

Podcast User

NUMBER ONE FOR PODCAST NEWS, REVIEWS AND TIPS



Reviews

WINPODDER
MULTIMIX 8 USB MIXER

Articles

PODCASTING BUSINESS MODELS
INTERVIEW WITH IZZIE VOODOO
WHY I HATE STEREO MICROPHONES

Tutorial

HOW TO CREATE ITUNES
SMART PLAYLISTS



A star is born....

Roger Smalls imparts his infinite
wisdom through his **BIG COLUMN**

EDITORIAL



I'm so pleased to welcome you to the second edition of **Podcast User Magazine**.

As a team, we at **PUM** have been astonished at the amount of positive feedback and sheer number of downloads: three thousand in the first week alone — and this without any publicity. Many thanks to all of our readers, old and new.

Once again, the team have all pulled together to bring you a diverse and excellent range of information that will be of interest to everyone from the novice to the seasoned professional.

A special thanks to our guest columnists, including the legendary Roger Smalls, and to Mr Ink, Paul Pinfield, for his tireless efforts in laying out and professionally formatting the publication.

Please feel free to send your comments by mail to general.comments@podcastusermagazine.com, directly to the columnist in relation to a specific article, or by commenting on the blog at www.podcastusermagazine.com.

Three thousand downloads
in the first week alone

PODCAST USER - CONTENT YOU CAN RELY ON

FIRST FOR...

Podcasts and podcasting news

Our monthly schedule and website allows us to keep you up to date with the latest news as and when it happens.

Product and service reviews

Each month, our dedicated contributors will review the latest hardware and software so to allow you to make the right buying choices.

We will also be reviewing a wide variety of podcasts so that you don't have to waste hours of your life . We are kind like that...

Advice and help

Podcast User staff have years of combined experience . So, if you have any problems or would like any information, just email us at

help@podcastusermagazine.com

WWW.PODCASTUSERMAGAZINE.COM



Paul Nicholls is our editor. He is a lawyer and the brains behind the Podcast Paul and Jukepod Jury podcasts. He has an encyclopedic knowledge of music. Sadly it's the 80's...

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Simon Toon

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Evolution

As you may have noticed the magazine has evolved from issue one, both in terms of its size and design.

Thanks are due to Randall Reed for his suggestion about using Acrobat's built-in bookmarking system to help navigate the magazine. This really has helped us, Randy, so thank you.

We would also like to thank everyone else who has made suggestions about improving the look and feel of the magazine. Although we may not have got back to you yet, rest assured that we will contact you. •

Submissions

We are always looking for great new talent. So, if you have a topic that you would like to write about (without turning it into one of those turgid promos for your show) please mail us at submissions@podcastusermagazine.com.

We would be glad to hear from you. And who knows, you might write better than any of us. Now there is a challenge... •

Special thanks...

...go to Linda Mills and Adrian Pegg. Linda lives in the States and makes sure that everything is spelt correctly and has all the commas and such like in the right place. Thanks, Linda. Adrian sits in the background and opens all sorts of doors for us. Good work, Adrian. •

LETTERS

A reader writes...

Dear **Podcast User Magazine** and readers:

Six months ago I was introduced to the community of podcasting by a colleague at work. On one of our many coffee breaks I mentioned how great it would be if I could produce something like the podcasts they did.

Little did I know that it was as simple as a microphone and an RSS feed, or was it? After downloading the Audacity software to do my mixing and MP3 production, I came across my first stumbling block – what to talk about?

It's not usually something I have a problem with, just ask anyone who knows me, but after spending many an hour sampling the vast quantities of podcasts about TV, sport and general chit chat it seemed like all the bases had already been covered.

There was one area that hadn't been covered though – me! So I got to work, recording on a regular basis about general things that were happening in my life and my opinions on topical subjects, and so "Rantings of a Northern Bloke" was born.

For the next three months I recorded approximately twenty five podcasts using just my laptop and a microphone, but then I changed jobs and had to hand back my laptop. Would this be the end of my rantings? For the next few months it appeared that my rantings had joined the phenomenon known as "podfading", the disappearance of podcasts as quickly as they appeared.

Then there was a light at the end of the tunnel, I was given an iRiver IFP-790 for Christmas and now my rantings were not only back, but extremely portable. This time round I wanted to do something different, something that would set me apart from other podcasts and keep my listeners interested, so I

decided to serialise my diary from when I was 17 as part of my rantings.

After seventeen more podcasts, lots of experimentation and a small amount of feedback I found the **Podcast User Magazine**. Reading the articles about podcasting Do's and Don'ts I recognised the parts of my rantings that I was doing well and those that I could improve.

I now introduce each podcast in the same way, explaining how people can get in touch and the contents of the podcast. I have changed the cheesy saxophone music in the background to something a little more upbeat and have tried to remove the long pauses and "erm's" from the podcast, without scripting it and removing the spontaneity which I enjoy. I also found that devoting time and concentration to the podcast not only improved it but also increased my enjoyment of producing it. Trying to watch the tv, cook or drive at the same time was not going to make my rantings any more interesting; if anything the opposite was true.

As a podcast listener I subscribe to the shows I like; it's free and it helps indicate to podcasters that people are listening. I try and provide feedback via emails or message boards as that's the only way podcasters can ever really improve. The major reason behind the disappearance of most podcasts is due to the podcaster thinking they might just be speaking to themselves, and if that's the case, what's the point?

Keep up the good work, and I look forward to improving my podcasts even further by following the future guidance in the magazine.

Regards

Andy Taylor
<http://rantings.shorturl.com>

First podcaster in the Guinness Book of Records?

The hugely popular record-breaking Ricky Gervais podcast finished its run of twelve shows this week with Ricky telling listeners that the show was set to continue, but this time with a fee attached. In an effort to capitalise on the enormous popularity of this show, the new series, starting on 28th February, will be available through Audible at \$6.95 for 'at least' four new episodes. A free preview is available now at www.audible.com.

See www.rickygervais.com for more updates.



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TELEGRAPHPODCAST

Further evidence of podcasting's rise into mainstream media emerged this week when English newspaper The Daily Telegraph closed applications for its new position of 'podcast reporter/producer' several days before the deadline, due to 'overwhelming response to the vacancy'.

A disappointed applicant told PUM 'it seems unfair to close the application early without notice, but I am not surprised by the popularity of the role'.

How long before we see the first newspaper becoming a pure podcast?

Congratulations to Richard Vobes www.vobes.com and Frank Edward Nora www.theovernightscape.com who both hit the 400 show mark on 24th of Feb. Incredibly, Richard Vobes produces not one but two podcasts every day of the week. Surely, this must be some kind of record.

Send your news stories to: news@podcastusermagazine.com

Lance Anderson Podcast Experiment

The Lance Anderson Podcast Experiment, reported to be the first-ever effort at a multinational, trans-Atlantic, real-time, live-stream show with eventual downloadable podcast and DVD, successfully accomplished its primary mission on 24 February 2006. The show, which in addition to Los Angeles storyteller Lance Anderson <http://vergeofthefringe.com> and via video feed his LA cohort Dan Klass www.thebitterestpill.com, featured Glasgow's Mark Hunter www.tartanpodcast.com and

Peterborough's Rob and Jon from www.topofthepods.com, whose top ten list was augmented by comments from both the performers and the audience at the Rose Theatre in Ormskirk. Music for LAPE was provided by Glasgow's Hotrod Cadets www.hotrodcadets.com. Further information about the podcast and the DVD can be found at Lance's website www.lanceanderson.com/lape or from producer Nigel Paice at LAPE@PodcastLive.co.uk. •

LISTENER

Setting up iTunes Smart Playlists

Paul Pinfield explains how iTunes can keep track of all your unplayed podcast

As anyone who is subscribed to more than a dozen podcasts will know, it can be quite a task to work out which episodes of a particular podcast you have listened to, particularly if the podcast issues daily episodes.

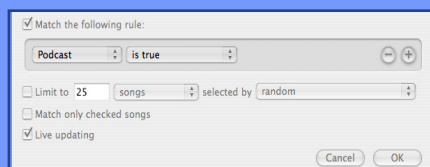
A quick scan through my iTunes software reveals that I am currently subscribed to 16 podcasts, with many others coming and going as I search for new content. A quick email circular to other **Podcast User Magazine** contributors reveals that Phil Coyne is subscribed to 43 podcasts and Colin Meeks is subscribed to a staggering 59. If anyone out there can top this, please let me know. My email address can be found that bottom of this article.

Until very recently my listening life was typified by listening to the first ten seconds of a show, realising that I had already heard it, fishing my iPod out of my cargo pocket,

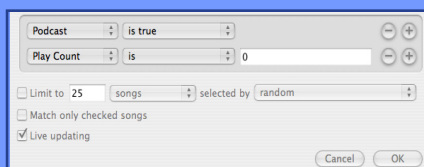
moving to the next show and then quite possibly having the same Ground Hog Day-type experience all over again.

However, what with all the spare time on my hands after we published Issue 1 of **Podcast User Magazine**, I thought I would have a play around with iTunes to see if there was a more elegant way to listen to new episodes of my favourite podcasts. There is, and it is so easy to do that I wished I had done it months ago. Simple!

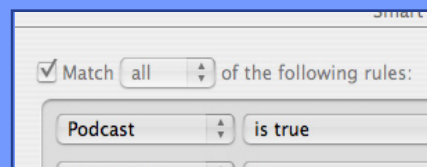
Once you have carried out the steps below and as long as the podcaster uses a consistent naming technique, you will be able to listen to all un-played podcast episodes one after another. And, when each episode is complete, it is automatically removed from the Playlist but the file is not deleted from your iTunes Library. How cool is that? No more podcast misery. • paul.pinfield@podcastusermagazine.com



After selecting New Smart Playlist... from the File menu a new form will appear. Click on the left-hand dropdown list and select 'Podcast'. When 'Podcast' is selected, the right-hand dropdown list is configured to 'Is True', which is exactly what you need. The first rule is now complete.



To create a second rule, click on the circular plus (+) button. From the left-hand dropdown list select 'Play Count'. The resulting default settings that are created do not need to be altered. This rule filters all files in the iTunes library that have an ID3 play count tag value of zero.



In the left-hand corner of the window, you will see a tick-box and a dropdown menu. Make sure that the tick-box is ticked and 'All' is selected in the dropdown menu, otherwise it will all go horribly wrong. Click 'OK' to close the window

Active listening

Simon Toon gives you the lowdown on getting involved

You know how in a normal conversation a listener encourages the speaker by making noises such as ‘mmm’, and ‘aha’? This is commonly called “active listening”. Well, podcasters need encouragement, too! This article will show you how to be an active listener to podcasts.

Obviously the easiest ways to provide feedback to a podcast are using tools such as text email, instant messaging, and comments on blogs or forums. We’re not going to cover these tools in this article, as you probably know how to use them already, and if you don’t there are plenty of other places to learn about them. Podcasting is wonderful because of the joys of audio (and maybe even video). Of course, podcasters will still appreciate feedback in textual form, but audio feedback is usually even more welcome. Recording video

be converted to an audio file and emailed to the podcaster. This all makes it very simple for you to give feedback, but you can’t review or edit your feedback, and the sound quality can also be very low. If you want more quality and control, or if the podcaster doesn’t have such a voicemail facility, you’ll need to use a computer...

Computer

You’ll need access to a computer of some kind and an internet connection. If you’re listening to podcasts, you’ve probably already got access to one of these that is good enough for recording audio feedback. A recent Macintosh computer is the easiest solution, as these usually have all the required software and hardware, but any recent computer is probably good enough.

Microphone

On the web you can find tonnes of highly technical articles, reviews and opinions on the subject of microphones. Some of the most objective information will be found in **Podcast User Magazine**.

Forget about all those, however, for the time being. For providing audio feedback, you don’t need expensive microphones. The built-in microphones included on most Macs, and on some other computers, are perfectly good enough. Inexpensive USB microphones, computer headsets or gaming headsets are all perfectly sufficient.

Recording Software

If you have a microphone connected to your computer, you’ll need some software in which to make your recording. If you have a

Try to inject some extra enthusiasm into your voice to make it sound more natural

is an even more specialised area and will be covered in **Podcast User Magazine** in a future article. If you’d like some help in providing audio feedback, then this article is for you.

Telephone

Many podcasters have set up a special voice mail telephone facility. These are often telephone numbers in the US starting with area code 206, e.g. 206-222-2788, provided by k7.net or similar services. You can call these numbers with any normal telephone and leave a voicemail. This voicemail will then



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recent Mac you'll probably have a copy of Garageband installed on it. This is an ideal piece of software for the purpose, and all versions of it are very easy to use. Another very popular piece of audio recording/editing software is Audacity <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>. This free software has a rich feature set and can be used on Windows, Linux and Mac.

