

# Podcast User Magazine

Issue 4  
May  
2006

## FACE YOUR AUDIENCE? GRANT MASON DID

Also this issue:

'Club soda or tonic?':  
which mixer?

Richard Vobes:  
a podcaster abroad

Pop Chicks

Plus all the usual  
news and reviews

Be a discerning listener...  
and a productive podcaster



PUM [www.podcastusermagazine.com](http://www.podcastusermagazine.com)

## EDITORIAL



### FIRST FOR...

#### Podcasts and podcasting news

Our monthly schedule and website allow 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 .

#### 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](mailto:help@podcastusermagazine.com)

[WWW.PODCASTUSERMAGAZINE.COM](http://WWW.PODCASTUSERMAGAZINE.COM)

**Welcome** to readers old and new. The the team at **Podcast User Magazine** has yet again pulled off the impossible and brought together a great series of articles on the many aspects of podcasting.

As usual, you will find news, reviews, tips and views on all manner of topics, from a step-by-step explanation on compression to a snapshot of the Dutch podcasting scene, with many additional items.

I have to yet again applaud the PUM team and contributors for giving their time in making this project work.

If you would like to leave a comment on our blog page [www.podcastusermagazine.com](http://www.podcastusermagazine.com), or to send a mail to any of the team or contributors (email addresses are provided) please feel free to do so.

You will find news, reviews, tips and views on all manner of topics



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

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## 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](mailto:submissions@podcastusermagazine.com).

We would be glad to hear from you.

## Special thanks...

Go to [Clustrmaps.com](http://Clustrmaps.com) and [Frappr.com](http://Frappr.com) for granting us permission to reproduce their maps in this and future issues of **Podcast User Magazine**.

We would also like to thank you, the reader, for your support and enthusiasm over the last four months. Your feedback has been gratifying, and we look forward to reading your suggestions and comments and responses to future articles.



## **Do UK Podcasters think there is a need for an organisation to represent the interests and protect the rights of UK Podcasters?**

**The** state of UK podcasting is like the mythical chimera – difficult to describe, ever changing and can appear to be many things to many people. However what is not in doubt is its growing popularity. Many hundreds of people in the UK now produce many thousands of hours of audio and video content each week, and they meet a growing international demand for podcast content. But, such is the great involvement of UK podcasters with their podcasts, that very few of them are actually aware of the furore which has been happening regarding the licensing and regulation of what for many is their favourite activity, and for some, a substantial part of their income.

In March 2006, MCPS-PRS – the Music Alliance, i.e., the UK agencies responsible for collecting and distributing royalties from the use of copyright music – issued a ‘podcast license’ which sparked lively debate in forums. Some UK podcasters considered the issue to be of the greatest immediate importance to the entire community, others a minor irritation which could be safely ignored and others dismissed it as totally irrelevant.

While many of the more commercially-oriented podcasters had no problem with paying fair fees for the use of copyright music in commercial podcasts, what concerned them about this license was firstly that it extended the remit of MCPS-PRS into speech only podcasts, and secondly, that it enforced a set of unworkable ‘podcast rules’.

Podcasters were polled on the issue in the Podcast Nation blog (see end of article).

This article links to the PRS license and quotes their proposed podcast ‘rules’ in full. The poll as it says is subject to error. We were not screening for UK votes only, but the form is long and detailed, and designed to deter spurious entries. By the 15th question – Do UK Podcasters think there is a need for an organisation to represent the interests and protect the rights of UK Podcasters? – we can be fairly sure that this is UK Podcasters voting on the issue, With over 50 votes cast, and around 250 active UK podcasters, the results are therefore significant.

Following this, we formed UK Podcasters Association. We intend UKPA to be run along the lines of a guild or a professional body, to be non-exclusive and to exist purely to protect podcasters rights and promote their interests.

The first thing on our agenda is to make the case for fair and workable usage of licensed >>>



## HAVE YOU SEEN MY SHED?



repertoire, to educate the collection agencies about such concepts as Creative Commons and to resist license encroachment into the syndicated distribution of our speech and spoken word, which we hold to be an infringement of our rights.

What animates me personally to act is that silence will be interpreted as acquiescence, and the knowledge that what we do now may very well determine the state of UK podcasting in the coming months and years. I don't want clumsy legislation stifling this wonderful explosion of UK talent. I do want a voice when it comes to legislation that will affect me, my creative output and my income.

Dean Whittbread

<http://ukpodcasters.org.uk>

<http://www.podcastnation.co.uk/podblog/2006/03/uk-podcast-licence-poll.html>

**Podcast User Magazine** encourages your comments on this proposal. Let us know what you think at [suggestions@podcastusermagazine.com](mailto:suggestions@podcastusermagazine.com).

Are you having trouble thinking up ideas for getting sponsorship at the moment? If you are, then look no further than your back yard for inspiration, which funnily enough has worked out quite well for my podcasting buddy, the charismatic egomaniac, Richard Vobes.

On a recent show, Richard introduced the idea of sprucing up his rather unloved back yard. If you have seen the photos that Richard has online, you will already know that he has his work cut out for him, and when I saw the pictures I knew that Richard would need a bit more than a helping hand to complete this project: he would need money and he would need sponsorship.

While listening to Richard produce his show live on the camstream, I sent him an instant message suggesting that he could offer up areas of his garden for sponsorship. He liked this idea and moments later announced it on the show. Little did I know at the time I proposed the idea that I would

end up becoming a sponsor myself, but for some unknown reason I felt compelled to sponsor his shed. After an unsurprising quick negotiation phase (which involved my asking if I could sponsor his shed and his saying yes), I sent the funds by PayPal, and a few moments later Richard announced on the show that I had secured sponsorship of his shed. The shed is now lovingly referred to as the Stupod Shed (tm).

I now look forward to receiving news about my shed on the podcast, and Richard has promised to post pictures on the web on a regular basis.

You can see my shed at [www.vobes.com](http://www.vobes.com).

Do you have you any novel sponsorship ideas or sponsorship-related stories that you would like to share? If so, please get in touch.

Geoff Tinnion can be contacted at [geoff.tinnion@podcastusermagazine.com](mailto:geoff.tinnion@podcastusermagazine.com)

## The View From Here...



As seen by **James Hastell**

### Old news

Get it? Veteran BBC 2 radio host Terry Wogan (you cease to be a DJ if you're not on Radio One anymore) has launched his own podcast, or Togcast, named after his fans that are known as Terry's Old Geezers and Gals. The podcast, which started on Tuesday April the 12th, features speech highlights, listeners' emails and Pause for Thought. The BBC can be assured listenership to this Irish chappie for sure; it's just that his fans will have to trade in their radiograms for MP3s whatever they are.

#### Belt up

An iPod belt buckle: yes, believe it or not, you can now buy an attachment to convert your bling-bling iPod into a working belt buckle for just \$59.95 from [www.tunebuckle.com](http://www.tunebuckle.com)... It had to happen sooner or later... just off to get my belly pierced for the volume control.

### Just some boring numbers...

Forrester research in the US predict just a 12 million rise in podcast listeners by 2010, whereas BMRB (yet another research company) suggest that an extra 8 million Brits will be hunting down podcasts in the next six months. The BBC in February had downloads numbering 1.7 million, but Sarah Prag, senior project manager responsible for the BBC podcast trials, admits that there are "no reliable reporting mechanisms". It does not say anything about the number of individuals or whether people are even listening to the files. I know, I use mine just to fill up the hard drive!



... To Here



## Mine's bigger than yours

Podcast Empire (Canada) is officially the largest Podcast directory (in Canada) bragging some 11,000 shows from just over 250 Canadian podcasters. Are they chuffed? You bet. Happier than a moose on Monday (don't ask).

Have you seen the size of my ring?

Podcast Pickle, the well-known and respected podcast and videocast directory, have started up a web ring at [www.podcastpickle.com/index/webring/](http://www.podcastpickle.com/index/webring/). Don't worry, you don't have to like pickles or be green.

PODCASTER



# Hey, I'm a Podcaster

Part 2

**Alan Carr** continues his saga of starting Darkhorse Radio

**I**f you want to produce a regular, half-decent music podcast, then you'd better be prepared to put in a lot of time and effort, probably significantly more than you will have envisaged. Actually, you will need to be a bit obsessive. You will probably need a lot of help and advice at the beginning; I certainly did. Fortunately for me, UK music podcasters have proved to be a helpful bunch of obsessives.

