



Creating Effective Podcasts for Your Business

Podcasting is an exciting new way to communicate with people both inside and outside your organization. Effective podcasts build a loyal audience that keeps coming back for more of what you have to say. Your podcasts don't need to be fancy or expensive. They just need to be worthwhile so that your target audience will listen to them consistently.

In this whitepaper, we'll explain some of the advantages of podcasting as a business communications tool and give you several ideas how you might use it. Then, we'll break down the process of creating a podcast series and talk about some best practices to consider along the way. The goal is to help you create effective business podcasts that benefit both your business and your audience.

Why Should I Podcast?

It's a fact of life that people in business are constantly bombarded with all sorts of information from many different sources. As a result, they are becoming increasingly adept at choosing how, when, and where to consume that information, if at all. More and more, they are turning to non-traditional media channels such as news feeds, blogs, and now podcasts so that they can better control the information they consume.

Podcasting is relatively new but its popularity is growing. A January 2008 study by eMarketer estimated that in 2007, there was an active U.S. podcast audience of 6.5 million. These are people who downloaded at least one podcast per week. This number is expected to grow to 25 million by 2012. Podcasting looks to be a communication technology that's here to stay, and those who learn to use it effectively have a powerful tool for reaching their audience.

In addition to the promising potential of its growing appeal, podcasting has several advantages over other communication technologies:

- **Podcasting is new and interesting.** One attraction of podcasting is that it's something different and therefore fun, just like e-mail was in its early days. People get bored easily and enjoy variety. They are naturally attracted to new things. Also, because podcasting is new, it's not over-used like e-mail, where messages are frequently lost or ignored.
- **Podcasting is inexpensive.** You don't need a lot of fancy equipment and software to create a good podcast. Everything you need is inexpensive or free, and readily available.
- **Podcasts are convenient and easy to consume.** Once you subscribe to a podcast feed, new podcasts are automatically downloaded to your computer as soon as they are available. You can listen to them at your convenience.
- **Podcasts make information personal.** In a podcast, someone is talking to you, or in the case of a video podcast, showing you something. That's a much more intimate way of getting information than reading it from an e-mail or document.

US Podcast Audience, 2007-2012 (Millions)

	Total Podcast Audience*	Active Podcast Audience**
2007	18.5	6.5
2008	28.0	10.0
2009	38.0	14.0
2010	47.0	17.5
2011	56.0	21.5
2012	65.0	25.0

Note: from any location; *individuals who have ever downloaded a podcast; **individuals who download an average of one or more podcast(s) per week. Source: eMarketer, January 2008

- **Podcasting is a time-efficient form of communication.** You can listen to podcasts while you do other things at work, play, and home, or during your commute. Some types of meetings can be eliminated in favor of podcasts, saving time and improving productivity.
- **Podcasts are portable.** Once a podcast resides on your computer, if your computer is portable, you can take the podcast with you and listen whenever or wherever you want. Or, you can transfer the podcast to a personal media player such as an iPod.
- **Podcasting is an on-demand technology.** Listeners decide what they want to hear, and when they want to hear it. On one hand, this means you're competing for their eyes and ears. On the other hand, this means that if they are subscribing to your podcasts, there's an excellent chance they're actually getting the information you're providing to them.
- **Podcasts cut costs.** Because podcasts are delivered digitally, they eliminate many costs associated with other forms of communication including postage, printing, and paper. They can also reduce meeting costs and e-mail storage costs.

What Should I Podcast?

There's really only one rule for determining what you should podcast: it needs to be something that provides useful information or is entertaining to your audience – preferably both – on a regular basis. Otherwise, they won't listen and continue to subscribe to your podcasts.

Here are some examples of possible podcasts for different organizations in your business:

Corporate:

- Financial updates such as quarterly earnings reports
- Business news such as company announcements, industry news and trends
- Internal company announcements, newsletters
- Management fireside chats

Sales and Marketing:

- Product news, such as new features and release schedules
- Product promotions and discounts
- Account management status and updates for customers and clients
- Interviews with industry experts
- Whitepapers
- Research paper summaries



How do I make my podcast?

