

Podcasting in the 21st Century

While iPods and MP3 players are gadgets for the upscale and younger audience, podcasts, as the latest trend to hit the airwaves, are about to affect everyone, and that includes business and the world of public relations.

What is a podcast?

A podcast is an online audio file or program that can be listened to on a personal computer or portable device such as Apple's iPod or another MP3 player.

Podcasts are free, portable and time-shifted, meaning, unlike commercial radio programming, they can be listened to at one's leisure.

Further, podcasts can be automatically delivered to the user who downloads the audio broadcasting at his or her discretion.

In short, podcasts are on-demand radio programs.

The news media is spinning off its own definitions of podcasts. At the Denver Post, a podcast is "a new way to get your news." At 7 am, Monday-Friday, an MP3 audio file of all the day's top headlines can be downloaded from DenverPost.com to be listened to during a leisurely jog, a hike in the mountains or a commute into the office.

Other news media offer "behind-the-scenes" tidbits. One podcast by the San Francisco Chronicle recently featured "On the Record with Oracle's Larry Ellison," who talked about his married life, closest friends and his wish to run a sport franchise. Another, PhillyFeed, a weekly podcast by the Philadelphia Daily News, talked with 2005 Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Jim MacMillan about his year embedded in war-torn Iraq.

Big business is taking part in the action.

Podcasts on Amazon.com showcase songs and recording artists, such as “Sugarcube” by La Tengo, “Call to Love” by Crooked Fingers, “Out of Zone” by Marbles and a special live version (exclusive to Amazon.com) of “She Really Wants You,” a song from Aimee Mann’s new CD “The Forgotten Arm.”

The free 30-second MP3 files act as demos, enticing listeners to purchase CDs.

Warners Brothers wanted to titillate Paris Hilton’s fans with “The Paris Hilton Podcast - Countdown to House of Wax” which spotlights Paris as “she shops, parties, poses and publicizes” in the seven days leading up to her movie premier of “House of Wax.”

Not quite as “hot” but just as targeted is the Disneyland Resort 50th Anniversary Podcast, a “sneak peek” at the 18-month celebration, including celebrity interviews with Buzz Lightyear, Julie Andrews and Tim Allen; a walk down Main Street; an interview with “Travel Mom,” a worldwide traveler who shares “the secrets” of going to Disney Park with “little ones;” and the inside scoop on the hobby of pin trading.

General Motors airs “FastLane radio,” a podcast to promote brands with an “enthusiast” audience, such as the Hummer or Corvette.

Volvo’s podcast on Autoblog.com, as reported by MarketWatch, has been “retrieved 20,000 times.”

What’s phenomenal is the man-on-the-street podcasts.

One young man audio-toured Colorado’s Alligator Farm, 3 miles outside of Denver. Among the crawly creatures he met was Darth Alligator, a sharp-toothed baby with its mouth taped shut. His jaws were already strong enough to “take a child’s finger off.”

www.Denverpost.com

Marymount Manhattan College co-eds hit the front pages of The New York Times for

their “slightly subversive” (silly exchanges, irreverence, music, echo effects and the sound of a woman moaning in pleasure) audio guide of New York’s Museum of Modern Art.

(www.Mod.blogs.com/art_mobs)

Father Roderick Vonhogen, a Dutch priest aired his podcasts from St. Peter’s Square for www.Catholicinsider.com during the death and funeral of Pope John Paul II.

Father Vonhogen’s April 5 podcast alone has been downloaded over 10,000 times, plus his podcasts were picked up by the international media, including, De Telegraaf, Frankfurter Neue Presse, Spijkers Met Koppen, Tagesschau, BBC Radio 5, Reuters, CNN, The New York Times, Guardian Unlimited and Webpronews.com.

According to Webpronews.com, “[Father Vonhogen’s] eyewitness account as a mourner in Vatican City brings you specific details and the emotion of the moment, something a reporter simply cannot.”

Podcasting is inexpensive, do-it-yourself broadcasting.

Hsiao-Ching Chou, food editor for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, interviews chefs and cookbook authors for her podcasts, e.g., “Perfect Cheese,” “All About Pork” and “Matzoh Ball Conversations,” with a high-end digital recorder.

Father Vonhogen records his podcasts on a Sony MD Walkman Mz-R700 with a Sony ECM-MS907 stereo microphone.

Other recommended digital voice recorders are the Sony ICD-ST25VTP that can record up to 14 hours or the Olympus DS-330 with a docking station and over 5 hours of recording time. Both are pocket-sized, a snap for downloading audio files and well under \$200.

Anticipating the explosion of podcasts, KYOU Radio recently proclaimed itself the world’s first all-podcast station and www.PodcastGuests.com has launched an online database to

match podcasters with potential guests - authors, experts and businesses “looking for more exposure.”

Podcasting is an on-demand 21st century communications tool. It’s easily accessible, affordable and represents the voice of the people. As such, podcasting should be part of any well-integrated public relations strategy for forward-looking businesses.

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