Podcasting:
Practical Guide to Podcasting

<u>What is podcasting?</u>

If you're not familiar with the term "Podcasting," it is the use of audio or video to broadcast a message. Though experts disagree on where the term came from (some say it came from a combination of the Apple iPod and the term "broadcast," while others say it comes from "Public on Demand" + "Cast"), the medium is growing exponentially as a tool businesses use to communicate with customers and potential customers.

Think of it as an audio blog or an audio e-newsletter. Like both of those tools, podcasts are an excellent and cost effective way to reach your target market in a personal and informative way. Additionally, podcasts can be distributed through RSS format, which is a subscription service that announces and delivers the podcast to your subscribers like a blog or a newsletter.

One of the reasons for the popularity of podcasts is that users, your customers and your target market, are able to easily access the information and listen to it on their computer, iPod (or other MP3 player), handheld device and even their cell phone.

<u>How you benefit from podcasting or adding audio/video to your website:</u>

1. Podcasts increase your marketing reach and online visibility. You will expand your target market because different people prefer different mediums. Some customers like to read company information, others prefer videos or live communication and still others like to download your information and listen to it when they have time. Many podcast users listen to downloaded podcasts on their way to work or while they're working out.

2. Podcasts can improve your sales and conversion rates. Podcasts are yet another way to reach your customers, and the one-on-one communication provides the kind of personal touch that customers crave. People are more likely to buy from someone that they feel they have communicated with directly, and podcasts enable you to do just that.

3. Podcasts provide a consistent line of communication with subscribed listeners. It has been proven that regular communication with your customers improves both your overall relationship with them and their buying frequency. A regularly distributed podcast can strengthen your relationship with your buyers and help to build a community with your customers.

4. Podcasts provide beneficial and value added content, which increases customer loyalty. Podcasts can offer a different kind of content to what you can provide with a blog or an e-newsletter. This kind of content can be extremely beneficial to your customers.

5. Podcasts allow you to distribute industry news and trends, which sets you apart from your competition and establishes you as a respected leader in your niche or industry. One of the best ways to get repeat purchases and loyal customers is to become the "expert" in your industry. Once your business is established as the place to go for quality information, services or products, your profits will grow.

6. Podcasting, or adding audio or video to your website and email messages, enables customers and prospects to access information in a more personal way. You can add video or audio testimonials, quick "how to" segments, and even a special promotional message. Adding audio or video is a unique way to add a personal touch to your website.

7. A podcast or an audio file can be used as a giveaway to build your opt-in list. Consider recording either an interview with an industry expert or a seminar or workshop, and then offering the audio file as a free download. In return, you get their email address for future mailings.

Let's move on to how to begin podcasting and increase your profits!
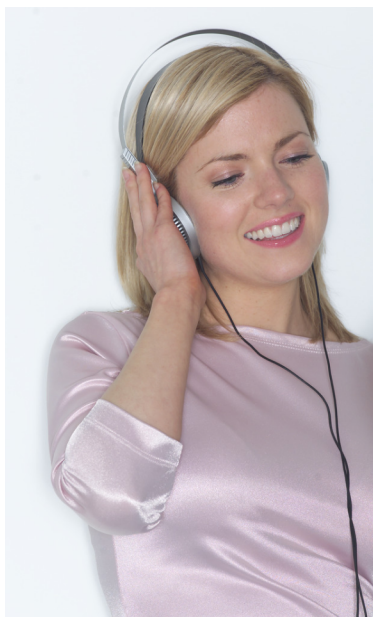
Equipment:

The great thing about podcasting is that you can do it at home with a basic Mac or PC and an inexpensive microphone. Some podcast hosting sites even make it possible to podcast with your cell phone. You simply register with the service and create your podcasts by recording them when you're on your cell phone.

If you want to kick it up a notch, there are several ways to set up a podcast recording "studio."

For serious podcasters, the list of necessary equipment is as follows:

- Microphone
- Preamp
- Digital recorder (or computer)
- Headphones
- Sound-editing software

Frequency:

Podcasting on a consistent schedule is important when building a community and a wider audience. In fact, don't expect your podcast to have a large audience in the beginning. But with proper promotion, quality content and a regular schedule, your podcast audience will grow. Many podcast audiences number in the thousands.

Decide, before you get started, how often you will be able to broadcast. Each podcast will take time to script, rehearse and record. You are likely to want to commit at least four hours of planning and production time for each podcast.

