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March 23, 2005 (5:28 PM EST)

Podcasting 101

By Cora Nucci, TechWeb.com



If your day isn't complete until you've had coffee with Matt and Katie while listening to public radio, clicked on your 37 most-beloved Web sites, checked the local newspaper, listened to traffic, weather, and sports updates in the car, and plowed through a chapter or two of one of the books on your nightstand . . . you must be exhausted.

Honestly, who has time to process it all—from the future of Social Security, to troop movements in Iraq, to the jackknifed tractor-trailer on Rt. 2? But if you've got a taste for something offbeat, room in your skull to squeeze it in, and the stamina to go out there and find it, give podcasting a whirl.

You've probably heard of [podcasting](#) by now. If you haven't, it's pretty simple. Podcasting is a method for delivering audio content. It allows sound files to be moved across the Internet the way text files can be moved by an [RSS](#) feed. In fact, the best-known and widely used iPodder, is based on RSS 2.0.

Like an RSS feed, it periodically searches for content you've indicated you want, and automatically downloads it to your computer. Podcasting delivers content via your ears, not your eyes. So you can download audio files to your mp3 player and listen to them at the gym, in your car, or while walking the dog.

It's easy to get started. Download an aggregator such as [iPodder](#) and install it on your PC. iPodder is free.

Then search for programs you'd like to subscribe to. iPodder lists thousands of podcasts, by topic. Other sites to search include [Podcast.net](#), [DigitalPodcast.com](#), [PodcastDirectory.com](#). Once you've loaded your selections into your aggregator, it will check for updates and move your programs to your media player or "[digital jukebox](#)," as Apple calls its mega-popular iTunes, which is free and available for PCs as well as Macs.

You don't have to use iPodder or iTunes. Competing products are out there. And if you're not among the estimated [one in ten](#) iPod-toting Americans, you're in luck: you don't need one of those either. Any MP3 player will do, even if it's on your desktop.

With hardware and software matters settled, turn your attention to the fun stuff: content. The content that's available now is . . . developing. It's refreshingly unpolished, riveting, inane, occasionally brilliant, and irksomely self-referential. Never have so many had so much to say about so little.

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Economists say—and countless bloggers have proved—that low barriers to entry stimulate markets, but they also make a mess of the marketplace. So watch your step.

You'll find a range of quality, from guys delivering their audio manifestos to the world and kids hosting their own music shows—"I'm Zoe, I'm 14, this is my [radio show](#)"—[to wine buffs](#) delving deep into issues of the grape.

To get an idea of what's popular, check out Podcast Alley's [top 50 podcasts](#).

One consistently good podcast is [Coverville](#), which plays covers of songs you probably know by bands you probably don't and vice versa. You haven't truly heard The Backstreet Boys' "I Want It That Way" until you've heard the Texas punk band [Dynamite Boy](#) rock it.

For now, though, most of my regular feeds are professionally produced. Essentially, I'm using my iPod as a TiVo for my radio. For example, WNYC's excellent "[On The Media](#)" is delivered to me each week via iPodder. I simply synch my iPod and listen at my leisure. In the past I'd only hear bits and pieces of it, depending on my proximity to a radio at air time.

At the risk of overwhelming my brain with information, I'll keep hunting for good independent podcast content. Like a hog rooting for truffles in the soft spring loam, I'll have to work at it. But I know that ultimately, I'll be rewarded.

Cora Nucci is a senior editor at [TechWeb](#).

The TechWeb Spin TechWeb's editors are busy assigning and editing and linking and otherwise creating the content you see on [TechWeb.com](#) and the [Pipeline](#) sites, but we wanted the chance to tell you what we see and what we think about it directly. So, each week, The TechWeb Spin will bring you the informed insight and unique perspective of a different TechWeb editor: Fredric Paul, Scot Finnie, Tim Moran, Stuart Glascock, Mitch Wagner, and Cora Nucci. We hope you like it, and even if you don't we hope you take the time to [tell us what you think about it](#).

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