When Darkhorse Radio made its debut earlier this year, Podcast User Magazine hadn't produced its first issue, so I relied on firing off emails to the established hosts of music podcasting and asking such questions as:

*Where will I find the music to play?*

*How can I promote my new show?*

*Can I have some feedback on my presentation?*

If I could pass on two pieces of advice to the podcasting newcomer, they would be:

1. Thoroughly devour the contents of Podcast User Magazine. The excellent article by Colin Meeks in Issue 3 (Beginners Guide to Podcasting – pages 41–43) is essential reading; and to think it's given away for nothing!





2. Contact established hosts who are covering similar material to your own. They will almost certainly be very happy to help and advise. I am particularly grateful to Grant Mason (Three From Leith) for the help that he provided. Others to assist included Mark Hunter, Paul Nicholls and Phil Coyne, all of whom are also PUM contributors. These guys are all busy people, but they still find time to lend a hand when approached.

My own podcasting adventure began because, as an IT trainer, I wanted to run awareness sessions for college lecturers. I realised that to be successful I would need an in-depth knowledge of the medium. It was for this reason that Darkhorse Radio was born. My intention was to create the whole thing for no cost, so I needed a free podcast host. I had attempted to create my own XML file but couldn't get the free web validators to OK all of the parameters, and I wasn't overjoyed with the prospect of editing the fragile code every week, so my host was also going to have to relieve me of that chore.

At this point I discovered Podomatic, a service that seemed to do everything that I needed, and all for free. I signed up immediately and within a day had posted my first podcast. Excitedly I typed the feed into iTunes, and there it was: Darkhorse Podcast #1 (it became Darkhorse Radio with show #2). What a great feeling! I had arrived. Friends were all very generous with their comments, and I was happy that, however good or bad my own performance may have been, the music was excellent. Scottish band Kasino provided both tracks on my 10-minute show -- wonderful stuff.

It turned out that my presentation was very bad (so much for friends, eh!) and now I have removed the first two shows from my feed. I cringe when I listen to them now. This may be a good time to refer readers to Paul Nicholls's comments on presentation techniques in Issue 3; I wish I had read that before I started performing in front of a mic. "Speak as though

you are talking to a friend in the pub" is what Paul suggests, not at all what I started doing: reading from a prepared script very deliberately, rather too quietly and sounding extremely lugubrious.

Mark Hunter (the tartanpodcast) offered me the following advice which I now try to observe "One point to consider developing is to add more 'sense stress' to your voice, nothing too major, just adding a little more life to it. This can be tricky as it's easy to feel self conscious, but the results are worth it."

It's a strange thing, but when you can't use gestures, expressions or body movements as communication aids, the spoken word does

I have removed the first two shows from my feed. I cringe when I listen to them now

need to adapt, as Mark says, by giving it 'a bit of life'. Yes, you do feel silly to start with, but if you record your voice when no one else is around, you'll soon get over that.

Darkhorse Podcast became Darkhorse Radio, and the second 10-minute show followed within a week of the first. I had abandoned the script now and was just using prompts – recording, deleting, and recording again until I was happy. After show #4 I discovered that I had overrun my Podomatic bandwidth allowance, since the free service only permitted 7.5GB of monthly downloads. My podcasts were now over 20-minute shows, each averaging 24MB. 200 downloads of just one show would be almost 5GB of my monthly allowance, and I was hoping for more than 200 downloads a week, so this was the point where I had to fork out a monthly fee. I had proved that I could do the whole thing for nothing, but now I was a victim of my success!

## PODCASTER



Podomatic's next level of service gives me 50GB of downloads a month (2000 downloads) with 2GB of storage. For that I am paying \$9.99 a month, or about £1.50 a week. I'm happy with that, but if I'd known it was going to cost me I would have considered Libsyn, another low-cost hosting service that many podcasters are using. I can't honestly say which would be the best; I have had a few problems with Podomatic, but the response to my emails has always been very fast. Perhaps someone will produce a consumer evaluation

What I find interesting is that podcasting is still a relatively new medium and that some of the big names have been involved only for a year

of podcasting hosts for a future issue of PUM?

In my position as an IT trainer at Mid-Cheshire College of Further Education, I have run 'Introduction to Podcasting' sessions for about 60 college staff. Most are surprised and excited to learn about the educational opportunities offered by the 'Podosphere'. The best part of my sessions is when I record someone's voice and play it back in Audacity. Then I add an instrumental track, which I fade out to let the voice come in, followed by a fade back to the music again. (I have been using The Ocean Floor's 'The Whole Animal' for that, and I always get asked what it is). This is all done live using a laptop with a cheap mic and a digital projector. This demonstration always goes down well, and when I explain that my podcasts are produced the same way (although I have upgraded the cheap mic), it gives

colleagues some insight into the technical side of podcasting.

I'm really pleased to see that some lecturers are now providing podcast resources for their students. Videocast tutorials (such as tips and techniques in Photoshop, Illustrator, and so forth) are particularly appropriate for fashion, graphics and photography courses. One of the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teachers is providing podcast material for her foreign students to listen to and discuss in class. The thing that pleases me most is that one of the music tutors is making his own podcast, of interviews and insights with people involved in the music industry, as a resource for his students. My next aim is to get the students to make a podcast. I will let you know when and if I succeed with that!

What I find interesting is that podcasting is still a relatively new medium and that some of the big names have been involved only for a year. After just a few months of experience I have already been asked for advice from new starters, been interviewed on a local radio arts programme and been asked to run a podcast seminar at a further education conference in the summer.

So, what happens to Darkhorse Radio now? Well, I have discovered that I have started something that I need to keep going (a weekly 20-minute show featuring the best independent music from home and abroad). I couldn't stop now and let my subscribers down, could I? I do hope that you're one of them. If not, well, you know how to put that right!

Alan Carr is the host of the Darkhorse Radio podcast  
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# Mixcraft 2.5

Colin Meeks

There are two streams of podcasters: those who like to do everything live, and those who like to construct their podcasts a piece at a time. I'm defiantly part of the latter stream, mostly because I'm not the most comfortable behind the microphone, so when I make a bodge live, that can mean a whole lot of editing. When I do it a piece at a time, it's only the piece in which I made the boo-boo that I have to do again or have to edit. This is the very reason I enjoyed working with Mixcraft so much.

I originally received Mixcraft a while ago, just to perform a review on it. However, when I decided to launch the Indie Launchpad podcast, it seemed like a good idea to jump into the deep end and see how well Mixcraft would work with a real podcast. That was 11 weeks ago and I'm still using Mixcraft, so that is surely a testament to how good it is.

For anyone who's used multi-track software before, the main interface will come as no surprise.

Indeed, even Mac users can pick up the basics fairly quickly. When laying out the podcast, I usually break it down into the following segments:

- Main Title
- Intro
- Song 1
- Filler
- Song 2
- Filler
- Song 3
- Filler
- Song 4
- Filler
- Song 5

I usually like to have a track for the pre-recorded main title, a separate track for the vocal recorded segments and a final track for all the music. I split them into those three tracks so I can control the volume, and with

my hardware setup, I have a big disparity between the recording of my voice and the music featured. This is very much a hit-and-miss affair, but I seem to have got the hang of things and it should get even better once I can manage to get some decent equipment together. Although I only usually use three tracks, you can add as many as you feel necessary. For each track you can also add a range of included special effects/filters and can also add special effect/filters in the popular VST format.

Whilst there are many more advanced features in Mixcraft, it's a testament to its ease of use that the user isn't forced to learn a whole ton of stuff just to get started. As I got more comfortable with the software, I started to feel the need to experiment, and this was where Mixcraft really started to open up. Some of the more advanced features are time stretching, time shifting, sound envelopes and looping.

The final step to creating the podcast is to mix down to one of the more popular audio formats, either MP3, WAV, WMA, OGG or Real. This basically merges all of the tracks into one audio file. Some of the mix-down formats also support ID3 tags or an equivalent, which allows tagging the show with a name for the episode, copyright information and so forth. A copy of the podcast can also be burned to CD, all from within Mixcraft, which is a really neat feature.