Mobile Recording

Maybe you already have a mobile recording device that is capable of making a recording that you can send through your computer. Does your mobile telephone have recording capabilities? Can it transfer these recordings to your computer? If so, you may have all the recording equipment you need. Refer to the manufacturer's documentation to find out how to do this with your particular telephone. Many MP3 players have recording capabilities, too. The iRiver range, especially the IFP7xx, is very popular amongst podcasters for the quality of its recordings.

Making the Recording

Think about what you're going to say. Keep it brief — podcasters don't usually want long recordings with lots of umms and ahhs. Keep it relevant to the podcast you're sending it to. The more relevant it is, the more chance it will be

Keep it relevant . The more relevant it is, the more chance it will be played

played. Some podcasters will be unimpressed by a generic promo of your 'product'

whatever it may be.

If you're going to read from a script, record it first, then listen to your first recording, and consider whether you need to try to inject some extra enthusiasm into your voice to make it sound more natural. If you're not going to read from a script, consider making notes on what you're going to say. Don't rehearse it too many times, otherwise your message will not sound fresh and natural.

Once you've recorded your feedback, save it as an MP3 file. Try to keep the bit-rate (or quality) as high as possible. Don't use less than 64kbps for mono or 128kbps for stereo. Take care of your MP3 file's ID3 tags. These are the labels such as Track Name, Artist, Album and Comments. Make sure you include a descriptive title, your name and your email address.



Help and Tips

James Hastell is keeping it simple

"You want to hear my podcast? Got a computer? Great! That's all you need". Beginning to try to explain podcasting in one sentence is practically impossible. Sure, you start with "It's just a sound file you download". Now that's simple, but then it gets a little tricky... "You need, of course, an aggregator such as iTunes". Have they turned off? You bet.

The average Joe in the street doesn't want all this hassle. You can't expect them to learn a whole new concept just for you.

It may come as a surprise, but I don't use any device at all, ever. I simply go to the website and download the MP3 there and then; most sites include an option to do this, a simple link or icon. If the site doesn't have one, then I don't listen. It's that simple.

Now that may sound a little harsh, perhaps, but there are people out there who have just mastered the mouse and discovered the backspace key.

It is not to say that the virtues of iTunes, Juice and the like are to be ignored; of course not, but can you see the scenario? People will click





Sending the Recording

Try to find out whether the podcaster prefers MP3 files to be included as attachments to an email or whether they prefer you to email them a link to your MP3 file on a server. If it is the former, just attach the MP3 file to an email. If it is the latter, you'll need to upload your MP3 file onto a website somewhere. If you do not have any suitable web space, register with one of the free webspace providers, such as www.tripod.com. The aim here is to get your file onto a server such that it can be reached from anywhere on the internet via an address starting with 'http://' and ending with '.MP3', for example: 'http://homepage.ntlworld.com/rogersmall/podcasts/DSC20051116_distrought.MP3'. Then try sending the link in an email to a friend and asking them to test whether they can hear the file. Once that works, send that same link to the podcaster.

Voice Chat

Most of the instant messaging clients, such as Skype, AOL Instant Messenger, MSN Messenger, iChat and so forth, have voice chat capabilities. Many podcasts encourage listeners to provide audio feedback interactively (like a telephone conversation) or via voicemail. The podcaster will often be able to record the conversation at their end. Skype www.skype.com is one of the most popular in podcasting, due to its audio quality, full feature set and cross platform compatibility.

Hearing yourself on your favourite podcast is one of the most rewarding thrills a podcast listener can experience. Podcasters themselves need listener feedback in order to remain motivated. Popular podcasts may receive a lot of feedback, though, and it may not always be possible to use your contribution. If, after all your efforts, the podcaster chooses not to use your feedback (or even to deride it), try not to be too disappointed or take it personally.

This article has shown you not only some of the many options you have to provide audio feedback to a podcast but also how you may need to spend little or no money to do it. While the sound quality of the recording is not unimportant, it is the quality of the message, above all, that is the key to getting your feedback to the podcaster and onto the podcast. •

Simon Toon is the creator of the Slam Idol poetry podcast.

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on the iTunes logo supplied by your site, download and run the show and what's next? A whole list of podcasts is staring them in the face, and your site? Sorry, that window was closed a while ago!

Now perhaps you can see the benefit of keeping this possible listener on your site as long as possible by making things clear. They will soon learn about aggregators and use them the way they're designed to be used, as a tool, not as an essential.

I think we all realise that the vast majority of listeners are podcasters themselves or have a good working knowledge of computers and software. They are the 'techy brigade'. We need to reach the everyday, common, garden-variety MP3-wearing public and beyond.

OK, the last bit: the word 'subscribe'. In the US that's not a problem, but here in the UK it has but one meaning. I have lost count of the times when I explain this to people and they assume that, much like a magazine, you have to pay for subscribing to a podcast. Think I'm joking? I'm not. A 'subscription', like the word 'podcast', is very much a misnomer.

I'm sure everyone has met someone who assumed they needed an iPod to listen – see just how easy it is to confuse?

Keep it simple...

LISTENER

A day in the life of a podcast

Colin Meeks gives listeners a peek behind the scenes

Although there is much talk of podcasts, both how to listen to them and how to create them, it's not often that you actually get to hear about the actual creation process. I thought this would be a good opportunity to detail what goes into the Indie Launchpad podcast, including my prepping for the show. I'd like to enter the usual caveat, that I am in no way a seasoned podcaster, so am still learning as I go along, but maybe once I have 30 or 40 shows behind me, I can do a bit of a reprise and detail what's changed.

I'm probably in the same boat as many other podcasters. I have another life away from the mic, and podcasting has to fit in with everything else happening. I'm married with four children, including 16-month-old twin girls, so as you can probably tell, life is at best hectic and at worst... well, let's not go there.

I usually record my podcast in the early hours of Saturday morning. Although it's Saturday, it's always marked as Friday as this is what my body clock tells me, so I call it that. The first thing I do is prepare the show notes. This has the added benefit of providing me with the brief notes I need when actually recording the podcast. The show notes always include the four or five songs I'm going to cover, each with the artist's name, the name of the album on which the song is featured, the name of the song and a link to both the artist and the actual review on Indie Launchpad. I also write a brief outline of the show and, of course, any web links mentioned. I sometimes

have to go back over the notes and add any new things that come to mind while I'm recording. These notes and the outline provide the basis for the show and probably take 20 to 30 minutes to prepare. If I'm being really good, I sometimes even get a chance to do this a few days in advance, which can help things quite a bit.

Before I can even start to record, I have to get my microphone set up just right. I use either a really cheap microphone that came with my computer or an analog Labtec stereo headset that I picked up off eBay for \$10. My choice depends on the surrounding noise. I use the headset if there's noticeable ambient

I usually record my podcast
in the early hours of Saturday
morning

sound around, as the headset microphone is very close to my mouth, which prevents the ambient sounds being picked up. The cheapie mic gives me incredible quality when you consider the original nominal price. The headset is also good, but all too often you can hear the microphone as it moves or brushes against my chin. (I could alleviate some of that if I had a shave before a podcast, but at 2:00 a.m., that's the last thing I want to do.) Both microphones simply plug into the





microphone socket on my PC's sound card.

The motherboard on my main PC was replaced recently. Consequently, my set-up is now non-standard, so I have to make some minor modification to my PC's setup to ensure I can properly record my podcast. Unfortunately, every time I reboot my machine, I have to make sure that these settings are set again, as they get forgotten. One of the most important things I set, if I am using my cheapie mic, is to turn on mic gain; this gives me a 20db increase in volume, which results in a much nicer sound. With all that done, I am ready to start.

It's important to note that use of all the featured music first has to be approved by the artist, band or management

There are many different ways to record a podcast. Some people like to use the programs 'Castblaster' or 'Audacity' and record their whole show live. I'm not quite so brave and like to record the songs in segments with a piece of software called 'Mixcraft' from Acoustica. Mixcraft allows me to import the four or five songs I wish to use into a timeline and then fill in the gaps with talking between each song. I recently changed the opening to the show to a computerised voice singing "You're listening to Indie Launchpad Episode n". I create this for each show on my Mac Mini with a script that makes an AIFF file. Then I then copy this file to the PC and convert it to a Windows WAV file with software called Switch, which is free and very easy to use.

So now I have the opening to the show. The next job is to record my opening spiel within Mixcraft. This can take a couple of takes but usually no more than that, as I don't want to get too hung up on hiccups or pauses. The

only thing that forces me to do another take is when I make a big blunder; with the profanity that follows, prudence usually tells me it's a good idea if I do it again. Then I place in a song, record my comments that follow, and repeat this process again and again until the show is done.

As the Indie Launchpad is a music-based podcast, it's important to note that use of all the featured music first has to be approved by the artist, band or management. I always ensure that before any show I gain approval by email both to make available a downloadable song on the website and also to use a song on the podcast. Only if appropriate permissions have been given, do the songs make it to the website and podcast. This is relatively straightforward, as all the bands featured are independent, which means that the record companies and various license holders, ASCAP, BMI and so forth are not involved.

After the show is done, I quickly have a listen to all the song intros and outros, to make sure I've faded correctly and haven't chopped the songs or words. I then make sure that I set the volume of the songs to 75% and the volume of the spoken word to 200%. This ensures that the whole show is normalised, which means that the volume is relatively consistent and the listener isn't forced to constantly adjust the volume throughout the show. Once I am happy with that, I create the final MP3; this is usually called mixing down. Using Mixcraft for this task gives me the opportunity to adjust the bit rate, which I set to 128kbps, and to also enter the ID3 tags, which show the name of the show, the author, and other information that I might want to add. I am then left with the final MP3 file, which I load up into Windows Media Player to have another quick listen, skipping through to make sure the sound is good and the volume is consistent. All that's left is for me to do then is to upload the file to 'Libsyn', a service that handles the gigabytes of information that will be downloaded, and to publish the show notes. I already have



LISTENER



my feed set up in 'Feedburner', so within a few minutes, Feedburner has seen that a new podcast is available and adjusts my feed, so subscribers can begin downloading the new show.

A complete show, including show notes, usually takes me around two hours, which I don't think is too bad for a show that lasts between 30 and 40 minutes. There's a lot of stuff I can do to improve the show, including purchasing new equipment (which is earmarked soon) and adding some bumpers and sweepers, which I'll try to do over

A complete show, including show notes, usually takes me around two hours

time. I will also try to record a podcast in 'Garageband' on my Mac, which a lot of people do, but that will have to wait until I can get a 'Griffin iMic', as the Mac Mini doesn't have any audio input.

So there you have it. That's how my show is created. I'm sure a lot of this will change over time as I become more accustomed to podcasting and gradually pick up new equipment to make the show sound better, but as you can see, with very little money, it's possible to have a show that sounds pretty good. Here's a breakdown of the costs involved for software, hardware and services.

Microphone / Headset - \$10 (All \$ USD)

Mixcraft - \$40

Libsyn - \$5 per month, but I think I need to go to the next step and pay \$10 per month

Feedburner - \$0

Web Hosting - Free if you use the space provided by Libsys or Blogspot. I'm paying \$20 per month as I have 8 websites all under one account.

Glossary of terms

Intro/Outro - The transition into and out of the music

Bumpers / Sweepers - Audio clips / sound bites that allow the listeners time to comprehend something you just presented.

Feed - The text file, usually with a file name ending in .RSS or .XML that people subscribe to, to automatically get new editions of your podcast.

Show notes - Notes used to record your show and usually later published on your website or within the podcast shownotes

I hope this has been of some help. If you have any questions or comments please do not hesitate to contact me. •



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Why I hate Stereo Microphones

Richard Vobes has a small rant about our fixation with stereo microphones.

I am often asked by listeners of my daily 30-minute podcast why I don't purchase a stereo microphone to make recordings with for the show as it will, they say, improve the quality and listening experience for them. I tell them, however, it will not!

Stereo microphones have one major flaw built in: There are two microphones attached to the same stick, so separation is extremely limited.

I consider high production values imperative in a podcast. People are used to listening to the radio, the television and cinema where they have amazing sound and audio channels bombarding their ears. A standard has been set, and we as podcasters, who are trying to tease this same audience to our home-produced recordings, need to make this as comfortable as possible for them and to place them in familiar territory, particularly if we wish them to stay with us for any length of time. The novelty of hearing an amateur recording and voices wrongly positioned, mumbling and stuttering their way through half-baked thoughts and sentences, wears off all too soon, and the last thing we need is for these people to go clambering back to their old radio sets again and tuning to the bland output by commercial FM stations.

So we need to learn the correct way to record sounds, and that also means not being succumbed into thinking that one size fits all.