1. **Record:** You'll need a software application to record your audio podcast in digital form. If you want to improve the sound quality, use a microphone (that's compatible with your computer's sound card). Make sure to get rid of background noise. If you're doing a video podcast, you'll need a digital videorecorder and a connection to download it to your computer.
2. **Edit:** Unless you're able to record your podcast in a single take, you'll have to edit it to get rid of the mistakes. You'll need editing software to do this. Your recording software may have this capability.
3. **Save:** Save your edited podcast in the file format for the media player you use to play it. MP3 for audio and MP4 for video are two of the most common formats.

Human Resources:

- HR training courses
- HR initiative announcements
- Policies and procedures
- Management tips and best practices
- Employee commentaries

Customer Support:

- Product usage tips and best practices
- Problem reports, status, and workarounds
- Product training

These are just a few ideas. Be creative. There's virtually no end to the possible content for your podcasts.

How Do I Create My Podcasts?

There are four important steps to take in creating your podcasts. Conveniently, they all start with "P": Plan, Produce, Promote, and Poll. We'll discuss some of the best practices for each of these 4 "Ps" below.

Planning Makes Perfect

You can save a lot of time and frustration, and increase the potential success of your podcasts by doing some planning up front.

- **Know your audience.** Target your audience and provide them with content you know they need or want. The more specific your audience and the more specific the information you provide them, the greater the chances are that they will listen to what you have to say.
- **Don't podcast just to podcast.** Make sure that podcasting is the appropriate medium for the information you're providing. For example, information with a lot of facts and figures may be better delivered as a document so that your audience can easily scan and reference it. Updates, news, and commentary, on the other hand, work very well as podcasts.
- **Pick the right length and frequency for your podcasts.** The length and frequency of your podcasts depends on the content and audience. Product training podcasts, for example can be longer than employee announcements, which probably should be shorter and more frequent. In most cases, shorter is better because you're competing with other demands on your listeners' time. Likewise, it's harder to sustain interest with longer podcasts. Also, keep in mind that creating a good podcast takes time – probably more than you would suspect in the beginning, so plan on that as well.



- **Be consistent.** Listeners like consistency, as long as it doesn't bore them. Developing a consistent theme, tone, format, length, and frequency lets them know what to expect from one podcast to the next. It also makes it easier for you to create the podcasts because it establishes a reusable framework for the content.
- **Beware of "podfading".** Podfading is when a podcast series become less and less frequent or stops altogether. It's estimated that at least a fifth of all podcasts end before the tenth episode. It's no surprise that listeners tend to tune out when podcasts fade. There are many reasons for podfading – lack of content and lack of time being two of the main causes. There's nothing wrong with having an end to your podcast series, but you should anticipate it and plan the podcasts accordingly.

Produce a winner

Producing a podcast consists of creating the content, performing it, and making it available to your audience. Beyond the technical aspects of production (see box), there are several best practices to keep in mind during this process:

- **Content is king.** What you put into your podcast will be the most critical part of its success. Make sure the content is something your listeners will value. Also, people bore easily, particularly when someone is talking to them. So get to the point quickly and be succinct. Try to limit each podcast to one or two key points. If you have a lot of information to get across, break it up into multiple podcasts.
- **Don't forget the basics.** The basic structural elements of a good podcast are the same as for a presentation, whitepaper, or any other effective communication. Start with an introduction, deliver your message, and then end with a closing that reinforces that message. You can add other elements around these – for example, you might end with a preview of the next podcast – but don't leave out the basics.
- **Don't advertise, sell, or bash.** People who choose to listen to podcasts do so because they value information and the convenience of podcasting to deliver it to them. They will quickly lose interest if they think you're hijacking their time to advertise, sell, or bash someone or something. This isn't to say you can't point out pros and cons. Just do it in a truthful, informative manner.
- **Authenticity beats professionalism.** Don't waste your time trying to sound like the evening news. You'll never be satisfied with your podcasts and likely, neither will your audience. Polished, professional podcasts are difficult and costly to produce, and they're not necessary. Listeners want authentic and informative. Podcasts that are a little rough around the edges may even come across as more honest and personal than glossy ones. An interview format can increase authenticity. Using subject matter experts or corporate management to deliver the content can also add interest and credibility.



How do I distribute my podcasts?

