



BY TINA PITTAWAY, JOURNALIST

IS THERE A PLACE FOR PODCASTING WITH YOUR PUBLICATION?

PODCASTS ARE A SERIES OF audio or video episodes that are made available to stream from a website, or made available to download through iTunes and other file sharing services like SoundCloud, or through a social media site like Facebook.

There was a lot of excitement about their potential back in the mid-2000s, when they first began to take hold, and then they seemed to take a bit of a back seat with the focus on social media and its incredible impact on consumption and sharing.

What has emerged in that time is a still-vibrant medium for building brands, retaining subscribers and sharing content, with a particular emphasis on niche interests. General interest podcasts put out by the likes of the New York Times have been shuttered, while niche interests like finance, technology, faith, poetry and politics are doing well.

The Economist, for example, publishes a word-for-word audio edition of their magazine in audio format, which 25 - 30% of their subscribers download. They also produce five weekly podcasts of original material, including debates and blog posts that are available to non-subscribers.

Here are some quick facts according to an Edison Research survey of 2,020 Americans over 12:

As of early 2012, three in 10 American adults had listened to a podcast

- 25% had watched a video podcast
- 14% had listened to at least one in the last month
- 12% had watched at least one in the last month
- Audiences skewed slightly male: 54% male and 46% female
- Half were aged 12 - 34
- 1 in 5 smartphone owners are podcast consumers
- 64% consume podcasts outside of their homes, i.e. on smartphones or mp3 players while driving

WHY CONSIDER A PODCAST?

Brand extension is one of the main attractions to marketing departments, which have become the main drivers of podcasting within publishing houses. Subscriber retention is part of the Economist's strategy: with readers often frustrated with their inability to read the paper version of the magazine as often as they'd like—and sometimes canceling subscriptions as a result—the audio version provides easy access to content while in transit (or even scuba diving for one adventurous reader).

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN PRODUCING ONE?

The easy answer is people and technology. Your podcast can be as simple as a weekly conversation with the host—usually an editor or editors—and writers or guests profiled in the written publication. Recording gear can be as simple as booking conversations via Skype, and publishing the audio track, or you may want a more professional sound with stand-alone microphones patched into a computer with an audio editing software like Audacity (free) or ProTools.

Look for opportunities to use sound wherever you can to create a richer experience for the listener. An example could be a lively exchange in the House of Commons (free of copyright) to kick off a debate between two bloggers, or a voicemail from a reader who was particularly animated in their message about an article or interview you expand on in the podcast.

Make it available on your website, and set it apart by giving it a visual stamp of some sort to draw potential listeners to the download or subscribe link. You can also edit a short two-minute teaser, and link to that audio via your Twitter feed. Making snippets available for sharing on social media draws new listeners and extends the brand.

Have your technical department submit the podcast to iTunes, the number one platform for podcast subscriptions. There are other services like SoundCloud, but you need to be where the majority of consumers head to for podcasts, and that's iTunes. Upload your podcast on a regularly scheduled

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basis—you want to create a listening habit among subscribers, so consistency is important.

MAKE IT LISTENER-FRIENDLY

Audio is an intimate medium. Hosts need to be comfortable in conversation, and free to bring a little—or a lot—of their personality to the production. Listeners don't have time for unfocused, rambling introductions. Script an introduction to the podcast, and deliver it in a relaxed and conversational style.

Listeners should know within the first couple of minutes what they'll be hearing in the episode, and when they can expect to hear it. For the web-based version of the podcast, provide them with a written summary of what they'll hear, and even include timecodes so they can scroll ahead if they'd like to the section they are most interested in. Also give timestamps within the podcast, such as "Coming up in five minutes, my conversation with our gardening bloggers about the biggest trends to emerge from the Chelsea Flower Show."

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