What is a Podcast

In this article I'm going to explain what a podcast is and why it's becoming such a popular media. This is going to be an easy to understand podcast definition in everyday terms.

If you prefer "geek-speak" and pride yourself in the use of jargon, click here to see a brief [podcasting definition in technical terms](javascript:switchit('expand')).

You're about to see how you can find a huge variety of new and interesting content from the internet to fill your MP3 player for free. You can listen to what you want, when you want, and how you want.

Imagine getting new “radio”-style talk and music shows to listen to on your iPod or other MP3 player every day. You wake up and automatically have new shows ready to listen to while you exercise or commute to work. This is the podcast listening experience.

Not only that, but anyone can create his or her own “radio”-style show and broadcast it to the world in very little time and at very little cost. All you need is a computer, a mic and the internet.

When I first heard about podcasting I was blown away. I spent a week reading everything I could about podcasts and finding new podcasts to listen to. I was so excited about the idea of so much free, original and interesting content to listen to. I could also sense that this was going to be an amazing new way to share content across the internet and to millions of mp3 players.

**Break Free from the Same Old Stale Radio Content   
and Choose to Listen to What Interests You**

Let’s face it. Broadcast radio is getting old. The same songs get played over and over until you're sick of them. A few large companies have control of the formats and what gets played. There is no variety.

If I listen to the radio while driving, one hand is on the “scan” button and the other is on the wheel. As soon as something loses my interest, I tap the button—and I tap it a lot.

With podcasts you don’t have to wait to hear something that interests you. You choose what you want to listen to. There are now thousands of podcasts and the number is growing rapidly.  
  
Podcasting has leveled the playing field. Anyone with something to say and a desire to say it can create a podcast and publish it to the world.

Podcasters (as they are called) are not restricted by the FCC or traditional broadcast formats and regulations. This allows for numerous subjects and formats.

Podcasting is an escape from the same old, corporate conglomerate, worn-out, Clearchannel controlled, pre-programmed, blah blah blah radio. Podcasting has personality and variety that run-of-the-mill radio does not.

**So Let’s Talk More Specifically Now About   
What is a Podcast?**

The word podcast is a play on the word broadcast combined with the word iPod (one of the most popular portable MP3 players). Apple did not invent the word podcast, although I'm sure they are enjoying the free marketing they are getting from the popularity of podcasting.

You do not have to have an iPod to listen to a podcast. In fact, I personally believe there are many other MP3 players that are better for listening to podcasts. You can listen to podcasts on anything that plays MP3s. Once the podcast is downloaded, it's just an MP3.

**The Podcast Revolution:  
You Can Create or Listen to Whatever  
Kind of Audio Content You Can Imagine.**

Anyone can create a podcast. All over the world, people are creating podcasts on subjects ranging from movies, to technology, to music, to politics and whatever else you can think of. This is new original content made by passionate people who want to share their creativity with the world.

The cost to start podcasting is so low that anyone can do it. Most podcasters are everyday people like you and me. They could be talking to you driving in their car, sitting in their living room or speaking at a conference. You get to glimpse into their life and into their interests.

Podcasters are creating very raw and real content and listeners are responding. Free from corporate radio and broadcast regulations, you can create whatever kind of show you can imagine.

Some podcasts are “talk show” style. Others introduce you to the latest bands and music. With podcasts you can stay current on the news, get a glimpse into someone’s life, listen to move reviews and the list goes on.

Most podcasts are made by people who are very passionate about their subject. Passion is infectious and interesting to listen to. Since the birth of podcasting, a huge variety of shows have shown up on the internet.

In addition, many major media outlets are also now offering podcasts. You can listen to NPR, Rush Limbaugh and many major news outlets by podcast.

**What Makes Podcasts Different   
and So Popular to Listen to?**

Maybe you're still wondering what all the hype is about. MP3s have been on the internet for quite some time. Internet radio is nothing new. Audio blogs have been around for awhile, too.

What sets podcasts apart is that they can be automatically downloaded to your computer and synced to your MP3 player without you lifting a finger. You can wake up each morning with new shows on your MP3 player ready to listen on your way to work.

This ease and convenience of this automatic delivery is powerful. This is what sets podcasting apart and made it so popular. Imagine walking into Starbucks to get a drink and by the time you leave you have new shows to listen to on your MP3 player. We haven’t reached that point yet, but we are headed there.

This amazing technology came out of the minds of David Winer and Adam Curry (you may remember Adam was a VJ on MTV in the mid-80s). Adam wanted an easy way for people to create audio content and for listeners to automatically receive it to their MP3 players.

David had the basic feed technology (explained below) in place to make it happen. Together they put together the foundation that would become podcasting. You can read more about the history of podcasting here.