Ok, then, what is wrong with a stereo mic? They are supposed to be sexy, aren't they? They give you two separate channels, and you can position a speaker's voice on either side of the listener's head, just like in real life, can't you?

Yes, that is correct, although not sure about the sexy bit, unless you dress it in nylon

stockings and give it a plenty of eye liner!

Let's first of all have a look at the professional broadcaster's approach, shall we? After all, they use stereo microphones all the time, don't they?

Wrong! They don't. Very rarely, in fact. But they do broadcast in stereo, and that has nothing to do with the way they obtain the original recordings. Let me explain.

Have a look at any broadcast supplier's catalogue and you will be lucky to find a stereo microphone on offer. There are some, but they are very rare. Why? Because the professional sound recordists don't use them.

A professional knows that you use the correct microphone for the job in hand and that every situation is different. A single microphone is correctly positioned and collects the audio in a single mono channel. A human

I consider high production values imperative in a podcast

being, as far as my experience goes, only has one mouth, and therefore the sound arrives from that single source. Ergo, you only need one microphone. As a rule, it is positioned roughly 8 inches from the mouth and the sound is captured cleanly and clearly. Room noise or external sounds maybe also recorded, but the voice is the most dominant feature and is what will be focused on.

However, we can take this a stage further and argue that in fact there are two sources of sound here; namely, the speaker and the environment that he or she is in. We may want to convey depth in the recording,



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>>> A stereo microphone, as said before, does not allow you to have complete control

atmosphere and position of the speaker by having him walk around his environment. Surely, this is where a stereo microphone comes into its own?

Yes and no. Ideally, two separate microphones, positioned where they achieve the correct 'depth' you require in the environment, is best. Each one records to a separate channel and so is fully accessible afterwards in the mix and edit! More on that later...

A stereo microphone, as said before, does not allow you to have complete control here, as both mono microphones are attached to the same stick, usually with a ridiculous and nonsensical 180-degree arc of positioning. This means their optimum pick-up is pointing away from each other, so the minute you start to record audio anywhere in the middle of that 180-degree radius the sound quality is extremely poor and at the edge of the microphone's sensitivity.

Don't be fooled into thinking also that a stereo microphone makes the perfect device for recording interviews. In theory it sounds simple. You position your subjects either side of the microphone and have them chat away. The result is then similar to real life – two people talking, one on the left and one on the right.

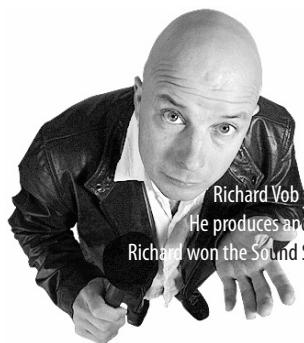
This is where the theory falls down, because when in life do you listen to a conversation by standing immediately in between two people and have them converse to one another through your head? It just doesn't sound right, and it's very poor technique! When you listen to two people standing on either side of you, you will actually hear both of them through both ears and not exclusively just in the left or in the right ear. The difference is one of

degree: speakers will appear to be louder on the side of the nearest ear, but they will be heard in both ears. A stereo microphone tends not reproduce this very human characteristic terribly well.

A better approach, if you are desperate to have a stereo effect, is to have both speakers miked up independently and then record them both on separate channels. Then in the edit, or via a mixing desk, pan the first speaker slightly over to the left channel and the second speaker over to the right, but not completely – certainly no more than two thirds. You will find that the sound quality will be much improved and will sound a lot more natural.

This way you can introduce a third speaker who can be mixed in the middle position across both channels, making a nice clean balance.

Having said all of the above, I do find stereo microphones useful and actually do use one myself. I use this exclusively for recording atmospheres, such as street sounds, interiors of coffee shops or natural birdsong, anywhere in fact where the background is moving about. Therefore, if during an audio tour I have my voice describing the things I see in mono over both channels, mixed in with the stereo background of perhaps cars traveling left to right, I end up with a realistic and easy-to-listen-to audio soundscape. For me then, as a secondary recording device, the stereo microphone is a bonus and can create some wonderful effects. •



Richard Vobes is the most prolific podcaster in the UK. He produces and presents the Richard Vobes Radio Show. Richard won the Sound Seeing Tour Award for the best audio tour in the Podcast Awards 2005

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eBay Microphones

James Hastell goes in search of eBay bargains

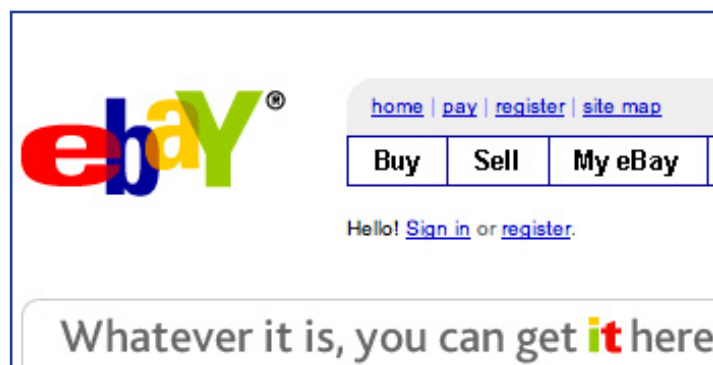
OK, admit it, you've looked, haven't you? Podcasters can be a self-critical bunch, and most of us are a little unhappy about the sound of our own voice. This coupled with electronic farts and popping p's pushes us to looking at upgrading our basic equipment; the microphone.

Now don't get me wrong, eBay is a fine source of supply for all and sundry, but there are many pitfalls to catch the freshly unwrapped podcaster. I speak from experience.

Anyone can use the word 'professional' with gay abandon

"Only £9.99 including p&p: a bargain, a genuine 'vocal' microphone...." or there's that 'Shure' mic at £19.99, now that's a name to be trusted for certain... or is it? Notice that 'Shure' has been spelt 'Sure'. Getting the picture now?

A vocal mic is designed for singers and is held close to



the mouth to receive a strong clear sound within a very short distance. These mics are to an extent dulled down and in the wrong environment make train announcements sound great.

Forget anything labelled 'Karaoke/disco'. These are for the kids with a Woolworth's amp. If it's cheap, then generally so is the product. Anyone can use the word 'professional' with gay abandon. Strangely enough, though, a cheap computer mic can give surprising results, as they are designed for the spoken voice.

The ideal microphone would of course be a fully fledged studio mic at around £1000 or more, but if yours is sat in the wrong environment, it's worthless: granny knitting in the background, computer fan hum, hard surfaces reflecting the sound back all contribute

to undermining quality.

Some budget-price microphones worth looking at are the Behringer C2, at just under £40 UK. This price is for a matched pair (yes, pair) of small-form mics complete with windshields, holder clips and XLR 3 pin

are ideal for mixer input.

Another is the Sony ECM-MS907 which has a 3.5 mm jack plug making it ideal for mobile recordings. It has a unique feature of having two channels, one at 90 degrees and the other at 120 degrees, which is great for table-top chat with two people or just as a direct 'in your face' mic. Priced from £50 upward; shop around for this one.

Now here's where the advice comes in: On eBay, check the seller to see if he has a 'see sellers shop', and if it turns out to be for audio equipment, then that should give you more confidence and offer you the opportunity to ask questions. The seller will have background knowledge that's invaluable, and after all, he would like you to come back and buy more. •

PODCASTER

Just why is the public so reluctant to embrace podcasting?

Grant Mason has some sobering news for podcasters

If you ask the average person in the street or at work if they listen to podcasts, you'll likely be met with a look of befuddlement. If they do listen, it's likely that they'll hold to the mistaken belief that it's something the major broadcasters do to allow you to listen again to previously broadcast content. Or, if they look at podcasts on iTunes, they'll likely look no further than the top 10 shows listed there (which are usually shows by the aforementioned big broadcasters).

So, just why is the world so reluctant to embrace podcasting? In an effort to find out (and please bear in mind that this was all done in a shabbily unscientific manner), I emailed a small band of work colleagues (of whom only two knew that I did a podcast) and some transatlantic friends in the US (all podcast-literate but able to pass on their experiences of public understanding of the term) with a small set of questions concerning podcasting and podcasts. I asked:

If I said the word 'podcasting' to you, what would you think? I need to know:

- if you know what it means
 - if you know of any podcasts
 - if you own an MP3 player, and what type
 - if you listen to any podcasts
- If you do listen, what do you listen to and how did you find what you listen to?
If you don't listen to any, why not?
Is there something that puts you off?

The resulting responses make for pretty scary reading. Consider first the UK results:

Only two of the fifteen sampled didn't have MP3 players (either stand-alone devices or as part of another device such as a mobile

phone).

There was a pretty even split between those who knew and didn't know what the term meant. Those who said they knew said things along the lines of "radio formatted to download onto an MP3 player".

The only podcasts known to the sample were "that Ricky Gervais one" and "Chris Moyles on Radio 1". No one asked actually listened to any, and here's the really interesting part for UK podcasters to note — the reasons why include:

"I listen to the show anyway so no need to hear bits again." (as the only podcast they knew was Chris Moyles' repackaged Radio 1 show)

"I don't like listening to people talk in between music. I don't listen to the radio for the same reasons"

"I'm not really interested; I don't even listen to the radio. I have loads of my own tunes."

"[...]don't know anything about it, however if they begin to podcast the Celtic matches maybe"

"I prefer listening to music or reading books (as opposed to audio books), and podcasts normally have lots of talking like radio. Podcasts are like blogs, the quality of content is highly variable."

"If I want to listen to the radio I'll listen to it live, not recorded, and I've also got a vast CD collection which I have downloaded onto my MP3 player"

"You have to pay for them, don't you? They're on iTunes so I assume you have to pay to get them."

Responses from the US were equally worrying, though showing signs of more public awareness than here in the UK:

"I don't know who these people are who are listening to podcasts over here; I haven't





run into them.”

“I was in the midst of very geeky types, at a computer-based testing conference, and I’d say that about 2% of the people I asked about podcasting actually knew what I was referring to.”

“In all honesty I would say that the majority of people, if I were to ask, would go “Yeah I’ve heard of that” but would not really know what it is.”

the headline <http://www.podcastalley.com/blog/2006/02/10/podcast-billboard-in-san-jose/>.

So it appears that we podcasters have a problem. It’s nigh-on impossible to attract new listeners these days, and this small sample gives us a little taste of the entrenched opinions or podcasting ignorance that we’re fighting against.

With the term pretty much unknown, it’s only being brought to the attention of the

public via the existing mainstream media as a repackaging exercise. Being radio in another format doesn’t interest anyone who bought their MP3 player to listen to their music. Worst of all, it appears that many people don’t like talking between the music, which is something that nearly every music podcaster does. Years of listening to cheesy DJs inanely babbling on and on in attempts to stamp their personalities all over their shows has turned UK listeners off. It would seem that we’re buying iPods, iRivers and MP3 Walkmans in their millions simply to avoid having to listen to commercial radio, ads and DJs. As podcasts are being sold as “radio programs you can download and

listen to on your iPod”, they’ve become – by association with the word ‘radio’ – a pejorative



Is there anyone out there?

“The biggest confusions are ‘I’m not really into music’ or ‘I don’t have an iPod.’”

As far as people knowing about podcasting goes, most people have NO idea what I’m talking about MOST of the time. I think ‘industry’ people (tv, film, advertising) are finally catching on, but your average guy on the street still has no idea what’s going on. I can’t imagine it’ll last much longer. We now have AT&T billboards all over our major cities with the word ‘Podcasts’ as

We’re buying iPods, iRivers and MP3 Walkmans in their millions simply to avoid having to listen to commercial radio, ads and DJs

term and something best avoided. Yet in the US, audiences are being driven to podcasting precisely because they’re tired of commercial radio and corporate domination of the



PODCASTER



music they're made to listen to. They're also tired of the endless sponsorship and advertising ("I love being able to listen to what I want when I want with no or very little advertising").

So here we have the podcasting diaspora – the US is moving towards acceptance and the UK is moving away.

There are clouds on the US horizon though – the dreaded 'monetizing' of podcasts is coming your way. Suddenly the big money is circling, keen to exploit this new advertising avenue. Already we've heard Podshow podcasts being infiltrated by ads for Earthlink. As listeners, many of us have begun unsubscribing as their favourite shows become downloadable ad-hoardings. Many fear that it won't be too long before show content is dictated by the wishes of the sponsor and we wake up to find podcasts have morphed into precisely those shows podcasting was set up to provide an alternative to. US podcasters can then kiss their audiences goodbye; even if you're still independent and ad-free, you will suffer by association. Podcasting will become a dirty word, and it'll have gone full-circle in a way; from people not knowing about it to people not wanting to know about it.

