



Podcasting: What it is and what it can do for you

It sounds like something that only techie geeks could be interested in. But actually, podcasting is a fun, simple way of communicating information. This new medium holds lots of potential for a wide variety of audiences and purposes, making it well worth exploring.

What Is Podcasting?

Podcasting is the latest in on-the-go, on-demand technology. Basically, a podcast is a digital recording of audio or web/visual content (like a web conference, radio program or music), made available on the Internet for downloading to a personal computer or MP3 player.

A lot like radio on demand, podcasting actually offers far more options in terms of content and programming than radio does. And best of all, with podcasting, you can download whatever programming you want and listen to it whenever and wherever you want. This anywhere, anytime freedom is the main attraction of podcasting.

The term “podcast” is a blend of two words: iPod (an Apple MP3 player) and broadcast. But it’s important to note that podcasting is not just for iPods — any computer software that supports MP3 and MP4 (like Windows Media Player and QuickTime) and any portable device that supports media download and playback (an MP3 player, PDA or cell phone) can be used to watch and listen to podcasts.

A little podcasting history

Media entrepreneur and former MTV VJ Adam Curry popularized the term podcasting. Curry created an AppleScript application that automated the process of downloading and syncing audio files to iPods.

Curry’s application expanded on the work of programmer Dave Winer, a pioneer in the world of Web logs and XML development. Winer wrote the RSS 2.0 specification, which is used to deliver information about podcasts. RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is an XML format that is used to define channels of information that contain elements, which are typically stories or Web log entries. RSS 2.0 supports enclosures, and podcasts are simply the application of RSS enclosures to audio files.

The concept of podcasting began as early as 2000, and its technical components were available by 2001. In 2003, regular podcasts started showing up on well-known Web sites, and software support spread. In 2005, the editors of the New Oxford American Dictionary declared “podcasting” the word of the year.

Like the blogging phenomenon, podcasting came out of nowhere and attracted an enthusiastic following. Podcasting’s initial appeal was to allow individuals to distribute their own “radio shows,” but the system quickly became used in a wide variety of other ways, including distributing school lessons, museum tours, meeting updates and public safety alerts. The rapid adoption

Podcast Facts

- 22 million American adults own an MP3 or iPod
- More than 6 million of these owners currently listen to podcasts
- The podcast audience is estimated to reach 56 million by 2010
- The number of podcast feeds has increased 25 fold over since July 2006
- ABC, NBC, ESPN, Disney and NPR all have introduced podcast programs



of MP3 players and the desire of owners to have fresh content have also helped increase the popularity of podcasting.

It is clear that the technology provides significant opportunity and potential. Podcasting is definitely more than a passing fad.

How Podcasting Works

Think of it as subscribing to a magazine.

Podcasting uses a standard RSS feed reader or news aggregator — the only difference is that the feed you subscribe to contains a link to an audio or video file. Instead of reading content in your RSS feed reader or aggregator, you listen to it.

Once the audio or visual files are produced, they are published online and indexed for subscription and reception by an RSS reader. Podcasts can be displayed on websites with clickable links to audio files. Subscribers then download the files to iPods, cell phones, iTunes directories, computers or other locations to listen to whenever they want.

What You Need to Receive Podcasts

Basically, you'll need broadband Internet access and some way to play audio and visual files.

Common programs used to play podcasts include iTunes, Windows Media Player, WinAmp, RealPlayer and QuickTime Player. Many of these programs come bundled with operating systems or can be downloaded for free.

To automate the process of downloading podcasts that you subscribe to, you will need a podcast-specific aggregator. This program is an always-on program that starts when your computer is started and runs in the background. Some, such as iTunes and iPodder, can detect new enclosures on the Web feeds you subscribe to and automatically download them to your portable MP3 player or iPod so you can listen to podcasts when and where you want to. Interestingly, it is estimated that perhaps only 20 percent of podcasts are actually consumed on portable media players — 80 percent are listened to on the computer onto which they are downloaded.

Why Viewers Podcast?

As a viewer or listener, you'll experience several benefits to podcasting.

