



Technology

Pod Squad

A growing army of 'podcasters' is revolutionizing the way we listen to radio

By Caleb O. Brown

"Unless you've been living under a rock, you've heard about this thing called podcasting," the radio host says with an air of superiority. "It's where the kids are taking their iPods and MP3 players and downloading music and talk shows from the Internet and listening to them whenever they want. I've got a podcaster in the studio with me, Mr. Brian Ibbott, who has a cover music podcast called 'Coverville.'"

The gravel-voiced host introduces Ibbott, who offers a quick explanation of "podcasting," a new form of delivering audio programs without bulky, expensive transmitters and the ominous threat of FCC fines. The user simply downloads a "podcast receiver," software that scampers out into the Internet to find the latest edition of any of thousands of programs, then listens on a computer or MP3 player. A few of them are good. Most are terrible.

The host then gleefully introduces "This Love" by Maroon 5 and Ibbott begins talking to him as if off-mic.

"Don't you ever get tired of listening of this Maroon 5 song?" Ibbott asks, pleadingly. The host responds defensively, "It's a hit. Gotta play the hits. Gotta play it a lot. Gotta play 'em over and over. That's what radio's all about."

The interview, in fact, is a put-on from a recent edition of "Coverville," with Ibbott both playing himself and the arrogant "host." You get the idea of what he thinks of contemporary hit radio.

Ibbott, who lives in Denver, obeys what ought to be the cardinal rule of radio: Respect the value of your audience's time.

And he's got an audience.

Each installment of "Coverville" (www.coverville.com) is downloaded more than 12,000 times. Ibbott produces the show with a 12-inch Apple Powerbook, a small mixing board and a stereo microphone. Oh, and he is allowed to play all that music via an ASCAP license that he helped foster just for podcasters. The license keeps the authorities at bay.

A merger of the words "iPod" and "broadcasting," podcasting refers to the growing practice of downloading radio-style programming from the web and listening to it — at your convenience. A cousin of Internet "blogging," it significantly lowers the barrier between listeners and people who have something to say.

That low barrier to entry is what intrigued entrepreneur Michael Geoghegan when he began producing his "Reel Reviews" program. The Newport Beach, Calif., man has spun his vast knowledge of movies into an entertaining podcast (www.reelreviewsradio.com), where he waxes enthusiastic about what he considers to be the best movies of all time.

"My goal is that when I'm done that someone will want to see that film," he says.



Photo by Brian Tietz
Briann Ibbott of Denver recorded part of his podcast program, "Coverville" while in Frankfort recently.

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Geoghegan spends about 15 minutes once a week talking about a particular movie into a microphone. That recording becomes his podcast. But his reviews are not just reviews. They interweave analysis with little nuggets about actors, filmmakers and scenes.



Geoghegan, "an entrepreneur who sells insurance," also executive-produces "Grape Radio," a podcast at www.graperadio.com that is devoted to wine.

And he's already got a sponsor, an insurance brokerage that is looking to make inroads with Geoghegan's tech-savvy and upwardly mobile audience. Meanwhile, he recently received — unsolicited — several copies of the hit flick "Sideways" to give away to listeners to help promote the film's DVD release. Now *that's* target marketing.

And with the cost of setting up a podcast at virtually nothing, anyone with a compelling message can develop a following.

"Just start," he says to the would-be podcaster. "Don't worry about the quality. Just start. Learn from your mistakes and you'll improve."



Caleb O. Brown has a podcast, too, but his isn't as cool as the ones mentioned above. On "Kentucky Focus," he talks about Kentucky politics and public policy, and his guests are typically smarter than he is. You can download the podcast at kentucky.blogspot.com.



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