Things are looking as dismal for UK podcasters. Making matters worse, here in the UK it would seem now that there's also a growing use of podcasting by the major record labels to 'hype' their signings: record some snippets of their latest manufactured band's songs with a little chat, then advertise said cast in the mainstream media. After watching bands like Nizlopi and The Arctic Monkeys make their presence felt and whip up major sales and media attention that you couldn't buy, they're catching up fast on the whole podcasting phenomenon. Whilst this is likely to push podcasting into the mainstream, it's also going to mean that by the time Joe Public gets cosy with the term 'podcasting' they're only going to equate it with pushy marketing and forgettable advertising by the usual big business players. Thereafter the thinking

will be that to avoid any more advertising, just don't listen to podcasts. Since you don't have to make any effort to avoid podcasts, as you do to avoid ads on TV or radio, it's only going to push independent, non-commercial podcasters further off the radar.

Many of us have begun unsubscribing as ... favourite shows become downloadable ad-hoardings

This is why we should be getting very frightened indeed. Since we barely register at the moment, all of our signals (in the UK and the US) could eventually disappear completely.



With thanks to Donna Morris, Leigh Dastey, Andrew Craig, Linda Mills, CC Chapman, Dan Klass, Sooz Miller, Marilyn Madsen, Kari Kilgore, Jason Adams and all those who responded but asked for anonymity.



Grant Mason is a professionally self-conscious Scot, if that were possible. However, he still manages to produce the fabulous Three From Leith podcast

<http://www.threefromleith.com>
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Roger Smalls Big Column

 when i received an email asking me to publish my thoughts in a magazine i was so overjoyed that i felt like swinging wide my front door and shouting out the world that someone finally wanted to hear my opinion!!!! but then two things occurred to me that prevented me doing such a rash act. the first thing i realised was that people already do want to hear what i have to say via my podcast, which i will go on to explain. the second realisation was that i wasn't wearing any trousers, and after repeated complaints from neighbourhood watch along with the dreadful cold weather i thought it best to cover up my particulars and start writing this article. i just think it is mind blowing that people all over the world go to the effort to hear my recordings. 🤔🤔

it is very straightforward to record my podcasts (if you can call them that). with my mobile phone i can create a voice memo, which i transfer to my PC, save as an MP3 file and then upload to my web server. i have quite a lot of limitations with my current setup — my audio quality is very poor, i don't know how to edit, i have a slow computer clogged up with dubious images, i only have 55 MB of free web space and i am using a modem to transfer everything. in some ways it's actually easier having low sound quality, because the file size is very small and that means every single one of my entire podcasts can fit onto the 55 MB space on the web server without any problems. 😡

to be honest, i can't be fussed about all that editing, laser-beam noises and gruff american voice-overs that a lot of other podcasters seem so obsessed over. they all sound the same to me, and nobody talks like that in real life unless they work in a laser beam factory and smoke 80 cigarettes a day. i don't know anyone with that job, so i won't be asking them on my show to read out the title, although they sound interesting. surely people will know what show they are listening to because they downloaded it in the first place. it must come from the past when you only knew what radio station you were listening to by the number on the dial — “quit living in the past”, that's what i say. these days

About Me

Name:

Roger Smalls

Location:

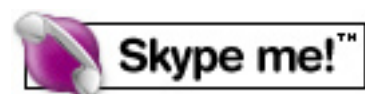
Guildford, Surrey, United Kingdom

i'm looking for a girlfriend am not fussy. i enjoy using the internet to find prettygirls. if anyone would like to go out with me for a date my email is roger_smalls@hotmail.co.uk.

i am not free on tuesdays.

[View my complete profile](#)

<http://rogersmalls.blogspot.com>



if women want to skype me then so be it. that is good. but not men. or strangers. going to miss the bus, better disappear!



it's still Big

what with ID3 tags and whatnot you can find out what show you are listening to without any photon torpedoes and pervy yanks reading out email addresses. 🤖

back to editing — i sometimes append one file after another if i've forgotten to mention anything, but that's about it, really. remember that this is podcasting and not commercial radio, so there is no point in trying to rival Chris Evans. although I do fancy his wife. the jammy ginger bastard. it's just not fair.

i always look to popular podcasters to see how they do things, such as how to name files or what web sites to use. the ones that have been podcasting for ages have learnt their lessons and know what to do. i would recommend a combination of blogger and feedburner if you are new to podcasting as they are very easy to learn. even the scottish lot seem to understand it. 🌈

i probably send as many audio comments to shows that I listen to as I put up on the web server as podcasts. i like to participate in other shows, too, and will make comments and observations about their show topics. as a listener i don't like hearing clips where people read out their web address to the sounds of technobeat music, it's the equivalent of posting a link to your website in a comments board without actually commenting or joining in the conversation. as i sit here now, naked as the day i was born, it angers me, but i remember that this is a community and in every community there is always at least one idiot.

that's about all i do. i don't spend that much time recording podcasts, probably one every fortnight, as i don't have that much to say. i do enjoy participating in other people's shows as it makes me feel like i have real friends and i am a part of something. so far i haven't paid a penny to podcast (apart from my monthly dial up account where i get free webspace, too) — imagine if i had something important to say or real issues to get off my chest? i wish these type of important people would take up podcasting — i'm just a nobody from Guildford in a dead end job with nothing much to say or do.

this technology seems wasted on people like me — if someone like Lee Harvey Oswald had his own podcast and a couple of hundred listeners on feedburner, he wouldn't have felt so lonely and do what he did. who knows? sometimes i think that we all feel like killing small groups of people, but then i remember all the kind emails i get from listeners all over the world and i'll forget all about it and sit back down at my desk. 🤖

as this is a magazine that is read by lots of people, i would like to add for the record that if any girls who drink at the Guildford branch of Yates Wine Lodge on either a Friday or Saturday night should know that the very short man who has a goatee beard and looks like a dwarf rapper is in fact an audi-driving married man with two lovely daughters and takes his wedding ring off before he goes out.

GUEST COLUMN: CHRIS VALLANCE

Chris Vallance is a podfaded hobbycaster who podcasts at

<http://pocketplanetradio.typepad.com>

He also does BBC Radio Five Live's pods and blogs segment heard 0200 every morning on 'Up All Night'.

Back at the turn of the century, before the iPod was thought of and when a blue iMac was the latest thing, I started work on my first radio gig at WGN 720AM in Chicago. WGN's call-sign stands for World's Greatest Newspaper; founded in 1924 as a playful younger sibling of The Chicago Tribune, it crouches at the foot of the neo-gothic Tribune Tower, pumping out Cubbies games and chit-chat to the Chicago metro area. So newspapers getting into the broadcasting business is nothing new — Gervais et al. take note. Oh, and the station is podcasting now, too.

It was at WGN that I first came across a compilation of Ed Murrow's WWII broadcasts: lingering on dusty vinyl shelf in the station's Fibber-McGee-like record library, muddled up with soundtracks to forgotten B movies and novelty baseball records. One track on the LP featured Murrow "embedded" on a bombing raid, which is to say he hitched a ride on a slow, mostly canvas aeroplane chugging through skies filled with plate-sized bits of shrapnell. Murrow came back, but several of his press colleagues did not. The result was one of the great radio broadcasts. I still remember the crackle of the record's endless groove as I sat deeply affected by what I had just heard not wanting to stop listening –what Americans call a "Driveway moment". Yet like many podcasters, Murrow was just a man talking into a mic and like Air Crew Betty or Joe D'Eon, he had to wait till the wheels touched down before he could talk to the listening audience.

It's this great simplicity of speech broadcasting that gives the lie to the indie and professional division that generates so much friction in the podcasting world. To misquote something said to me by a late friend, "There are two kinds of people in this world, those that say that kind of thing, and those that don't". For me the pro/mainstream and indie division is about as meaningful.

I've barely skimmed the surface of the ever-expanding podosphere and yet I've come across quite a few Murrow moments on indie casts. The East Oakland Community College Podcast and Podcast Paul's material from Swaziland stand out, as does Simon Toon's podcast after the 7/7 attacks. None of these casts were technical marvels — though they were certainly well produced — but they were sincere, human and in their different ways each deeply moving. Similarly I think the best piece of radio I've produced in the last five years was done on one of my podcasts without a lot of fancy kit and without the umbilical cord of a large organization behind me. And it's never been broadcast on the radio.

It's an obvious thing to say, but getting a salary every week doesn't guarantee that you'll make consistently great radio. Nor does a low quality MP3 recorded on a cheapo dictophone automatically lead to mould-breaking broadcasting. Both podcasters and radio producers should be fighting against labels and rules, cults, schools and movements that limit their freedom to tell great stories. The greatest battle we face is artistic, with the craft itself. Not with each other. •

Disclaimer. The mice currently infesting the BBC Radio Five Live newsroom count higher up the corporate pecking order than I do, so please don't take anything I say as being representative of BBC policy. This is a purely personal view.

Respect to the indie pod producer

MUSIC

Interview with izzie Voodoo

Phil Coyne speaks to the delightful izzie Voodoo about music, podcasting and anything else that he can get away with...

Phil : How long have you been podcasting?

izzie: About 9 months, I think.

PC: What had the reaction been from other artists when you've told them you podcast?

iV: I think they thought it was line dancing or something. A lot of them didn't know what a podcast was. The immediate reaction I got once though explained was 'Can I send you some material?' I did get the odd band wanting me to prove that it was worth them sending stuff in, but as soon as they were aware that it had the backing of FtM,

I'm incredibly hard to work with

Clickcaster, Podcast Pickle and various other podcasting sites, coupled with its regular streaming now at extremeindieradio.com and live365, they didn't stop to question.

PC: How did you find setting up the podcast?

iV: As easy as you could imagine — from



the recording point of view. As a musician, producer and website designer with my own studio at home, it was second nature. There were one or two things I had to get my head around as regards the different sites having different means of uploading and publishing show notes, but that's just normal with anything new.

Phil : Do you think there will be a big response to your new album because of the tracks being played on podcasts?

iV: I hope so. The new album is slightly different generally from the previous material that I've done. The material itself is different in that the arrangements and the production are better quality. It's taken longer than the previous album for me to get it right, but it's been worth it. It's been mastered by someone else this time, too, and although they're very good at what they do, I'm incredibly hard to work with, and some of the tracks have had to



>>>

be redone a few times. It gels much better as an album, too. ‘Pointless’ was basically just a collection of songs I wrote which had absolutely no bearing on each other at all. It all sounded good separately, but I shoved all the tracks together on a CD with some artwork because people liked them and wanted to own them. This time, the songs are all written in a similar vein and given similar treatment — as they should be in order for it to work well — and I think it does. I’ve only played a couple of tracks from ‘Mercury Poisoning’ so far on the Quota Show but the response has been excellent. I’m hoping that Quota Show fans have been sufficiently impressed with what I have played to want to hear what the rest is all about.

Phil : What do you hope to be doing in 6 months’ time? Both as an artist and a podcaster.

iV: How long is a piece of string? Six months would take us to August which is still festival time, so I guess I’d like to be playing some festivals, promoting ‘Mercury Poisoning’ with the rest of the band. I hope that the new material encourages labels to start offering me deals again and obviously I’d hope that one of those would be a major and offer me something I can’t refuse.

As a podcaster, I’m looking all the time now into expanding the horizons of the Voodoo Quota Show. I’m currently building a website for a new offshoot called ‘Limelight’, which will be on the 15th of the month, so it falls between the Quota Shows. It dedicates its full 30 minutes to a different band each month, playing their music, with lots of info about them, interviews, quizzes with t-shirt give-aways and all kinds of other things.

There’s already a lot of interest in it, so six months down the line, I’m hoping that that has taken off as well as possible. There are three goals here, one is to give music fans some bright new music to listen to

and a show featuring bands they can actually get excited about. Another is to gain a much wider audience for talented bands who are sick of being ignored at major radio stations, not because they don’t meet the industry standards, but because they get overlooked due to various factors including the pressures that ‘fashion’ puts on their A&R — or simply because they get buried in the huge constant influx of submissions that they have. And the

I don’t just play everything that gets submitted. There has to be a good reason why I want to play a track on the Voodoo Quota Show

third goal is to attract the industry itself, so that we know it’s getting heard by the right people.

Reputation has a lot to do with the ability to do that — and that’s why, although I try to give everyone a fair chance, I don’t just play everything that gets submitted. There has to be a good reason why I want to play a track on the Voodoo Quota Show and the same will go for the bands on Limelight. That way I can make sure that they both maintain a high standard of music that’s attractive to those people and makes them want to keep coming back.