- **Content Control.** With podcasting, you have control over when and where you hear your favorite programming.
- **Easy Subscription.** Simply copy the feed URL into iTunes or click "subscribe" on the news aggregator.
- **Program Choice.** Sports, comedy, movies, food, politics, music, books, speeches, walking



Ravings of a Podcast Enthusiast

Lisa Breytspraak, an IT strategy consultant, just discovered podcasting and has become a huge fan of the technology. She bought an iPod to download music for running and soon discovered that podcasting offers much more than music. Lisa found that podcasting is a great way to get caught up on news, technology trends, entertainment, political issues and other topics that interest her. Now, she subscribes to 30 different podcasts.

“I’m so excited about podcasting, because I’ve been hard on myself my whole career about staying on top of the news — and this is an easy way for me to stay up to date and keep learning,” Lisa says. “I listen to podcasts everywhere — grocery shopping, driving, having my nails done and even while I’m hitting golf balls. I feel so much more productive now.”

Lisa is convinced that everyone should try podcasting.

“There’s a podcast out there for everyone. I can’t think of any professional who couldn’t find topics relevant to them to help them grow and learn,” she says. “Best of all, it’s totally free. You’re not paying for any of these downloads or subscriptions.”

tours, whatever — you name the topic and you’ll find podcasts about it.

Look and You Will Find

You can find thousands and thousands of podcasts. Whatever you like, whatever you’re interested in, whatever you need to know — there’s a podcast out there for you. A few of the many topics include:

- Music, including band promotional clips and interviews
- Talk shows
- Industry or organizational news, investor news, news coverage and commentaries
- Audio books
- Sportscasts
- Entertainment
- Story telling
- Interviews
- Directions
- Commentaries
- Language lessons, tutorials or other educational materials
- Recipes
- How-to instructions
- Self-guided walking tours
- Hiking trail guides
- Yoga, meditation, visualization, or self-hypnosis instructions
- Speeches, sermons or debates

Go Ahead — Listen to a Podcast

If you’ve never listened to podcasts, you’re in for a treat. Podcasting gives you incredible choice, along with the freedom to listen whenever and wherever you want.

In a few easy steps, you can start listening to podcasts.

1. **Get the application.** Simply download and install a news aggregator, RSS reader or podcasting software onto your computer. Although applications vary, each should provide instructions on how to add podcast feeds to your list.
2. **Find a podcast.** You can search for content using an online podcast directory. Just like conducting a Web search, you can find podcasts by searching by topic, author, subject or any other keyword. Some directories allow you to listen online and initially become familiar



with the content before deciding to subscribe.

- 3. Listen.** Once you've found something that looks interesting, listen to it! Just click the "Listen" button to hear it on the Web.
- 4. Subscribe.** If you like what you hear, subscribe. But don't panic — it's almost always free. When you subscribe to a podcast, you'll get the newest installments delivered to you as soon as they're available. And if you have an MP3 player, the next time you sync your device, your podcasts will be downloaded for listening on the go.
- 5. Download.** If you just want a copy of a particular podcast, you don't have to subscribe. You can just click the "Download" button to save it to your hard disk. Then, manage it and play it like you would any other audio file.

This Could Be the Start of Something Big

Once you feel comfortable listening to podcasts, you might start thinking about how you can make podcasts of your own — and you might start discovering what a great tool podcasts can be for your organization.

Podcasting Resources

Podcasting Tools - <http://www.podcasting-tools.com>

Podcast Alley - <http://www.podcastalley.com>

PodcastBunker - <http://www.podcastbunker.com>

Podcasting News - <http://www.podcastingnews.com>

Podcasting Information - <http://www.all-podcast-secrets.com> and <http://www.podcast411.com>

Beginner's Guide - <http://www.mypods.net>

Podcast Industry Trade Site - <http://podall.blogspot.com>

Listener Downloads - <http://www.podcastmania.com>

Resources and Software - <http://www.freshpodcasts.com/podcast-resources-tools-software.html>

Tutorial - <http://www.feedforall.com>