



## Training part 1 – Podcasting: Pod training goes pop

by Debra Blundell.

If you had to hazard a guess as to what comedian Ricky Gervais held a world record for, you might think it was for non-stop robotic dancing or telling the most jokes in a minute, or something equally silly. In fact, he earned his place in the Guinness Book of World Records by having the most widely downloaded podcast ever. His audio podcasts, launched on Guardian Unlimited last year, were downloaded over three million times in three months, which only goes to show what a powerful medium podcasting is becoming.

The term 'podcasting' merges 'iPod' and 'broadcasting' to describes downloadable broadcasts to any audio device (not just Apple iPods), including PCs, laptops, MP3 players, pocket PCs and audio-enabled mobile phones. In a few short years, it has become the open-access radio of its age, with anyone and everyone recording their thoughts, musings, wisdom and advice for the world at large to listen to as they go about their day. While it's the podcasts from well-known entertainers like Gervais, Russell Brand and Little Britain's David Walliams that are grabbing the headlines, there are some exciting applications for podcasting in the business world too. One of the best of these is training – an activity that most organisations need and few employees enjoy. If podcasting can take the drag out of training and put the enjoyment in, you could be on to a winner.

Podcasting is ideally suited as a medium for training programmes for a number of reasons. Firstly, it's mobile and on demand. Staff don't have to take a day out from work to sit in a classroom or go abseiling to learn something new. They can download the latest training module to their chosen device and listen to it when it suits them – at their desk while they eat their sandwiches, in the car while they're driving between meetings, while they're running or on a packed commuter train. Not only does this appeal to time-pressed execs, but people often enjoy and get more out of training when it's taken away from the stuffy confines of the classroom.

Once you subscribe to a podcast via a web page, a technology called RSS ensures that the latest instalment is automatically delivered to iTunes or a similar application on your desktop, so it's ready and waiting when you need it. You can then either listen to it at your desk or download it to a mobile device. The delivery of each new podcast subtly reminds trainees of the need to train, unlike a book, which can be easily tossed aside to gather dust. There are advantages for the company too. Podcasts may be cutting-edge but they are also cheap to make, cost nothing to distribute and need little in the way of special equipment.

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It's not all about delivery and cost, however. Podcasting offers some distinct advantages that tap into the way we learn. Listening as a learning method doesn't suit everyone – some need visual stimulation, others interaction – but many people find it one of the most effective ways of picking up something new. Unlike classroom learning, delivering a course as a podcast gives trainees a chance to work through short modules at their own pace and review information as often as they like. This feature is especially useful for international organisations or companies that employ a lot of foreigners – a chain of coffee bars for example - where English may not be employees' first language.

Trainees don't just have control over when, where and how often they listen to training modules. The technology allows them to specify exactly which modules are relevant or interesting to them when they subscribe and just those items will be automatically delivered to the trainee. It's also possible (if not always practical) to personalise a podcast, with the tutor creating files of feedback on the group's work for broadcast.

The very best podcasts form part of a much broader, 'blended' training solution that might include video podcasts, blogs, social networks, interactive pdfs and even good old fashioned manuals. In the second part of this article, we'll look at how all these elements can work together.

Of course, there's one thing that's truly essential to a successful podcast, and that's content. Without engaging content, you're heading straight for the delete button. Getting professional help with the content as well as the technology is often a good idea, even if it's only to show you the ropes. But, if you are confident enough to go it alone, follow our tips (below) and go for it! You may not be the Ricky Gervais of podcasting, but if you've got a little of the John Cleese of training in you, you have nothing to lose...

- Podcasts aren't the same as audio cassettes or lectures. Making the content engaging and entertaining is essential. Use humour, parody, add made-up 'adverts' or poke fun at your competition.
- Keep the style conversational and relaxed. It's not a lecture.
- Good writing skills are essential. Either farm your project out to professionals from the start or write the basic content and employ a copywriter to 'polish' it.
- Good voice skills are also essential. You don't have to speak like Joanna Lumley, but the narrator does have to have good clear diction, a comprehensible accent, a well-pitched voice (too high is annoying, too low difficult to hear) and an engaging, easy speaking style.
- Bad podcasts are a real turn-off. Avoid fuzzy audio, muddled structure or incorrect content.
- Structure your podcasts like a presentation: tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them.
- Make podcasting part of a blended training solution. (Read more on that in next month's id.ology.)

**For more information on creating podcasts for training or for help with content, contact Gary Clark on [gc@indigocreative.co.uk](mailto:gc@indigocreative.co.uk)**