

You Make Me Wanna SHOUT!

by Paul Chin

Blogging gave netizens a voice; podcasting allows others to hear it.

Paul Chin (www.paulchinonline.com) is an IT consultant and freelance writer. He has previously worked in the aerospace and competitive intelligence industries and currently writes on a wide range of IT-related topics. He is also a regular contributor to IntranetJournal.com.

To the uninitiated, podcasting might seem like one of those glitzy marketing techno-jargon terms used to repackage something that has existed for years—like calling running shoes “kicks” or “skids.” After all, the web has been serving up MP3 files and streaming audio for over a decade. So what’s all the fuss about? Isn’t podcasting just glorified radio?

Not so. Podcasting is much more than radio—an unfortunate comparison between two outwardly similar mediums. Unlike commercial radio that’s at the mercy of advertisers and government regulation, a podcast is grassroots. It’s personal expression regulated and constrained only by the ethics and imagination of the podcaster.

Podcasting is all about individual voice and individual choice. It’s used to raise awareness, to entertain, to teach or to promote. It has given those with something to say an inexpensive medium in which to say it. If a parallel must be drawn between radio and podcasting, then podcasting is radio unleashed.

LISTEN & LEARN

Podcasts came about partly because of the popularity of blogs. Like blogs, podcasts are internet-based

content—usually audio—that users can subscribe to via a syndication feed. Content is delivered to users for playback on their computer or portable media device. It’s the syndication feed that turns a library of MP3 files sitting on a server into podcasts.

Podcasting, however, has substantial advantages over its cousin, the blog. “Podcasting allows you to engage with your listeners in a way that blogging just can’t,” explains Paul Boag (www.boagworld.com)—a web designer, podcaster and founding partner of web design firm Headscape. “It is a much more personal experience. Also, podcasts are a ‘consume anywhere’ format. The audience doesn’t have to be at a computer. A listener can be out walking the dog or commuting to work. That has a profound impact on how the medium is used.”

John Edson, president of Lunar Design—an industrial design firm based in San Francisco that runs the podcast Icon-o-Cast (www.lunar.com)—shares this opinion, “We originally considered starting a blog instead of a podcast,” Edson explains. “But podcasting adds several dimensions that a blog cannot capture. We’ve been able to attract a wonderful set of guests over the past year and deliver them



ICON-O-CAST

RSS FEED ITUNES

WELCOME TO ICON-O-CAST: LUNAR DESIGN'S PODCAST

Icon-o-Cast is a new downloadable audio program that discusses, explores and demystifies the world of design. We invite you to listen and subscribe (read about [how to subscribe](#)).

Latest edition

We offer five icon-o-cast departments are delivered as individual shows:

- **Cover Story:** A feature length story on current events or in-depth interviews with noteworthy individuals who are using design to make a difference in the world. The Don Norman Cover Story was our first feature length interview.
- **From the News and ReviewsDesk:** Listeners will be hearing Lunar's point of view on the design news of the day – new product reviews and talk about how we see them making a difference – or not.
- **Transmissions from Earth:** Focusing on the response from Icon-o-Cast listeners, Lunar will read letters from listeners, talk about ideas Lunar's designers are seeing in books and on other related podcasts and blogs, and let our listeners know what's

Icon-o-Cast

"We have long been participants in public dialogue about design," says Lunar Design president John Edson, "mostly through presentations at conferences, school lectures and published articles. In podcasting, we saw an opportunity to be involved with this dialogue in a more immediate and less formal way."

Podcast listings

Directories such as Podcast Alley (www.podcastalley.com) and Apple's iTunes Store present users with a listing of available podcasts—often organized by topical categories and popularity. You can listen to some samples online or subscribe to feeds from your content feed aggregator.



to our audience. People like Bruce Nussbaum, Don Norman and Sam Lucente are well known in the design world, but very few people have ever heard them speak.”

Before starting your own podcast, you should research what’s already out there. Tons of podcast directories exist on the web (see podcasting resources on page 45) that list podcasts on every imaginable topic—from web design to tips on trimming a Chia Pet. The purpose here isn’t to imitate, but to familiarize yourself with the different podcast styles, content types, formats and structures.

THE NUTS & BOLTS

OK, you’ve got something to say that you think others will want to hear. So how do you go about creating your own podcast? Do you create it in a soundproof studio with a high-end, turnkey digital audio workstation, mixing board and a \$200 noise-canceling microphone? Yes. Or do you generate it with your notebook computer sitting in an airport lounge while waiting for a delayed flight? Also yes.

Creating and running a podcast is surprisingly easy once you know what you’re doing. You don’t need ultra-expensive gear to create a high quality podcast. “Anyone with some halfway decent hardware can get into the game and produce content that can be heard around the world,” says Adam Hay—a San Diego-based designer, podcaster and principal of Titan Strides Creative—who operates the weekly podcast Rookie Designer and the vodcast Quicktips (www.rookiedesigner.com).

Podcasting boils down to three basic steps: planning and preparing, recording and encoding, and finally publishing and promoting.

1. Planning and preparing your program

If you’re considering starting a podcast, you should plan well in advance and have a good idea of what it’s going to be about. You should avoid starting one simply because everyone else is doing it and then learn that you having nothing to say—or worse, to actually have nothing to say but think you do.

There are a few questions every potential podcaster should ask before picking up a mic:

- What’s the podcast’s main theme?
- What audience and market are you targeting?
- What’s the tone (formal, casual, humorous)?
- What’s the format (newscast, personal commentary, instructional training)?
- Will it be a one-person show or will you have a cohost?
- What’s the intended length of the podcast episodes?

Recording tips

Speak clearly. Don’t mutter under your breath or race through a podcast. Keep in mind that you’re speaking to potentially hundreds or thousands of diverse listeners.

