



Finding Your Voice

Start Podcasting with
Open Source Tools

by Dale Qualls

Given the popularity of podcasting, it should perhaps come as no surprise that the legal community is embracing this medium to keep its clients and prospective clients informed and educated.

Inexpensive, Innovative Marketing Tool

Podcasting has the potential to be an important part of any firm's marketing plan. Perhaps you or others in your firm have aspirations to become the next Edward R. Murrow or Wolfman Jack. Alternatively, you may want to take a slightly more cutting-edge approach to an existing blog and use audio to convey your message. Whatever the case, podcasting is an excellent technology for reaching your audience on a more personal level.

Because the content is delivered in the author's own voice and inflection, podcasting is an instant hit as an alternative to blogging, especially when the meaning might be easily missed or misconstrued in typewritten text, as when using sarcasm.

The open source software (OSS) community offers a number of great podcasting tools. Generally speaking, when compared to proprietary software, good open source software requires little or no investment, is much more flexible in its use, is standards-compliant and simply functions better. Given this general superiority, it is little surprise that podcasting is another area in which OSS excels.

Testing, Testing: One, Two, Three

So, what do you need to create a podcast? The list is short. Besides your content, you'll need at least the following to create a podcast:

- **Microphone – choose a quality microphone and be sure it has a foam cover which will act as a pop filter (to avoid a popping sound when the letters p and s are used).**
- **Digital recording device – a handheld digital voice recorder works well for portable recording, or use a computer.**
- **Audio application – here is where open source software comes in. There are several open source audio applications, the most popular being Audacity, which can be found at audacity.sourceforge.net.**

The Finishing Touches

Regardless of how careful you are when recording your podcast, you'll always need to edit it in postproduction by adjusting sound levels, changing the audio format and applying ID3 tags to the audio. (ID3 tags are what allow podcatchers and applications such as iTunes to display the title, artist, genre and other metadata of the audio.) Postproduction is where the real power of Audacity comes into play. You can manipulate all aspects of the audio, including adjusting sound levels, filtering out unwanted noise and exporting your podcast into various audio formats, such as the open source format Ogg Vorbis, found at www.vorbis.com.

Another option for producing your podcasts is Dynebolic. Found at www.dynebolic.org, Dynebolic is a bootable CD that features a full audio suite and only requires 64MB of RAM to run, which means it can easily run on older commodity hardware. Despite its small computing footprint, it offers a large number of audio recording and editing features, including the ability to broadcast streaming audio using Muse, found at muse.dyne.org.

To add a professional element to your podcast, you may want some opening or closing music. Visit Podsafe Audio at www.podsafeaudio.com and sample its archive of free-to-use audio. This music is under the "Creative Commons" license, which gives rights similar to the Gnu Public License. Another source for audio is The Freesound Project at www.freesound.org.

Taking It to the Web

After you've recorded, edited and polished your podcast, the next step is publishing your podcast to your website. To do this, you can use Podcast Generator on your PHP-enabled web server. This software, downloadable from podcastgen.sourceforge.net, can be used to upload your audio files, dynamically create "Recent Podcasts" and "Podcast Archive" web pages, create a streaming MP3 and much more.

Now that you have a podcast, you'll need to maintain contact with your audience. By creating an RSS feed for your website, interested listeners can subscribe to the podcast and be alerted when there's a new release through podcast aggregators such as Juice, found at juicereceiver.sourceforge.net, or iTunes. While Podcast Generator can create RSS feeds, List Garden — available at www.softwaregarden.com — is a multiplatform software that can be installed either on a workstation or a web server (as a CGI application) to create and maintain your RSS feeds.

Are you a Microsoft SharePoint shop? There's even an open source podcasting add-on for SharePoint. While the Podcasting Kit for SharePoint does require SharePoint Server 2007, Silverlight 2 and Microsoft Expression Encoder 2, it allows you to publish audio and video podcasts while making use of the rich content delivery of Silverlight. Visit www.codeplex.com/pks for more information.

Speak Up with OSS

Though we've barely scratched the surface of the available open source tools available for podcasting, those discussed herein are the best of breed, and they'll certainly get you podcasting quickly and professionally. There are a plethora of podcasting projects on Sourceforge at www.sourceforge.net, so jump in and explore to find the solutions that best fit your needs. With these open source software resources and the flexible, personal and visible medium of podcasting, you can give your firm a whole new voice. **ILTA**



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