



National
Co-ordinating
Centre for
Public Engagement

How to... ...start podcasting

Getting started

Before you begin, think about what you want to achieve. You will need to ask yourself a series of questions:

- Podcasts can either be viewed/heard online or can be downloaded and transferred to an MP3 player. Think about your audience – is a podcast an appropriate medium for them? Would they be likely to download a podcast?
- What is your podcast about? In order to market it and prepare effectively you will need a clear and specific idea about what your podcast is trying to achieve? What makes your podcast different?
- Will you make an audio or a video podcast? You will need to think carefully about how you write the script – taking into account visual priorities for video podcasts and sounds for audio podcasts
- Where will you host it? From your own website or elsewhere?
- How will you attract listeners/viewers? Why would they be interested?
- Can you tie the podcast into another activity? Is it a one-off podcast or a regular series?
- Do you need any partners? Will you have a co-host? Who could you ask to be an interview subject?
- What sound effects will you need and how will you go about getting them?

What do you need?

There are a number of essential components which you will need to purchase or hire before you can make your podcast:

- A portable, digital audio recording device (such as a high quality Dictaphone). You can record podcasts straight onto the computer but in order to do interviews, capture other sounds and record outside or in special venues, a portable recording device is essential
- If you are making a video podcast – you will also need a digital video camera and a tripod
- A decent quality microphone (at least one, but it depends on how many hosts your show has)
- Headphones – important for sound checks and getting the sound balance right. (Headphones that cover your ears are best as they are more effective at isolating the sound in your recording from outside distractions)
- Software for recording, editing and publishing sound. There are a number of decent podcast editors available to download online (e.g. Audacity, Propoganda, Gabcast, Odeo Studio, iPodcast Producer). Some of this software is available for purchase but there are some decent podcast editors which are available to download for free i.e. Audacity

Making Preparations

- It is essential to prepare before recording your podcast. You will need to be organised in order to capture everything that you need. When putting an audio programme together, it is very difficult to go back and insert sound during the editing process – this is because the

venue and the background noise all have an impact on the acoustics. If there is inconsistent background noise, the audio may sound strange once you edit it together.

- How long do you want your podcast to be? If it is a long 'programme' then you will need to think about ways to break it up a bit for the listener. Will there be a 'package' of events which will be introduced from the 'studio' or will it all be set in one place – with interviews and discussion? Remember to keep it as brief as possible – what may seem like a short script to you can feel much longer when it is listened to. Remember to capture more sound than you need. You will be surprised how much you lose during the edit. A good guide is to record about 2 minutes of sound for every 1 minute of the podcast.
- Think about where you will record your sound. Different venues give the podcast a 'different feel'. Recording 'on location' or outside can provide additional interest for your listeners. It will also make interviews sound more informal than those that take place inside a quiet room or studio. But there are other things to think about when recording outside or in noisy venues – potential problems with sound inconsistencies that you will need to be prepared for.
- In order to make your podcast more interesting for the listener and in order to illustrate what you mean – you might also want to create some sound effects. Think about what sounds you require and how you will capture them. Not only will this make your podcast more interesting and help you to structure the programme (music and sound effects are useful for linking between different points and sections of the podcast) but it is also useful for the listener. Listening to a stream of speech audio can be draining – you should aim to break up the sound in order to give them a break and allow them to digest what has been said, before moving on.
- If you are making a video podcast, you will also need to capture visual footage. In some cases the host or interviewer may wish to face the camera, but this is not very interesting for the entire podcast. You may wish to have a 'voice over' but in that case you will need visual footage to 'talk over'. In order to break up the visual elements of the podcast you will need to record some 'cutaways' (close ups or scans of the room to illustrate the point or just give the viewer a feel for the location/event/whatever is happening).

