

PODCASTING HACKS™

*Tips & Tools for
Blogging Out Loud*



O'REILLY®

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HACK
#10

Make Your First Podcast

Use the hardware you have right now, and some free software on the Web, to make your first podcast.

If you don't have an internal microphone in your computer, you will need to get a microphone. Microphone solutions are available for all budgets. [Hack #12] covers the basics of sound input, and [Hack #13] will help you pick out the right microphone for your budget.

Once you have the sound input device covered, the next step is to download Audacity (<http://audacity.sf.net/>). This is a free application that runs on Macintosh, Windows, and Linux. It can record sound from any source, including the internal microphone on your PC or Macintosh laptop.

With Audacity installed, press the big red Record button and explain what you have in mind for your podcast. The meter bars attached to the window will show you when you are talking too loudly (by hitting the far side of the meter near the 0 mark) or too softly (by registering only slightly as you talk). Click the Stop button to finish the recording. When you are finished, you will have something that looks like [Figure 2-1](#).

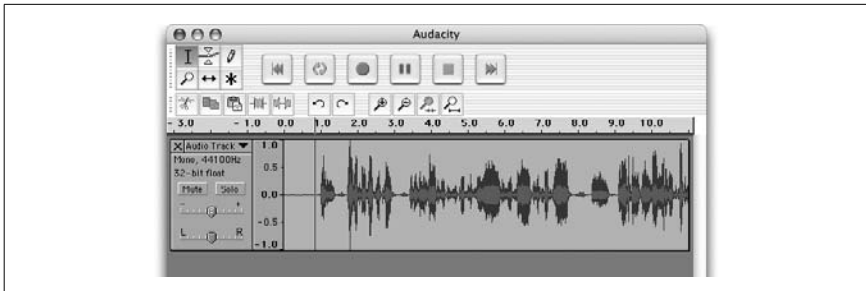


Figure 2-1. A recording in Audacity

As the recording is made, your voice is shown as a waveform on the display. Each word you say appears as a little blip in the signal that goes above and below the center line. The louder the word, the taller the blip.

[Figure 2-1](#) shows a short period of silence at the beginning of the recording. I didn't start speaking until one second after I pressed the Record button. You can remove that period of silence by using the Selection tool, which is in the upper lefthand corner of the window. Next, select the period of silence and click either the Delete key or the icon with the scissors to cut the signal. You can do the same at the end of the signal to remove any trailing silence.

Digital audio is exactly like digital photography or video, in that you can do as many takes as you like or do as much editing as you please. It's all just RAM or disk space and you can delete what you don't use. So, relax and take as much time as you need to say what you want to say.

Being relaxed as you record your podcast is of primary importance in terms of getting a good sound. A number of handy [tips for improving your vocal skills are outlined in \[Hack #11\]](#).

With your audio file edited, you need to save that Audacity file to disk, and then export the file as MP3. For voice-only podcasts, I recommend using a 32-bit compression rate for MP3. You set that in the Preferences dialog in the File Formats tab.

You will be prompted for some information about your MP3 file. These are stored as ID3 tags that are embedded in your MP3. [Getting the right content in those tags \[Hack #40\]](#) is important for making it easy for your listeners to find and listen to your podcast.

With the MP3 in hand, now you have to put it up on the Web and link it to a Really Simple Syndication (RSS) 2.0 feed. Several solutions are available for this, depending on what you have today.

You have no blog, domain, or ISP

If you don't have a blog, domain name, or ISP, the easiest way to put together a podcast is to use Ourmedia. [\[Hack #38\]](#) walks you through the process of setting up an account and uploading your first podcast. Other similar options include Liberated Syndication, Odeo, and AudioBlog.

You have a domain, but no blog

If you have your own domain and ISP, you have several options. You can set up a blog using [Movable Type or WordPress \[Hack #38\]](#).

You have a domain, but don't want to run a blog

You can podcast without a blog using [Podcastamatic or Dircaster \[Hack #37\]](#).

You have a Radio UserLand, Movable Type, Word Press, or Blogger blog
See [\[Hack #38\]](#).

With most of these solutions (except for Liberated Syndication, Odeo, AudioBlog, and Ourmedia), you are going to have to find a place to host your MP3 file on the Web. MP3 files are a lot bigger than text files, so [finding a place to put them can be difficult \[Hack #39\]](#).

Once you have used one of these options to get your blog set up with an RSS 2.0 feed, and you've uploaded an MP3 file, you can create a new entry in the blog that points to your MP3 file. At that point, you are a podcaster! Point

your podcatcher to your RSS 2.0 feed to make sure it downloads properly. Then go out into the podcastosphere and promote your podcast [Hack #46].

Where to Go from Here

The technical aspect of podcasting is only one part of the story. Once the microphone is switched on and the digital reels are virtually recording, what do you say? Content is king. Chapters 4 and 5 will give you some ideas about what to say and how to say it. [Hack #11] covers lessons you can learn from radio professionals to improve your podcast.

Still, the technical side of podcasting is a blast. You have a wide variety of amateur and professional microphones to choose from. Digitizing hardware is inexpensive and can greatly improve your sound. You can use cheap mixing boards and portable recorders to podcast anywhere, from your car to your local bar. The digital revolution has dropped the barrier to entry for communications, photography, and digital video. However, audio was not left behind. Chapter 3, Chapter 8, Chapter 9, and Chapter 10 cover your hardware and software options in detail.

Becoming a Critical Listener

Now that you are a podcaster, you will need to develop a new way of listening to podcasts. Instead of just laying back and enjoying, which you can still do, now you have to become a critical observer of podcasts. You are listening for several things:

Structure

What is the show's format? What recurring elements, called *format elements*, does the show use to keep you listening to this podcast, and coming back for future podcasts? Is the interesting stuff in the beginning, at the end, or mixed throughout?

Style

How are they presenting themselves? Are they professional or aloof? Are they just goofing around? Is their style related to what they are talking about?

Technical elements

Are they using their blog in a unique or novel way? Have they put together something new with RSS? Do they offer a new way of contacting them with feedback? You should be on the lookout for all of these things when determining what to include in your show.

Content

What's holding your attention? This is particularly important, since it's primarily what keeps people coming back to the show. When something moves you, listen to it over and over and figure out what is keeping you engaged.

You can learn from what does and doesn't work. When you hear something that works you will want to take that idea and see if it can work on your show. And when something falls over, you will want to make sure you aren't making the same mistakes.

This pertains not just to podcasts, but to anything on the radio, on television, or in what you read. The structures remain the same throughout. The narrative arc that moves you in a 30-second commercial can work in your podcast.

Think of yourself as that kid in his dad's workshop, taking apart a transistor radio to see how it works. You used to just listen to the radio, but now you want to see how it works, and see if you can make it better. Podcasts are just like little machines that you can dig into and see how they work, and then apply those lessons to your own podcast.

See Also

- “Set Up a Basic Home Studio” [\[Hack #12\]](#)
- “Pick the Right Microphone” [\[Hack #13\]](#)
- “Reduce Noise” [\[Hack #15\]](#)
- “Train Your Voice” [\[Hack #19\]](#)
- “Adopt a Format for Your Podcast” [\[Hack #20\]](#)