



Introduction To Podcasts

The term podcast is a combination of pod (Portable On Demand) and broadcast. You can use any MP3 portable music player to create or listen to a podcast. Think of your podcast as your own radio show where you say what you want, when you want. It's your private thoughts gone public. Your words for the world. Your commentaries and reflections. Your video and audio recordings—even documents—delivered on the Internet using RSS (Really Simple Syndication) that people can download to their computers or portable music or video devices to listen to or watch wherever they want.

A quick question for you. Do you actually realise how much work goes into publicising the spoken word? These days with a computer, Internet connection, mic, and some software, you can podcast alongside the largest media companies and the many other independent podcasters around the world.

You need more than your voice to begin podcasting, but not too much more. Once you have the equipment, setting up a podcast generally takes from several hours, not much time when you consider how long it would take to set up your own radio station, and after you're set up, making podcasts won't take much longer than it takes to speak the words.

You can use a mobile PC or a desktop computer with an Internet connection to create a podcast. Some podcasters prefer to work with a mobile PC so they can podcast from any location they want. If it has a microphone built into it, you can also record your podcast on a portable MP3 player and then transfer the file of your recording to your computer to edit and post to the web.

Your computer's microphone probably won't give you the sound quality you're after for a podcast. For one thing, it'll likely pick up background (also known as ambient) noise. Mine picks up the furnace switching on and off—even my computer's fan. You might have the same problem with a portable MP3 player's mic. All of this ambient noise could be a neat effect ("Listen everyone, I'm giving you a tour of the basement plumbing in my home!"), but before you choose to join the ranks of the sonic avant garde, it's probably best to focus on getting your voice heard, and heard well.

For quality podcasting, get an external condenser mic that plugs into your computer. This kind of mic will reduce the background noise so your voice comes through loud and clear. If you get this kind of mic, get a stand, too. This will eliminate the noise you'll pick up from adjusting your hands on the mic during your show. You'll probably also want a headset that'll allow you to monitor your recording levels as you speak. You can't use speakers while recording because the speaker sound will be recorded and you'll risk getting audio feedback.



Go online and take a look at some of the USB headset/microphone pairings for an all-in-one solution—or you can get the separate mic, stand, and headset (usually pricier) like the pros. There are even several podcasting equipment packages that include a microphone, headset, audio mixer, and audio recording and editing software. Using one of these packages doesn't give you much of an alibi for not sounding your best.

Recording and editing software

To create a podcast, you'll need software that can record sound on your computer. An obvious choice is Sound Recorder. While Sound Recorder is fine for recording, you can't use it to edit audio, and editing your recording a big part of creating a podcast. I know that on the first take I don't always say exactly what I want exactly the way I want to, and you might not, either.

Windows Movie Maker has some basic audio recording and editing features. For more information on how to use Windows Movie Maker to record and edit sound, see [Add narration to your movie](#). You might also consider downloading and using a program that can both record and edit your audio, such as the free software available online from Audacity. With it, you can record several audio tracks, such as your voice, music, and other sounds, so that your podcast can use a variety of sounds at once.

You can also get an all-in-one record, edit, and upload podcasting program that has multiple recording tracks, a teleprompter, and voice effects. (If you choose this route, you can skip the "MP3 converter" section below and go directly to the "Plan your podcast" section.) Such end-to-end podcasting programs also often allow you to create RSS feeds that help tell people that you've posted a podcast, what it's about, and how to find it. There are many of these podcast recording and editing software solutions available.

MP3 is a standard podcast file format, which means that the greatest number of people will be able to hear your podcast if you make it available to them using this format. If you haven't already recorded your podcast using the MP3 file format, then you'll need to take your recorded file and convert it to an MP3 file. To do this, you need an MP3 converter. There are many free programs and commercial MP3 converters to choose from.

Plan your podcast

Sometimes ideas come to me in a flash. Other times, I have to sit down and hammer them out. While you're waiting for your podcasting equipment to arrive, think about what you want your podcast to be. When you at last press record, you don't want to sit there just drumming your fingers trying to think of what to say. It's a good idea to plan—at least in general—not only what you want to talk about, but how you want to talk about it.

Your podcast can be about anything, even interviewing guinea pigs. Overall, what to talk about is probably easy—it's whatever interests you. You can podcast about anything—from your criticisms or praise of local government to your search for the most talkative parrot in New Jersey. There are no rules! But since ideas are likely to be the core of your work as a podcaster,



why not write them down? An outline of what you want to say can help your podcast recording go more smoothly, although some podcasters feel most comfortable with a script.

How you do your show is a different challenge. Will your podcast be a monologue, a talk show, a restaurant review, a walking tour of your favourite hiking trail, an interview with your pets? Of course, it could also be something different each time, and it can evolve.

Listening to other podcasts is a great way to get ideas. Here are some online podcast directories to explore:

[Blubrry](#)

[iTunes](#)

[Odeo](#)

[Podcast Alley](#)

[Podnova](#)

Record and edit

Okay. This is the moment you've been preparing for—recording your voice. Before you click the Record button, check to see if your microphone came with information about how to speak into it for clearest audio quality. There is a technique to using a mic correctly, such as speaking directly toward it, over the top of it, or off to the side.