Make a list of everything you need to collect:

- Who do you need to get interviews from?
- What sound effects do you need to record?
- What 'linking' voice footage do you need? (i.e. in order to introduce a new point, a new interview subject or an experiment.)
- If you are making a video podcast – make a list of the 'cutaways' you would like to record
- If you are performing an experiment – you will need props and consumables. Make sure you have lots of resources to enable you to run the experiment or demonstration several times

Writing the script

You will need to decide what you are trying to say. What are the learning outcomes or messages? What is it about? Try to stay on message. A short podcast is not a lecture so you need to define a small and specific topic to discuss.

Map out the 'arc' or 'narrative' of the recording. What do you need to say? You will need an introduction, a middle and a conclusion. The introduction should explain what your podcast is all about and should map out what is to come – in order to get people hooked and to keep them listening. You may wish to insert markers throughout the script in order to encourage retention e.g. 'later we will hear from...', 'we will find out more about that later...', 'keep listening to find out why'.

How will you illustrate your points? It is more difficult for some people to follow complicated explanations when they are listening rather than reading. Keep your language clear, concise and free of jargon. You might wish to run an experiment or activity in order to investigate and illustrate your points. But remember, if it is an audio only podcast you will need to think carefully about the sound effects and the commentary so that listeners can understand what is going on.

Podcasting is an informal medium – so remember to keep the tone natural and conversational. Remember to write linking paragraphs – not merely to introduce different segments of the show but also to introduce your interviewees, and to structure your interview. For example, you might wish to break up one of their answers by recording an introduction to the next point.

Remember to write a 'wrap up' to your podcast which summarises/concludes the main points. You may wish to thank your interviewees and the audience for listening. If you are planning on running a series of podcasts, you could provide an outline of what your next podcast will contain in order to encourage your audience to return.

Recording your podcast

Before you begin to record your podcast, it would be a good idea to rehearse your script. Get a friend or colleague to listen to it or record yourself and play it back. Some things read perfectly well on paper but when they are spoken out loud they can sound stilted and long-winded. Some words might also be tongue twisters when spoken aloud – you might prefer to edit some of your sentences to make them easier to read.

A good tip is to 'edit' your script - with a pen or highlighter – to highlight words which need particular stresses and to mark your pauses and breaths. Remember to speak slowly and clearly – if you speed through it, it will sound garbled to the listener.

Make sure you do a sound balance before recording your podcast (and a white balance for a video podcast – inconsistent light can be as problematic as inconsistent sound). It is a good idea to ask your interviewees to state their name and a few details about them while you are checking the sound – this way you also have a record of exactly who is talking at any one time – which will be helpful during the edit.

When you are recording your podcast, there may be interruptions. If there is a constant sound in the background, such as a continual low hum, or the hubbub of people talking in the background this won't matter. But inconsistent sound could be a problem. If a plane flies overhead, or

someone walks close by talking very loudly, this could pose a problem during the editing stages. In these instances, simply stop recording and wait for the sound to pass. If you are interviewing someone it is a good idea to go back to the previous question and start again rather than attempting to pick up where you left off – it is difficult to try to piece together their points if they are cut off mid-sentence.

In some cases you may be recording an 'action' such as an experiment. But don't try to capture it all in one take – it would be a good idea to record it a number of times, in order to capture different elements which can then be pieced together later, (particularly if you are making a video podcast). You might wish to record some parts of the action with a 'close up', while others would be 'long shots' showing the entire scene/experiment. You might also want to cutaway to record the reaction of the audience if there are people viewing the experiment.

Editing your podcast

The next stage is to put your podcast together. You will need to download a digital sound/podcast editor first. You should edit out all of the mistakes, re-order it as necessary and also remove a number of 'ums' or long silences. But be careful not to over-edit. You need a certain number of ums, breaths and silences to ensure that it sounds natural.

You might also want to insert sound effects and, if you are feeling confident, try fading music in and out.