The one main complaint I have with the software is purely cosmetic. Whilst the software is very easy to use and functional, the user interface is fairly ugly. It's very reminiscent of a piece of software from the early 1990s and could very nearly be mistaken for an old Windows 3.1 program. A nice overhaul of the interface would go a long way to making this a sexy program, and sexy sells (just look at the new Apple Macs). Talking >>>

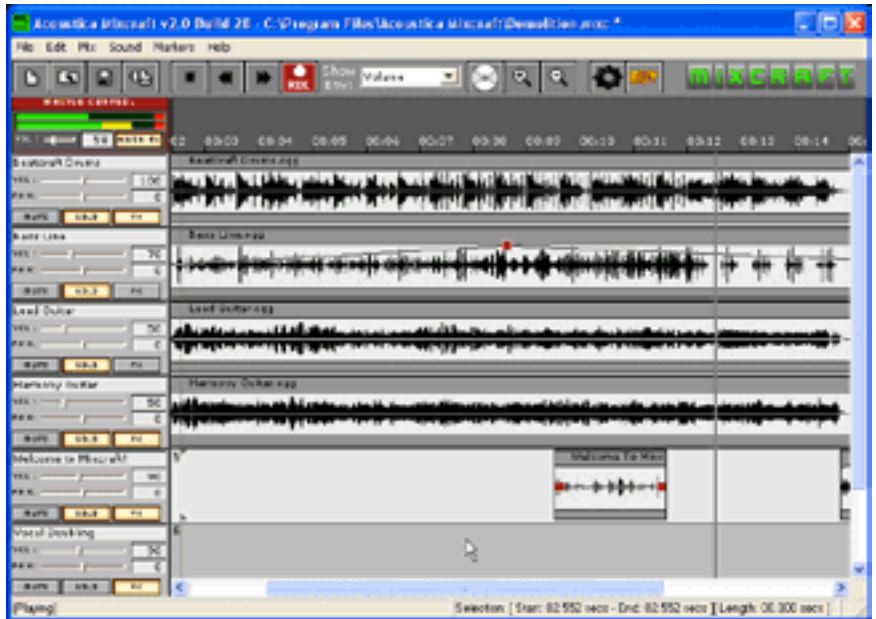
## REVIEW



of Macs, if you want to see a seriously sexy piece of software just look at GarageBand; this should give Acoustica something to aspire to.

The more you begin to understand a piece of software, the more you start to think about the features you wish were included. One feature I would like to see is the ability to start and stop recording by just pressing the space bar. You can do this using the return key once the record box is opened, but this also forces the recorded item to create a new track, which isn't always required, especially in my case.

Conclusion : There's never going to be the perfect podcasting solution, just as there is no perfect user, but Mixcraft comes pretty close. One of the things I love is the ability to try it unrestricted for 30 days. This really gives you a chance to put the software through its paces. I can highly recommend this excellent piece of software.



Publisher: Acoustica <http://www.acoustica.com>

Platform: Windows

Cost: \$39.95

## TOP TIP

**One** of the best tips I can give to any podcaster using Audacity (and I know there are a good many) is to completely disregard the Lame encoder recommended for use. I find the Lame encoder to be slow, of poor quality and giving a 'squelch' to the audio that is unpleasant to the ear.

Always record at the highest bit rate possible; those who know and use Audacity would also be given the very good advice to save as often as you possibly can between editing, as the platform tends to be unstable and crash.

For encoding purposes, export your project

as a WAV file; this will take a fraction of the time of an MP3 format.

Open iTunes, and drag the WAV file into the library. iTunes gives you the option to convert the WAV file into MP3. I always select 128 kbps / 44.1kHz.

To start your conversion, simply right-click on the file and choose convert. You can select the bit rate of your choice. 128 kbps is a pretty good standard, particularly for music.

When your conversion is complete, right-click on the file, press 'show song file' and you'll be directed to the MP3 icon.

I guarantee, you'll find iTunes to be an invaluable companion.

Paul Nicholls

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(or How to Edit your Audio Documentaries)

# Get Out The Knife and Hack it All Up!



Richard Vobes gets the knife out

**Last** month you may remember I urged you to get off your bottom (notice I am being more polite this time) and record local events and festivities and upload them on your podcast. I certainly hope that encouraged you to get out into the open air, poke your microphone under people's noses and have them spew their life stories!

Very often, in fact mostly all the time, you will come back with far more material than you actually need or that a busy, unsuspecting listener can actually handle. I myself have been accused of having audio tours that have 'gone on a bit', and it does happen, because it is very easy to fall into the trap!

Trap? What trap? I hear you cry. No need to whimper; I will reveal all.

There you are, out at an event, recording the scoop interview of your life: it's fab and the talker is eloquent, coherent and actually making sense. There is no background noise to distract from the vocal track. It's perfect and you're ecstatic, but watch out, you may be snared by the trap!

Put simply, the error that a lot of podcasters and even some broadcasters make is that they just take the interview lock, stock and barrel and put it in the podcast complete.

What's wrong with that? Maybe nothing. But is it in context? Remember, you were there at the event; you know what the bloke is talking about and all the little references he is mentioning. You found him amusing and funny because you saw his eyes sparkle and his face light up as you nodded in agreement. Also, the subject matter all makes perfect

**HACK** the bloody stuff to **PIECES!**

Shorter, in time, is always **BETTER.**

The old maxim is definitely

**TRUE** here...



## PODCASTER



sense to you and has been explained comprehensively. Wonderful, but does it do the same for a detached listener?

These days, people's attention threshold is pretty damn low. That's not your fault; it's down to the media in general. They have dumbed down so much and placed everything into bite-sized chunks that we are now used to hearing things like that. One of the reasons podcasts are so refreshing is that they break the commercial mould; people can touch reality and listen to things as they truly are and not what a commissioning editor, influenced by his corporate sponsors, wants them to be.

That said, people still appreciate a well-put-together piece of audio, and very often that means editing it!

## What about the use of sound EFFECTS; could they do the trick?

The second part of the trap I mentioned earlier is very similar to what an author has to face. Novice writers believe that everything they scrawl to their manuscripts is inspired, the work of genius and immovable. They cannot conceive that someone else reading it for the first time with no prior knowledge of the subject or story will find that it is actually incredibly long-winded, dull and, dare I say, boring!

Hack the bloody stuff to pieces! Shorter, in time, is always better. The old maxim is definitely true here, and although I try myself to do this, it isn't always the case (I mean, have you seen how long this article is?). Leave them wanting more!

So how do we go about editing this masterpiece you have recorded? Let's start

with a few questions:

How long do I wish the piece to be? Is it better to chop it up into chunks that can run consecutively over a number of podcasts, or should you devote the entire show to this audio tour? Only you can answer this, since you know your podcast, how often you produce one and the normal length of your show. Just be aware you don't have to chuck it all in at once. You might even want to include a little at the start of your podcast, then come back to the second part later on, after another item.

Does it stand up on its own? Sometimes an interview is just that, an audio track of someone answering questions or giving information about a given subject, and it needs nothing else. But at other times, the subject matter needs to be enhanced. This might be remedied by using music, and very often this is a first choice. Many podcasters just shove a piece of music top and tail and that's it, done! That may well be all you need to do, and on occasion I do just that and it works fine. But it isn't very imaginative. What about the use of sound effects; could they do the trick? An eerie, squeaky door opening, rattling chains and echoing footsteps might be just the right kind of stage setting you need if you are having a tour 'round a haunted house! The sound of a biplane taking off and landing works well as a transitional device at a vintage air show.

I listen to BBC Radio 4 documentaries a lot. They rarely use music, and more often they integrate sound effects. Mostly these are recorded on location, usually after the interview and separately, or they are obtained from a special-effects library. There are plenty of places on the internet to get sound effects, often free (although watch the quality), but very often it's just as easy and more fun to manufacture your own from scratch. I will talk more about the use of sound effects in the next masterclass, when we start using software to layer tracks of sound.

What should go in, and what must stay





on the cutting room floor? Audio is a fantastic medium. Unlike video, it is so easy to edit and move about, especially these days with computers and digital files. (When I first started mucking about with sound, I was using open reel tape recorders and actually splicing the quarter-inch tape and sticking it back together again in a different sequence. I miss those days, but I digress!)

With sound editing, you can hack into the

Unlike video, it is so **EASY** to edit and move audio about

file and remove all the nasty and annoying utterances and noises, such as ‘erms’, coughs, throat clearing and snorts! Also, have a listen to the idiosyncrasies people have in their dialogue: for example, repeated phrases such as ‘know what I mean?’ or ‘you know’ or ‘yeah, yeah’ or ‘I know what you’re saying’ and so forth. These can be removed quite effortlessly

and can make the piece much softer on the ear!

