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## **Secrets of Podcasting: Audio Blogging for the Masses**

By Bart G. Farkas

.....  
 Publisher: **Peachpit Press**

Pub Date: **August 09, 2005**

ISBN: **0-321-36929-7**

Pages: **224**

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### **Overview**

If you thought Internet radio was cool, wait 'til you experience podcasting--regular audio programs delivered via the Internet, which you can listen to when you want, where you want! Here to lead you into this brave, new world of mass audio blogging--and quite possibly change your listening habits forever--is a fun, fact-filled guide that shows you how to find, create, and distribute podcasts. Author Bart Farkas recognizes that this concept is new to many and starts at the beginning, explaining what podcasting is, how it came into being, and how it promises to change the world. From there, he covers the basics: podcast-grabbing software, MP3 players for listening to podcasts, the types of podcasts out there, and more. Knowing that you won't be satisfied just listening to podcasts, Bart shows you how to create podcasts as well, covering the hardware and software you'll need as well as the distribution options and legal issues that confront you. Interviews with real-world podcasting masters are highlighted throughout.

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## Dedication

For Cori, the backbone of the backbone.

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## Acknowledgments

A book like this cannot be written without a great deal of support. The first round of thanks needs to go to Cliff Colby at Peachpit. Cliff had the vision to pursue this book before podcasting went into the stratosphere, and he worked hard through the entire process to keep things on track. Kathy Simpson, editor extraordinaire, also deserves a huge thank you, not just for her fine work editing the book, but also for acting as a sounding board whilst I droned on and on about RSS feeds.

Thanks also go out to everyone who participated in the book via interviews; their insights and opinions add greatly to the content. To Phil Torrone, thanks for both your expertise and your help in the early going. Phil is as close to "MacGyver" as any human can get! I also need to send a special thanks to Bob Goyetche (of "The Bob and AJ Show" fame) for his extra help and insights in the late going.

For my family, I need to say thanks for supporting me during the entire project. Without Cori (my wife), the entire operation would collapse (and she knows this). Thanks also to my three kids Adam, Derek, and

Natasha whose constant harassment of me during the long hours was both maddening and humorously uplifting. Last, thanks to my cat, Shadow, for being a warm, fuzzy hot-water bottle.

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## Foreword

I'm not sure what it is about Bart Farkas and forewords, but the last time I penned one of these things, it was in the guise of Michel Nostradamus, the 16th century's all-seeing, dyspeptic monk, in the first pages of Bart's and my book, *The Macintosh Bible Guide to Games*. Rib-tickling as that foreword was, we sold something like a baker's dozen worth of the book. Given TMBGtG's less-than-stellar sales, I'm shocked that Bart would risk opening this book with yet another inane foreword penned by yours truly.

Ah, well, such is the ill-considered good nature of your typical Canadian.

The difference between that book and this one, of course, is that unbeknownst to us at the time computer gaming was on the wane, whereas the subject of this book has barely begun its assured meteoric rise. With Bart's *Secrets of Podcasting*, you're getting in on the ground floor of the electrifying new technology known as podcasting.

The author will go into greater detail on the subject, but allow me to dip my oar in as well and say that podcasting is *A Big Deal*. It's going to profoundly change the way you consume news and entertainment, as well as give a voice to those who normally work well outside the bounds of traditional media. Follow the techniques in this book, and one of those voices may even be yours.

One of the benefits of writing forewords is that you have the opportunity to read the book while it's still in utero long before some befuddled crank on Amazon issues a one-star rating because he's disappointed that the book fails to address the intimate workings of Orvis's Vortex VO2 Fly Reel. I've taken the time to read the book, and I assure you, you're getting the goods. Not only does Bart clearly show you how to bring podcasts into your life (and onto your computer and portable music player), but he also tells you all you need to know to create a quality (and, one hopes, compelling) podcast of your own. Along the way, he speaks with individuals who are creating today's best podcasts and passing along their insights on how to do it right.

You're in good hands. Enjoy the book. Discover podcasts that stir you. And if the spirit moves you, make some of your own.

I'll be listening.

