



Speaking In Your Own Voice

How Podcasting Can Help You Get Your Message Out

By Michael Quinn Sullivan

For many years, advocates of the free market have argued that we need to “be” the media in our efforts to disseminate messages that might not otherwise make it through the editorial process.

The rapid rise of the Internet—the Web, e-mail, blogs, newsgroups—have given us tools to connect with allies across the globe in ways never imagined. Podcasting is another such tool.

What is a podcast? Put simply, it is an Internet-based audio program that can be easily downloaded to a computer, iPod (hence the name) or other portable music player. Podcasts can be thought of as running on the same technology that gives us blogs and other user-subscriber Web tools. The clearest advantage to a podcast is that once someone subscribes, your daily or weekly program is automatically delivered to their computer without them having to check for an e-mail or visit your Web site.

For most of us, the primary purpose of a podcast should be to offer existing information in a format that is more readily accessible, or easier, for our audience. One should not try to think of it as creating a new information program, or even as an in-house radio show. Instead, think of it as an audio version of our latest research, commentaries, or other communication outreach efforts.

Such an activity allows us to maximize our existing efforts in a convenient format for both primary and secondary audiences.

Like most communications tools, podcasts must be offered on a regular basis. Irregularity makes it extremely difficult for users to know when something new is available. If they check back once or twice and nothing new is posted, they are likely to forget about checking back again. Setting a regular update schedule and sticking with it is critical.

By podcasting speeches, interviews, reports,



Getting Started ...

Hardware Needs

- Mixing board: EuroRack UB502. (\$30)
- Two microphones and a splitter (leading into the mixer). It is important to get decent quality microphones. Radio Shack specials will not give the same quality as a Sure microphone or an EV. (\$100 – \$200)
- “InPort” USB audio connection. This takes the RCA-style output from the mixer into your computer’s USB port. (\$30)
- Any modern laptop computer (hopefully already part of your budget).
- Optional hardware.
- Olympus DS-330 digital recorder (allows you to record to a separate device from your laptop and well worth the cost).

Software Needs

- **WavePad** (www.nch.com.au/wavepad/masters.html). A superior “audio capture” program for recording purposes. A free version exists, but the master costs only \$50. This software allows for easy graphical editing of sound files, pasting in corrections, etc. It can also remove annoying clicks and pops that tend to plague audio recordings, as well as reduce distracting “white noise” background sounds (like the constant hum of an air conditioning unit).
- **Propaganda** (www.makepropaganda.com). The software bills itself as a way to seamlessly record and post podcasts. It doesn’t entirely deliver on that, but for the money the program does an excellent job of turning wav-format files created with WavePad (or any other sound file) into a solid mp3. You can mix channels of audio for background music, introductions, exits, and other cues. Propaganda allows you easily to implement fades and other fancy audio stuff. Cost: \$50.
- **WS-FTP** (www.ipswitch.com). I use this free file transfer program to upload my files (XML and MP3) to the Web server. FileZilla is another free option.

Questions to Consider ...

Pre-Production

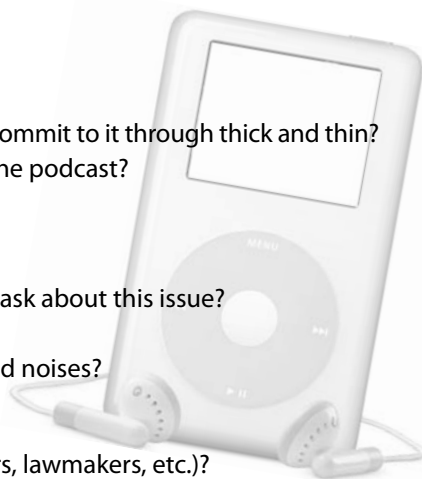
- How often will we issue our podcast? And can we commit to it through thick and thin?
- Will we use background music to begin and end the podcast?
- How will we promote the podcast?

Production

- What are the four most important questions I can ask about this issue?
- Can my guest get to the point quickly?
- Am I recording in a place with minimal background noises?

Post-Production

- Who needs to get an early release of this (reporters, lawmakers, etc.)?
- Where on the Web site will we highlight this edition?



short lectures and other forms of intellectual exchange, think tank managers enable legislative staffers, and anyone else interested in important public policy discussions, to download and listen to great ideas at their leisure.

Podcasting allows individuals to expose themselves to great ideas as they go about their daily lives, often as they continue working uninterrupted on other projects.

For many of us, our core audience is policy-makers and their staffs. While it might be nice to think they sit eagerly in their office await-

are doing that week. Don't have a commentary, press release and study coming out about the minimum wage, and use your podcast to extol the benefits of a new trade proposal!

And as with other forms of communication, know who you're trying to reach with your podcast. It's rather doubtful your largest donors are also going to be your primary podcast audience. The most consistent, immediate listeners will be young elected officials and their young staff—along with news reporters, talk-show producers and possibly lobbyists.

The tools for producing a quality podcast can be had for a very small investment.

ing the next 80-page study, complete with regression analysis tables and appendices upon appendices, they in fact are doing other things. It is in that realm of “other things” that podcasting allows us to disseminate our message.

It's important, though, not to confuse podcasting efforts with *real* journalism. Just as we don't pretend our newsletters are the one-news-source for our readers, so too should we treat our podcast somewhat realistically. We're not trying to recreate a radio show or newsmagazine, we're trying to propagate our ideas.

A daily or weekly podcast—set on a definite release schedule—can serve as background accompaniment to the stuffing of envelopes, a morning job or the evening commute.

It is important not to let our podcasts become the audio version of a thick economic text. The content should be engaging, preferably in an “interview” format—giving the listener a voice with which to identify as the learner/questioner. The podcast should be kept to a manageable length—no more than 15 minutes.

As with all communications efforts, podcasts should be in line with the other things you

As a side note, radio reporters are no less lazy than their print counterparts. Just as the text from a press release helps a print reporter fill space in a story, so too does a quick, existing actuality from a podcast help the radio journalist.

The tools for producing a quality podcast can be had for a very small investment—less than \$500—and your existing Internet hosting provider should be able to support podcasting without any hiccups. It is important to check your contract to understand what your bandwidth charges might be; a popular weekly podcast of modest size could greatly increase your monthly Web hosting fees if you are not careful and do not plan ahead.

Perhaps more than any other form of electronic communication to date, podcasting allows us to speak, literally, in our own voices to those we are seeking to influence and educate.

Mr. Sullivan is president of Texans for Fiscal Responsibility. He started the successful, weekly “Texas PolicyCast” at the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