It's a good idea to practice speaking and recording a few times. To begin, plug in your microphone and headset into your computer and mute your computer's speakers. After you record, you can use Windows Media Player to listen to your recordings to make sure everything is working correctly. This is a great time to get comfortable with the equipment and how it works with your voice and style. For more information on how to listen to audio files with Windows Media Player, see [Play an audio or video file](#).

Find a quiet place to record your podcast, and then have some fun. Once you have a recording, many of the audio editing programs let you add effects, such as fade in and out and extra sound tracks. Don't be afraid to experiment! Check the documentation that came with your software to get tips about the best ways to use the features it comes with, or take a look at articles online or at the library about home recording. If you add effects or music, make sure they aren't protected by copyright. After you've recorded and edited your first podcast and you've got an audio file you're proud of, convert it to an MP3 file using the MP3 converter I talked about earlier.

Publish your podcast

Now, you're ready to publish your podcast online. To do this, you need a place to put it—your website or a web hosting and syndicating service that distributes podcasts across the Internet.



There are a many free and paid options that you can find online. Here are just a few hosting services to compare:

[Hipcast](#)

[Libsyn](#)

Now that you've posted your podcast to your website or hosting service, you need to help people find it. Along with your podcast, you'll upload an XML file called an RSS feed. This short XML file helps tell people that you've posted a podcast, what it's about, and how to find it. You can enter this descriptive information in an RSS feed generator, such as TD Scripts or RSS Feeds Submit to generate this RSS feed code. If you're using an end-to-end podcasting program or hosting service, creating the RSS feed might be a built-in feature. Essentially, this RSS feed will produce the link that people click to listen to your podcast.

When you've uploaded your podcast and have a link to it, you can take that link and let the world know about your podcast by putting the link on your blog using Windows Live Writer, publishing it to your Windows Live Spaces webpage, posting it into podcast directories, or sending it in e-mail. Now, your listeners are drumming their fingers, waiting for news that your next great idea is ready to download.

Podcasts offer a fantastic way to catch up news, listen to radio shows, and get great media delivered right to your computer (they're like newsreaders for media). Check out these five popular podcast managers and let the entertainment come to you.

gPodder

gPodder looks like a simple no-frills podcast manager, but underneath the hood you'll find a huge array of options and some perks—like the ability to sync to iPods, directory-based portable players, and MTP-compatible players. gPodder doesn't include a built-in player but you can specify your favourite video and audio player. If you delve into the advanced options menu, you'll find options for nearly every aspect of the software's functionality—you'll definitely want to read the gPodder wiki before going crazy with the toggle switches however. You can also access some of the more advanced tools found in podcast managers like iTunes, such as the ability to alter the playback speed of your podcasts, but such tinkering requires a close reading of the manual and isn't immediately accessible to the user right after installing the application.

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Rating 

Zune

Like you can use iTunes without an iPod, you can use the Zune software without an actual Zune player. Microsoft's offering in the podcast management department isn't half bad considering how new to the portable music arena the Zune is relative to the iPod, at least. You can subscribe to podcasts from the greater web, browse the Zune marketplace to select from thousands of podcasts, rearrange the order of podcasts using the order-series function, bookmark your place in long podcasts, and stream over the web through your Zune.net account. If you are syncing your podcasts to a Zune, you can enjoy a few nice perks, like the ability to update your podcasts to your Zune over your wireless network and sharing your podcasts with



friends' Zunes.

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Miro

Miro is a lightweight and open-source video and podcast manager with strong emphasis on streaming and web-based media. Although other contenders in the Hive Five support video-based podcasts, Miro really shines when it comes to smooth and pleasant playback of video podcasts thanks to its roots as a video player. You can manage your podcasts, set them to automatically download, or make them wait for your go ahead. You can also set how long they'll hang around before expiring and set those values differently for video and audio to help manage how much disk space your podcasts chew up. Miro also imports and exports your podcasts in OPML format, which makes it compatible with all major feed readers and other podcasting clients.

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Rating

iTunes

Not only is iTunes a popular podcasting manager in its own right, it helps that iTunes was the first introduction many people had to the idea of podcasting. Many a new iPod owner has installed iTunes over the years and upon looking at the navigation column asked, "What's a podcast?" Many of the tricks available in the music-management side of iTunes are available when managing your podcasts. On top of just managing the subscription itself, you can increase the playback speed of your podcasts so you can consume more of them in a shorter span of time, bookmark where you left off both in iTunes and on the iPod, set up smart playlists to blend one podcast into another or make a constantly refreshing playlist of your new podcasts, and tell iTunes how long to archive your podcasts before making room for the new ones. Although iTunes wasn't designed to be a stand-alone podcast manager, it has done a fine job integrating podcatching.

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Rating

Juice

Juice—formally known as iPodder—is an open-source podcast manager. If you're looking for an extremely lightweight, no-frills podcast manager, it would be tough to get lighter and more streamlined than Juice. Juice is focused on grabbing podcasts, downloading them for you according to their refresh rate or your set schedule, and little else. It has a built-in directory and a few basic tools—like a cleanup tool for deleting old podcasts—and that's about it. While the lack of bells and whistles might turn some people off from using Juice—it certainly lacks the visually stimulating built-in directories you find in iTunes and Zune—if you just want a program that doesn't tax your system resources and downloads the podcasts you want, you can't go wrong with Juice.

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