Christopher Breen  
 Editor in chief, [Playlistmag.com](http://Playlistmag.com)  
 Author of *Secrets of the iPod and iTunes*

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## Introduction

In late 2004, the combination of the RSS 2.0 specification and audio blogging came together to create what is now known as podcasting. Podcasting is the broadcast of radio shows and other audio content over the Internet via compressed audio files such as MP3s. RSS technology makes it possible for these files to be syndicated on the World Wide Web so that anyone can access them easily with one of many simple programs

called podcast aggregators (or podcatchers). The result is a revolution in radio whereby every day, people can create audio shows that are listened to by thousands or tens of thousands of people all over the world.

This book examines the phenomenon of podcasting and its short history, and demonstrates in detail how you, too, can get started enjoying podcast content. I also supply detailed instructions on how to create and publish your very own podcast. From finding the equipment to setting up the software on your home computer, it's all here.

Podcasting has emerged from the fertile soil of Web logs, and in less than a year it has grown from a small curiosity to a major force, altering the media landscape as it continues to grow and change. Indeed, many radio stations now offer podcast content, and one station in particular (in San Francisco) recently announced a move to an all-podcast format.

Where podcasting will ultimately end up is the subject of speculation, but with the proliferation and ubiquity of iPods and other digital media players, it is clear that podcasting is here to stay. This book is a complete beginner's guide to podcasting that includes interviews with software creators, educators, industry experts, and even the hosts of some of North America's most popular podcasts. I know you'll enjoy learning about this fascinating and entertaining new medium.

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## How to Use This Book

This book has four main chapters, each of which details a different area of the podcasting universe. Podcasting is so new that it is entirely possible that you may have never heard of it or that you have heard of it but have no working knowledge of what it is. With this in mind, the book is designed as a beginner's handbook for finding, downloading, listening to, and creating podcasts. The book can be divided into two sections. The first section ([Chapters 1 and 2](#)) concerns learning the basics about podcasting and how to go out and enjoy the great podcast content that's available. The second section ([Chapters 3 and 4](#)) details the process of creating your own podcasts and then publishing them on the Web for the world to enjoy.

[Chapter 1](#) is an introduction to the concept, explaining what podcasting is, how it is being used, and how it may be used in the future. By the end of [Chapter 1](#), the term podcast will be firmly established and completely understandable. [Chapter 2](#) is for the person who wants to download and enjoy podcasts without having to worry about how to create them. This chapter explains the process of setting up a podcast aggregator (podcatching software) and details the most popular programs available for this purpose. [Chapter 2](#) also takes a look at a few of the most popular iPods and other digital media players that are best suited for podcast playback.

[Chapter 3](#) is concerned specifically with the process of creating a podcast. This chapter looks at most of the options available today, in terms of equipment and software, and then takes you through the process of creating a podcast from start to finish. Finally, in [Chapter 4](#), publishing a podcast to the World Wide Web via an RSS feed is explained, demystified, and then described in step-by-step fashion.

Because podcasting is so new, this book is designed specifically for the new user, but that said, there are plenty of details that an intermediate podcaster can benefit from. The inclusion of interviews with people from all walks of the podcasting universe helps bring home the incredible effect that podcasting has had on radio, business, and even education in just a few short months.

This book is designed to be useful on several levels. If you specifically need to learn about RSS feeds, [Chapter 4](#) awaits. If you are completely new to podcasting, the entire book is a treasure trove of information. Use this book as much or as little as you need to get exactly what you want out of podcasting. Most of all, have fun!

## Icons

The four icons used in the following chapters are:



Macintosh-compatible



Windows-compatible



Unix/Linux-compatible



Items to take note of and helpful tips

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## Chapter 1. Podcasting Basics

Wouldn't it be nice to be able to listen to radio programs, audiobooks and magazines, and alternative broadcasting on your own time? Heck, it might even be nice to make your very own broadcasts that others could listen to and enjoy. If you have ever been interested in such a concept, the wait is over.

The revolution is under way, and it's gaining steam. Podcasting, as it has become known, is a very new and exciting form of Web-based (that's World Wide Web based) broadcasting. This chapter takes a look at just what podcasting is, where it came from, and what effect it has had on media distribution and the public's listening habits since its creation.

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### What Is Podcasting?