**Podcasts Automatically Put New Listening Content   
on Your MP3 Player on a Regular Basis   
Without You Having to Lift Even a Finger**

At the core a podcast is an audio file that is automatically received from the internet and then synced to your MP3 player. The files are received by subscribing to what's called a podcast feed. Sometimes you also hear this called an RSS feed, but that is just geek speak that gets used to try and impress you.

Maybe you have seen the small orange icons that look like this or this on some web pages. This icon is a link to a news feed. Blogs use this kind of feed to deliver new content to their subscribed readers.

The same kind of feed is used to deliver podcast shows to your computer. You don’t need to know how the feed works to subscribe. You just need to know that you can subscribe to a podcast feed to get the latest shows when they are released.

You don’t have to remember to check for new shows. You don’t have to download it. It's done for you.

You can think of a podcast as being like a magazine because you subscribe to it and receive new content regularly.

Even though subscribing to a feed is the most convenient way to receive podcast, you don’t have to subscribe to listen. Many podcasts can also be streamed from the web or downloaded directly as an MP3 file.

**What is a Podcast Aggregator?**

To subscribe to a podcast you use a software program called a podcatcher. Sometimes this is also called a podcast aggregator (but again this is geek speak). Just know that podcatcher and aggregator mean the same thing. It's the software that you use to subscribe to and receive podcasts.

The podcatcher regularly checks the feed for new content that has been posted. When a new podcast show is found, it's downloaded. The next time you plug your MP3 player into your computer, the new podcasts shows are synced by your media player (such as iTunes).

**Now You Can Listen to Exactly What You Want,   
When You Want and How You Want!**

With podcasts, you're in control. Earlier I mentioned that a podcast is kind of like a magazine subscription. Podcasts are also like Tivo because you're in control of when you listen to it.

You can rewind a podcast. You can play it over and over. You can pause it. You can store it wherever you want. You can delete it when you want. Podcasts give you the control.

You can listen to podcasts on your computer, burn them to CD or transfer them to your MP3 player. You're in control of when and how you listen.

Compare that to listening to the radio. Big corporations decide what you get to listen to and when you listen to it. It's all controlled by what will make them money. Now you can have radio your way.

Unlike streaming audio, you can take a podcast with you. To listen to streaming content you're tied to a computer with a fast internet connection.

Now compare podcasts to a download from iTunes. You're not limited to how many times you can download a podcasts or how many times you can burn it. It's not limited to only playing in certain media players. Speaking of iTunes, with podcasts there are…

**No 99 Cent Downloads. Most Podcasts Are Free.   
You Can Subscribe to as Many as You Want.**

If you want something other than 99 cent music downloads to fill your MP3 player, then podcasts are it. Most podcasts are free and there is no limit to how many you can find and subscribe to. You're only limited by how much time you have to listen to them. Maybe you can actually fill that 40 gig drive now.

Just because podcasts are free does not mean that they are not quality. Granted, there are some podcasts that will make you cringe because the content and audio stink. But there are a lot of podcasters out there who are passionate about what they do and make quality shows even though they are free to listen to.

**Most Podcasts Don’t Even Have Commercials**

The purpose of most radio content is to keep you listening until the next commercials. Who likes listening to ads? Without commercials, radio would die.

Most podcasts are commercial-free. The cost of podcasting is low enough that podcasters can produce their shows with little or no sponsorship. Even when podcasters do incorporate some advertising it's much less intrusive than the barrage we get on the radio.

**You Only Receive the Podcasts that You Subscribe To.   
There’s No SPAM Like With Email.**

You will only automatically receive podcasts that you have subscribed to our downloaded yourself. There is no podcast SPAM. You can unsubscribe if a podcast bores you to death.

Become a Celebrity and Recognized Expert on the Internet.  
Promote Your Businesss and Stay in Contact with You Customers.  
Start Your Own Podcast.

Since podcasts showed up in Fall 2004 thousands of shows have been created. In the Summer of 2005 iTunes 4.9 added features for podcasts. This generated a huge leap forward in the number of podcast listeners and podcasters.

A popular podcast feed management site, Feedburner, reported that the number of listeners in January 2005 (13,500) almost doubled to 24,000 by February of 2005. This stat is from just one slice of the podcasting feeds on the internet.

Podcasting has become a big buzz word on the web and in the media. New services for listening to and creating podcasts are constantly popping up. This industry is seeing very exciting growth. Podcasting is moving forward at the speed of light.

Despite this rapid growth, we are only scratching the surface. You can still catch this wave. Think of how fun it will be to create your own podcast and become a celebrity on the internet.

People will be listening to what you have to say. They will be enjoying your own creation. You can become and a recognized expert on the topic of your choice. This makes podcasting valuable for business use.

You can leverage this relationship with your audience to make money and promote yourself. Your listeners will become dedicated and will return often for your opinion and expertise.