Length:

To determine how long your podcast should be, you'll want to consider how frequently you're going to broadcast, what content you're delivering, and who your audience is. For example, if you're doing a daily podcast you would be likely to want to keep it short. Five to ten minutes is a perfectly acceptable length for a daily. It is enough time to offer an

inspiration, a tip for the day or an insight. If you're doing a weekly and you know that your subscribers generally listen to your podcast on their drive to work, then a 20-30 minute podcast would fit perfectly into that time frame.

Costs:

Great news! Podcasts can actually be free. If your computer came with a microphone or you use the cell phone type set-up, then you already have your recording equipment. All you need is a podcast host and, like blogging hosts, many are offered for free. Simply use your favorite search engine and you'll find numerous choices.

Of course, for a few extra dollars you can find podcast hosts that offer sound editing software, more storage and unlimited bandwidth. To choose the right podcast host, it really depends on how many podcasts you want to produce per month, how big they will be and what kind of subscriber base you are expecting for your shows.

Adding music/sounds to your podcast:

Adding music to your podcast can:

1. Set the theme of your podcast
2. Prepare your listener for individual segments or features within your podcast
3. Entertain your listener

When selecting your music, remember to consider the theme of your podcast and your target audience. Since each podcast is different and has a unique audience, the music used should reflect both.

Royalty-free music can be used in productions without recurring fees, i.e. without paying royalties each time the music is played. An alternative to royalty-free music is "podsafe" music.

Podsafe music is acquired by partnering with a musician and crediting their work during the podcast. Independent artists are making their compositions available as podsafe music in exchange for publicity and airplay. Sound effect libraries can be subscribed to for a modest fee, or podsafe CDs can be purchased and imported through your computer's media player.

Naming:

The name of your podcast is important. It not only reflects your business and your brand identity, but it also needs to inspire people to download it, listen to it, and come back for more. Choose a name for your podcast that matches your content topic. People generally search for a particular subject when they visit podcast sites, like "meditation", "marketing", "investing" etc.

Like any other online content, publicity is all about using the right keywords. Your podcast can have your company name on it but you should also consider having a secondary name. Dating the podcasts is also suggested, because it helps subscribers organize them and know what is new content and what is old content.

For customers that download onto their iPod or other MP3 player, they will see a 255 character id tag that scrolls across their screen. Be sure to include your URL (and possibly your phone number as well) in that title.

Scripts:

Always script your podcast before you record it. Make sure to outline your point or points first. What message do you want to get across to your subscribers? Make sure you are able to address this point accurately and completely in the time that you have allowed. Make notes of where you want to add inflection. Podcasts that are without inflection or a range of vocal emphasis are not interesting to listen to. Add emotion to your voice; if you are excited about your material show it, and if you are discussing something serious or sad, let your voice demonstrate that too.

Don't forget to plan pauses and breaths into your script and where you're going to place your advertisements. Advertisements work best when you can easily transition into them.

For example, *"Speaking of making money online, head to our website now and save 10% on our new book 101 Ways to Save Money."*

Here's a sample format outline:

- *Introductory music*
- *Introduction of host or hosts*
- *Host introduces topic (with an appealing title and teaser)*
- *Couple of minutes of content*
- *Advertisement*
- *More content*
- *Promotional mention of an upcoming seminar, sale or new product*
- *Teaser for next podcast topic*
- *Closing music*

Advertising:

Make sure that your audio or video includes an easy to remember phone number, because many people will be listening to your offers while they're driving or working out. They won't be able to simply click through to your website. That being said, make sure you also include your URL in your call to action so that those that are listening on their computer can immediately visit your site.

Keep your advertisements short. Listeners can easily "fast forward" and not listen to your advertisements. If you keep them to 10-15 seconds they won't make the effort to skip over them. Additionally, you should transition into them as you're speaking so that the listeners aren't immediately aware that they're listening to an ad.

Make sure that you keep the ads free of time constraints. Due to the nature of a podcast, a person can listen to it today or six months from now. If your advertisements have a "limited time offer" call to action, then you'll miss out on a lot of potential customers.

Hook your audience with interesting content before you insert your ads. Placing your ads in the beginning of your podcast can cause some listeners to tune out; however, if you've already hooked them with interesting information, they'll listen to a quick plug to hear the rest of your information.

