

Is There a Podcast in Your Future?

By: Renie McClay

You can't go anywhere these days without seeing someone listening to an iPod. In trains, planes and automobiles, at the health club, or on the street, iPods and MP3 players are making music available anytime, anywhere. But iPods aren't just for music. They can also be a very cost effective, cutting-edge business communication tool.

Podcasting Defined

One of the things often associated with an iPod is the concept of podcasting. I recently had a conversation with Dan Walker, who is an expert on podcasting. Walker, a former Chicago radio broadcaster, is now President of the [Marcomm Store](#) - a full service marketing communication company specializing in the development of custom corporate audio and video recordings, web development, and print design. Here are some of the highlights of that conversation about podcasting.

The first thing Walker explained to me is that an iPod is *not* essential to a podcast. A podcast is a pre-recorded video or audio message sent out via the Internet. <formatting note: pull this last sentence out into a sidebar, but also leave here in the body of the article> There are many ways a message like this can be heard. It can be watched or listened to from a computer, a Smart Phone (like a Treo), an iPod or MP3 player; or it can be burned onto a CD. Below are some examples of the type of messages a company could send via a podcast:

- Company audio newsletter
- Internal communications (morale boosters, company earnings messages)
- Upcoming events
- New product rollout (for sales force, buyers, or the public)
- Training reinforcement
- Prework to a training session
- Sales updates to a geographically dispersed sales force
- Customer education

Just about any audio or video message can be communicated using this method. If the message is longer than 20 minutes, it is best to use a different medium or break it up into chunks.

The Podcast Generation

Podcasts are not just for the younger, iPod-carrying audience. While younger audiences listen to podcasts, and even expect them, people of all generations

are now using the internet and can therefore easily access a podcast. They just might not be listening to a podcast while exercising or running, which would be more typical of the younger, iPod generation.

Producing a Podcast

Creating your own podcast is easier than you might think. To cut costs, companies can produce podcasts internally. All you really need is a microphone that plugs into your computer and editing software such as Adobe Audition. If you are doing phone interviews, you'll need a way to digitally record the phone conversation.

If an organization wants to communicate a certain "image" in their podcasts, and does not have professional talent or recording booths, they should consider having their recordings professionally produced. Professional talent can easily convey the enthusiasm and energy often essential to engage listeners.

Tips for Podcasters

I've heard several of Dan Walker's podcasts, and they are always a pleasure to listen to. I asked him how he manages to get and hold people's attention. Here is his advice:

- Make the messages compelling. You want people to look forward to your podcasts.
- Make it sound natural, not like you are reading from a script. A radio talk show interview format works well for this. Interviewees have bullet points in front of them but answer questions in their own words.
- Enhance the recording with music (royalty free music is available on the Internet).
- Choose the right people to do the talking. Include a well-respected colleague, and/or individuals with strong communication skills.
- Represent different perspectives on the topic at hand. If your message is for training purposes for example, include a review of content, a sales rep with a success story, or a customer's view.
- Keep the pace fast moving and entertaining. Hit high points in the podcast and keep the nitty-gritty details for a follow-up email.
- Use a professional host, if your budget allows.

The pearls of podcasting are many. Individuals or groups working virtually can stay informed and feel connected with podcasts. It is a more personal and robust medium than email, yet still just as fast. Both employers and employees like the flexibility of being able to access just-in-time information while commuting or exercising, rather than using their 8:00-5:00 workday to retrieve information.

Podcasting shows you are on the cutting-edge of technology. Your audience is likely expecting it - so use your imagination and have fun!

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