In a nutshell, *podcasting* is a World Wide Web based form of broadcasting that allows anyone with a computer and/or a digital media device to download and listen to content. Formed by the combination of the words *iPod* and broadcasting, podcasting involves the creation of "radio" shows that are not intended to be broadcast over Marconi's invention. Indeed, these podcasts can be downloaded and enjoyed only through access to the World Wide Web. Podcasts can be enjoyed via a media player on your computer (such as RealPlayer or Windows Media Player), or they can be uploaded directly to your digital media device (such as an iPod) for enjoyment anytime and anywhere.

Over the past few years, sales of digital music devices such as Apple's iPod, MP3 players, and even cell phones and Palm Pilots have been soaring to new heights. Indeed, these devices have been finding their way into the pockets and purses of a wide cross-section of the North American public. With these gadgets becoming increasingly cosmopolitan, it was perhaps inevitable that a mass movement away from standard

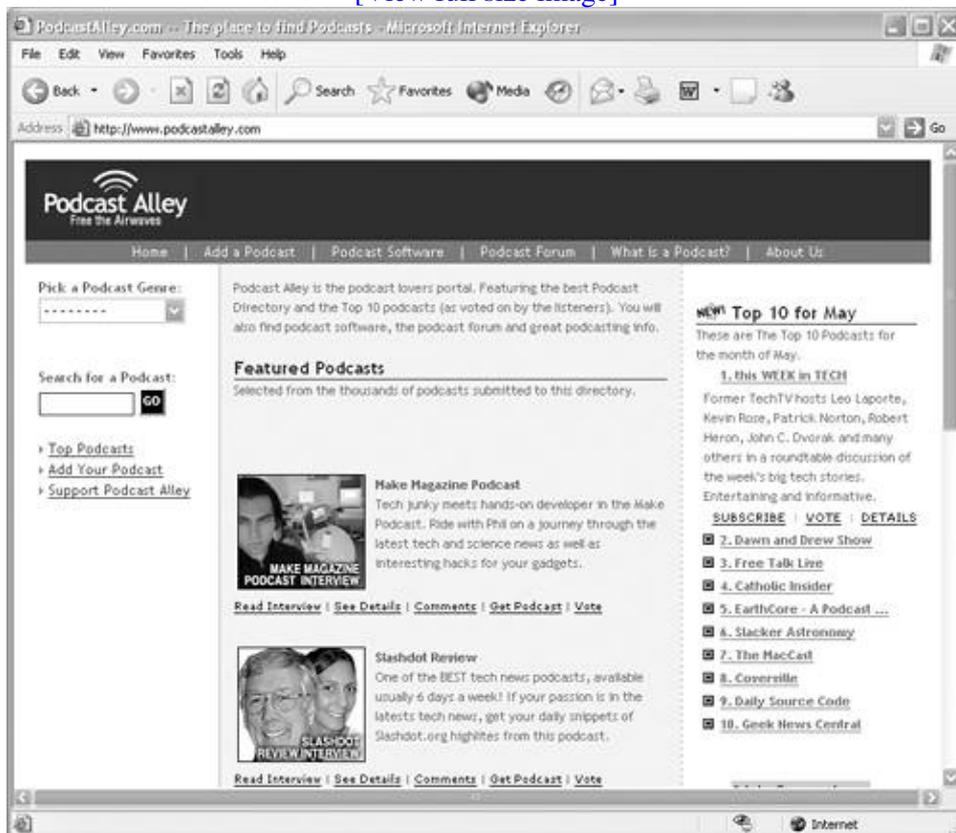
media broadcast methods would occur. After all, what's on the radio might not be what the customer wants to hear at any given time, and most digital media devices don't even have built-in radios. Enter the podcast.

The concept is simplicity itself: Allow users to listen to exactly what they want, when they want, and where they want. With today's world becoming progressively crammed with tasks ranging from doing the dishes to taking the kids to karate class, the ability to time-shift information is increasingly desirable. On the other side of the coin are the folks who want to actually produce podcasts. With little more than a computer, a microphone, and some freeware (or shareware), anyone can produce a podcast on any topic under the sun.

It's a new medium, to be sure, and it is still in its formative years, but podcasting is here to stay. From large corporations looking for new ways to get their programs heard, to home-brewed shows covering a diversity of topics ranging from sports to wine tasting to marital issues and beyond, podcasting is proving that it has the power and flexibility to reshape the media landscape. As the Web site Podcast Alley (Figure 1.1) says, "Free the Airwaves!"

Figure 1.1. Podcast Alley ([www.podcastalley.com](http://www.podcastalley.com)) is one of the best places to look for the hottest podcasts.