So both as an artist and a podcaster, I’d like to be doing what I’m doing now in six months’ time, but on a much broader scale. •



Phil Coyne: Host of the Bitjobs for the Masses! podcast

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BUSINESS

Chris Skinner is a radio producer who has a dream of making a sitcom about a cricket team made up of techno DJ's, with David Hasselhoff as the lead. One of the 1st British Podcasters, Chris's show Simulacrum has won a worldwide audience. Chris has recently grown an ear.

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Chris Skinner, set to play a role in an exciting new podcast development for the BBC, tells us the BBC continue to lead the way

The BBC's podcasting 'trial' has been so successful that in the forthcoming months we will see our listening choice expanded to around 50 programmes, with some important new developments. It has been a move that they have been careful to consider, bearing in mind 'the unique way the BBC is funded' and, it is another indication that the BBC sees online as a congeable, perhaps vital way of broadcasting in the future.

One potential talking point is the planned Five Live Formula One podcast, 'Chequered Flag'. All being well, this will be the BBC's first podcast-only programme (i.e., not a cut down or complete version of a radio broadcast) and is the strongest indication yet that it could be content and genre, and not networks, that will govern how we listen to BBC Radio. The fact is that for most pre-recorded programmes you hear on the BBC, there are several more hours of footage you will never hear. By making extra, specialist footage available in addition to the final programme, the listening experience will be improved and the BBC will as a result be better value for money.

There are many podcast 'networks' forming at the moment; these, in a simple sense, are non-linear, online radio stations. The programmes often share websites, jingles and trails and (importantly) audience. The BBC is also beginning to feel like this, but what about commercial radio?

Speaking at a recent Radio Academy event, Chris Pegg, programme director of GCAP group station Beacon FM, did not appear too worried about the potential effect of podcasting on his station's popularity, revealing that their role was as 'content providers, and people will always want good content'. This may be true, and Chris certainly didn't deserve the treatment he received from a podcast-hungry crowd, but GCAP, for all their work behind the scenes (and there is no doubt that there is work under way), appear to be lagging.

In UK radio, the Rajar ratings, calculating audience figures, were always monitored to see how the BBC fared against commercial radio, but with the BBC so strong at the moment, Virgin's James Cridland believed that "commercial radio's main aim is not trying to beat the BBC, but to keep people listening to radio". All the more difficult, states Cridland, as "podcasting has reawakened the excitement for great speech programming", something the BBC have always excelled at.

It's a battle they will have to fight on several fronts, and if big radio players lag behind and don't make innovative content that can be heard in a number of ways, then they must expect to struggle.

The 'trial' seems to be over, and a very favourable full-time contract looks set to be the order of the day. •



The Revolution Has Begun

Are these podcasts Top Gear or should they be Doing Time?

There is only one way to find out. So, fix yourself a drink and prepare to be enlightened as Alex and Janet guide you through this month's pick of the good, the bad and the ugly...



Alex started his pioneering small business podcast, SmallBizPod, in March 2005. He also pretends he's a superstar DJ and produces original electronica and mixes for the electromancer.com podcasts.

<http://smallbizpod.co.uk>
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Sitting down to write a few reviews this month, I seriously thought about pulling my trousers up as far as they could go, without irreparably damaging anything vital, donning a tight white t-shirt and adopting the curiously camp air of Simon Cowell. If I'm going to do reviews on a regular basis, I might as well take on the good, the bad and the ugly and demonstrate my witheringly sharp wit, I thought.

But then I remembered something that I still believe about podcasting after more than a year: there's no such thing as a crap podcast. "Bollocks", I hear you cry. Well, let me explain myself.

If just a couple of people listen to your podcast and enjoy it, or if you create a podcast simply because you value the opportunity for self-expression, then it's worthwhile and has a value. And that's the point. It doesn't matter how small the niche is in podcasting. The beauty of it is that it opens the doors for "anyone with something or nothing to say", as Peter Day of the BBC once said, to express themselves, experiment and have fun.

That said, you'll see for the first time we've introduced a rating system in the review section this month ... and I plan to be brutal!

MeltingTalks Podcast – <http://annie.viglielmo.free.fr/>

Among the hundreds of emails and comments received in response to the first edition of **Podcast User Magazine** was a note from a French podcasting news and directory site. This prompted me and other francophile UK podcasters to check out the scene across the channel. France is a powerhouse when it comes to blogging, compared with the rest of Europe, but podcasting seems to have taken off more slowly.

But French podcasting does hit the headlines once in a while, as Loic Lemeur proved when he did a podcast interview with the French Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, and controversially used the familiar, podcasting-friendly, 'tu' form of the word

TOP GEAR ☆☆☆☆☆
WHIZZING ALONG ☆☆☆☆
BOY RACER ☆☆☆
SUNDAY DRIVER ☆☆
12 MONTH BAN ☆
DOING TIME x



PODCAST REVIEWS



‘you’ throughout their conversation.

Behind the headlines, a little digging throws up some real podcast gems, such as Annie Viglielmo’s MeltingTalks podcast. It’s a French language, talk-based companion to her popular MeltingPod podcast, which focuses on rock bands from Marseilles and beyond. Annie is apparently France’s first female podcaster and in MeltingTalks includes behind-the-scenes interviews with bands, members of the French digerati and most recently politicians and others in relation to the EU Copyright Directive (EUCD).

Annie’s style is engaging, lively, intelligent and amusing, which makes for some entertaining interviews. The series on the proposed French implementation of the EUCD is well worth a listen, as dry a subject as it may sound. Annie adeptly reveals the full implications of a law, which if enacted, would make podcasting and freeware software illegal, as well as forbid independent bands from releasing any tracks over the internet unless they are protected by a digital rights management system. All this in the name of “protecting the rights of the artist”. Incredible, I grant you, but listen to MeltingTalks for a deeper insight.

WHIZZING ALONG



Download with Heather & Jonelle – <http://download.acuvue.com>

I’ve nothing against manufactured girl bands and have been known to hum along to the odd Spice Girls tune. But manufactured girl podcasts? Isn’t that what Johnson & Johnson has created with Download with Heather & Jonelle? If I’m wrong, I’d be more than delighted to hear the back story from either of the two hosts of this 15-minute podcast, which mixes podsafes music with conservative, teenage girl chat from the heart of middle America.

Not being a conservative teenage girl from the heart of middle America, I’m unlikely to be able to do this podcast justice, but I’ll try to be as impartial as I can.

Firstly, the two young protagonists of the show have actually nailed that familiar, chatty podcast-like tone. It’s like listening to two teenage girls on the back seat of a bus talking about spots, boys, being dumped and whether Ugg boots are best worn with jeans or sweat pants. Each week Heather and Jonelle also invite one lucky high-school beau onto the show in order to add a little saccharine sexual tension. Other regular features include lyric of the week, “overheard in the café” and the weekly debate on issues such as “blind dates – a good or bad idea?”

If I were a teenage girl in the US, I think I’d be wanting to listen to something more gritty or more provocative. Having said that, I remember my little sister always read magazines aimed at 18-year-olds when she was 12, so perhaps Heather & Jonelle’s listeners are largely comprised of eight-year-olds. Girls always seem to consume media beyond their years.

Which brings me to Johnson & Johnson’s involvement with the show. For a company as conservative as J&J venturing into the world of podcasting is a brave move, and they deserve credit for this. Whether you agree with advertising in podcasts or not, the way Acuvue is mentioned in the podcasts themselves is not bad. It’s relatively subtle. No Earthlink controversy here.

Perhaps Heather & Jonelle’s
listeners are largely comprised of
eight-year-olds





The website, on the other hand, blows any kind of podcasting authenticity out of the water, being as plastered in Acuvue endorsement, products and the words of corporate lawyers as it's possible to be. I know the US has a litigious culture, but the following legals taken verbatim from the site are hardly likely to encourage genuine feedback from listeners:

"Information collected in our Share the love, Burning? of the week, and Tell us what U think! forms become the property of Johnson & Johnson Vision Care, Inc., and may be used on download.acuvue.com. You agree that any content you send us will not violate any rights of any third party and that you will only send us content for which you own the rights. By submitting the information, you agree that the information you provide will be governed by our site's Privacy Policy."

The above raises an interesting question. If J&J had merely sponsored an independent podcast, would they have had to put this kind of disclaimer on the site? I'd hazard a guess the answer is probably no. I suspect, however, that it's because this podcast has been manufactured, as it were, by J&J that the lawyers were keen to get involved. Similar disclaimer statements are made at the end of the podcast, albeit with some humour, but they don't sit well in context.

The website blows any kind of podcasting authenticity out of the water

So, to get back to the podcast itself, although the content is delivered well by Heather & Jonelle who seem to have a natural style, there remains something slightly artificial to me about the show. But then that doesn't matter, if the target audience is enjoying it.

That said, I would like to send a message to both Heather and Jonelle to say that yes, someone in England has listened to your podcasts and that I'm looking forward to hearing you guys play my audio comment!

SUNDAY DRIVER



Reviews In Brief

The Gillmor Gang – <http://gillmorgang.podshow.com/?p=33>

Sharp, irascible host Steve Gillmor and regular team of tech glitterati talk for hours on gesture, attention and Google while desperately trying to keep their fingers on the racing pulse that is our technological future. Appears to be recorded using a tape deck and phones imported to the US by the founding fathers. Almost incomprehensible, insightful and compelling listening.

WHIZZING ALONG



Sky News Podcast – <http://www.sky.com/skynews/>

The Sky News Centre podcasts its mid-day news bulletin headlines. Why? Ideal for those who want to listen to last Wednesday's news headlines while walking the dog.

DOING TIME



PODCAST REVIEWS



Janet Parkinson is better known as GeekgirlUK. Along with her husband, Paul, she presents the Flashing12 podcast. There are some who think that Janet generally gets the better of Paul. But, don't tell him we said that as he is a big lad.

<http://flashing12.blogspot.com/>
janet.parkinson@podcastusermagazine.com



IOEO <http://groovetrack.blogspot.com/>

Caught your attention? Got mine, too.... Taking my first small foray into the depths of French podcast land (an experience to relate another time...), I stumbled across and fell in love – in true French style – with IOEO....

Originally a 'cast in pure French, IOEO decided in Audioblog 10 to go bilingual – one assumes to broaden his audience... And it works! His blog, groovetrack.blogspot.com even asks the question, 'Do you prefer this blog in English or French?' and you can vote.

In a simple and understated way he introduces you, in his 'Dark Sensual Ambient Audioblog' no.10, to an ambient piece by an Indian composer which was written for the victims of the hurricanes in the USA last year. The piece is in an interesting flavour of English/American (!) but has a unique mystical twist.... all ambient connoisseurs should subscribe....

Delve deeper into earlier 'casts and you discover that IOEO is Cédric Rey, a truly talented French ambient composer who introduces you to diverse international musicians along the way. So for those who dare take the risk and venture onto the continent, IOEO makes it a smooth and easy ride.

Bon voyage! •

WHIZZING ALONG



Terminal skin-flint, James Hastell, makes a valiant plea for the cheap MP3 player

There are now a plethora of MP3 players on the market in every conceivable shape and size, so what's the difference?

"Not a lot" is the simple answer; they all do the same job, delivering audio to the ears in a comfortable way. The mother of all players has to be the famous iPod, the very device that coined the term 'podcasting' — sleek, stylish and reassuringly expensive, but does that make it better? No, just fashionable.

Ah, fashion... there's the rub. There are only a certain amount of control options that can be put on a device before it becomes difficult or uncomfortable to use, and so marketing starts to look at other options to promote their products. Apple, I think, have sewn up the market with the wide range of accessories

available, making the iPod fashion icon. Bling bling!

So what's at the other end of the scale? Cheap Japanese mini players, of course.

I have not seen an ugly player; all have some semblance of style, but I always err towards simplicity. After all, I just want to hear what's on it, not fiddle with the controls. To this end I own a supermarket special buy £19.99 machine, the size of a small sausage. With 128 MB solid-state memory it holds five half-hour podcasts. After all, just how long do you spend listening? Most people I know use these devices on the way to and from work, and this is ideal.

Did you get one for Christmas? Used it yet? •

Podcasting business models

There is something troubling **Paul Pinfield**

If you are anything other than straight out of the box, you will know that most tech articles tend to be highly descriptive and crammed with certainty. Well, this article is certainly neither of those. It's more of a series of thoughts and questions which I raise in the hope of getting you and everyone else thinking and asking yourself some pretty basic questions about where we would like podcasting to be in a couple of years' time, what we would like to listen to and view and, most important of all, what is podcasting worth to us?

What I am looking for is feedback, argument, call it what you will. Whilst it would be lovely to have a whole bunch of people emailing in and saying what a far-sighted genius I am, I am much more interested in people with opposing views or those who actually have an opinion at all. Your feedback will be published in **Podcast User Magazine Issue 3**. This is your chance to perhaps influence, in some small way, the direction that podcasting takes.

