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Tired of TiVo? Beyond Blogs? Podcasts Are Here

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GRAND FORKS, N.D., Feb. 16 — From a chenille-slipcovered sofa in the basement of their friend Dave’s mom’s house at the edge of a snowcovered field, Brad and Other Brad, sock-footed pioneers in the latest technology revolution, are recording “Why Fish,” their weekly show.

Clutching a microphone and leaning over a laptop on the coffee table, they praise the beauty of the Red River, now frozen on the edge of town, and plug an upcoming interview with a top-ranked professional walleye fisherman. Then they sign off.

“I’m Brad” says Brad, in real life, Brad Durick, a 29-year-old television advertising salesman.

“And I’m Brad,” says Other Brad, a 44-year-old newspaper writer, Brad Dokken. “Until next week, keep your hook in the water, keep your line tight, and keep it fun.”

Their show, mostly ad-libbed, is a podcast, a kind of recording that, thanks to a technology barely six months old, anyone can make on a computer and then post to a Web site, where it can be downloaded to an iPod or any MP3 player to be played at the listener’s leisure.

On an average day, about 100 people download “Why Fish” from its Web site. That is

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not a huge audience, but two fishermen can dream. Some popular podcasters say they get thousands of downloads a day.

Since August, when Adam Curry, a former MTV video jockey, and David Winer, an early Web log writer, developed the podcasting technology, 3,075 podcasts have sprung up around the world, according to a Web site, Ipodder.org, that offers downloads of podcasting software.

From “Say Yum,” a California couple’s musings about food and music, to “Lifespring,” a Christian show whose creator said he had a vision to podcast, to “Dutch Cheese and American Pie,” by a Dutch citizen planning to move to the United States, these shows cover every conceivable topic.

Podcasts are a little like reality television, a little like “Wayne’s World,” and are often likened to TiVo, which allows TV watchers to download only the programs they want to watch and to skip advertising, for radio or blogs but spoken.

And as bloggers have influenced journalism, podcasters have the potential to transform radio. Already many radio stations, including National Public Radio and Air America, the liberal-oriented radio network, have put shows into a podcast format. And companies are seeing the possibilities for advertising; Heineken, for example, has produced a music podcast.

Inevitably, politicians are taking note, too. Donnie Fowler Jr. put out “FireWire Chats” by podcast in his bid to become chairman of the Democratic National Committee, saying Democrats had to embrace new technology if they wanted to reach a grass-roots audience.

Still, most podcasts are made by people like the two Brads, who record from basements, bedrooms or bathrooms, and devote their shows to personal passions.

In Southern California, three men have hit the Top 50 on Podcastalley .com, a podcast tracker, with “Grape Radio,” a “Sideways”-like program about wine. Their expertise? They drink wine and like to talk about it.

There are music podcasts — cover songs, punk and “The Worst Music You’ve Ever Heard.” There are many religious podcasts, nicknamed Godcasts. Then there is “Five Hundy by Midnight,” a Midwest gambler’s musings on Las Vegas.

There are podcasts on sports and on bicycling, on agriculture and on politics. There are poetry podcasts and technology podcasts.

In Northern California, Devan and Kris Johnson, young newlyweds, offer “Say Yum,” recording themselves making dinner and playing music after work. (A snippet: “I hope everybody gets to eat avocados.”) But they are not even the first of their genre; one of the first and most popular podcasts is recorded by a young married couple, talking about their lives, and sex lives, from their farmhouse in Wayne, Wis.

There are even podcasts about podcasting and several Web sites, like Podcastalley.com and Podcastbunker.com, that review and rank podcasts and provide links to them.

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