foam windscreen.

You should also have a pop filter, such as the one shown at the left, because it provides improved protection against plosives. These three items probably won't cost more than about \$75.



Script Your Podcast

If this year's strike by television writers proved anything, it proved how important a script is. When you listen to news on radio, you can be sure that somebody has written it and that the newscasters are reading it. If you're the 1 person in 10,000 who can stand up in front of an audience and ad lib in a way that your

message is clear, feel free not to write your podcast. I am not one of those people.

I start with a script. It helps me to stay on track, on message, on target.

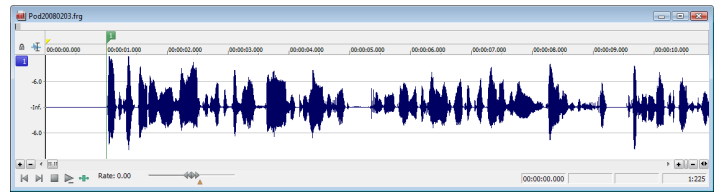
Work Close to the Mic



In the old days, when microphones were fragile, engineers placed the microphones and the announcers kept their distance. Now we work microphones close. Being close to the microphone enhances presence—the effect that suggests to the listener that you are talking to just that one person.

The best radio performers have always known that their audience may be numbered in the hundreds, thousands, or millions but people listen when to radio individually. The conversation must be between two people. And it is a *conversation*, not an *oration*. Talk to *me*.

During the years when I was on the radio, people I met would say, "You don't sound like you do on the radio." My explanation, particularly if the person who made the comment was both female and cute, went this way: "Put your ear *here*," I would say, pointing to a space about half an inch from my mouth. I would then speak quietly into her ear. That's presence. That's radio. That's podcasting.



A Sound Recorder and Editor

To record your podcast and generate the MP3 file that you'll upload to a website, you'll need a recording program. These range in price from free to several hundred dollars. I use Sony's Sound Forge, a \$300 application, but Sony offers a slim version for under \$70. Alternatively, you might want to use the open source Audacity, which is free. The interface is primitive, but the features you need are all there. **B**

This article will be continued next month.

on the market by A.J. Stinnett

CORNER

"To set objectives, work with employees to determine the expected results; make sure goals are realistic and challenging; and help employees understand the goals."