So, why is it that I am writing this article? Well, I have a problem. Actually it's a series of problems. As a small businessman, I just don't understand how podcasting is developing with regard to its financial viability. I can't see sustainability in the businesses that are currently trying to make a go of it. I should point out right away that I don't include the paid-for hosting services, such as Libsyn, in this. Paid-for hosting companies have a really simple business model: you pay, they host your podcasts. If they are any good, they make a profit. Simple.

In researching this article, I contacted Podshow, Blastpodcast, Podtrac, Kiptronic and Fresh Media Works. The fact that only Podshow

showed any professionalism by having the courtesy to reply does not bode well for the future.

The questions about their business models were as follows. How do they identify listeners geographically, socio-economically and by interest group? What is the process by which advertisers are paired with podcasts? How do they see podcasting developing in terms of revenue? Do they believe that it will become feasible for podcasters to make a living by podcasting full-time?

I just don't understand how podcasting is developing

Responding via email, Ron Bloom, Podshow's CEO wrote "PodShow is intent on helping podcasters turn user generated content into media properties. As part of its service, PodShow provides the tools, services and infrastructure necessary to compete with the most powerful media companies in the world. We work with producers of independent content to bond these media properties to their audience, grow that audience through network exposure, and then bond that media property and audience with name-brand marketers. We have shown a unique ability to foster these relationships and make them successful.

"Through this process, we are already seeing a market emerge whereby podcasters and other producers of content are enjoying the economic benefits of competing successfully with mainstream media. This is an inevitable result of the increasing quality of the



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content, the connection with a hungry audience and the willingness of marketers to partner with leaders in the medium.”

Before I get to the crux of my ignorance, let’s just set out the various business models available to podcasting companies. If I have left a model out, please mail me. I would be really interested to understand it. To my mind there are three possible business models that can be implemented in this industry.

- The advertising based model: Adverts are, in various ways, incorporated into podcasts
- The paid subscription based model
Listeners pay a fixed monthly sum to hear a whole collection of exclusive-content podcasts
- The free model: A podcasting company collects as many listeners as possible around a series of podcasts and then sells the company on to another who will seek a revenue from the existing listener base.

The free model

Let’s just deal with the last model, if we can, first. I might be wrong, but right now I can’t see that the free model is sustainable in the long term. Sure, if the company owner can get a buyer, he or she will make some money from the sale. Surely, the whole point of listening to a podcast is that it is not like other media. Who in their right mind would buy a group of people who have become podcast listeners precisely because podcasts are, on the whole, non-standardised and free from advertising? Would it be possible to convert the purchased listening base into paid-for subscribers?

I don’t know whether the free model would work, but I would have thought that if you were looking for a paid-for subscriber base to sell, it would probably best to develop it from the outset. At least that way, you know that everyone of your listeners is the type of person who is willing to pay for something that they value.

The great thing about being a podcaster is that you can potentially have a global audience

The advertising model

As mentioned previously, I am a businessman, and one of the things that I spend a good deal of money on is advertising. Before I hand over my cash, I want to know who I am going to be able to reach, their socio-economic group, what their interests are and whether I am being asked to pay to advertise to people who could not possibly buy my services.

The general thrust of businesses who implement the advertising model (and I accept that Podshow and maybe others will offer additional services) is to collect as many podcasts as possible and act as a mediator between podcasters, with their inevitably small listener base, and advertisers, who are looking for larger collective audiences. The podcast company then shares any revenue with the podcaster. Quite what the revenue split currently is, is anyone’s guess, and a guess it will remain, because you will find little or no published data for public consumption.

As you will be aware, the great thing about being a podcaster is that you can potentially have a global audience. Very cool, you might think, and indeed from the podcaster’s point of view it certainly is. However, when it comes to advertising, there is a problem to which I have not yet heard a satisfactory answer, or actually, any attempt at an answer, and it is this: How do you ensure that podcast listeners get to hear advertising that is geographically relevant to them?

The trend seems to be that if you live in the USA, you will be fine, because the vast majority of current advertisers are US-based. However, if you do not live in the USA, how long will it be before your listeners tire of listening to





repeated adverts for a product or service that they cannot purchase? How long before they get into the habit of skipping all adverts in the same way as they may currently skip songs that they don't like? The concept of skipping adverts could quickly develop into the habit of skipping the whole show, the very thing you or your advertiser does not want.

One answer might be to sign up worldwide brands such as Calvin Klein, Nike, Coca-Cola et al. This however raises three further questions:

Firstly, do these brands want to advertise on podcasts? Do they even understand what a podcast is and how it currently differs from traditional radio? Arguably, some may, but most will not understand.

Secondly, there is a sizeable number of listeners who listen to podcasts precisely because they are sick of listening to the same play lists and the same adverts on every radio station. Are these people going to be driven to advert-free podcasts? I would like you to hold on to this thought for a moment or two because advert-free may come at a price.

Thirdly, although the podcasting centre of gravity is undoubtedly in North America at the moment, this will diminish in the coming year or so as podcasting gains a wider understanding and acceptance in the rest of the world. Europe has a strong tradition of following in the footsteps of the USA, particularly in the media field. If this is the case, is it really sustainable that enough worldwide brands would want to support all of the tens or possibly hundreds of thousands of people who would like to make a living from podcasting, now and in the medium term?

How about these for a few thoughts:

- In an attempt to make money from podcasting, would the advertising model turn podcasting into the type of medium that caused so many people to shun commercial radio? To become attractive to advertisers, would podcasts become homogenised?
- Would the majority of advertising supported shows become middle of the road in order to hang on to their advertising? Doubtless, there will always be some groundbreaking shows, but if we are honest with ourselves, how many of us are currently breaking the mould in podcasting terms?
- Could it be that the podcasting companies' are looking over our heads', so to speak? Perhaps, as podcasting becomes more popular, they are actually aiming for the second and third wave of listeners: the people who are used to hearing adverts on their radios and to whom podcasting is just another way to consume radio on the go. If that's the case, and I have no evidence that it is, the expectation of

Why would I pay for something that I currently enjoy for free?

new listeners will allow for a marked shift in what podcasting is. I think that these are the issues that we all need to think about and at least be aware of. You think that's mad? Just remember, there was a time when people said that advertising on the internet would never catch on.

The paid subscription model

This final business model calls for listeners to put their hands in their pockets and, horror of horrors, pay to listen to a series of podcasts. What, in effect could be termed as your own personal radio channel. And, it's right about now that I am imagining you all either laughing at me or choking. 'What? Pay to listen to a podcast?'

Well, I grant you, there are some problems with this argument, not least of which is the question 'why would I pay for something that I currently enjoy for free?' That is a fair point and, in itself, a huge obstacle to the



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whole model. Having said that, in the long run, you will pay for podcasts in one way or another. For how many more years do you think that podcasters will carry on spending up to 30 hours per week creating podcasts for nothing and then stumping up to pay for a hosting service? If there is a payback for the enthusiastic amateur, surely that road will be taken rather than ignored.

The other problem with this model is that a fair number of podcasts would not attract revenue easily. So, I don't for a moment believe that the paid subscription model is the answer to all our prayers, because most podcasts would not be worth paying for.

Having said that, there is one notable exception in the form of the Richard Vobes Radio Show, run, as the name would suggest, by Richard Vobes. Richard, along with Adrian Pegg, took the idea of Shareware – a voluntary software licensing model widely used by small application developers to cover the cost of developing software – renamed it Podshare and applied it to the Vobes show, www.vobes.com. The principle being, if you enjoy and value this show, please pay \$20 per year to help fund it. By paying the Podshare fee, listeners are given access to back catalogues and other material which the casual listener cannot access. Richard has had some success with this model, to the extent that it has helped to fund a trip to the USA to meet some of his listeners.

The paid subscription model does however have some merits, such as giving podcasters' the freedom to experiment, short-term financial security and so forth. As podcasting changes, will you be one of the people whom I asked to hold that thought for a moment or two? Do you value the podcasts that you currently listen to enough to support the people who produce them? And, if you don't value these podcasts, what on earth are you listening to them for? Do you want to contribute to a show that does not have to worry about having its advertising pulled because the advertiser does not approve of the

direction that the show is taking?

Now that we are reaching the end of this article, it is time to come clean. I don't for a second believe that we will see a major company setting up a wide-scale subscription-based podcasting service anytime this year. But you should be aware that the advertising model carries considerable risk for everyone, from shareholders to advertisers to podcasters to listeners.

If the current crop of podcasting companies fail to satisfy the listener base (and I just get the feeling that this is beginning to happen), or, if they fail to attract the very large advertising revenues needed to service all those who would like to make a living via podcasting, then some other model will be required if podcasting is to be anything other than a quaint little hobby. I have no doubt that podcasting companies are working to try to make this all work, and a lot of people have their hopes and dreams pinned on the likes of Podshow being able to fulfill their promises. But, at the moment I personally think it's a marginal call either way. I really hope these guys can do it, but it is going to take a lot of careful thought and execution to overcome the many problems that lie ahead.

You will find my email address at the bottom of this article. So if you want to harangue me, tell me to keep quiet, think that I am deluded or any or all of that, fill your boots. Argument is the sign of a healthy democracy, and we all have an equal say here. Don't we? •



Paul Pinfield runs various businesses and is the producer of the Calmcast. He quite likes Birmingham.

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Free?

Mark Hunter has a bee in his bonnet

One of the defining characteristics of the podcast community is the word ‘free’. Like many podcast listeners, I use the music store, for free, to subscribe to the podcasts I enjoy listening to. iTunes then checks the feeds of each podcast, and when a new show becomes available downloads it onto my computer. For free. When I plug my iPod into my computer, iTunes transfers the new podcast episodes, for free, onto my device, which I then unplug and take with me, allowing me to listen to content created with care by talented people from the four corners of the earth. For free.

So let’s add up how much this has cost me so far. I’ll discount my broadband bill from the equation because I have that anyway, and of course I bought my iPod and computer before I even knew what a podcast was, so they can’t be added to the bill. iTunes was a free download, and I was able to subscribe to and download each podcast without once having to get my credit card out of my wallet. That gives me a grand total of zero money spent. In other words, it’s free.

And it’s this culture of ‘getting it for free’ that is one of the key hallmarks of podcasting. In fact, someone recently described it as the ‘ethos of podcasting’. It’s extended into all avenues of podcasting, from the creation of the podcast, to the delivery of it. People expect ‘free’. Software developers have worked hard to create podcast clients such as Juice (formerly known as iPodder), iPodderX (currently unavailable due to a trademark issue) and the new WinPodder, all of which are either available for free or have a free version. And of course, the behemoth of podcast clients, iTunes, was developed by Apple and

delivered for free. Even the magazine within which this column appears was made available by its creators for free.

Podshow-centric directory Podcast Alley lists, at the time of writing, 14,164 podcasts and a total of 371,895 podcast episodes, the overriding majority of which are available for anyone to download for free. Podcast Pickle similarly lists 5429 podcasts providing a total of 71,922 free-to-download episodes.

But does ‘free’ mean the same as ‘without cost’?

Let’s think about those software developers. They no doubt work long hours working on and developing software clients that we happily, and with impunity, download and use. How many of us give a thought to the sheer number of unpaid hours they’ve put in to getting the software just right before uploading it onto a server which they’ll need to pay for – from which we download our copy

Free does not equal without cost

of the file, thus adding to their bandwidth bill? That free piece of software has been created and delivered to us, but not without cost.

What about an online magazine such as **Podcast User Magazine**? While the crew of willing contributors is fairly large and enthusiastic, each of us has spent time writing, researching and editing the content that’s on your screen right now. And while it’s being made available to download for free, it hasn’t been without cost, mostly in time and effort.

And consider the podcast producer. The time and energy that goes into creating



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a podcast can only be appreciated by other podcast producers. I recently asked some non-podcasters to guest-host and produce the tartanpodcast. While they enjoyed the experience, each of them was at pains to point out they had no idea, until they'd tried it, how much work and effort goes into producing a podcast.

Once the podcast has been created and the correct ID3 tags entered, etc., it's uploaded onto a server and made available for free download. Thankfully we podcast producers have services such as that provided by Libsyn (short for Liberated Syndication), who provide a flat bandwidth fee in exchange for a limited amount of storage space, otherwise each of us would have quit producing a long time ago due to our wallets taking a bandwidth-bill-

Be prepared for your favourite podcasts, through time, to be supported by ads

induced pounding. But while Libsyn's service is a boon, it is provided at a cost, a cost met by the producer.

Factor in the purchase of hardware, something that many producers opt for through the desire, both in themselves and from their listeners, for a better produced podcast as far as its audio quality, and very soon you have a potentially expensive exercise: time spent producing and editing and writing show notes and paying for a hosting service and hardware.