[View full size image]



## What's in a Name?

Why is podcasting called podcasting and not digital delivery or MP3casting? Well, the emergence of the dominant digital media device has a great deal to do with it. With somewhere around 65 percent of the hard-drive-based MP3 player market, Apple's iPods have taken the niche by storm. It's arguable that iPods are a cultural phenomenon and embodiment of a generation's zeitgeist. With over 10 million iPods on the streets in just a few years of sales, who

can argue? For the record, Dannie Gregoire of Louisville, Kentucky, is widely credited with coining the term *podcast*. Who knows without this gentleman, we might have ended up with a lame moniker such as Intercaasting!

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## How It Works

The cutting edge of podcasting involves a set of rules known as *RSS* (Really Simple Syndication). RSS allows podcast content to be syndicated instantly on the World Wide Web for download and use by anyone who has an interest in listening to it. By using RSS, the creator of a podcast can make his or her material available to anyone in the world (who has access to the Internet) within a matter of minutes.

With the evolution of RSS and associated technologies, podcasting becomes analogous to a TiVo for audio broadcasts of all kinds. Once syndicated, a podcast is disseminated over the World Wide Web to anyone who has subscribed to that content. Via RSS, podcasts are downloaded to users' computers and can be uploaded to a user's digital media player the next time it is connected to the computer.

Although this process may sound complicated and cumbersome, it really isn't. Thanks to incredibly versatile and user-friendly software like Apple's iTunes and Adam Curry's iPodder (Figure 1.2), the process of enjoying podcasts plays out like a soft Jamaican breeze.

**Figure 1.2. Adam Curry and Dave Winer created iPodder, the leader in aggregator software for the Mac, PC, and Linux.**



Although syndication is probably the most popular way of obtaining podcasts, there are other ways to get your hands on these audio gems without committing to daily or weekly content. Many podcasts are available as one-time downloads or as streaming content from any of a number of podcasting Web sites (the number of which is sure to mushroom even while this book is at the printer), giving you the option of sampling small bites rather than ordering a four-course meal.

Technically speaking, any media event that is played on a digital media device such as an iPod or other MP3 player is a podcast. Indeed, many weekly magazines, radio shows, and even television shows (such as "Charlie Rose") are available for download in MP3 format for use on digital media devices or home computers. As one might expect, many of these commercial ventures are associated with some small cost, but that is just one small area of the podcasting realm. In fact, 99 percent of all podcast content has no cost associated with it other than the necessary audio hardware and computer/Internet connection.

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## Why Podcast?

The answer to the above question is simple: Podcasting is so incredibly simple, especially compared with getting your own FCC license, that virtually anyone with a personal computer and an Internet connection can produce a show that could potentially be heard by tens of thousands of people. In the United States alone, where freedom of speech is set forth as one of the founding pillars of society, one does not have to take a large leap of faith to imagine that the podwaves are filling with interesting, offensive, humorous, and often inane chatter.

You may ask, "Who is podcasting?" That question can be answered very simply: Everyone is podcasting, [Figure 1.3](#) shows Bob Goyetche podcasting out of his home in Deux-Montagnes, Quebec. By everyone, I mean people from all geographic locations and all walks of life. If the Internet ushered in a revolution in information dissemination, podcasting has done the same for the audio format. Podcasting is the metaphorical saw that cuts through the chains of radio, be it satellite radio or the old-fashioned AM/FM brand.

**Figure 1.3. Bob Goyetche podcasting from his home in Deux-Montagnes.**

Photo courtesy of Bob Goyetche



The following is a short list of the sorts of topics that are routinely discussed in podcasts available today:

- Wine connoisseurship
- Husband-and-wife relationships
- Suburban life
- Christian fundamentalism
- Geek news
- Science fiction
- Comedy
- How-to shows
- Sports
- UFOs
- Music shows of all genres

Needless to say, this list could go on and on. And on. The number of podcasts is growing exponentially, and by the time you read this book, there likely will be a podcast for nearly every subject that could come to mind. If you can think of a subject that isn't covered, you've found your niche to start podcasting yourself!

