

Podcasting as a New Media Marketing Tool

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Wikipedia.com describes a podcast as "a series of audio or video digital-media files which is distributed over the Internet by syndicated download, through Web feeds, to portable media players and personal computers. Though the same content may also be made available by direct download or streaming, a podcast is distinguished from other digital-media formats by its ability to be syndicated, subscribed to, and downloaded automatically when new content is added."

It was the Apple iPod that opened the door to this new media format and the name was created by combining iPod with broadcast. In reality, podcast are narrowcasting, where content developers create and deliver audio or video files to a select group of people who ask for it by subscribing. This ability to let content consumers "pull" the information they want to them is attractive to marketers as it tends to be more effective than the old "push" method of bombarding prospects with material until they buy.

In fact, marketers are finding out that well produced podcasts can be very effective at shortening the sales cycle as they open doors with prospects even before a company salesperson makes the call. The key, of course, lies in producing good podcasts.

How to Produce a Good Podcast

While producing multimedia may be viewed by many as an art form, there is more science than art in producing good podcasts. Good production is primarily a result of knowing who the podcast will serve and what the company hopes it will accomplish. It starts with making some decisions about the show to be produced.

What is the key objective of the podcast?

To keep listeners engaged, your podcast should only include information that supports the end goal. If your objective is to inform listeners about a new company initiative, don't waste time talking about the weather in your home city. Capturing listeners within the first few seconds is important. In addition, if your objective is to get listeners to download a white paper, make sure this opportunity is highlighted throughout the podcast.

What value does the podcast offer the listener?

Marketers are often so focused on the messages they must deliver to target markets that they forget to add value in every communication. Prospects will not "pull" information to them that does not add value. Failure to remember this is a major cause of podcast initiative failure.

What technology will be employed?

There are many different software applications that can be used to create a good podcast, but the technology should never be visible to the listener. They don't care how you made the podcast, they only care about the value it brings to them.

What is the call to action?

There should be a call to action in every podcast. Even shows that are designed primarily to educate a group of prospects should have a next step that is easy for the listener to take. Without this interaction, the podcast loses much of its power. Even though web statistic tracking can show you where your listeners are coming from, you won't really know who they are unless you can get them to interact with you.

Promoting the podcast

While having a well produced podcast is certainly an accomplishment to be proud of, it does the company little good if it is not viewed and enjoyed by the target audience. Here are some ideas for promoting your finished podcasts.

Post it to your website.

Your website will benefit from multimedia assets because these are the elements that create interest. They bring in website visitors and they keep them on the site longer. But don't hide the Podcast under a text link at the bottom of the page. Create a colorful graphic and post the show above the fold.

A well produced Podcast will do a better job of explaining your value proposition than many pages of boring website text. If you have a good site master, you can embed the MP3 audio file into a flash box. You can get as fancy as you want. If you choose to go with a simple link, make sure you let your website visitors know what to expect. Let visitors know that it's an audio file and give the size in megabytes. That way, if the file takes a few seconds to load (which is likely, given that the vast majority of businesses are wired with broadband) they won't be as likely to click away in fear.

Send it to your mailing list.

Just like the rest of your company news, the very best place to send your new podcast is to the people you want to buy your products or services. Most companies already know who they want to sell to. They have pre-qualified many of their prospects and are in the process of working them through the sales cycle. While these folks may not be the most eager to get your news, they're the people you most likely had in mind when you created the Podcast. So make sure they get it.

If your podcast is well designed, packed with valuable information that is critical to their success, they'll receive the material gladly and your corporate goodwill will increase. Furthermore, they will become more educated and will be moved automatically further along in the sales cycle. Even if you know your clients have subscribed to your RSS feed and will automatically receive your next Podcast, send them a notice. And be sure to ask them to pass it along to others that might be interested in the material.

Send a link to the media.

Send news of the podcasts to the reporters and editors that write about your part of the business. These guys are always looking for good stories and Podcasting is a hot story right now. Make sure you're your public relations firm knows you want to release the fact that you have produced a new program so they can get the news out to the trade press. Producing a Podcast is a good news item that is likely to get covered.

Send it to the bloggers.

It's great to have people talking about your company. It's even better to have them talking about it in a forum that is open to a big audience. Even though Web Logs (blogs) aren't considered mass media because they typically cater to niche audiences, many blogs in the real estate and financial services businesses are becoming fairly prominent. There are a number of bloggers in this space that would also like to hear about your new Podcast. Find out who is blogging about your industry and make sure you send them a link to your new show.

Add Podcast Links to Marketing Material.

Your marketing department already uses a number of tools to get the word out about what your firm offers. Make sure that you add a link to your Podcast program on each of these tools. Many can remember back to the days when a corporate e-mail or website address was rarely seen on a business card. Few companies fail to include that important information today. In the near future, the company's Podcasts will be just as important as they will be the first stop a new prospect makes before deciding to pursue a deeper relationship with the company. Point to them in ads and other marketing material.