Think about the transition between different topics or segments of your podcast – you might want to separate them with music or a jingle to give listeners a chance to digest what they have just heard before moving on. Beware of copyright issues when using music and other sound clips. If you are using sound effects you have created – these belong to you. If you interview or record someone else speaking then it is safe to assume that they have granted you license to use their voice – however you should check with them before you start. When it comes to other sound clips, make sure you do have permission to use them. There are a number of sources for copyright free podcast music. For example:

- www.podsafeaudio.com
- www.stockmusic.com
- www.royaltyfreemusic.com/music-for-podcasts.htm

Publishing your podcast

Decide where you would like to publish your podcast. There are a number of websites that will host podcasts and your podcast sound editor may also publish your podcast for you. Alternatively, you may want to host it from your own website. The preferred format for audio podcasts is as an MP3 file, so remember to convert it before publishing.

If you are technically bold, you might explore the use of RSS.

Think about how you will market the podcast. How will people find out about it and how do they access it?

What it can be used for

Podcasts are useful for:

- Targeting a certain demographic – particularly those that tend to use digital technology. (But beware – don't assume that podcast users will listen to your podcast just because it is something they routinely do. Think carefully about content as well as the medium itself)
- If you want audience members to participate in a prolonged engagement with a particular subject matter, a series of podcasts will help to continue the momentum
- Online audiences are large but you can also target narrowly, gaining a large audience with a narrow demographic
- With a podcast you do not have to engage in 'real-time'. You can 'do your bit' at a time that suits you and which fits in around your workload, while still reaching audiences at times that are suitable to them
- There is no need for a physical venue with all the inherent costs and access requirements that other methods of engagement entail

Things to bear in mind

- How will your audience find your podcast? The world-wide-web is vast and sprawling. People are unlikely to just stumble across your podcast by accident. You will need to think of ways to make the audience aware that it is available
- Why would people want to listen/watch/download your podcast? You need to sell it well. Think of ways to encourage them to listen. Who are your audience? What appeals to them? What is different about your podcast?
- Securing successful uptake of a podcast is difficult – many never get listened to – so don't be too disheartened if your audience figures are low. Be realistic when setting targets
- Don't forget that there are some already established and highly successful podcast makers out there e.g. The Naked Scientists have frequently been high hitters in the iTunes download charts and also have streaming slots on local radio. You might prefer to contact organisations such as these and pay them to help you make a podcast or to stream your podcast for you. (Or perhaps you could serve as an expert interviewee on one of their regular programmes?)

Cost and time requirements

Example costs

The cost of making a podcast depends on the quality of the equipment you use to create it. But this would be an upfront cost so that subsequent podcasts can be made at little extra cost. The cost of a podcast will depend largely on what you put into it i.e. if you choose to record it in a specific location you may need to pay expenses for travel and entrance. You may also choose to offer some remuneration to your interviewees. If you are conducting an experiment as part of your podcast there will be a cost associated with consumables.

Digital Voice Recorder: From £30-£300

Microphone: From £10-£80

Headphones: From £15-£60

Digital Video Camera: From £150-£1000

Podcast editing software: Free - £300

Example timings

Planning and recording: Before you record your podcast you will need to spend time writing your script and recruiting contributors. You might also want to check the location prior to recording. You will need to allow approximately half a day for recording your podcast. (Allow enough time to rehearse your script, rehearse your demo or experiment, check all your recording equipment, prepare your contributors and to pause and repeat during recording).

Editing: Editing sound can be very long-winded and time consuming, especially if you are inexperienced. If you have never done it before it could take as long as a couple of days.

Staff time needed: Variable

Top tips

Before you decide to become the next big thing in podcasting, you might want to think about ways to get involved, without having to equip yourself with a whole host of new technical skills and expensive kit.

- Find out if your media or marketing departments can help you. They may already have equipment you can borrow and should be able to advise you on the right tone and style for your target audience
- Someone from the IT department may also be able to advise you on execution and lend you some kit
- Your University might have a student radio station, with equipment and technical expertise
- Perhaps there is a colleague in your department who has already styled themselves as the University's podcasting guru. See if you can work in partnership
- There may be people in external institutions running podcast projects who need your help. For example, 'the Naked Scientists' run a regular series of podcasts. You could volunteer to serve as an expert interviewee or to run a demonstration for them.