Another thing to think about is the order of sequence. Just because you recorded an interview first, a snippet from a band second and then a discussion from a small number of partygoers last, you don’t have to place them in that same order in the podcast. You might want to start with some band music first and fade into a few choice remarks from the partygoers before hearing the main part of the interview next. Then bring in the band music to break up the interview for a moment, perhaps come back to the speaker’s final points and then end on the partygoers’ funny remarks to end and fade to silence

It’s food for thought. Next time, let’s play with the software and timelines and actually start the fun process of editing audio sound! Can’t wait!

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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## Rip-Off Radio (Sound-Seeing Tour Suggestion)

Geoff Tinnion

Are you short of ideas? Ask a sales assistant for advice. For example: Visit a high street electrical store and ask for advice on buying an MP3 player. Act dumb on the subject and see what rubbish the sales assistant tells you. Will they try to sell you something expensive or try to sell you an MP3 player that far exceeds your needs? Why not try and wind them up and pretend not to understand the answers they give you. You could also compare the service between competing stores.

**LISTENER**



# What's a Vidcast?

**Colin Meeks** shows how to stick it to your eyes

**So** what's a vidcast, and why is it mentioned in a podcast magazine? Simply put, vidcasts are to video, what podcasts are to audio. Yes, that's right: now not only can you hear what's going on, you can see it, too. Vidcasts, or IP/TV as it's also commonly known, is very much in its infancy. Whilst there are many vidcasts available, they pale in total to the number of podcasts. I think the main reason for this is that now it's much more difficult to produce a vidcast than a podcast, but even that is getting easier and easier.

As it was with podcasts, the first vidcasts were mainly technology orientated. This

is understandable as there are many steps involved in putting a vidcast together, but this article isn't going to explore that just yet. However, over the past few months, more and more non-technology-based shows have been surfacing, and it's now that the vidcast scene is beginning to explode.

Like any good guest on a talk show, I should make sure to mention my latest in the Launchpad series, Vidcast Launchpad <http://www.vidcastlaunchpad.com>. This site hopes to cover some of the best vidcasts available. While I'm trying to cover many non-technology shows, it's impossible to ignore the technology vidcasts, especially when some





of them are so good. Here's a brief list to whet your whistle:

1. Port City PD  
<http://www.portcitypd.com>  
 Recently launched cop show that's an exceptional example of a drama-based vidcast
2. ScreenCastsOnline  
<http://www.screencastsonline.com>  
 A Mac/iPod video tutorial. A wonderful way to learn many new facets of your Mac/iPod
3. Dignation  
<http://www.dignation.com>  
 Those young scalawags, Kevin Rose and Alex Albrecht, bring us some of the fascinating stories featured on the social bookmarking site Digg:  
<http://www.digg.com>
4. The Scene  
<http://www.welcometothescene.com>  
 This one's probably only for net heads, but it's a great drama all about the online pirating scene. It starts slowly, but boy, does it hook you in
5. Open Alpha TV  
<http://www.openalpha.tv>  
 Learn all that's great and new in home gaming, be it Playstation, Xbox, Gameboy or PSP, presented by your wonderful host, Jenn Cutter

So this vidcast thing may seem really interesting, but what do you need to do to

start watching? The first thing you'll probably want to do is download the latest copy of Apple's QuickTime – <http://www.quicktime.com>. Many vidcasts are produced on Apple Macs or created specifically in Apple's Quicktime format, so if you want to watch any vidcasts, chances are you're going to need Quicktime. Another solution that you may prefer is VLC – <http://www.videolan.org> which supports Quicktime as well as many other popular video formats. This gives you the added bonus of needing just one piece of software installed for all the different kinds of vidcasts available. Apart from that, the mechanism to subscribe to vidcasts is exactly the same as for podcasts.

This is certainly an interesting time for vidcasts, but until viewers can subscribe and watch through a television, I don't think this format is going to have as wide a user base as podcasting does with the various types of MP3 players available to the public. However, I truly believe that the time for an expansion of vidcast popularity isn't far away. In fact, US viewers can already subscribe to vidcasts through a Tivo box, as they can with podcasts as well.



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PODCASTER

# What is Audio Compression?

**Simon Toon** crunches audio

**Are** you confused by some of the talk you hear in the podosphere about audio 'compression'? I was, until I realised that the word 'compression' can be used to refer to two completely different processes you can perform on your audio recordings. This article will help you to understand the difference between converting to an MP3 file and using an audio level compressor.

As a podcaster, you may need to concern yourself with two distinct types of audio compression: audio data compression and audio level compression. The first type, audio data compression, is all about taking a large digital audio recording (usually a WAV, AIFF or AU file) and converting it into a smaller file (usually an MP3 or AAC) that sounds more or less the same as the original. There are plenty of articles in previous issues of Podcast User Magazine that can tell you more about converting files to MP3s.

The second type, audio level compression, is concerned with processing the sound (whether it be digital or analogue) and changing it to make the sound seem louder or more comfortable to listen to.

### Clipping

If an audio signal is too loud for any of the elements it passes through, then 'clipping'

will occur, and the top or bottom of the sound wave will get chopped off. Consider a simple audio signal such as the sine wave in Figure 1. Clipping results in the wave shown in Figure 2.

Figure 1

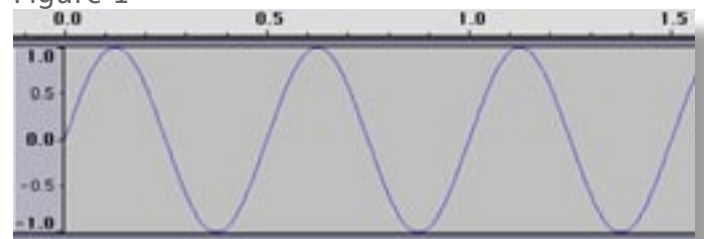
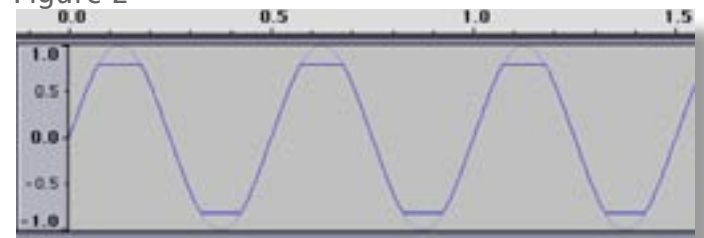


Figure 2



Clipping may cause a distortion, also known as over-modulation, in the sound when sharp 'corners' in the wave are created. The result is unpleasant for the human ear, and even though it may not be perceptible to the listener, it will lead to fatigue if it continues for too long. The listener may not know why the fatigue is happening but might just switch off anyway.

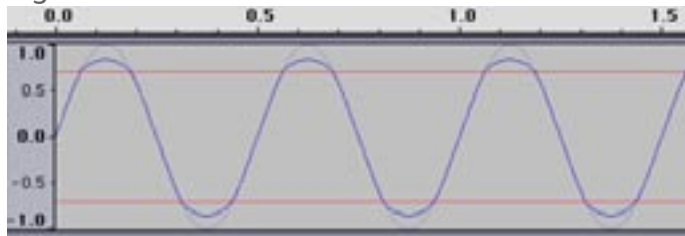




### Compression

To prevent the distortion created by clipping, a compressor can be inserted into the flow. When the audio signal reaches a specified threshold, any further increase in the signal is reduced by a specified ratio. For instance a 2:1 ratio would trim the peaks and troughs down by half, as shown in Figure 3, where the threshold is shown as a red horizontal line.

Figure 3

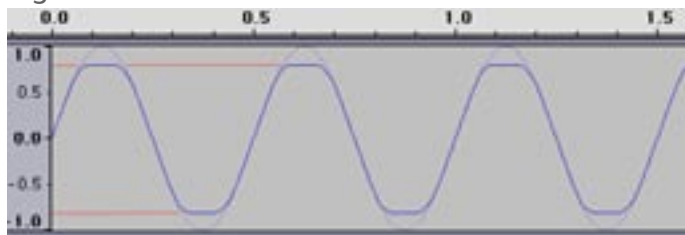


Further control over the compression can be taken by adjusting the reaction speeds – the speeds with which the compressor makes and removes these adjustments to the signal, or the so-called attack and release speeds.

### Limiting

A compressor-limiter may then apply the additional step of limiting, which is effectively a deliberate version of clipping. This provides a final controlled adjustment to remove the tops and bottoms of the peaks and troughs, as shown in Figure 4 (again, the limiting threshold is shown in red).

Figure 4



### Make-up gain

You can see how the process of compressing and then limiting has smoothed off the extremities of the audio signal, with a much

smaller amount of distortion. A final step, make-up gain, is usually then taken to amplify the signal to fill out the available capacity.

