



Your Short Cut to Knowledge

Podcasting for Trainers and Educators

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BONUS: This Short Cut
contains embedded files


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we have presented these various “levels” as either/or. In fact, another mark of a capable learning consultant is the ability to use these efficiently and effectively, in combination.

For example, a major customer care initiative might incorporate a suite of methods:

- ▶ An announcement e-mail, with a short persuasive [Breeze](#) presentation in which the CEO narrates four slides identifying the benefits of the new program.
- ▶ A three-part podcast (20 minutes each) detailing the fundamentals of “how we care for customers here.”
- ▶ Classroom sessions for all supervisors whose team members have direct customer contacts (objective: how to coach your team to be customer “stars”).
- ▶ Several short, captivating demo movies on the new Customer Problem Tracker application. Because employees know the “why,” the “how” can be demonstrated with no frills.

Question 2: “There are so many different deployment tools. How can I select the right tool for any particular training objective?”

In this section, we have answered this question by proceeding from the least expensive and intrusive training methods and asking, “Will this work?” If they will work, we will use them. If not, we will move to the next level.

Podcasting “Best Fits”

If your learning customers think of podcasting as at best a supplement to conventional deployment methods, you need to give them some additional knowledge. A good place to begin is to

focus on several features of podcasting that appear straightforward but might be difficult to appreciate fully without firsthand experience. We've touched on these elements before, but now we want to recognize their full impact. Then you can open this new door for your colleagues.

Advantages of Podcasting

There are several advantages in choosing podcasting as a training and communication mechanism. Three in particular are the use of subscriptions to engage the listener, the “direct communication” factor, and the usefulness of giving back time to the user.

Subscription

Several best-fit applications of podcasting are series of short sessions. By this time, you have probably downloaded a tool like iTunes and subscribed to several daily or weekly podcasts. (If not, be sure to read [Chapter 6](#), “Podcast Hosting Sites.”) If so, you have seen that by simply plugging your MP3 player into your PC for a power recharge, new installments are automatically transferred to your player. And, if you have selected Recently Added, you have found that the most recent downloads play automatically, with no searching necessary.

So, if you can convince members of your target audience for a series of learning podcasts to subscribe initially, no other effort on their part is required. They do not need to remember how and when to go out and find new episodes.

Direct Communication from the Speaker

Podcasts provide the opportunity for a teacher, sponsor, manager, or leader to transmit directly and without distraction.

Throughout the past quarter century, most readers will have listened to some of the [National Public Radio *Fresh Air* interviews with host Terry Gross](#). Notice that even when you listen to interviews with individuals you have never heard of before, from occupations of perhaps no particular interest to you, more often than not you take away a positive impression of the speaker. Why?

- ▶ These interviewees typically sound sincere.
- ▶ There is nothing to distract from the interviewees' words.

Beyond gender, audio-only interviews like this remove attributes that might ordinarily influence reception of the message. Age, physical appearance, demeanor, and physical setting are all filtered out.

This puts us in mind of business presentation classes we have taught in the past. After explaining how to use visuals, particularly [PowerPoint](#), to support the speaker's delivery in a face-to-face setting, we always caution, "Remember that you as the speaker *are* the message, so *do not* allow your slides and animations to distract from that message." Of course, inevitably whenever we use visual aids, these always distract to at least some degree.

For the teacher or leader who wants to convey a message, then, podcasting can remove some important barriers. During those first minutes where key first impressions are created, the speaker is much less likely to be labeled as "another gray head," "a kid who cannot have much experience," or "fairly conservative from the look of her clothes." In short, the audio podcast levels the playing field and leaves the advantage with any speaker who is sincere, enthusiastic, and has a message of importance.

A New Reservoir of Audience Time

Time that was once scarce or nonexistent for learning is now available.

We have touched on this point often, but it is hard to emphasize it too much. In most organizations—even academic organizations—access to members’ personal time is the scarcest learning resource. The most gifted presenters and the most lavishly produced classes (live or recorded) cannot overcome this limitation. Moreover, whatever learning time does exist is contended for by many other worthy areas of study and information.

Podcasts delivered over MP3 players open up large blocks of time—time used for commuting/exercising/traveling. Topics that could not previously qualify as “important enough to take away time from work” now suddenly become practical.

Keep these three unique advantages of podcasts (subscription, direct communication, and the new reservoir of student time) in mind as we consider several applications for which podcasts provide a unique fit.

Finding the Best Podcasting Fit

In the following paragraphs, you will find a series of “best-fit” scenarios especially for training in corporations and the use of podcasts. Any one of these can work out to be highly beneficial for your own company or organization.

Best Fit #1: Direct Messaging by Senior Organization Executives

Have some sympathy for organization leaders. They know that to be effective, they must communicate with the troops on a regular basis, but their followers are spread out and already overbooked

with work. How do they get the message out so they're perceived as a "genuine" person who others would want to follow, while avoiding the inevitable response of "I'm already working 12 hours a day, and you expect me to add another 15 minutes for this?" Lengthy e-mailed letters are a common resort (more contention for short space). Another approach is to herd everyone available into the cafeteria for a quarterly address that might be barely audible over the PA system.

In contrast, a quarterly podcast from the senior executive takes advantage of all three of those special advantages of podcasts. Once these podcasts are subscribed to, they download automatically. Speeches are challenges for all but the most gifted orators, but podcasts allow the executive to speak conversationally and directly to the employee, and most executives have mastered the skills of persuasive one-on-one conversation. And, rather than take time away from work, many employees prefer to listen to a 10-minute quarterly report while driving to work. An added plus for the executive is that the podcast can be recorded in a controlled environment and mistakes edited out.

Best Fit #2: Updates by Leaders Throughout the Organization

Senior executives are not the only ones who need to get a personal message across to employees and members. Managers of new initiatives, experts on key organization technologies and products, and managers of major organization sites all have an interest in updating people throughout the organization. These updates can include the following:

- ▶ Information on new initiatives
- ▶ Work in progress
- ▶ Celebration of successes, awards, and recognitions

- ▶ New markets, new opportunities
- ▶ What's going on at key offices

Podcasts work here for the same reasons they do for senior executives: the automatic push, direct contact (where the enthusiasm can show through), and time to listen.

Best Fit #3: Regular Learning Updates via Short Topics

Long ago, safety professionals concluded that the way to maintain awareness was to deliver short safety topics to employees on a regular basis. Through several means (“lunchbox lessons,” beginning every meeting with a safety topic, and so on), they consistently drove home the message. They often introduced these topics with the account of an accident or a near miss. By most accounts, the awareness and knowledge transfer from these short sessions are superior to bundling all these topics into a single session. And many individuals who would shrink from long sessions have the patience to listen to short messages.

Fast forward to 2007. Many podcast series have seized upon these same principles. [*Grammar Girl*](#), for example, examines a single topic (the use of a particular word, or a troublesome punctuation question) and is subscribed to by many listeners who would never purchase a book on grammar or read it cover-to-cover. Ditto [*Mr. Manners*](#) daily tip on polite behavior targets listeners who have no books of etiquette on their shelves. What do we have in our organizations that lend themselves to a “once a week”?

- ▶ Lessons learned
- ▶ Tips and tricks
- ▶ Best practices