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## Commercial Podcasting

For existing radio networks, individual radio stations, and even television stations, the move to podcasting is an obvious one. These outlets quickly realized that there was a market for their programming to be disseminated in the form of MP3 or AAC files so that individuals could enjoy them on their own time. And while the listener has control over whether she listens to any advertisements during the program, the exposure can only serve to aid in the growth of a fan base for any program. As a result, an increasing number of media outlets are making podcasts available to the public from their Web sites.

Also, several Web sites, including Apple Computer's iTunes Music Store and [Audible.com](#)'s online store ([Figure 1.4](#)), sell commercial podcasts of periodicals such as Scientific American Magazine and newspapers such as The Wall Street Journal. The cost of these podcasts is often less than that of the publications on the newsstand, and they can be purchased through subscription, much like any magazine or newspaper. As time goes on, we can expect nearly every magazine (with the exception of certain sexually explicit rags) to be available in this format, allowing readers everywhere to get in their reading while riding a bike or driving a car.

**Figure 1.4. [Audible.com](#)'s Web site sells audiobooks but also commercial podcasts of popular television and radio shows.**

[\[View full size image\]](#)



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## The Podcasting Echo

Exactly what mark podcasting will make on the world is a chapter that is as yet unwritten. Still, despite the fact that podcasting is in its infancy, we don't need a crystal ball to see that the whirlwind surrounding it today will most likely stir up the sand in several established sandboxes. Let's take a look at what might be affected, directly or indirectly, by the rise of podcasting:

Conventional radio. Perhaps the one area that might be most affected by podcasting, traditional radio has a lot to lose. In today's world, most of the people who listen to radio do so in their cars. With an increasing number of cars coming with MP3 players or Apple iPod connections, the ability for a driver to listen to podcast material rather than advertisement-laden radio broadcasts increases. The effects of this on radio are already apparent, with many radio programs offering podcast versions of their shows via station Web sites.



There are also products on the market that effectively turn any radio broadcast into a podcast. Griffin Technology's radio SHARK ([www.griffintechology.com](http://www.griffintechology.com)), for example, will capture any AM or FM radio broadcast and automatically export an MP3 file to iTunes so that the program will be loaded directly onto your iPod the next time you connect it to your computer.

Satellite radio. With less to lose than conventional radio (because satellite radio doesn't include advertising), satellite radio is still in a flat position, because its content is available only at set times. Podcasts are available

at any time. Might the satellite-radio fees be diverted to individual commercial podcast subscriptions? It's possible.

Internet radio. Internet radio is perhaps the safest of the radio media, because software already exists that allows the user to time-shift Internet radio shows. The downside to Internet radio is that it is primarily intended to be listened to on a computer and, as such, doesn't have the mobility of a podcast.

Celebrity. In less than a year of official existence, the podcast has already created celebrity. Of course, Adam Curry (former MTV veejay) is the face of iPodder and podcasting in general, but the hosts of the most popular podcasts are also beginning to achieve some measure of celebrity. It's only a matter of time before a podcaster makes the jump from podcasting to mainstream radio.



During the writing of this book, Adam Curry and Sirius Satellite Radio announced that Curry will be broadcasting a four-hour daily show on podcasting over the Sirius Satellite network. Although this broadcast had not premiered at this writing, it is a fair bet that it will give podcasting in general another huge shot in the arm in terms of positive publicity and legitimization.

Television. Television doesn't have a great deal to fear from podcasting. It can, however, profit from the new medium, and some canny producers are already making sure that they have a piece of the podcasting pie. Talk-based shows like "Charlie Rose" and the "BBC News Hour" are available on commercial services like [Audible.com](http://Audible.com) ([www.audible.com](http://www.audible.com)), making them available to an audience that might not otherwise partake.

Advertising. The obvious problem for advertisers lies in placing advertising in a medium that prides itself on freedom: freedom of ideas, freedom from advertisers' pressure, freedom to say what they want. With podcasting's increasing fan base, you can be sure that corporations will want to find a way to advertise, but it's unclear whether the listeners will accept such a thing. Perhaps the most logical path will be for companies to sponsor the production of individual podcasts, thus attaching their names to successful podcasting endeavors.

Education. This is highly speculative, but one can imagine university classes that are digitally recorded and then made available on a Web site as podcast "notes." Students can download the audio of that class and listen to it while they're out drinking beer and eating pizza later that evening. The possibilities for education are huge, and as MP3 players and iPods become ubiquitous (in phones and PDAs, and as stand-alone players), the ability for education to take advantage of this information pathway is increased. Who knows what the future of education will be?