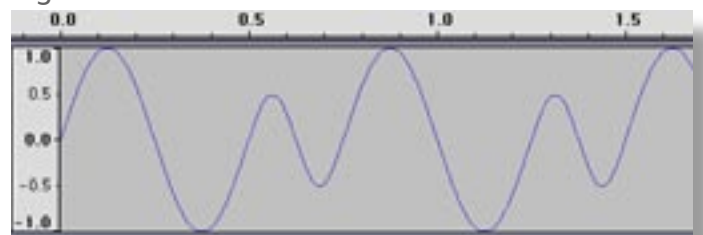
Figure 5



### The overall effect

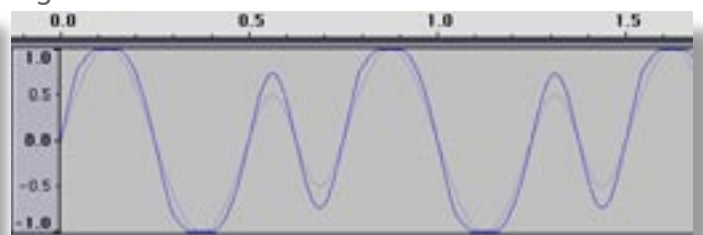
The effect of all this is to increase the volume of the quieter sounds in the audio as well as to boost the apparent volume of the louder sounds, without exceeding the limits of the available signal. For example, Figure 6 shows a more complex wave, with a loud signal and a quieter signal.

Figure 6



Put through a compressor-limiter, this signal could come out as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7



This technique is often used in TV and radio advertising to make the commercials appear louder than the main programmes. The adjustments and minor distortions added to



## PODCASTER|



the sound are also used by both musicians and vocal performers to add certain qualities to the audio.

### Should I use Compressor?

Audio level compressor and limiter features are offered by many audio hardware devices, such as mixers, and also by many popular software packages, such as Audacity and GarageBand. Audio level compression can be used to make your volume levels louder and more consistent. Though it's not as bad as clipping, compression will still produce some distortion. Some vocal artists use this distortion consciously, preferring the sound it creates. If you're not trying to distort your audio, but simply wish to keep the sound levels under control, compression is a valuable tool.



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

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# Just what is an MP3?

The simple answer is 'a sound file'. 'MP3' is shorthand for 'MPEG layer 3'. Wished you hadn't asked? OK, let's make it even more confusing, shall we? 'MPEG' stands for 'Moving Picture Experts Group', and yes, you can get films in MPEG format, but a special version (Layer 3) deals with just the sound. These are the standards set by The International Organisation for Standardization (ISO), but we shall stop there.

So what makes an MP3 so special? The deal is a simple one: a standard sound file, often referred to as a WAV file, is huge in comparison. One music track in a WAV file could take up 30 MB on a hard drive or CD, whilst the same track in MP3 format would be around 3 MB in size. A quick calculation reveals that a standard CD could hold up to 233 tracks as MP3 files.

Through the clever use of

compression and removal of sounds beyond the range of human hearing, creation of an MP3 results in a digital file that produces a sound that is hard to tell from that of the original recording. Such is its quality that the MP3 format is now becoming a very popular way to save audio files. Manufacturers recognise this trend and produce CD players that handle MP3s with no problems; the same often happens with newer multi-use DVD players.

You can see now why the MP3 is the file format of choice for podcasters, since its delivery and transportation is ideally suited to both their needs and those of the listeners.

**James Hastell** is a regular guest on the  
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# Pop, Podcasting and Promotion

The Secret is out... **Nigel Paice** likes girl bands

The girls from Clea

**Late** last summer, I was given the opportunity to enter the cut and thrust world of the music industry and to produce a podcast for a chart act who had two top 30 hits already under their belt. Actually, I begged for the opportunity and was met with a chorus of “what’s a podcast?” (we’ve all been there!)

Clea are a three-piece girl band, the losing finalists from Pop-Stars the Rivals (a UK TV show) which gave us Girls Aloud. Personally, I think the voting public got it completely wrong and threw out the best of the bunch, but I digress.

With the backing of the girl’s ‘A-List’ management company, I set about initially finding out exactly what the purpose of the podcast was to be. The management at this point had no idea either, so it was really a bit of a shot in the dark for everyone concerned.



As it turned out, we seem to have got it right first time, beating all comers in the process. As far as I’m aware, we were the first chart act in the world with a podcast, beating Madonna by nine days.

## Interactivity

We never wanted the podcast to be a ‘them and us’ situation. Ownership of the shows



## MUSIC



rests firmly with the fans, even to the extent that they have sent in video footage from their camera phones and the management even took a video camera on tour to capture those ‘special’ moments fans so rarely get to see. The upshot of all of this is that the fans see the group for who they are: three young girls having a good time, not some god-like, unreachable pop stars.

### Diversity

I’ve mixed audio and video podcasts on the same feed. Why? The honest answer is that initially I didn’t have enough content of either to get the ball rolling, but in hindsight this seems a very shrewd move. We have an international audience, some of whom know very little English. The video shows allow them the same ownership as the English-speaking fans. Whilst I have been concentrating on the video shows recently, I’m still an audio guy at heart, and the next couple of shows will include interviews with fans as well as a few guests that will surprise even the management.

We now have a situation that is fast becoming **SELF-PERPETUATING**, and as the girls are beginning to see the **PROMOTIONAL** power of the **MEDIUM**

There has also been some unexpected crossover. Recently I’ve been working with Kevin Coy of JKC Media, [www.jkcmedia.co.uk](http://www.jkcmedia.co.uk), a contact made during the production of The Lance Anderson Podcast Experiment. Kevin has been playing Clea tracks on his afternoon radio show, [www.airwave-radio.co.uk](http://www.airwave-radio.co.uk), and has

seen his listening audience increase. We now have a situation that is fast becoming self-perpetuating, and as the girls are beginning to see the promotional power of the medium. I’ve been given permission to play copyright-

One third of Clea



protected music (by the copyright holder) and re-broadcast radio shows. Subscriber numbers spike every time the girls mention the word ‘podcast’ in an interview.

As of this issue, Podcast User Magazine has been added to the ‘All Clea’ feed (with the blessing of the management), and I sincerely hope that it spawns a greater interest in podcasting among the predominantly 15- to 20-year-olds who are our subscribers. Maybe some of them may take up the challenge and create podcasts of their own.

Clea’s new single ‘Lucky like that’ is released in the UK on 22nd May 2006, with the album ‘Trinity’ following closely behind in mid June.

**Nigel Paice** is a full time performing arts technician in a Liverpool high school.

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# Podcasting Business Models

## Feedback - (Continued)

Chris Matson

In the discussion about monetizing podcasts, continued by Phil Shankland in the last edition of PUM, one model was not mentioned: the integration of podcasting into the overall marketing mix of a business. An outstanding example of that, and a great podcast to listen to is More Hip Than Hippie. It's a fun, family-friendly, educational and entertaining G-rated podcast.

Dori and Val, the two co-presenters, started podcasting a weekly show in June 2005. Val is a business owner in Chico, northern California, and Dori works for the local radio station. Their friendship began when Dori was sent out to do the live broadcast at some radio advertising for Val. They were 'sympatico', immediately liked one another and became good friends.

Inspired by her husband Rob's research, Val was originally looking at podcasting as a marketing tool for their 'Greenfeet' business, which teaches people how to live greener lives in very simple, practical ways. Having a podcast was a great tool to share information in a way that print or regular advertisements can't do, and early feedback from listeners indicated that they had struck a chord. People were very interested in learning what small things they could do to save the planet. When looked at as a global issue, people were overwhelmed, but through this podcast, people are able to see that they CAN make a difference right from their own homes, using small steps that are not tough to do. Each new step begets another one, which then starts to snowball.

Val is a very shrewd marketer. She has also been a columnist for a local print magazine for a couple of years and has written articles for her company's web site, so the topics for each show are based partly on those. They also get

listener feedback and look at the calendar for upcoming events and seasonal advice.

The sound quality of the show is very high. Award-winning radio personality Dori is normally the knob twiddler. When they are recording a session on the patio at home (with obligatory beer and chocolate) they record directly to a PC using Goldwave, and Dori edits the show. Each podcast takes from two to ten hours for research and preparation, depending on how much they already know about the topic. They also get about 30 emails per week from listeners, some of which are answered in the next week's show.