**Podcast Definition Summary**

Now it's time for your pop quiz. Quit your whining. I promise it's easy:

1. What are podcasts:

a) A new type of media that puts you in control of what you listen to, when you listen to it and how you listen to it (usually on a computer or portable audio player)

b) An easy way to share your own audio content on the internet with a focused audience

c) A media that can be created with equipment you probably already own, for little cost and in as little as a day

d) A way to become a recognized expert or celebrity in your niche

e) A powerful way to connect with your customers and promote your business to them on regular basis

f) All of the above (you saw that coming)

If you answered ‘f’, then you were right. If you didn’t answer 'f', then I'm wondering how you got to this point on the page without even reading about what is a podcast.

Just to top it all off, here is a podcast definition from the Oxford English Dictionary (yes, podcasting is in the dictionary now...how validating):

***podcast****n. a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar programme, made available on the Internet for downloading to a personal audio player.*

**You Can Launch Your Own Podcast in Just a Matter of Days  
With My Step-by-Step How to Podcast Tutorial**

First, sign up for my free podcasting ezine to get exclusive tips for creating, publishing and promoting your podcast. You will never receive SPAM. I follow a strict privacy policy.

This ezine will keep you up to date on all the latest breakthroughs in the podcasting industry. Podcasting is moving at the speed of light. New technologies are constantly emerging and things change every day.

By subscribing to the How to Podcast Ezine you will stay current the most important tips and information. Sign up here:

Audio is not a new technology in education. Learners have been listening to educational radio for nearly a century (Hawkridge and Robinson, 1982). Even before that, they could listen to audio recordings. Durbridge (1984) identified audio's key educational advantages. She found that students liked learning from audio because they learned well from recorded sound. They found audio useful for understanding spoken language, analysing music and hearing the professor's voice. They liked listening in on conversations about parts of their courses. They also liked being 'talked through' tasks in the laboratory or workshop, listening to discussions and opinions from experts in their field, and being encouraged by the voice of somebody they knew and respected. Bates (1981, 1984), Perraton (2006), Power (1990), Yates and Bradley (2000) and Young et al (1980) provided examples of the use of audio from primary and basic education to higher education, covering a range of formal, non-formal and informal curricula, in economically developed and developing regions, offered both at a distance and on campus. Although audio had been proved successful in terms of student learning, especially in distance education, Power (1990, p. 43) recognised that its use had been 'often undervalued'. Among the reasons were perhaps the lack of production, recording, distribution and playback facilities for audio, and, in the case of radio, the lack of flexibility of broadcast schedules. Lee and Chan (2007a) pointed out recently that audio had been neglected and underused. Podcasting has expanded the opportunities for using recorded audio as a learning medium. Today, audio 'is experiencing a renaissance' (Schlosser and Burmeister, 2006). What Schramm (1977) more than four decades ago considered a 'little medium'– in terms of its cost and complexity to produce as well as its impact compared with television or film – is now reappearing on the educational stage, to the benefit of both campus and distance learners. A podcast is a digitally recorded sound (or sometimes sound with vision) file. The name comes from the Apple iPod, a small, very portable player with a huge memory into which thousands of podcasts can be downloaded. Podcasting is strictly speaking the process of rendering the files accessible to listeners, usually via the Internet or a computer network from which they can be downloaded onto an iPod or similar MP3 or MP4 player. However, as with 'broadcasting' and 'broadcasts', podcasting is often applied to the whole system of making and using podcasts. Podcasting can now be considered as a stable technology, ready to move from experimental and pilot uses into mainstream education. There is a significant body of empirical evidence of the impact of podcasting on student learning and staff engagement. Academics are developing podcasting approaches within a variety of educational contexts, though most take a single aspect of teaching and learning (for example, presenting information to students) and develop a podcasting approach to support it. Universities are integrating podcasts into their learning environments, for use on campus, nationally and even globally. Several trends work in favour of podcasting moving from a peripheral to a core technology for learning. First, researchers and practitioners are piloting many different approaches to using podcasts to support learning. We give just three examples, but many more are described fully in Salmon and Edirisingha (2008). Details of others are available in the literature and in conference proceedings (EDEN, ALT-C, Online Educa), in informal and formal communities of practice such as Podcasting for Pedagogic Purposes.

