How to create a podcast: The basics

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Back when I started podcasting a decade ago, there was not a lot of information available about how to go about it, and podcasting was considered a hobby or something that existed on the periphery of the communication profession. Now various companies and organizations are making podcasting a regular part of their communication strategy, but communication professionals might not be sure about how to begin one, or what is needed once an organization has requested one.

This article offers some basic elements that are part of a solid podcasting plan. Once you decide on the focus for your podcast (because podcasting is "narrow-casting" rather than "broadcasting"), you will need to get essential equipment and use best practices for creating quality audio.

Microphones

Make sure you use a high-quality microphone; avoid using the built-in microphone on your computer or your phone's built-in mic.

There are **two types of mics** that you can use: USB, which plugs into your computer, or an analog mic that you plug into a mixer. If you want to keep it simple, use a **USB mic**, though it won't be as high-quality as an analog mic. There are several USB mics on the market, and some of the better-quality ones are the Yeti Pro, Apogee Mic (for Macs, iPhones, iPads), Audio-Technica, Shure MV5, and Samson Meteor.

If you want to use an **analog mic**, you will need an XLR connector that connects the microphone into a mixer. It is more convenient to get a USB analog mixer so that you can plug it into your computer. Since mixers can be quite complex, another option is to get a kind of "audio box" which is a simple intermediary between your analog microphone and your computer (it does not have all the sliders or knobs that you see in regular mixers). An industry standard analog microphone is the Shure SM58.

If you want to use your smartphone, get an **external microphone** for it (though there are some recent iPhones that produce high-quality sound). Whatever you decide, test your phone first. You might discover that the sound it generates is not as good quality as a regular microphone setup.

Essential items for your mic are a **pop filter** and **windscreen**. These will prevent extraneous noises and "popping p's."

Software

If you already have Adobe Creative Suite, use Adobe Audition to record and edit your audio. There are other kinds of audio software that you can pay for (and if you ask an audio pro they have their favorite), but if you don't want to pay, use GarageBand on your Mac or download **Audacity** for Mac and PCs. Audacity also has a great **manual** that gives lots of tips on editing and processing your audio. It's important to note that simply recording and posting your podcast online will probably not result in quality audio, so it would be beneficial to explore the plugins and effects within your audio program to get solid, balanced sound.

If you are doing online interviews, you can use the recording function within Skype, but make sure you test it out (testing is essential since people tend to forge ahead and end up with mediocre audio). If you have a Mac, get **Audio Hijack**. It is fantastic, and you can record basically anything online.

Recording tips

Always wear headphones and do a test run to make sure the recording is decent before you proceed with the intended content.

Make sure you record in a soundproof space, unless you want ambient sound. One way to soundproof a room with windows is to put blankets or curtains over them. If you don't have that option, make sure you are speaking directly into the mic, and if you are interviewing someone, do not put the mic or digital recorder on a table between the two of you; point the recorder or mic directly at the person's mouth.

If you want ambient sound, make sure you, and the other person if you are interviewing someone, are speaking directly into the mic or recorder, and listen to a sample to make sure the surrounding sound does not overpower your voice. Otherwise, it will take some audio editing magic to reduce it.

Posting online

Always post your audio online as an .mp3, not a .wav file, because a .wav file is too big. It's fine to record in .wav because it's better quality, but .mp3 is standard for online distribution and downloading. The bit rate of your .mp3 should be 96 or 128 Kbps, and the sample rate should be 44.1 kHz or 48 kHz. Some people keep the file in stereo, but not only does that make the file size larger, but sometimes the stereo sound moves between each ear; it ends up not sounding balanced. So, a safe file type would be mono.

Also make sure that you have all the tags you need for your audio file, because when people download it or subscribe to your podcast, there should be consistent labeling that distinguishes your content and allows it to be searchable and organized.

People pay for podcasting services such as **SoundCloud**, **Blog Talk Radio**, **Libsyn**, **Podbean**, **Spreaker**, and **Pippa**. They are easy to use because all you have to do is upload your podcast to their platform, and they create the RSS and XML feeds that are necessary for online distribution.

If you already have a WordPress website, you can add your podcast to your website with WordPress plugins such as **PowerPress** and **Seriously Simple Podcasting**, in addition to others, though those two are often used.

Hopefully these basic tips will be helpful for you to get started. Good luck with your podcast, and have fun!

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