Outside of podcasting, to promote More Hip Than Hippie, they integrate the podcast into the Greenfeet company newsletter, which has been published for many years and has tens of thousands of subscribers. As other podcasters have discovered, though, acceptance of the audio can be tough going because many people still don't know what podcasting is, or how to start listening.

The format of the show hasn't changed much since the beginning. It now goes on slightly longer, usually lasting about an hour each week. It's more casual and conversational now than a year ago. In the future they are going to have more recorded interviews with other people and will be having more fun contests to increase listener participation.

It's clear that Val and Dori both have a lot of fun making More Hip Than Hippie, and when you listen, you'll be able to hear the enthusiasm. It can be found at

<http://www.morehipthanhippie.com/>.

Chris Matson is a British-born, self-described "IT guy" who lives in Montana and is an active member of the Richard Vobes Radio Show forums. Chris's podcasts can be found at

<http://eatrightgetoutofbreath.blogspot.com>

<http://redwhiteandbluepodcast.blogspot.com>

[janesdaddy@gmail.com](mailto:janesdaddy@gmail.com)

MUSIC



# Moving the music from the virtual to the physical world – a user's guide

## Grant Mason receives an email...

I didn't get a good night's sleep on Thursday 13th April, and it had nothing to do with the excitement of a few days off work for the Easter break. No – rewind a few months to an email from Rowena Dugdale of sparkly Bristol pop urchins Santa Dog, <http://www.santa-dog.co.uk/>, "We're coming up to play in Scotland", she announced, "so we'll get to meet you in Edinburgh. Do you know of any good venues we could play?"

Shortly afterwards, following a late-night email from Row after she'd been out for a

to a specialist in talking to the wall by the PC in the corner of his bedroom, then I'll be your man!)

A few weeks later we had a confirmed line-up for the night: Chocyamo, <http://www.chocyamo.com/>, Santa Dog and Opal Sky, <http://www.opal-sky.com/>. With the rather splendid (and recently reviewed and praised by the NME) Cabaret Voltaire, <http://www.thecabaretvoltaire.com/subindex.php>, booked as our venue for Friday 14th April, we were now cooking with gas.

So, how is it done? Isn't it an expensive business?

Surprisingly, the costs involved were actually pretty minimal. In Three From Leith's case, the venue (including sound engineer, equipment and PA) was £150, with £50 paid up-front and the remaining £100 to be taken from the ticket sales. The venue allows you to take the money on the door yourself, or for £20 they'll provide someone to do it for you. In effect then, at £5 a head you only need 34 people through the door to break even. Once you're past that number, then there's money being made to share between the bands for their efforts.

On top of that, though, you'll also have to consider your publicity costs: posters, flyers and any promo packs you might want to issue to the local press to garner some attention. In our case, we were lucky enough to have Row, who's an illustrator by day and whose Dad is a printer, so we were mailed some highly original and stunningly artistic posters and flyers to start putting up wherever we

You'll also have to **CONSIDER** your publicity costs: posters, flyers and any **PROMO PACKS** you might want to issue to the local press

curry and drunk a bit too much wine, I was agreeing to a Three From Leith showcase gig which would feature Santa Dog and two local bands who'd been played on the show. I supplied Row with a list of possible acts and left her to have a listen and approach them directly. After all, organising and gigging with other bands was her speciality, so I thought it better to leave that part to the expert. (If anyone ever comes up with a role best suited





could (including my inspired placing of flyers, [http://www.grantmason.co.uk/Podcasting/images/santadog\\_flyer\\_small.jpg](http://www.grantmason.co.uk/Podcasting/images/santadog_flyer_small.jpg), above the urinals of local hostelrys after a few too many pints of Belhaven one night; they gave the blokes something to ponder whilst whistling and trying to stare straight ahead). If you've not got a talented artist and printer in your particular line-up, then judicious use of your PC and a Paint or Photoshop-like package will do for the posters, and some emails to press contacts may well achieve the same kind of journalistic interest. As a minimum, you should contact your local papers and make sure you get the gig in their weekly 'What's On' listings (although in our case, despite approaches and listings submissions from two sources, we didn't get a mention at all).

After that, it's all just a case of plugging, promoting, hassling and press-ganging as many people as you possibly can to come along or to give you a mention. As a podcaster, you can create an audio plug to play on your own show and submit to as many other shows as you can. I even went as far as sending the TFL gig promo around the world, since you could never tell who might have been coming over to Edinburgh on holiday at the time. Email all your contacts in other bands and invite them too – more often than not they're up for a good night out to see other bands and do a spot of networking.

Cue the wavy-lines across the TV screen and let's move back to the night itself; how did it all turn out in the end? Well, despite initial panic over whether anyone would want to come out after the weather gods smiled and provided a glorious, sunny day on an Edinburgh Friday holiday, we had people flood in and enjoy what turned out to be a cracking evening's entertainment that went like clockwork. Afterwards, the bands and friends all decamped to a local pub to continue with the fun and camaraderie which had developed in the run-up to the night and on the night itself. Everyone was happy; everyone was beaming broadly and laughing. I was delighted

## Let's see how LOUDLY we can get it heard

– everyone had enjoyed themselves immensely, bands got to bring their music to new ears and fans got to see, hear and interact with bands they'd only ever heard before on podcasts. Everyone was a winner on the night.

Now that the music has faded away and the night is all but a fading memory, would I do it again? Well, I've already been approached by a number of bands and listeners (some before the inaugural gig was even over) who are very keen to be part of the next one, so the answer is yes. I'd be delighted! I'll leave it a while as I want the event itself to continue to be special, so I'd rather not rush straight into another quite yet.

So, podcasters, it's now over to you – I've proved that it's possible to arrange your very own successful showcase night to get featured bands further exposure and expand their fanbase beyond those people who already listen to your podcast. I'm eagerly anticipating who's going to step up to the plate next and do one in their neck of the woods. Listeners, you don't get off lightly here, either; you can email your favourite podcast and suggest they do a live event, and then help by publicising anything that's subsequently organised. Talk to all of your friends and workmates into going along. Get your favourite independent bands to contact your local podcast and offer their services should the show decide to do a gig. Do whatever you can.

The music's started leaking out of the media player's headphones – now let's see how loudly we can get it heard.

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>  
[grant.mason@podcastusermagazine.com](mailto:grant.mason@podcastusermagazine.com)

## PODCASTER



# Podding Across America

James Hastell

**It's** still a little hard to believe that just over a year ago when The Vobes first tentatively placed his big toe into the world of podcasting that he and I would be USA-bound for a 'Pod across the States' podcast.

Over the space of a year, Richard had, like many, built up an American following of some standing. These friends (and I think we can use the term in its real meaning here) have been imploring us to come over and meet them. To us it was just a dream; neither of us could afford to indulge ourselves in this fashion, and we made that clear. It was a target to aim for, but in reality, unlikely.

Richard's show is one of those rare birds; it actually charges real money to listen, not that there isn't free content, which is selective but enjoyable. His 'fans', however, decided amongst themselves to start a fund to get the show on the road across the great pond we know as the Atlantic Ocean.

A PayPal account was opened, and funding rolled in. We expected that some money would be sent in the beginning, but, as with a lot of things, we expected interest to die off. In an attempt to 'make or break' we set a deadline, a circle on the calendar in the deepest of reds. As the time grew closer, the funding grew to cover the air fare, and very generously people started to offer places for us to stay and food on a plate... How could we refuse?

With the tickets booked, an ardent listener/content provider Phil Clark (aka Dr Phil) and

now our representative in Chicago is taking us under his wing for the first few days before dropping us off at Chuck Tomasi's in Appleton, Wisconsin. We look forward to appearing in Chuck's freestyle show and possibly his Technorama one too. It's also an opportunity to collect the award Richard won for the best sound-seeing tour that Chuck picked up on our behalf, assuming that he hasn't scratched off Richard's name and engraved his own!

Further stops are planned in St Louis, Arkadelphia, Dallas, and San Antonio.

The plan is to upload each day a small snippet, an 'on the road audio diary' of our journey. We shall be recording a huge amount of audio each day, but we'll not have the time to edit on the fly until our return.

The moral to this story is this: Many podcasters have a tip jar on their web sites and ask discreetly for donations to cover some running costs. However, we have found that if you actually set a target and inform the listeners of its progress, a target can often be reached. The results in our case are an exception; a more realistic target, perhaps a new microphone for the studio, is not beyond reach for those of us podcasting to an audience on a tight budget.

You will be able to follow the progress of Richard and Jimmy daily via [www.vobes.com](http://www.vobes.com). They arrive in the States on May 3 and depart on May 18.