Book and magazine publishers. Perhaps at the forefront of podcasting (although some would argue that pay service isn't true podcasting), [Audible.com](http://Audible.com) went online in late 1997 and was at the forefront of digital audio content delivery. Audible made its name by selling audiobooks for use on the computer, CD player, or MP3 player, but since its inception, it has been on the cutting edge, offering everything from comedy shows to daily newspapers (in audio format). No doubt the success of [Audible.com](http://Audible.com) has spurred more publishers to produce audio versions of their books, thus changing the publishing landscape.

The legal system. Any time there is talk of digital content of any kind, legal ramifications start to rear their ugly heads. Although independent podcasts are free to the world, it's only a matter of time before some conflict arises in this area. How and when are matters of opinion, but one only has to look at the music industry to see how ugly things can become. That said, let's try to be optimistic. Perhaps the spirit of podcasting will prevail, and the medium will thrive without copyright-infringement lawsuits to bog it down.

Commerce. As mentioned previously, Web sites like [Audible.com](http://Audible.com) and Apple's iTunes Music Store already sell what are essentially podcast versions of popular radio and television shows, as well as audio versions of periodicals. As podcasting continues to take off, one can imagine compact discs for sale with hundreds of

podcasts in a sort of "Best of Podcasting 2005" compilation. No doubt we will see many changes in commerce and e-commerce as a result of podcasting's entrance into the marketplace.

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## A Brief History of Podcasting

How can I write a history of something that has been around less than 12 months? The answer to that question lies in the truism that just about nothing is created in a vacuum, and just as x-ray photography evolved from radiation tests, podcasting evolved from humbler beginnings. Podcasting's roots actually are planted in the world of blogs (Web logs). Therefore, we must look first at the origin of the blog. Indeed, to see the genesis of podcasting, we have to go back way back to the mist-shrouded days of the 1980s.



What is a blog? A blog, or Web log, is a World Wide Web page where content is added periodically and time- and date-stamped. These additions can be made by one or more people, including the general public. The content of a blog can range from diary entries to news items to opinions on world events. Today, some blogs contain links to podcasts which isn't surprising, considering that the roots of podcasting are firmly planted in blog soil. As an aside, the Merriam-Webster dictionary announced that by virtue of the number of online lookups, the word blog received its "Word of the Year" award in 2004. (For some reason, the word defenestration made No. 10 on the list.)

### The home computer and Internet

Entire phone-book-size books have been written about the history of the home computer and the Internet, and I'm pretty sure that you don't want me to go down that road in a book about podcasting! That said, I'll cut to the chase and just say that the current ubiquity of the home computer and nearly universal access to the Internet (in one form or another) are the structural underpinnings that make podcasting possible to begin with. Without this technology in millions of homes, this book wouldn't have been written. 'Nuff said.

### The blog

While some people feel that the roots of blogging lie in the ashes of pen-pal relationships and ham-radio operation, let's start with the computer culture of the 1980s. By the early '80s, the personal computer was starting to take hold. Apple was still king (in terms of home computers), but others, such as IBM and Commodore, were making significant inroads as the years passed. By mid-decade, many computer users had modems, and they were using these modems to log on to bulletin boards (also known as BBs), e-mail lists, or online services such as GENie and CompuServe (precursors of today's AOL). Many aspects of these outlets and services were essentially early versions of Web logs. People could dial in with their modems, read new messages that had been posted by others, and then enter their own messages.

Clearly, the seeds of blogging were sown in the 1980s, but the real sprouting and growth of blogging occurred in the mid-1990s, paralleling the meteoric rise of the Internet and the World Wide Web. According to Wikipedia, the term *Web log* was coined in 1997 by Web-log pioneer Jorn Barger. By the eve of the turn of the century, *Web log* had melded into the single word *blog*, and the popularity of blogs started to skyrocket. Ultimately, a gentleman by the name of Dave Winer designed a way to inform users when their favorite blogs had been updated with new information, thus making blogging even more versatile and useful to the masses. Today, there are countless blogs, many of which have large followings, such as Jade Walker's "blog of death,"

shown in [Figure 1.5](#).

**Figure 1.5.** [www.blogofdeath.com](http://www.blogofdeath.com), the brainchild of Jade Walker, is typical of the modern blog.