Admittedly, having podcast production as a hobby isn't going to hit you as hard financially as other hobbies. Buying a set of golf clubs and paying greens fees, for example, is probably considerably more expensive than podcasting buying podcasting gear. Similarly, quality photography equipment for the average hobbyist would cost far more than good

podcasting kit. So on balance the podcasters aren't as much out of pocket for enjoying their hobby than other hobbyists. And as a result it's unlikely we'll see any podcasters daring to charge listeners per download. At least not for the time being.

However, free does not equal without cost and while free is the identifying mark of podcasting for now, and for the foreseeable future, will that always be the case?

In my opinion, yes. I consider it unlikely, and not recommended, for a podcast producer to start charging a fee for downloading content. (One exception to this is Ricky Gervais, who after releasing 12 podcasts for free announced that future episodes will only be available for a monthly fee.) And that's because 'free' is the part of the ethos of podcasting and will continue to be the case. Some listeners are willing and vocal about contributing to the ongoing costs of podcast production and happily 'tip' or sign up for monthly 'subscriptions' to help defray the costs that may be incurred. Others feel that the content should be free, and I've read on more than one blog that some believe podcast producers should not receive any money at all for their endeavours.

However, I do expect to hear more advertising in podcasts and in free content such as a magazine like this one, and I personally support this model.

Free content does not mean it is produced without cost; of course there are costs involved. And while that doesn't mean you or I should have to pay a per-download fee, be prepared for your favourite podcasts, through time, to be supported by ads, thereby keeping them free. •



Mark Hunter has decided that he is going to talk about himself in the third person to make him sound more interesting. Mark presents the world famous tartanpodcast

<http://www.tartanpodcast.com>
mark.hunter@podcastusermagazine.com

I've recorded a Podcast – now what do I do with it?



Part II

Greetings fellow podpeople and welcome to part II in a series of articles intended to introduce the newbie podcaster to some real-world tips and tricks for getting your 'cast distributed, listened to and benefiting from a healthy feedback loop with a forum or two.

Last time we looked at the benefits of Libsyn and a Gmail email address and, as promised, we are now going to look at linking them both to a Blogger page. Once we've done this, you'll be able to use your podcast domain as if it were a site you built yourself; you can send and receive email from the domain and start playing with the blog template.

If you haven't already got one, go get yourself a blogging account. Blogger will do, but there are dozens of services out there with varying complexity and features. Go to Wikipedia, where there is a great section on blog hosting services at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Blog_hosting_services.

Setting one up is pretty straightforward whichever service you choose, but the standard templates are, frankly, dull. We'll be taking a detailed look at modifying the template next time. Please note that this month's homework is on templates – see below.

As before, it's best to give everything the same name as your 'cast. It helps when recalling the various files, URLs and log-ins, and Blogger uses the format "blogname.blogspot.com" : mine is "flashing12.blogspot.com" for example. At Blogger you can host

many blogs under the same user ID — the first one to email me with the names of my other (truly dreadful and painful but thankfully ignored) blogs will win a shout out on my next show!

In the spirit of keeping it simple, the best way to use your domain for now is to route it

Last time we looked at the benefits of Libsyn and a Gmail email address

to your blogging page. Your domain/hosting company should allow you to redirect all requests made for www.yourpodcast.com to yourpodcast.blogspot.com. "1and1" call it Domain Destination Settings. This makes tagging your podcast sound very swish. I, personally, think www.theflashing12.com sounds far better than flashing12.blogspot.com, but they are the same place! You still retain the flexibility for the next stage, which is to host the blog yourself and then go to a full-on website later on.

I use flashing12@gmail.com for my email. However, your domain/hosting company should be able to provide additional resources that make the whole thing a lot more professional. Email forwarding allows for an email sent to "me@mypodcast.com" to be sent to "mypodcast@gmail.com". Setting it up should be easy, but you might need to



PODCASTER



root around in the settings at your domain company. This enables incoming email to be sent to you, but what about the outgoing stuff?

There is a very cute trick in Gmail that allows you to send email as if it has come from a different email address. Go to 'Settings', then 'Accounts', and you will see 'Send Mail As'. This will, once you set it up, allow you to use your Gmail account to make an email look like it's come from your domain directly. I use this facility within the **Podcast User Magazine** group to allow me to send mail as if it has come from my account at **Podcast User**

Use your Gmail account to make an email look like it's come from your domain directly

Magazine, but it's actually my Gmail account. I have set up a filter in Gmail to star any email coming in this way as well as attach a label so I can identify it quickly and direct it as appropriate.

Sneaky trick

Many of the new features available in Gmail are available only to users in the US. However, everyone can get them very easily. All you need to do -- and this is the sneaky bit -- is change the Google Mail Display Language setting to "English US". Log out, log back in, et voila! New toys such as the useful 'Delete' on the main bar in the inbox and a chat icon on the left appear as if by magic.

Homework

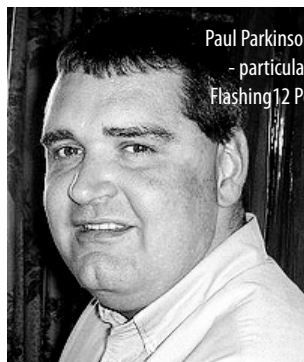
Next time we'll be looking at the template in more detail. In the meantime, go to <http://flashing12.blogspot.com> (in this case going to www.theflashing12.com won't work, as it is a forwarding page) and right-click to 'View Source'.

Page down until you get to the <!-- Begin #sidebar --> text and have a look at it. Get familiar with sections, and see how they relate to the web page itself. I'm not doing rocket science here, just simple copy-and-paste from other sites. Of particular interest is the Libsyn player: see if you can copy it and make the changes necessary to play your podcast and not mine. Don't worry if you get into a pickle; I'll tell you what the changes are next time. [The BBC section on my page is a bit different, as I just wanted to see if they would let me do it!]

A final note

Apologies if you were expecting me to cover the awareness, promotion and general 'hooray-look-at-me' kind of stuff in this article. I'm going to have to carry it over until a later issue, as I want to spend more time with the look and feel of your website. This is crucial, as it is the shop window for your podcast.

That's it for now — have a good time until next time, and Happy Podcasting! •



Paul Parkinson claims to be still learning about podcasting - particularly getting a decent sound. Paul presents The Flashing12 Podcast and is occasionally helped by his wife, GeekGirlUK

<http://flashing12.blogspot.com>
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Applying podcasting to the real world

Paul Nicholls gets real

I had to speak at a forum recently. Channel 4 TV here in the UK run a series of workshops for creative individuals; musicians, record labels, film directors, creative designers, writers, you name it, they were there. My brief was to speak about podcasting – a granny-sucking-eggs guide for beginners, if you will.

As I sat down to write the notes and put the PowerPoint together, it struck me that the uses for podcasting were limitless. I'll explain:

Back in February 2005 Alex Bellinger, Neil Dixon, Adrian Pegg and I sat around a virtual piece of paper. We were going to host the first dedicated podcast conference. Who would be interested? We had a good bunch of listeners and readers but they were global and scattered. Folks were expressing an interest on the online communities that were available, but this was the early gestation of a brand-new, cutting-edge tool. Who would come to London to listen to folks talk about this new medium?

One year later, the same question struck me as I sat to write the notes for this February's half-hour lecture for the Channel 4 forum. The answer was simple. Absolutely everyone had a share in the podcast stakes.

business: No matter what services or goods were on offer, there were great podcasts dealing with specific niche areas and great overview podcasts on business generally — Neville Hobson and Alex Bellinger are among those who featured in the initial stages. The quality of advice and material was first rate.

education: Folks in education were amazed at the results of kids who were shy of the classroom. The fashion accessory that was the iPod could and was delivering geography lessons to kids as they hung around with their peers. One teacher at a Liverpool school heartily endorsed the educational application pointing to hugely improved test results. Lectures could also be recorded and distributed to University students.

hobbyists: Knitting podcasts? Who on earth would be interested in knitting podcasts? Quite a few people, as it happened, as there was even an online knitting forum. The same was true of all manner of hobbies, no matter how obscure.

technology: These make up a huge quota

Back in February 2005 Alex Bellinger, Neil Dixon, Adrian Pegg and I sat around a virtual piece of paper

of podcasts available. From TWiT with Leo Laporte to Paul Parkinson's 'Flashing 12' (explaining technology to those who are technology challenged, just like me). These infocasts are two of the thousands available for those wanting tech chat or guidance.

music: Again, another subject favourite. Many independent bands see the light of day, and consequently sales, through the



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growing number of podcasters wanting to find the next best thing. Bands and record labels are now coming on board and explaining the motive behind the music. Direct Line Insurance cut out the middle-man and shot to the fore here in the UK, and this is precisely what I see happening with musicians. The record labels willing to change their ethos and profit share are also smart on-the-money cookies. See the business model of Magnatunes for instance: www.magnatunes.com

history: I'd seen the 'Sealed knot' society online, a society who re-enacted famous battles. I was even more pleased to hear that there was an archeology podcast. I haven't done any further research here, but I am certain that there are and will be a flourishing

Serious journalism: I had a stab at this in Swaziland recently, blogging and podcasting the plight of AIDS orphans there

band of folks in this area.

commercial and public radio: Missed a show from the BBC or your local forward-thinking commercial broadcaster? You can always listen again. Here the concept of time-shifted radio really is just that.

closed user groups: I know of one or two business ventures, 'Audacious' being one, where the podcast is to a closed user group. A company with an army of sales staff, spread nationally or internationally, can have an instant sales lecture, a message from the CEO or a directive in an instance.

serious journalism: I had a stab at this in Swaziland recently, blogging and podcasting the plight of AIDS orphans there. Serious political, local and world news are covered by many, notably best, in my biased opinion, by

the BBC.

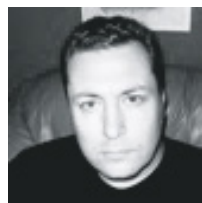
religious: online sermons, discussions and study are plentiful with the emerging 'Godcasts'. I met with and spoke to a chap in charge of 120 missionaries worldwide, wishing to increase communication to family, friends and supporters back home. The answer to the question was a no-brainer: podcasting and blogging.

audiobooks and publishing: For those who are partially sighted or without vision, these are invaluable; additionally, the ability to listen to a story, piece of poetry or literary work in the bath, on the road or even in bed is a great experience. Simon Toon notably spoke to international TV celebrity and pundit Steven Fry about his new publication at the tail end of last year. Simon, of course, promotes poetry through his podcast, Slam Idol.

Driving home with the idea of this article in mind just a few hours ago, I heard Virgin Mobile discuss the technology of time-shifted TV through to WAP mobile launch later this year. Time-shifted video blogging?

In short, this list is not exhaustive, or, if it is, it soon won't be. Every time I look at the array of podcasts, blogs and video 'casts available, yet another niche is plugged.

The variety of content can only be a good thing, and I know it will continue to grow and even morph into the Tivo or Sky+ model with the emerging technology of video podcasting. I would say watch this space, but someone's bound to fill it before I get back.... •



Paul Nicholls presents the Podcast Paul and Jukepod Jury podcasts. Looks like he has recently been thinking about podcasting...

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WinPodder

James Hastell

I'll be frank. I'm not a user of iTunes [*sharp intake of breath*]. I know I'm perhaps a little old fashioned, but I find these sort of things over-engineered and confusing to say the least.

I was recommended 'WinPodder' as a simple and easy option, so with nothing to lose, I decided to check it out. Who can argue with the banner boasting, "Podcast receiving made easy"?

Many podcast 'getters' double up as listing sites, where advertising and promotion abound. Using WinPodder is like starting off with a blank sheet of paper. Deep joy. WinPodder is a different concept. Here, if you discover a podcast whilst surfing around, if there's an XML or RSS button on the site and you click it, WinPodder automatically adds it to its subscription list for you. Simple.

On start-up, the screen opens up with three main boxes, the uppermost has a selection of 12 'casts' in the form of pictures on display, and clicking them brings in their details and downloads the latest MP3s. Executing a right click removes them — I like this bit a lot. OK, I've removed the pre-selected casts and set off to find a list of podcasts to try it out. I use www.britcaster.com because I know there's a good listing of podcasts on the left of the screen. You can, of course, use Podcast Alley or many others instead. I select 'Top of the Pods' <http://topofthepods.blogspot.com> as a test example, and when the site opens up I look for anything that says RSS and click it. I'm then taken to their 'feeds' page. "What do I do here?" I wonder. Not for long, for almost immediately a bubble box appears (I'm using Windows XP Pro) and it says I've subscribed

to this podcast and I can close the browser. Done, that simple.