Fix yourself a drink and prepare to be enlightened as Janet and Mark guide you through this month's pick of the good, the bad and the ugly...



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.

[www.theflashing12.com/](http://www.theflashing12.com/)

[janet.parkinson@podcastusermagazine.com](mailto:janet.parkinson@podcastusermagazine.com)

<b>DONE TO A TURN</b> ☆☆☆☆☆
<b>WELL DOWN</b> ☆☆☆☆
<b>RARE</b> ☆☆☆
<b>A LITTLE BLOODY</b> ☆☆
<b>CORN ON THE COB</b> ☆
<b>SAUSAGE</b> x

No review of the Dutch podcasting scene would be complete, or even sensible, without reference to the Big Three – Father Roderick, Jan Polet and Castblaster Mike – so here we go:

#### Castblaster Mike

Mike is the creator of the extremely successful, popular and feature-rich “Castblaster” podcast software program, [www.castblaster.com](http://www.castblaster.com), and has recently released Beta 0.04 of his WinPodder, [www.winpodder.com](http://www.winpodder.com), pod-catching software (see a review of Version 0.02 by Jimmy Hastell in Issue #2 of PUM). Having seen this new release, all I can say is that if our reviews went to 11, this probably would, too. He is clearly a genius in the coding department, and other works from his “Combitech” company include serious software for yachtsmen (and women!) and a Slow Scan Television radio thingummy. We applaud you, Mike – keep up the good work, we appreciate it!

#### Jan Polet – [www.janpolet.com](http://www.janpolet.com)

Jan surged to prominence via the Daily Source Code when Adam Curry played Jan’s segment known as ‘The Hit Test’. Jan played three extremely short clips of well-known and not-so-well-known tracks for Adam to guess the name of and the artist, and it was often extremely difficult. It is testament to Jan’s musical knowledge and technical skill and to Adam’s music identification skills that this segment quickly became a firm favourite with the DSC listener base.

When Adam took the Daily Source Code completely ‘podsafely’ by no longer playing licensed music in any form, there was a global groan of pity and sigh of sadness, but Jan received a lot of public support for an independent, stand-alone show and started The Hit Test podcast.

Jan is a genius at the engineering side of the business and gives the right blend of personal and factual notes together with, of course, The Hit Test, which makes his podcasts a great listen.



## PODCAST REVIEWS



Jan is planning a new version of The Hit Test called “Hit Test Live” where he will have live contestants linked together via Skype. The beauty of this is that people all over the world will be able to compete! Great idea Jan! Go for it!

**DONE TO A TURN**



### BlaBlaBlog.nl

From the indie-casting side, [www.BlaBlaBlog.nl](http://www.BlaBlaBlog.nl) is an interesting take on Dutch family life, including videocasts of their holidays abroad. These are well produced, with music from the various countries visited.

**WELL DONE**



### Father Roderick Vonhögen – [www.sqpn.com](http://www.sqpn.com)

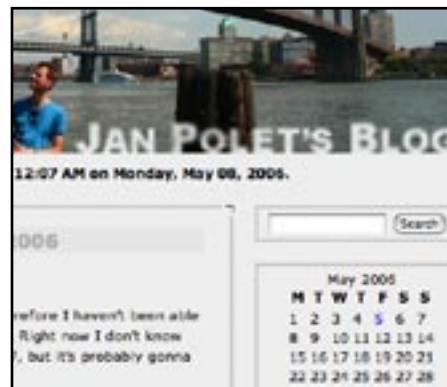
Fr. Roderick is a Catholic priest based in Amersfoort in the Archdiocese of Utrecht in the Netherlands. He works in four parishes in the city of Amersfoort and is the creator of the StarQuest Podcast Network.

What is the StarQuest Podcast Network? It’s a group of several very different podcasts, most of which have a religious theme. There are currently eight different podcasts, ranging from the ‘Pray Station Portable’ (I love that name!), which is a brief daily prayer to kick-start or help wind down your day, through to the Daily Breakfast, which is a 20–30 minute show covering items in the news, film and TV reviews, games reviews and listener mail. Fr. Roderick always finishes with a ‘Thought of the Day’, which often makes you stop and think.

‘The Secrets Of...’ serials break out of the Catholic religious style. Here Fr. Roderick goes into the various symbolism and ancient origins of recent films, which include all the Harry Potter films, all the Star Wars movies and the new Narnia sequence. They are a fascinating listen – Fr. Roderick’s studies in philosophy and the classics really help provide the background to these movies.

Fr Roderick has a very simple style that is very welcoming, approachable and accessible to everyone all over the world. Although he looks after four parishes and eight podcasts, he still finds time to watch Lost and keep his eye in with his X-Box! I don’t know how he does it – perhaps he has Divine help?

**DONE TO A TURN**





### [www.gespod.nl](http://www.gespod.nl)

Finally, I want to sing the praises of a Dutch language podcast site, [www.gespod.nl](http://www.gespod.nl). Acting like a Podcast Pickle or PodcastAlley for the Dutch language podcasting community, it offers categorisation, links to RSS feeds and a voting mechanism by which the most popular ‘casts rise to the top. The Top 40 panel makes for an interesting read and comparison with the English–language podcasting world.

All-in-all, my trip to the Netherlands was an interesting and surprising journey. There is clearly a thriving podcast landscape in the Netherlands, and the English–speaking podcasters are getting the message about Dutch podcasting out into the rest of the world.

Next month I am off to Germany! So all you German podcasters, please write in to me at [janet.parkinson@podcastusermagazine.com](mailto:janet.parkinson@podcastusermagazine.com) with your suggestions, hints and tips of podcasts for me to listen to. Auf wiedersehen!

### The Hollywood Podcast – [www.thehollywoodpodcast.com](http://www.thehollywoodpodcast.com)

Tim Coyne is an actor and writer living in Los Angeles, and he hosts and produces The Hollywood Podcast. For all intents and purposes, one could assume Tim’s podcast would be all celebrity sightings and red–carpet gossip. However, it quickly becomes clear that Tim’s take on Hollywood is very different from that of the gossip columns.

Launched on the 27th of March 2005, Tim has released over 30 podcasts and has managed to cover topics ranging from the stalker–like habits of the paparazzi (a fascination two–part expo riding shotgun with some of Hollywood’s most prolific snappers, all determined to get a picture of the elusive Gwyneth Paltrow), being banned from Kevin Smith’s ‘Vulgathan’, auditioning for ‘Charmed’, preparing to audition for the part of a biker in ‘Crossing Jordan’ and attending the ‘Great American Pitchfest’, all with a thick vein of pure red–blooded determination to succeed in Tinsel Town running through the interviewees, and at times, the interviewer.

This is one of those typical podcasts where you listen to the latest episode, download and listen to the entire archive and then wait eagerly for the next new episode to show up in your podcatcher.



Mark presents the world famous tartanpodcast

<http://www.tartanpodcast.com>  
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**DONE TO A TURN**



# Mixers

## a Really Simple

# Overview

James Hastell

**First** of all, let's make it quite clear: you do NOT need a mixer; it's totally unnecessary, a waste of money, just a toy and a gimmick, so forget it. Did I mention that I have a Behringer Eurorack UB1002? It has its uses, I grant you, such as the ability to have two microphones and perhaps plug in a CD player, which can make life a little easier, and it looks good on the desk.

So, what does it do? It mixes sound, of course. The mixer sits between the computer and the sound source, be it a microphone or any suitable audio device, and it allows you to control, with knobs or sliders, how much sound goes from each device to the computer.

Let's start with the simplest set up: you and a microphone. The mic is plugged in to the mixer, and the mixer output is plugged into your computer's sound card. It is preferable to plug it into the line-in socket on a sound card and not the mic socket. Then plug your headphones into the mixer, in the headphone socket, of course. Then make sure your

desktop speakers are off.

Start a test recording, and you can hear exactly what you sound like during the recording process. This is the ideal time to tweak those knobs to get your voice just right. The knob marked 'gain' increases the pickup from the microphone, but be warned: increase it too much and you'll get all the background sounds that you mentally block out, too.

Add another mic to the set up, and one guest voice, and you now have control. You can fade the guest out whenever you want (as well as your own voice). Where the mixer comes into its own is when you add yet another device, such as a CD player, to one of the mixers inputs; now you can have background music at a comfortable level and can raise and lower it at will, which is ideal when you have a fit of coughing.