[\[View full size image\]](#)



## Audio blogging

Audio blogging was a variant of the blog that involved the posting of audio files rather than text in its entries. By all accounts, the audio blog was not a resounding success in terms of garnering the kind of worldwide attention that the blog had. Still, the audio blog existed, and files were usually offered in MP3 format, although occasionally, other Web-based formats, like Flash (Macromedia), would be used. It was from the underpinnings of audio blogging that podcasting arose.

In 2004, the RSS format was combined with aggregator software to essentially check RSS-enabled Web pages for new audio content and keep users up to date on content. In English, that means that a combination of software programs came together to enable people to subscribe easily to audio content (podcasts) and have that content delivered directly to their home computers and, ultimately, their digital media devices (MP3 players).

## The digital media player

With all the talk about Web logs, blogging, and audio blogging, it can be easy to forget that the digital media player, otherwise known as an MP3 player (Figure 1.6) or iPod (Figure 1.7), also played a key role in the sudden rise and popularity of podcasting. The lineage of today's digital media players can be traced back to the venerable Sony Walkman from the late '70s. A play-only cassette tape machine, the Walkman was small enough that it could be taken virtually anywhere, and it became a huge hit, selling around 3 million units in its first three years of sales. (By comparison, Apple has moved more than triple that amount of iPods in a similar timeframe.)

Figure 1.6. A Creative MP3 player.



Figure 1.7. Apple's iPods have taken the world by storm, capturing the vast majority of the market.

Photo courtesy of Apple Computer, Inc.



From the Walkman sprouted plenty of competition, including cassette tape players with radios included. These devices ultimately shrank to near the size of the cassette tapes themselves. In the mid-1980s, the compact disc (CD) hit the market and took it by storm. It wasn't long before portable CD players showed up, and these, too, progressed from relatively bulky devices to very slim and elegant designs that were not much larger than the CDs themselves.

By 1998, the MP3 format was being used to play music on computers (with the help of a piece of software called WinAmp), and during that same year, the first viable MP3 player emerged on the market. Early MP3 players were flash-memory-based (meaning they had a small, fixed amount of space to hold music), but by late 1999, hard-drive-based MP3 players also started to appear. The market for MP3 players was very fragmented until Apple Computer released the first iPod in October 2001.

The iPod has been nothing short of a resounding success, and in the few short years since the iPod's introduction, Apple has gained control of more than 90 percent of the hard-drive-based player market and 65 percent of the total MP3 player market. With Apple's dominance and cultural influence with regard to MP3 players, it's no wonder that the term podcasting includes a reference to the iPod.

MP3 players today include software that makes moving music and other audio files from the Internet to computer to player very simple. Apple's iTunes software significantly affected the simplicity of all vendors' software in this manner, making podcasting easier for the average user.

## The MP3 file

The MP3 file was developed in Germany by Dieter Seitzer and Karlheinz Brandenburg at a company called Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft and the University of Erlangen. The MP part of *MP3* refers to the MPEG roots of MP3 compression. *MPEG* stands for Moving Picture Experts Group, which was established in 1988 to set standards for digital encoding. Developed and perfected in the mid-1990s, the *MP3* format, which stands for MPEG Audio Layer III, became the standard for digital audio compression worldwide.

MP3 compression is necessary because CD-quality audio files are extremely large—too large, in fact, to fit on digital players of the day. An average song on a CD might consist of 30 MB to 40 MB of information, while that same song in MP3 format could be whittled down nearly tenfold—to 3.5 MB or 4 MB—with minimal quality loss. Obviously, without the MP3 format, the rise of small digital media devices would have been cost-prohibitive and unrealistic.

As another piece of the puzzle, the MP3 format is one of the key elements of the rise of the podcasting phenomenon (among many other things). Although the MP3 format has been eclipsed by AAC (the format Apple uses on its iPods), it is still a viable and frequently used compression method for all Web-based audio content.

### Podcasting is born

And so with home computers, the Internet, blogging, audio blogging, the MP3 format, and digital media players all coming together in a roundabout way, the wonder that is podcasting is born. Without all of these elements coming together in just the right way, podcasting as we know it now might not even exist. The connections among all of these diverse technologies could be examined in much deeper detail, but for now, it will suffice to say that podcasting exists. Hooray!

