

# Get Your Word Out: A Primer On Podcasts & Podcasting

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## Defining Podcasts

The Internet is ablaze with video and sound, which is yet another hallmark of the Web 2.0 phenomenon of creativity and interactivity. One of the more popular trends in the 2000s has been the advent of podcasts and podcasting. According to technology glossaries such as Whatis (<http://www.whatis.com>) and Webopedia (<http://www.webopedia.com>) –as well as the user-edited encyclopedia Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org>) – the term podcast is actually a hybrid or mashup of Apple’s iPod and the word broadcast. A former MTV- VJ

named Adam Curry actually created the first podcast in 2004. In simple terms, a podcast is an audio file (usually in mp3 format), and it’s often distributed in RSS (Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary) or ATOM format.

Like other syndicated Web content (e.g., blogs and/or RSS feeds), users can actually subscribe to podcasts and take them “on the go” with their podcast player such as an mp3 player or the ubiquitous iPod. Listeners can also hear podcasts over the Web from a desktop or laptop computer . . . or from any web- and audio-enabled device, for that matter; all that’s required is a Web browser such as Internet Explorer, FireFox, Opera, etc.

## Finding Podcasts

No doubt searchers can easily append “+podcast” to their keyword or topical searches in Google. Here’s another route to audio goldmines: thankfully, a crop of vertical or niche search tools as well as directories have sprouted on the web. Searchers will definitely want to familiarize themselves with Yahoo! Audio (<http://podcasts.audio.com>), which crawls a variety

of audio content, including music, interviews, podcasts, and more. Another popular service is Podcast Alley (<http://www.podcastalley.com/>); this destination – created by a Purdue University graduate – strives to become the largest podcast directory on the Web. Also, Podscope claims to be the first search tool to index the actual spoken content of audio as well as files (<http://www.podscope.com/>). iTunes (<http://www.apple.com/itunes>), without question, is the most well-known tool that provides a podcast search feature (<http://www.apple.com/itunes/store/podcasts.html>), and it boasts that it indexes more than 100,000 podcasts.

## Finding Faith-based and Christian Podcasts

Interested in world religions, spirituality, theology, Christianity, and apologetics? ABC ran a story in 2005 called “Podcasting Gets Religion” (<http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/Story?id=1782355&page=1>). Among highlighting the outreach (and evangelistic?) impact of podcasts, the reporter interviews a pastor who wisely notes that podcasts can reach those who are physically unable to attend church – the elderly

and the infirm, for examples. Try OnePlace (<http://www.oneplace.com/podcasts/>), a subsidiary of Salem Communications Corporation, for sermons, biblical teaching, and more. Many well-known radio broadcasts are available as podcasts; these include The Bible Answer Man, New Life, and Mid-day Connection. Podcast hounds can simply execute a phrase search using Google or search tool of choice on “Christian podcast,” too.

### Listening to Podcasts

Those who want to get their aural fix on have a few options when it comes to listening to podcasts. First, they can play podcasts directly within their web browser of choice. Second, they can use a “podcatcher” – also referred to as a podcasting client. This piece of software automatically downloads and aggregates podcasts. Can’t listen to a favorite program at work? No problem. The podcatcher will capture the show for later listening in the car, on the treadmill, etc. Served fresh, daily . . . sometimes even hourly! Again, the most popular podcatcher is Apple’s iTunes software (along with its iPod device). iTunes is totally free software that can be downloaded and, actually, it can be used without an mp3 player; this writer has it installed on a Dell desktop as well as a laptop. Contenders to Apple do indeed exist. Microsoft offers Zune (<http://www.zune.net/en-US/>). What’s more, there are open source, Linux-based options such as Amarok (<http://amarok.kde.org/>). Then there’s Juice Receiver (<http://juicereceiver.sourceforge.net/>) a cross-platform tool that works with both iPods and mp3 players. Those looking for a device or player will want to head on over to CNET Reviews (<http://reviews.cnet.com>) to scout out hardware options. Or pay a visit to the local Best Buy or Circuit City.

### Church Leaders and Churchgoers

Church leaders and churchgoers alike can take advantage of podcasts. Pastors, for instance, can record their sermons and serve them up on the church’s website as a podcast . . . or on iTunes. What’s more, pastors can submit their podcasts to podcast directories.

In turn, churchgoers can listen to sermons by their pastors and Christian teachers. For example, if a beloved

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pastor accepts another call, perhaps you can still listen to the pastor's teaching over the web. John Ortberg, well-known pastor and author, transitioned from Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington Park, Illinois to Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in Menlo Park, California. His podcasts –along with those of other leaders amongst his team – are available here: [http://www.mppcfamily.org/app/w\\_page.php?id=49&type=section](http://www.mppcfamily.org/app/w_page.php?id=49&type=section).

Podcasts in no way are limited to sermons. In fact, possibilities are infinite. Podcasts can include the following: news, announcements, devotionals, interviews, speeches, lectures, book reviews, DVD reviews, live worship music, and more.

### Recording Podcasts

A podcast is an excellent marketing as well as didactic tool. Interested in creating a radio-style show over the Web? Then consider recording a podcast devoted to a favorite subject and or hobby? Only a few tools are required - - namely, a microphone and recording software. One of the best known software products is called Audacity (<http://www.audacity.com>). This software works on multiple operating systems, including Mac OS, Windows, and Linux.

Furthermore, Audacity has received accolades from PC World and other computer-industry media. It actually is highlighted in PC World's "100 Best Products of 2008". Also, Audacity provides excellent documentation (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/help/documentation>) and tutorials (<http://audacityteam.org/wiki/index.php?title=Tutorials>).

Quick tip: Windows users can use built-in utilities such as Sound Recorder to record audio content! Go to Start -> Programs -> Accessories -> Entertainment -> Sound Recorder.

To learn more about this month's theme, please read this incredibly helpful overview by Stephanie Watson: "How Podcasting Works" (<http://computer.howstuffworks.com/podcasting.htm/printable>). This piece explains the technicalities and history of podcasting. In addition, it covers podcatchers as well as the process and technology needed to create podcasts. Onward with listening and recording of podcasts!

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