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Podcasting: It's all over the dial

By Marco R. della Cava, USA TODAY

WAYNE, Wis. — *Psst! Over here! We're on the set of the hot Dawn and Drew Show. It's about to start taping, so let's listen in as these stars get set. (Related: [Web podcasting catches on](#))*



Drew Domkus and Dawn Miceli of Wayne, Wis., talk about anything and everything on their show, which attracts about 9,000 downloads.

By John Zich, USA TODAY

Dawn: "What bit are we doing first?"

Drew: "Um, I dunno."

Dawn: "I scribbled something here, but I can't read it. Oh, well."

A dog erupts in a yapping fit.

Dawn: "Zoe! Be quiet!"

The barking stops. Dawn lights a few candles.

Drew: "OK, are we ready yet?"

Dawn: "Hang on, let me swallow my gum first." Gulp. "OK, let's go."

A theme song plays, laced with X-rated heavy breathing.

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"Hello, kittens," Dawn purrs. "I'm a little freaked out today ... "

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And so is the concept of entertainment as we know it. Because *The Dawn and Drew Show* isn't on television or radio. Rather, it's the nation's most popular program among a new breed of free amateur chatfests available at an Internet connection near you.

Once upon a time in America, during the gilded reign of Johnny Carson, the rules were clear: Hollywood provided the candy, and people made time to devour it.

But this Web-based phenomenon puts the *real* back in reality programming, emanating not from slick studios but Anyhome USA, including this creaky 1800s farmhouse owned by performance artist Dawn Miceli, 28, and her Web-designer husband, Drew Domkus, 33.

Top 10 podcasts

1. **The Dawn and Drew Show**, dawnanddrew.com: Married-couple banter.
2. **Engadget**, engadget.com: Technology news and gadget reviews.
3. **Reel Reviews**, mwgblog.com: Reviews of current and classic movies.
4. **IT Conversations**, itconversations.com: Hard-core tech talk.
5. **The Daily Source Code**, live.curry.com: Adam Curry with podcasting news and the latest shows.
6. **Coverville**, coverville.com: All about cover songs, the good, the bad and the never-should-have-been-recorded.
7. **Free Talk Live**, freetalklive.com: Political talk radio with a libertarian perspective.
8. **The MacCast**, maccast.blogspot.com: All things Macintosh, by and for Mac nuts.
9. **The Rock and Roll Geek Show**, americanheartbreak.com/movabletype: One fan trails rock's less charted waters.
10. **Tracks Up the Tree**, upthetree.com: Music show featuring artists whose tunes are available online.

Source: PodcastAlley.com; ranked by fan vote

Just after dinner three or four times each week, Dawn and Drew plop down in their Salvation Army-decorated living room and record 30 minutes of funny, inane and often racy husband-and-wife yakking — a show about nothing. But how they're delivering the program worldwide is quite something.

The concept involves recording what amounts to your audio blog directly to computer, posting it to a server and making it available to fans via free software that scours the Web for the show. Once detected, the broadcast is downloaded automatically for transfer to a portable MP3 device such as an iPod.

Hence this medium's name: podcasting.

What does this all mean?

To borrow from *Seinfeld's* George Costanza: You adore dissecting old movies? That's a show! Yammering on about your prized car? That's a show! Spouting off about how music stinks? That's a show!

Truly programming by the people, for the people. No big overhead. No censors. No pesky professional standards to live up to.

"Dawn and Drew are the new reality programming, two normal people communicating naturally, no scripts, no planning," says Adam Curry, 40, the former MTV VJ turned computer geek who is considered one of the godfathers of podcasting for helping design the digital tools that make it work.

"We still have a ways to go before podcasting becomes an easy, one-button operation for users," says Curry, referring to the software rigmarole necessary for a computer to seek out and download podcasts. "But even despite that, *Dawn and Drew*

and a bunch of other shows already have a global audience."

Much of that is thanks to Curry, whose own podcast, retrievable at DailySourceCode.com, touts new amateur efforts. Those include *The Skinny on Sports*, a 10-minute recap of the week in sports offered up by Andy and Matt Skinn, two brothers from Calgary.

"We started last November and joked that if we had 20 listeners by Christmas, we'd keep going. We've got more than 500," says Andy, 26, an MD and Ph.D. candidate whose brother is a basketball coach. "We love sports, and we love the thought that there are some people out there who like what we say."