1. **Host:** Your podcasts need to be available for downloading via the Internet. You can either host them on your own website (make sure you have plenty of space and bandwidth). Or, you can use a podcast hosting service.
2. **Feed:** You'll have to set up an RSS feed to publish your podcasts. Everyone who subscribes to your feed will automatically receive new podcasts as you make them available. You can set up an RSS feed yourself, but the easiest way to do it is through a service provider.
3. **Read:** Your listeners will need a podcast reader (also called a "podcatcher" or "feed aggregator") to subscribe to your feed and download the podcasts. They'll also need a media player to listen to or view the podcasts. Most computers have existing media player plug-ins that the readers use. Or they can download to a personal media player such as an iPod.

- **Concentrate on delivery.** Although it is important to be authentic, the quality of the performance is still important. Try to use performers with good, articulate voices. Be conversational and informal. It's a good idea to use a script as a guide to keep your performance focused. However, don't let it strain or stifle the content. Practicing the performance a time or two is a good idea, particularly in the beginning. And then, slow down and relax during the recording.
- **Make it easy to edit.** You're going to make mistakes, maybe a lot of them at first. That's what editing is for. However, editing takes time and can reduce the quality of the recording if it's done poorly. So perform with editing in mind. Slow down and pause frequently as you record to provide adequate cut points if you need them. When you make a mistake, stop, take time to collect your thoughts and start over at the first natural break in the performance prior to the mistake. Don't stop and start the recording – you can edit out extra takes or asides. And finally, editing is easier and less time-consuming if you make larger but fewer cuts.
- **Don't sweat the small stuff.** Your podcasts won't be perfect and they don't have to be. Studio-quality audio isn't necessary as long as it's clear and background noise isn't noticeable. A few "ums" and "ahs" are okay. A cough here and there won't hurt. It's not worth the time trying to get rid of them. As long as there are no mistakes in the information itself, a few imperfections may actually add to the authenticity and charm of the podcast.

Be a promoter

You've done your planning and are producing podcasts. Once you've made them available (see box), you need to make sure your audience knows about them and can listen to them.

- **Get the word out.** Advertise your podcasts through your company's website, blog, emails, department meetings, client meetings, direct mailers – whatever the best way is to notify your target audience. Explain what the podcasts are about and how your audience will benefit from them.
- **Hold your listeners' hands.** Most of your audience will probably be new to podcasting. Give them specific, step-by-step instructions on installing and using a podcast reader for subscribing to your podcasts and a media player for listening to or viewing them. For internal podcasts, consider having your IT department install and set up the podcast reader and medial player for your listeners.

Poll for success

There's no reason to podcast if nobody is listening. And if they aren't, why not? To find out, you need to talk to your audience and get their feedback.



- **Find out who's listening.** Whoever is hosting your podcasts or providing the feed can track downloads of podcasts and give you statistics on traffic and subscriptions. Tools and services are available for doing this as well. Also, you can use the same communication channels you use to promote your podcasts to solicit feedback on who's listening or not.
- **Ask for help.** Your podcasts are for your listeners, so ask them what they want. Find out what they like and don't like about your podcasts and get their ideas for making them better. Take the time to contact some of them directly. Design a survey to get their feedback. Set up a web page where they can leave their comments and refer to that web page at the end of each podcast.
- **Build a community.** Podcasts don't have to be a one-way street. You can learn a lot from your listeners, more than just ways to make your podcasts better. Encourage a conversation among your audience. Set up a blog or online forum to facilitate a dialog about your podcasts. Make sure your listeners know their comments are welcome and that you value their ideas.

Why use ReadyTalk for business podcasting?

Clearly, there are a lot of things for you to think about to create effective business podcasts. It can be a daunting task to sit down and get started, especially if you still have to figure out how you're going to record, edit, host, and publish your podcasts.

ReadyTalk provides a turnkey podcasting solution that does everything you need to create your podcasts. You can record any audio or web conference, edit it, and mark it as a podcast episode. ReadyTalk converts it to the appropriate file format, hosts it, and publishes a feed to it so that your audience can subscribe and listen. It's all easy to use and better yet, the podcasting features come standard with every ReadyTalk account. It's the perfect solution for beginners.

So go ahead and get started. Try a few podcasts and see how fun and easy podcasting can be. Then concentrate on the 4 "Ps" and you'll soon be creating effective business podcasts that get information to your employees, your customers and clients, or anyone else who needs to hear what you have to say.

ReadyTalk Podcasting features

Audio/video recording	✓
Editing	✓
File conversion	✓
Hosting	✓
Feed publishing	✓