Right. Let's try somewhere else. How about 'Strange but true radio'

<http://strangebuttrueradio.libsyn.com>? Once I'm on their site I see an RSS button and I'm whisked off to a page that has RSS details that don't mean a thing to me but. . . lo and behold, up comes that bubble telling me I've subscribed again. I've no need to go any further, and this is growing on me already.

Now, one more. How about my good friend Chuck Tomasi from the US who has started a Gmail tutorial podcast? I test that,

<http://www.chuckchat.com/gmail/>, click the button and . .

Done.

I go back to WinPodder, and now the top screen displays icons for the three items I've subscribed to. Clicking one starts off the two remaining boxes below, and some details from the site appear. Interestingly, a set of tabs just above shows me what shows are available to download by date, and just clicking a tab downloads that very show. How simple: I can get what I want when I want it, one by one... bliss!

If you're a novice or just plain old-fashioned like me, I do recommend Winpodder as an easy option, totally uncluttered.

It rates a well deserved 10 out of 10.

Details: Windows XP only; Supports RSS, XML, audio, photo and video podcasts, newsfeeds. Support forum. 2.22 MB download. In Beta. Free of charge. •

www.winpodder.com

REVIEW

Multimix 8 USB Mixer

Paul Nicholls

Anyone who has been a musician for some time will know the quality and stable of Alesis. Throughout the 80's and 90's virtually every studio had a 'Quadraverb'; a reverb / delay unit that became virtually industry standard.

I purchased the Alesis Multimix 8 USB some months ago and would need it surgically amputated from my hands if I were now asked to part with it. It really is that good. I paid £140 for this (about \$200). The price does seem to vary from site to site and it does appear to be a little cheaper to purchase online. I purchased direct from the manufacturer and got next-day delivery.

As mixers go, they're always generally pretty unexciting pieces of kit, but this is a beautiful, cost-effective tool that I could not live without. Four XLR jacks in show that Alesis are aiming for the seasoned musician with a decent mic, the option on the first four channels is a standard mono jack input. Two stereo jack pairs and two track RCA in / out jacks make up the inputs. Phones, RCA stereo pair out and a stereo paired jack main mix and control room out tidy up the outputs. Aux send and return are expected on any mixer, and you get both here.

You have Hi / Mid and Lo EQ controls for each channel – absolutely essential, I've found, to get that 'just right' sound. I use my mixer with a good quality Dynamic Beyer mic, though you do have phantom power to boost up a microphone that may need it.

On this unit, you don't get sliders, you get knobs that move clockwise and back — not a problem, though, as they're very easy to use.

So far, so good — and standard. Here are the really great bits, particularly for the podcasters:

You get 100 on-board effects, excellent for creating sweepers or promos and getting the right room noise for your podcast. These are dead easy to use by the selection of another clockwise knob. An LED tells you whether your effect is Chorus / delay / pitch shift / reverb / flange, etc.

Even better, indeed essential, is the direct-in USB port. The mixer becomes your sound card, so recording Skype calls is a sinch, you just record them. WYHIWYG (what you hear is what you get).

The unit comes bundled with Cubase Lite Edition, a great piece of software, but, if recording on the fly, totally impractical for podcasting use. If you're a muzo, it'll come in very handy. For the audiotechs among you, the audio specs: Frequency response: 20Hz–22kHz ± 0.5 dB. Dynamic range: >100dB. Distortion: <0.01% THD+N (mic/line to L/R master out). Maximum gain: 60dB (mic in to L/R master out). Maximum output: +14dBu main L/R, +5dBV 2-track outs.

The weight is a mere 4.5 pounds and the dimensions: 3.5" x 9.25" x 10.25" (H x W x D).

For the non-audio techs, it's dead easy to use, really impressive sound quality, simple to port around with you and looks really nice....

I use my mic XLR'd in, and sometimes connect my ipod or a CD unit in; other than that I simply record directly into Audacity (free from the web) and use Quicktime on my laptop for the effects.

All in, a wonderful podcasters tool that I cannot recommend highly enough. When (because it is when, and not if) you want a better sound for your podcasting but don't want to break the bank, remember the Alesis Multimix 8 USB. •

Become a Ruthless Listener!

Geoff Tinnion

Why should you become a ruthless listener? Because if you're anything like me, then you will have let podcasting take over your life!

Based on my own experience, this article will give you tips on how to get the best out of your listening time and will show you ways to reclaim control over your aggregator. Be warned though, developing a ruthless streak is essential!

The Process

The process is simple: 1. identify your bad habits and then 2. be ruthless in correcting them.

The Bad Habits...

Over the last year that I have been listening to podcasts, I have developed many bad habits. Here are some of the podcast-related ones:

1. I find it difficult if not impossible to skip a podcast.
2. I regularly play "catch-up" and have a backlog of podcasts to listen to.
3. I spend quite a lot of my free time listening to podcasts.
4. I listen to a number of shows that hack me off or bore me more than they actually entertain.

The chances are that you can readily identify with all of these bad habits, since I've heard grumbings about them when talking to my podcast buddies and reading postings in various forums. It's amazing how people keep listening to some of the most "popular" podcasts simply because they are popular, regardless of how annoyed they get at the podcaster!

Let's look into these bad habits a bit more closely...

"I find it difficult if not impossible to skip a podcast." Why? Because you don't want to miss out! The biggest selling point of podcasting is that it allows you to listen when you like and where you like. You never have to miss a show; you never have to miss that really good song or that fantastically funny comment or touching word. But if you haven't got the time to listen to the podcast, then you will just let it sit on your drive, gathering dust. Finally, when you get some time, you will start working through all the audio that's kept on coming while you've been away doing something better. Imagine if you went on holiday! How many MP3s would you have waiting for you on your return, all demanding your attention? As you may or may not recognise, it is at this point that listening to podcasts isn't that much fun and soon becomes a chore. In "catch-up" mode, are you really listening to the podcasts or are you just churning through them?

The only way out of catch-up mode is to sacrifice quality time that could be spent with your family or friends or to listen to podcasts when you should be concentrating on your work. I wonder how many surgeons listen to Podcast Paul while in the operating theatre with a scalpel in hand? Whatever you do, don't let podcasting eat into the time you would or should spend with your family and friends. You need to keep up good social habits. Podcasting is great if you're a recluse, but it can also make you one ... be careful!

... and How to Correct Them

I used to watch the soaps religiously in the UK until I found out that I could download



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them for later viewing. So I did that and backed them up to the point that I could spend a lazy Sunday each month watching and catching up with the latest goings on, and it was fun. But then the site I was downloading from received a cease and desist order from the TV company, and I could not download the shows any more in time for my catch-up day. What was I to do? To be honest, I wasn't bothered! I didn't miss the soaps any more, because I had de-programmed myself, and I now enjoy the freedom of being able to catch a show when I like and when I have the time. This event actually changed my TV habits completely. These days, I rarely watch the telly, and my friends can be trusted to keep me up-to-date on the good stuff. Maybe you could do the same: hold back listening to a particular podcast for a month, do a catch-up day, then do the same again the following month. Before you listen, though, go to the show's website and check out the show notes, the comments and the buzz generated in the forums. If you find that some shows stand out, then listen to them and discard the rest (the ruthless bit). Go on, give it a go!

Thank God, MP3 players have fast-forward buttons. I don't know where I'd be if my little player didn't have one. Ok, I would be at my computer, but that's not the point. I use the fast-forward button to bypass many a sound-seeing bore and the odd music track that isn't to my liking. The question is, what's left? And is it compelling enough to maintain my subscription?

Has the podcast become stale? Unfortunately, this does happen, and some shows do come out a bit "same-y". Yes, they can still come up with the goods occasionally, but is this good enough? Ideally, you will have already made contact with the show's producer, but if you haven't by this stage, then you should send them an email with some feedback in it and give them the opportunity to keep you there. If they are not interested, then fair play; your suggestion could be rubbish, and it is their show, after all. If you

get no response, then maybe this is the time to take a break from listening to that podcast and put a date in your diary to check it out again at another time. I have done this, come back to a show a few months later, and I am well happy – the show did eventually move on, and now it's in my "must listen" playlist.

Do you listen to a lot of gateway podcasts, which play a lot of promos, the idea being that you continue listening to them because you will hear about the best of what's new in the podcasting world? I have found some great shows this way; however, the common failing of gateway shows is that they lack anything else of interest to listen to. If the show happens to play a number of duff promos, then you have pretty much wasted your time. I would personally advise ditching these kinds of podcasts and rely on your network of podcast buddies to find the Next Big Thing.

Because podcasting is so personal, you do grow a strong sense of loyalty to the people who produce the shows. After all, they have spent so much time creating them and keeping you entertained for many hours. You may know them personally, have chatted to them on Skype, even had a pint with them. They will know that you have stopped listening, which is tricky and could offend them – it's like telling a friend that they have body odour problem! Listening under these conditions is the hardest to break. In this case, it's better to catch most of the shows but miss a show occasionally. You should be able to get away with this, especially if the podcaster is pumping out content like there is no tomorrow.

Future Planning

Have I been terribly ruthless so far? You decide.

But will I take up any of my own advice and develop a ruthless streak? Of course, I will! But I hope you do, too. Podcasting is a fantastic hobby, but don't let it own you. Our time is precious enough, and it's important to get the balance right. •



When not trying to upset Rob, his friend and co-host over at Top of The Pods, Jonathan Groves makes colourful pictures of himself. He has a lot to say about that interweb thingy. This is what he has to say about search engine optimisation...

Introduction

This is a introduction to SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) and web site promotion. It is intended to give an overview of the techniques involved. The items here are the main areas, but not all of those that may require attention to tune a web site to achieve good results. Once a site is tuned you will still need ongoing adjustments, content and monitoring. Even then a site will take at least 3 months to start to grow from these methods.

Major indicators

These are the dials on the dashboard so to speak, easy to find information that you can gather before you start any SEO campaign. They give you your starting point and by checking them regularly you can see the effectiveness of your work. They can also be used to monitor how well the competition is doing and to see how you compare.

Google page rank

This is one of the easiest to find out but one of the hardest to influence. This is a simple 1 to 10 score, with 10 being the best, that Google uses to rate your web site. This affects how

you're spidered, where your results rank and is a major indicator of the success of a web site.

Google cache and spidering

Google keep a copy of all pages and by viewing the copies of your site pages you can find out some interesting information. When did Google last index your page and put information in its results? How many pages did it spider – if any? And how do the pages look – if they are wrong then you need to fix your site NOW!

Alexa and the Alexa rating

The Alexa information is a great benchmark and stores data for years, so for any of the information it supplies you can look at growth (hopefully) for the last 2 years or more. Millions of people around the world have the Alexa tool bar and it monitors their web usage and patterns. From this, it gives a wealth of useful information to help both surfers and the webmasters/ programmers. The rating is similar to the Google Page rank system, with 1 being the highest and going down to 5,000,000+



PODCASTER



Alexa reach

Reach measures the number of users. Reach is typically expressed as the percentage of all Internet users who visit a given site. So, for example, if a site like yahoo.com has a reach of 28%, this means that if you took random samples of one million Internet users, you would on average find that 280,000 of them visit yahoo.com. Alexa expresses reach as number of users per million.

Alexa page views

Page views measure the number of pages viewed by Alexa Tool bar users. Multiple page views of the same page made by the same user on the same day are counted only once. The page views per user numbers are the average numbers of unique pages viewed per user per day by the users visiting the site. The page view rank is a ranking of all sites based solely on the total number of page views (not page views per user).

Competitors figures

Alexa and to a lesser extent Google, let you view all of their information about any site, so check out your competitors – see how your site rates in comparison. The tool bar also shows similar site, sites which surfers also visited and sites which link to your site.

Links

Link popularity check is one of the best ways to quantifiably and independently measure

your web sites online awareness and overall visibility. Simply put, link popularity refers to the total number of links or ‘votes’ that a search engine has found for your web site.

Search engine saturation

Search Engine Saturation simply refers to the number of pages a given search engine has in its index for your web site domain. Not all search engines report this information, but enough of them do to create some meaningful benchmarks for your search engine marketing campaigns.

Symptoms / Remedies

These are some of the major problems which will effect a site and its ability to generate traffic. They all combine but not evenly, so you could have all but one of them spot on, however, the one thing missing could cripple the site – conversely you can have all of them 90% right and nothing works, it is still a matter of trial and error but this gives a good framework to start working on.

Load times

While large numbers of people have broadband connections, there are still large numbers of people with slow or dial up connections, and with people accessing the web on mobile phones and PDA’s we should still try to keep loading times to a minimum, or at the very least warn the user if they are about to attempt to download a huge file. •

Jonathan Groves is the founder of Urban Design Squad. The full text of this article can be found at www.urbandesignsquad.co.uk



Podcast User

NUMBER ONE FOR PODCAST NEWS, REVIEWS AND TIPS

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