The same motivation drives Michael Geoghegan, 36, a Manhattan Beach, Calif., insurance marketing company owner. His devotion to movies — he has 1,200 titles in his basement — spurred him to begin podcasting *Reel Reviews*. Each segment focuses on the merits and minutiae of one favorite film.

"At first my wife was like, 'Uh, what are you doing in our basement with a microphone?' " says Geoghegan. "But to reach so many people is so great. It's like when you play golf with your buddies. You hit a good shot, and three guys applaud. But this is 3,000 people getting into what you're doing."

Enough folks have applauded to cause mainstream site DVDTalk.com to use some of his reviews on their own podcast show, DVD Talk Radio. Geoghegan isn't satisfied with that coup. He now is producing his friends' podcast, *Grape Radio*, a chat show about wine.

"Podcasting obviously is still relatively small," he says. "But who's to say where it could go?"

Some commercial radio networks have jumped on board: National Public Radio and British Broadcasting Corp. offer some programming in podcast form.

Smart move, says Peter Sealey, co-director of the Center for Marketing and Technology at the University of California-Berkeley: "(Radio) has to contend with a new world where the consumer controls when they listen to programming *and* the programming itself."

Unique and familiar, all in one

While practical shows such as *Reel Reviews* have a following, there is evidence that what really gets people fired up is quirkiness.

AtPodcastAlley.com, shows are ranked according to a site visitor poll. There are religious musings (*Sup With Jesus*), lifelong DJ fantasies sprung to life (*Rock and Roll Geek Show*), and ruminations of a drag queen (*Yeast Radio*). Crowning the top of the heap is *The Dawn and Drew Show*, with 9,000 downloads for many of its 70-odd episodes.

Crazy? Try classic. Some of the most popular radio shows of the 1940s, including *Breakfast With Dorothy and Dick* and *Tex and Jinx*, featured spouses bantering about the mundane. "People loved to connect to voices that sounded just like them," says Monique Fortune, radio curator at the Museum of Television & Radio in New York. "And apparently they still do."

The Dawn and Drew Show premiered Sept. 23, the 10th anniversary of the couple's meeting at a club where Drew was playing keyboards in a band. Dawn decided it was

love at first sight. Drew doesn't disagree. He's that kind of guy.

Fast-forward a frenetic decade. The couple moved from Wisconsin to Los Angeles and then back to Milwaukee because L.A. was too nutty. Eventually, even Milwaukee proved too much of a scene, and the duo pounced on this ultra-rural hamlet an hour north of town.

Ever the techie, Drew had started listening to Curry's podcast. So on a lark last fall, the couple decided to fire up their Apple laptop, got its GarageBand software running and just started to talk. About art, sex, dogs, ghost stories, music. And a bit more about sex.

They even pretended to have sex on their show (picture the couple jumping up and down on their squeaky sofa), which soured a few fans but turned on even more. E-mails to their Web site mostly plead for more risqué material.

Shocking is Dawn's domain. Her solid physique and magenta Betty Page-like hairdo contrasts with her vixenish voice. She often sounds like a young girl lost in an adult novelty store. Drew is her Ed McMahon, a willing straight man and foil for her disjointed, amusing and into-the-blue probings.

One fan nails their odd appeal.

"They sound like the people I knew in college," says Scott Saunders, 33, a tech services whiz from Blacksburg, Va. "I'll come home, eat, surf the TV a bit, but usually there's nothing good on. And then around 11 p.m., I'll turn on *Dawn and Drew*. And it's like I'm hanging out with old friends."

On with the show

By now, the couple's four miniature Pinschers — Zoe, Spec, Raizin and Hercules — are sleeping. As the minutes tick away on the kitchen timer, Drew gives a shout-out to fans in Belmont, Calif., while Dawn punches him hard in the arm.

Drew: "What was that for?"

Dawn: "Nothing."

Drew: "Oh. Hey, did you hear that Bill Gates gave, like, \$750 million to help vaccinate people?"

Dawn: "So?"

Drew: "What do you mean, so? I bet you've never given any money to anyone, right?"

Pause.

Drew: "I'll take that as a solid 'no.' "

Dawn: "Fine. Hey, I give money to the Girl Scouts. For cookies. That reminds me, you didn't get our order in, did you?"

Silence.

Dawn: "Well, we're almost out of time. My sister's going to jail soon (for a DUI), but after her two weeks in there, she'll come on the show to tell us about it."

And that's a pod-wrap from this steamy corner of snow-covered Wayne. Whatever this innovative audio postcard is, Lake Wobegon it ain't.

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