Formats:

The use of a podcast or the format of your content is virtually limitless. You can podcast on the following topics:

- Instructions or training manuals of your products
- Company news
- Commentary on your industry or industry analysis
- Creative endeavors like singing, reading poetry, reading fiction
- Behind the scenes information
- Interviews with experts
- Seminars or workshops
- Reviews on products or services
- "How to" guides
- From the field information
- Lessons
- Inspirations
- Meetings or mastermind group discussions
- Call in shows
- Monologues

- Dialogues or conversations
- Quiz shows
- News magazine format

Content:

Like any online tool, content is king. In your podcast you absolutely must provide content that offers a benefit to your customers and target market. A podcast that is simply an advertisement for your services may get listened to once but it won't be revisited, and it won't be forwarded to friends, family and associates. However, a podcast that entertains and informs will grow and build your sales and your online presence.

Make sure that the content that you offer via your podcast differs from the content that you offer via your blog, e-zine or on your website.

Marketing your podcast:

The best way to increase the number of listeners you have is to tell everyone about your new podcast. If you have an e-zine, then promote, and link to, your podcast in your e-zine. If you have a blog, promote and link to your podcast there. Include a signature "visit my podcast" or "listen here" in every email. And of course, don't forget to promote your podcast on your website! Place a link to your podcast on your website, with a headshot photo, a call to action like 'listen here' and an intriguing headline.

Linking to and from favorite podcasts or other relevant podcasts is also a great way to increase your audience. And don't worry if the number of listeners you have is small in the beginning. Podcasts are a medium and, like e-zines and blogs, tend to grow as word gets out. The key is to get listeners "hooked" on your podcast so that they're listening to every podcast regularly and talking to their friends and associates about it. The best way to get them hooked is to provide great content.

How to use podcasting: tips and suggestions

Tip #1 Make sure you speak in a strong voice and add inflection. If you sound like you're uncertain about what you're saying, your listeners will think so too.

Tip #2 Make sure that your broadcasting frequency is consistent. You want people to make listening to your podcast a habit.

Tip#3 Offer variety. Include different guests and formats if possible. This will keep listeners intrigued and engaged.

Tip #4 Make sure that your podcast content is different from your blog content, articles and e-zine content. Chances are that listeners will explore all of your content, and if it is redundant they will lose interest.

Tip #5 Focus on content, not sales pitches. Your listeners will readily listen if you're providing content that offers them a benefit. However, if it's merely a sales pitch you'll lose them immediately.

Tip #6 Plan on Podcasting for the long haul. Podcasters who "test" the medium with one or two podcasts lose out on the opportunity of building an audience. Podcasting is a medium that builds an audience over time and a "test run" won't give you the results you're looking for.

Tip #7 Don't read directly from your script. Practice it a few times so that you know what you're going to say and then let the podcast recording flow naturally.

Tip #8 Invite others to contribute to your podcast by calling in, speaking, or contributing topic ideas.

Tip #9 Include music at the beginning and end, and use the same music each time so that your audience begins to identify the music with your podcast.

Tip #10 Give each podcast a headline or title. Make sure that it offers your audience a benefit such as "10 Tips to Lifelong Happiness."

Tip #11 Podcasting is a very personal medium. Talk to your audience like you're talking to a friend, as if you're having a one-on-one conversation.

Tip #12 Podcasting, like any marketing tool, needs to be tested and evaluated from time to time to make sure that you're getting optimal exposure. Track downloads and test headlines for open rates. Track click through rates by sending audiences to specific web pages. Many audio/podcasting services give you important statistics on downloads, play time and listens to completion. This makes it easy to know if people are listening and enables you to make quick changes to meet what your audience demands.

Tip #13 If you're uneasy writing a podcast or audio script, you can outsource the project by hiring a freelance writer to create your script. Remember to personalize the script when you make your recording.

Tip #14 Before you begin Podcasting, research your competition's podcasts or audio files. Find out what they do that you can do better and differently.

Tip #15 Before you begin Podcasting, visit and listen to numerous successful podcasts inside and outside of your industry. What makes the good ones good? What can you take away from the successful podcasts and make your own?

Adding a podcast to your marketing mix and to your website is a valuable and economical marketing tool that can bring you fantastic results. You'll grow your target audience, build a community around your brand, product, or service, and – best of all – you'll help people learn more. Podcasts are a win-win for both you and your customer.