That's about it. A mixer is really a simple device that gives you control over the final output. Plus, of course, you get the chance to play at being a disc jockey!

# RØDE NT1000 Studio Condenser Microphone

**Paul Parkinson**

Up until recently I was using a relatively cheap [~£30/\$50] condenser microphone as our primary (or, more accurately, only) microphone. Then Christmas came and Father Christmas was *\*very\**nice to me and I bought a RØDE NT1000. Not that I was planning to – I had my eyes set on another microphone entirely as I set off that morning with a wallet full of Her Majesty's Beer Vouchers.

I knew before I went into Turnkey in Central London (our nearest decent proper music store) that I wanted a decent microphone, and I was pretty sure which one. After a friendly chat with the chap behind the counter, I went and tried the one I wanted plus a few others out in their booth at the back of the shop. I won't bore you with the details of which microphones I tried out – let's just say that some of them were very expensive – but for my voice the RØDE came out head and shoulders above the rest, which was a complete shock as it wasn't on my shortlist!

**Top Tip:** If you are buying an expensive microphone – and the definition of expensive is *\*your\** definition not the shop's or a magazine's definition – I think it is worthwhile visiting a decent music store and trying some out.



You wouldn't buy a car without a test drive nor would you buy a hifi without listening to it, would you? The Internet is a great place to find deals on rack gear and cables and so forth, but for the primary interface between the original analogue sounds (your voice!), microphones are a very personal choice.

The Røde NT1000 is a cardioid-pattern, large-diaphragm studio microphone, and the heft of this is something to behold. Røde indicate that this microphone has a very low "self noise" and comparing my old microphone and this one side-by-side you really can hear the difference. It is quiet. Very quiet. It's a shame my PC isn't, but that's another story...

The Røde's build quality is like something you'd find coming out of a German car plant or a Swiss watch factory. It has a marvellously heavy (and heavy-duty) cast metal satin nickel body with a very strong mesh head. If I had to drop one of my microphones, I'd chose this one as it has the best chance of

surviving... well, alright, I'd probably choose the cheapo-cheapo £1 microphone, but you get my point: this thing is strong.



## EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

You'll have "no worries" about the dynamic range, sound pressure level (SPL) and frequency response with the NT1000 – all the stats are excellent at 134dB, 140dBa and nice 20Hz – 20kHz. I wouldn't recommend using the NT1000 in front of a Marshall stack and Yngwie Malmsteen's screaming lead guitar, but for most flavours of vocals, it's perfect.

A wee niggle is the stingy plastic bag it came with, as most microphones at this level come with a hard case. I'm not talking about a proper flight case as that would have been overkill, but something that would give a degree of protection would have been nice. The stand-mount and ring adapter were all of a good quality.

One thing I am thinking about getting is a shock-mount, as the absence of a switch to control the low-cut would have been useful. What can happen is that a low-frequency rumble can be transmitted to the microphone via the microphone stand. For example a

truck could go past and although you couldn't actually hear it, the microphone "feels" it through the ground. The only snag is that shock mounts are a little pricey. This is not a problem for me in my standard configuration, but it does apply to most sensitive mics, so bear in mind the cost of a shock mount if one isn't included in the pack.

At the rear of the microphone is a standard three pin balanced XLR connector which has gold-plated pins (w00t) but you have to supply your own XLR-XLR cable.

In summary, this is a great microphone. It's doubly amazing when you consider that when it came out in late 2001 it was on the far side of £450 and you can pick it up for around £160 now! That is amazing value and a bargain. Ripper!



**Paul Parkinson** is the co-founder and host of the Flashing 12 podcast.

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## The Three From Leith ClustrMap



# Why Podcast?

Colin Meeks

**One** of the questions I get asked a lot is why do I bother to podcast. I have to admit, when I'm putting a podcast together at 2:00 am, I sometimes ask myself that very same question, but that only usually happens when I'm doing the routine stuff, such as creating the show notes and sending out emails to artists featured on the show. So why do I podcast? It's certainly not because I have a lot to say. I'm not the most ebullient or verbose of talkers, but I do have a passion for the music I cover and know how to use a thesaurus. In fact, I think I'm a much better writer than I am a talker (or I hope I am); otherwise, I'm in a lot of trouble.

I think podcasts are very much like writing, in that it's best to try to cover something you

The real payback in podcasting comes when you start to receive emails from listeners

feel passionate about, or have a very good understanding of, as this will be reflected in what you say. I still have a lot to learn about creating podcasts, but each show gets a little bit better and my knowledge expands that little bit more. The first few podcasts are always going to be a little shaky, if not terrifying, but once you get over that hump,

you start to get that warm fuzzy glow after you finish each show. I'm very lucky in that my best critic is my wife. I record my podcast on a Friday night / Saturday morning, and once the podcast is in the can, I burn a copy to CD for her. She then listens to it on her way to work on the Monday. The first few podcasts revealed that my sound levels were a bit all over the place, especially when played in the car. I have managed to get things on a more even keel now, so my wife now only has to concentrate on the content of the show.

The real payback in podcasting comes when you start to receive emails from listeners, telling you how great your show is. Yes, you may think you are the next Howard Keel or Podcast Paul (don't forget my tenner, Paul!), but until your podcast is validated by a totally non-partial audience, you have no idea how your show is going down. Boy, though, once you start to get those emails, you start to chomp at the bit to get the next show out, and so the cycle continues.

So why do I podcast? Passion. I love music, and I mean really love. The one thing about having this kind of passion is that you want as many people as possible to share your it with you. When I find a band or artist I love, it's great to have an outlet, to have the chance to introduce many other people to the same music. So there you go. Do you have a passion? Podcasting now gives you a way to vent that passion and share it with a worldwide community.

## COLUMN

Mark presents the world famous  
tartanpodcast

<http://www.tartanpodcast.com>  
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Mark: My Words

I recently celebrated my first anniversary as a podcaster. When I say celebrated, what I actually mean is it dawned on me while up a ladder cleaning a window that today was the 20th of March and that it was exactly one year since I rambled through tartanpodcast #1. The celebration went as far as me descending the ladder and moving on to the next window.

Since March 20th I have been thinking about the past 12 months and in particular if my expectations as a podcaster have been fulfilled.

When I uploaded my first podcast onto my web server (before I'd signed up with the ubiquitous and quite excellent Libsyn – [www.libsyn.com](http://www.libsyn.com)), I expected very little. I recognised that my Scottish accent would be a useful hook in a community saturated with white 30-something North American men. Tartanpodcast #1 was downloaded 35 times, and I was pleased with that, especially as I received one or two encouraging emails after it. By tartanpodcast #11, I knew I'd found my niche: indie Scottish music.

Around that time I set the goal of getting into the top 50 at Podcast Alley ([www.podcastalley.com](http://www.podcastalley.com)), the place that people went to find podcasts. Everyone knew that the higher your ranking, the more likely you were to be found by new listeners and journalists sniffing for stories about this 'exciting new thing called podcasting'. I felt this was an ambitious but achievable goal; my podcast was fairly new, so I felt that breaking the top 50 would be a good target. My goal was achieved by the start of May.

By the end of May I'd been featured on 'The World', a BBC World Service radio show that is syndicated across the United States, and I picked up many more listeners as a result, Yeardley Smith and her husband Dan among them. Yeardley happens to be the voice of TV's Lisa Simpson. Clark Boyd, the technology reporter for 'The World', then wrote the headline story based on our interview for the BBC Technology website on June 5th. All of a sudden the tartanpodcast was known outside the podcasting community, and site hits and subscribers went through the roof; I actually had listeners who weren't other podcasters. By the end of June the tartanpodcast was #9 on Podcast Alley, Podshow was taking notice and I was getting email after email commending me as a podcast producer. People told me I should be making a living doing it.

When Podshow offered me a contract to produce the tartanpodcast for them, I started to believe that I could make a living doing it.

So, here we are, more than a year after uploading my first podcast, and I'm still making a living doing what I've done for the past 17 years: cleaning windows. I am no longer producing the tartanpodcast for Podshow, and my podcast is ranked well into the hundreds at Podcast Alley. (I stopped asking for votes months ago.) Have my expectations been met?

For the most part they have, and in some ways my expectations have been exceeded. Granted, I don't make a living as a podcast producer, but I have the two things that should lie at the heart of any new podcaster's goals; a niche and a voice. And that leaves me feeling satisfied.

The logo features a grey Wi-Fi signal icon above the word "Podcast" in red. To the right, the word "User" is written in white inside a red circle with a drop shadow.

# Podcast User

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