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## Chapter 2. Jumping In

OK, so now you know what a podcast is, where it came from, and what sorts of technologies had to come together to make it possible. What's next? Well, you may be champing at the bit to create your own podcast, but before I show you the ropes on that, I suggest that you learn a little more about the podcasting universe in general.

This chapter shows you how to go out and get just the right podcasts for you by examining the various programs that scour the Internet for podcasts of all kinds. This section also touches on podcasting content, resources, commercial podcasting, Internet and traditional radio, and computer and digital music device (MP3 players) podcast players. By the time you finish this chapter, the art of downloading and enjoying podcasts will be second nature.

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### Getting Started

As mentioned in [Chapter 1](#), podcasts can be found all over the World Wide Web in multiple forms, from audio blogs to daily newspapers (in audio form) to celebrity interviews. The majority of podcasts, however, are home-brewed gems put together by everyday people in an effort to educate, entertain, or even offend. This section examines how to get your hands on just the right podcasts for you and helps you decide which software best suits your needs.

#### Key podcasting Web sites

Before I get into the nitty-gritty of podcast aggregators and the like, I should point out the top five Web sites that you can surf to get a better understanding of the podcasting

community as a whole. In fact, having this chapter open as you look at these sites will help you make connections between my suggestions and what you see on your screen. So if doing is more important to you than reading, take note of these Web sites, and dive straight in.

The sites I recommend here are general enough to answer your podcasting questions and point you toward such fundamentals as podcast feeds and software downloads. The top five Web sites I recommend are:

1. [www.podcastalley.com](http://www.podcastalley.com)
2. [www.ipodder.org](http://www.ipodder.org)
3. [www.podcastingnews.com](http://www.podcastingnews.com)
4. [www.podcasting-tools.com](http://www.podcasting-tools.com)
5. [www.podscope.com](http://www.podscope.com)

### Podcast aggregators (the software)

The software that goes out and grabs podcasts for you is known as an *aggregator*. An aggregator scours the Web for the exact kind of content (podcasts) you have told it to look for. Many of these programs will go out and get the material at night (or whenever you tell it to), delivering the content to your desktop, iPod, or other MP3 player while you sleep. Because many broadband Internet connections are in an always-on state, aggregator software takes advantage of this situation, grabbing content around the clock.

Aggregators are available for Macintosh computers, Windows PCs, Unix/Linux systems, and handheld devices such as PDAs and SmartPhones.

Although some of these programs are capable of grabbing everything from stock quotes to your daily horoscope, I'll concentrate mostly on the podcasting angle (after all, this is a podcasting book).

There are two basic categories of podcast aggregators: highly polished programs that have plenty of features and are easy to use, and quick-and-dirty programs that are meant to be easily accessed and altered by those who desire to do so. It is likely safe to say that the majority of those who like to tinker with actual programming code are more apt to be using Linux than Mac OS X, but of course, there are exceptions to every rule. Therefore, this section looks at many kinds of aggregator software.

Aggregators are not a mystery; for the most part, they are easy-to-use, powerful programs that allow you to get your hands on the content you most want to hear. How they work, their interfaces, their ease of use, and their general suitability for your needs will be examined for each piece of software. The icons detail what systems the software is available for Mac, PC, or Linux/Unix.



Many great pieces of software are out there to help you capture podcasts, but for the beginner, I recommend two products. For the Macintosh, Linux, and handheld devices, I suggest iPodder. For the PC, I recommend HappyFish and iPodder; specifically for the Mac, I recommend PlayPod, iPodder 2.0, and iPodderX. Starting out with these programs will ensure a smooth entry into the world of capturing and enjoying podcasts.

## BashPodder

 Required Software: Xdialog

OS Requirement: Mac OS X, Linux

Price: Freeware

BashPodder (<http://linc.homeunix.org:8080/scripts/bashpodder/>; Figure 2.1) is a very simple (only 44 lines of code) aggregator that was designed primarily to work with Linux but works with Mac OS X as well. Basically, all BashPodder does is download MP3 files that are specified in an RSS feed. If you are not familiar with Linux and programming in general, I recommend that you set aside BashPodder, despite its power and simplicity, until you've learned more about tweaking scripts in Linux.

Figure 2.1. BashPodder is a very simple Linux option for grabbing podcasts.

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