Second, recent technological developments support podcasting to campus and distance learners. For example, in 2007 Apple introduced iTunes U (http://apple.com/itunesu), a dedicated Internet-based service 'to manage, distribute, and control access to educational audio and video content for students within an educational institution as well as the broader internet' (Wikipedia, n.d.). iTunes U offers a library of thousands of free podcasts provided by leading universities such as Harvard, Cambridge and the Open University. From the latter, at the time of writing, over 13 million podcasts had been downloaded by learners worldwide. Some universities have developed their own media streaming so that staff and students can upload and share podcasts (e.g., LUTube at the University of Leeds (http://lutube.leeds.ac.uk)). It is also possible to place podcasts directly on a VLE or webpage along with other educational materials that students are expected to access. Meantime, broadcasting corporations such as the BBC have enabled learners to download, again from the internet, podcasts of many radio broadcasts of educational value. Third, academics and students of the podcast generation have certain advantages over those who used audiocassettes for learning. Software for creating, editing, distributing and accessing podcasts is available free or at low cost on the Internet, and it is relatively easy to use (Mobbs, Salmon and Edirisingha, 2008). The necessary hardware is also cheap to obtain: for instance, many laptops now come with built-in microphones. Podcasts can also be accessed and used with personally-owned digital devices that were bought for other purposes, such as mobile phones, laptops and PCs. They do not require high-bandwidth connections for downloading. Most university students and staff now own such devices and are familiar with how to use them to listen to sound files. As Ramsden (2007) pointed out, such developments have made podcasting a low-threshold technological activity. Learners, whether on campus or at a distance, can listen to or watch podcasts without difficulty. Academics on campus may worry that their students will not turn up for lectures or seminars if academic content is made available as podcasts. Research on this issue offers some consolations! Gajasinghe's (2007) survey of 92 UK undergraduates at Loughborough UniversityUK found that only 3 percent said they would not attend if lectures were available as podcasts. Most used recorded lectures as a learning resource – something to revisit and study in their own time and at their own pace, just like books. Evans (2008), in his study of 200 undergraduates at BrunelUniversity in the UK found that podcasts offered students an alternative technology for learning rather than replacing lectures. Copley's (2007) survey of undergraduate students at Southampton University in the UK suggested there would be little impact on lecture attendance as a consequence of podcasting. Malan's (2007) study of podcasting of lectures at Harvard University found that students valued podcasts as a tool for revision rather than as a reason for not attending lectures. Learning at a distance does not raise the same issue, since there are no lectures as such to attend. Instead, podcasting is one medium among several that distance learners like to have available (e.g., Lee and Chan, 2007b).

Early adopters of podcasting have chosen a range of approaches to using it to support learning. Several were developed within a research project started in 2006 called IMPALA (Informal Mobile Podcasting and Learning Adaptation, http://www.impala.ac.uk), involving colleagues in 10 campus universities in the UK, South Africa and Australia. IMPALA was and is empirically based, within an action research framework. It started with a pilot at the University of Leicester in an undergraduate engineering module (Fothergill, 2008) that integrated podcasting and e-tivities based on Salmon's (2004) five-stage model for collaborative online learning. Using the guidelines and a preliminary podcast model developed from the pilot, IMPALA partners created their own podcasting approaches to address their specific teaching and learning challenges. Over 500 students and 20 academic staff have taken part in IMPALA since 2006. The podcasts' impact on students' learning was studied through collecting and analysing qualitative and quantitative data. The podcasting approaches developed in IMPALA – and the students' learning outcomes –are reported fully in Salmon and Edirisingha (2008): the approaches included using podcasts to provide summaries of lectures, podcasts to prepare students for geography field work, podcasts to help students learn to use computer software, and so on. Here we present examples from three different UK universities: 1) helping students to prepare presentations and assessed work, 2) offering feedback from staff on students' assessed work, and 3) assisting undergraduates to make the transition from school or college to university. All three can be easily adapted for learners at a distance. Podcasting to help students to prepare presentations and assessed work An approach adopted by Rothwell (2008) at Kingston University was to use podcasts to help undergraduates to develop their skills in preparing mid-semester presentations and an end-of-semester portfolio as assessed work. Rothwell's students, who come from varied backgrounds in the humanities and social sciences, take her core module in English Language. They receive very little support from their peers as they have no previous cohort identity: many are meeting for the first time. She felt that the conventional, face-to-face study skills sessions were inadequate, and used podcasts to address the skills her students required for assessed work. In a sense, she used a kind of distance learning to replace or complement in-class learning. Rothwell developed a series of podcasts, each about 10 minutes long, and made them available fortnightly on the course VLE site. Her podcasts aimed to: enhance students' understanding of the module's core concepts and issues, improve their revision, writing, speaking and presentation skills, and offer them frequent advice on developing the end-of-semester portfolio. She divided each podcast into short sound clips. Some clips explained key concepts covered in lectures and seminars, some were discussions between students and staff on assessment tasks, and in others, the student mentors (senior students) provided study tips. With a view to developing collaboration and cohort identity among her students, she arranged for podcast content to be generated from interviews with current and previous students, and from interviews with student mentors who help Level 1 students at the Faculty's drop-in academic skills development centre.