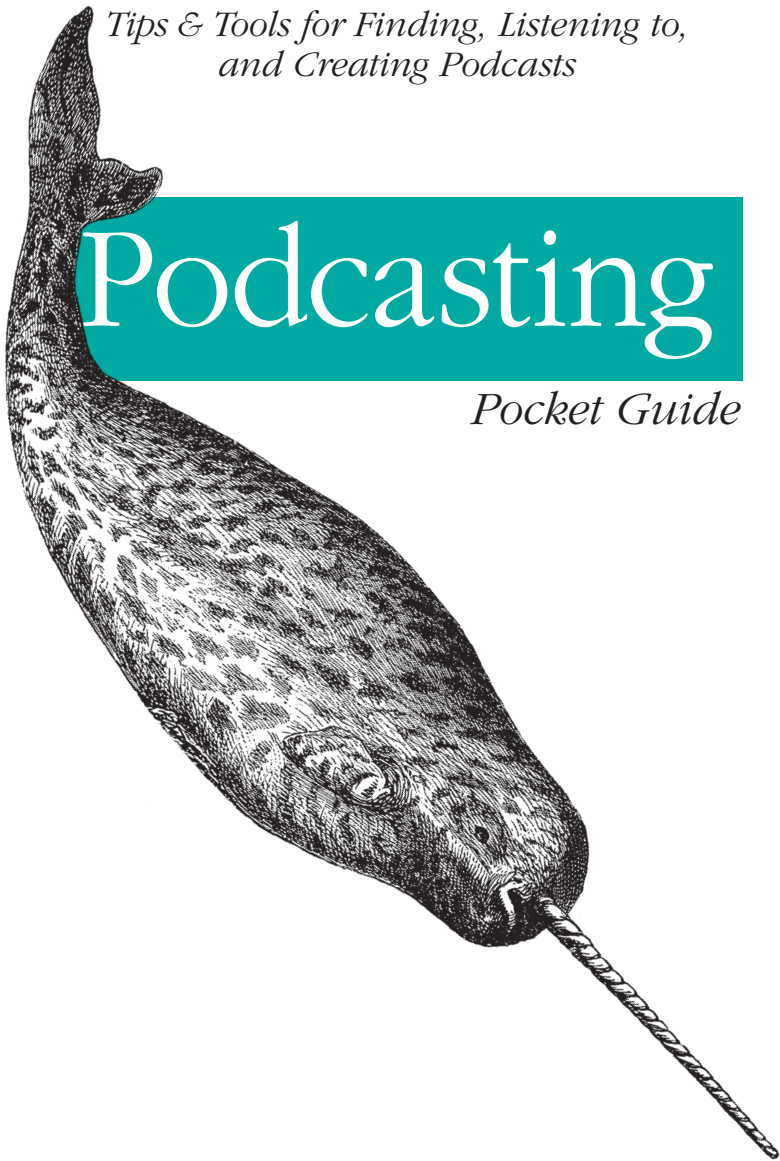


*Tips & Tools for Finding, Listening to,  
and Creating Podcasts*

# Podcasting

*Pocket Guide*



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## Podcasting Pocket Guide

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# Introduction

Like this pocket guide, podcasts fit nicely in your pocket. Even if you use a computer to download them, you can still put them on something small so you can listen to your podcasts when and where you want. It's this *time-shifting* that leads some people to refer to podcasting as TiVo for radio. They are close, but they miss the most important thing: there is no radio!

Radio waves are a heavily regulated territory. As a result, you can't say what you want on them. In fact, most of you can't say *anything* on them, since you need deep pockets to run a radio station. Of course, there are exceptions: college radio stations are often very accessible to amateur DJs, and Low-Power FM (LPFM) licenses are available to certain organizations. But such opportunities are few and far between.

This is where podcasting comes in.

Anyone who can make an MP3 recording, host it on a web site, and publish a "feed" for it can be a podcaster. The next step from there is to get the recording listed in podcasting directories, and listeners all around the world will start finding it.

As a listener, podcasting's accessibility means that you'll have access to opinions and ideas that you wouldn't get on the radio. Certainly, this means that there will be a lot of noise to sift through. The beauty of it all is that the best podcasts get the most buzz, and the good stuff tends to bubble to the top.

You can get a lot out of podcasts if you choose the ones that are right for you: listen to unique views on current events, hear music you'd never hear otherwise, and enjoy sound-seeing tours that take you all over the world.

## **Who This Book Is For**

This pocket guide will help you get started, both as a listener and as a podcaster. For the listener, you'll learn how to tune into podcasts and download them to your favorite portable device so you can listen to them when you want. You'll also get an overview of some of today's best podcasts. Because podcasters will promote other podcasts, you only need to start out with a few, and then start listening to new shows as you learn about them.

For the aspiring podcaster, you'll learn how to make and publish podcasts with the most basic of equipment: a computer, a microphone, and some free software. Once you've made that first recording, you can publish it online, get it listed, and start obsessing over the size of your audience!

## **Organization of This Book**

This book is intended to guide you through getting started in the world of podcasting, both as a listener and as a creator of your own podcast.

Chapter 1 will take you through the process of using iTunes to find, subscribe, and listen to podcasts.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are a brief introduction to creating, recording, and editing your own podcast.

Chapter 5 is a selection of reviews of some of the most interesting and unusual podcasts available when this book went to press in October 2005.

For a detailed guide to creating your own podcast, we suggest *Podcasting Hacks* (O'Reilly, 2005).

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# Starting Out in Podcasting

*Podcasting gives you the power to compete with Howard Stern, from your basement.*

—Joe Lipscomb

An hour from now you can be a podcaster. It's far easier than you think, and all you need are the microphone on your laptop and a connection to the Internet. Getting started early is very important. Podcasting is all about making mistakes and learning from them to create better podcasts. So, start right now and make your first podcast.

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## TIP

This chapter was excerpted in part from *Podcasting Hacks* (O'Reilly), which includes many tips and tricks for creating your own podcasts.

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## Make Your First Podcast

You can 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. *Podcasting Hacks* covers the basics of choosing and using microphones in detail.

Once you have the sound input device covered, the next step is to download Audacity (<http://audacity.sf.net/>), 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.

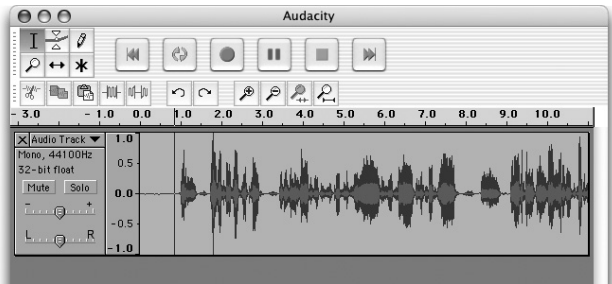


Figure 2-1. A recording in Audacity.

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 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.

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### TIP

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 *Podcasting Hacks*.

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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 application's File Formats tab.

You will be prompted for some information about your MP3 file. This information is stored as ID3 tags that are embedded in your MP3. Getting the right content in those tags 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 (<http://www.ourmedia.org/>). Other 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.

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

You can podcast without a blog using Podcastamatic or Dircaster.

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.

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.

## **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. Chapter 3 will give you some ideas about what to say and how to say it.

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 4 covers some of your 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 lying 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 because 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 only to podcasts but also 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 also work in your podcast.

Think of yourself as a kid in 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 try to 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.