Speak naturally and keep it conversational. There’s no need to go into news anchor mode—unless that’s the effect you’re shooting for.

Don’t obsess. Some first-timers might be overly self-conscious, recording and re-recording. Be careful not to allow two or three takes to turn into 32 takes. “The mantra is ‘express, test, cycle,’” advises Edson. “In other words, get it out there, evaluate it and improve it. Don’t wait for perfection before you get started.”

Record several pilot podcasts to see if you’re happy with the sound quality and show format.

If you’re not using headphones, make sure you mute your computer speakers to prevent feedback.

Splice out lengthy pauses and excessive “ums” and “ahs” that speakers use when they’re thinking about what to say next.

Have fun! You can’t expect to engage an audience if you speak in a dull monotone and don’t even show enthusiasm for your own podcast. “If you don’t like what you’re doing,” says designer and podcaster Adam Hay, “it will show and your podcast will not do well.”

Most importantly you must ask yourself if podcasting is something you really want to do. “It may seem very fun at first,” explains Hay, “but after a year it can seem a bit more like work. If you podcast for four months and then decide you are growing tired of it, you still have an audience to think about. There may be people out there depending on your content.”

2. Recording and encoding your podcast

Most of you probably already have the tools needed to record your first podcast sitting on your desk or hiding in a drawer. At bare minimum you’ll need the first three items in the Podcaster’s Equipment Checklist (see page 44). You’re going to be spending the majority of your podcast development time with the digital audio editor so it’s a good idea to choose something you’re comfortable with.

Audacity (audacity.sourceforge.net), an open source, cross-platform digital audio editor, is very popular among podcasters because it’s both free and easy to use. Although not a dedicated podcast tool, it can be used in conjunction with other freely available tools to build, manage and publish your podcast.

If you intend to do a lot of podcasting or you simply don’t want to fuss around with multiple programs, you can invest in a full, all-in-one commercial podcasting suite such as ePodcast Creator (\$71.95) by Industrial Audio Software (www.industrialaudio.com). These all-in-one podcasting suites allow you to record and edit your podcast, upload files to your host and generate the feed code all in the same package.

Whatever you decide upon, don’t let the software intimidate you—even if you’ve never worked with a digital audio editor before. Just plug in your mic, hit Record and start talking. You can play around with your newly created audio file to familiarize yourself with the process and the tools. You’ll discover that using an audio editor is as simple as using a word processor.

Encoding your podcast. When you finish recording and editing your show, you’ll need to encode it in a format that can be used by as large an audience as possible. MP3 is a good choice since it’s the format most widely supported by both computer-based media players and portable audio devices.

There is, however, a very important consideration when creating your file. You need to balance your podcast’s sound quality (bit rate: see page 42) and your available resources (storage space and bandwidth). The better the sound, the bigger the file size and bandwidth demand. The last thing you want is to have a queue of listeners trying to squeeze a watermelon through a drinking straw.



Choices, choices ...

Paul Boag's podcast boagworld.com offers the best of all worlds. It allows users to listen to current and past episodes online from a web browser, to subscribe via iTunes and to subscribe from any other third-party feed aggregator.

iTunes

Boagworld.com, shown here in iTunes, gives listeners the opportunity to subscribe to the feed or to download and listen to individual episodes.

Preparing your podcasts

The quality of your content and your presentation of it will define your reputation as a podcaster.

- Prepare an outline before each episode rather than a detailed script to keep things natural and somewhat spontaneous. An outline is useful in helping you stay on track and prevent digressions. A full script might lead you to read rather than speak.
- Do your research and fact checking. Nothing will ruin your reputation and credibility quicker than pretending to be an authority on a subject matter when you're not or when you haven't done your homework.
- Be original. Don't simply redo what's already out there. Think of something original and creative that other podcasts don't offer. At the very least, come up with a new spin on an existing idea.
- Inject humor. "Humor is essential," suggests Boag. "People don't listen to podcasts as part of their work; they listen to them for pleasure. As a result, a podcast needs to be a pleasurable experience, and humor is a great way to achieve that."
- Eureka moments aren't scheduled! Carry a notebook and pen everywhere you go; you never know when a great idea for a show will hit you.
- Consider a sidekick. "I do two shows, and the one where I present with a colleague is so much easier," admits Boag. "Having somebody there to bounce ideas off of and talk to stops the show from becoming a monotone monologue."
- Respect music copyrights. If you plan to use music that's not yours, you're going to have to pay licensing fees. There are several organizations charged with collecting licensing fees on behalf of artists such as ASCAP (www.ascap.com) and BMI (www.bmi.com). Don't let a great podcast be ruined by a lawsuit!

3. Publishing and promoting your podcast

Once you complete your podcast and are satisfied with the results, you're ready to enter the podosphere:

Find a home for your podcast files. Locating a residence for your podcast isn't as easy as putting it on the same server that houses your website. You need to find a host that accommodates the specific demands of delivering multimedia to a large audience. Podcasts require a lot of storage space and, more importantly, bandwidth. Many website hosting providers will charge overage fees if you exceed your allotted monthly bandwidth limits.

Depending on the sound quality of your podcast, a single 30-minute audio-only episode can range from 30 to 50 MBs—a vodcast of the same length will run into hundreds of MBs. If you multiply that by the number of users who subscribe to your podcast and listen online—which could be in the hundreds or thousands—you'll find yourself overshooting your host's bandwidth limit in no time.

Liberated Syndication (www.libsyn.com), a multimedia distribution service, caters to podcasters and offers various hosting solutions with no bandwidth restrictions. Liberated Syndication's Sandbox allows you to take their services for a free test drive so you can decide if this is the solution for your needs.

Suggested bit rates for MP3 files	
Bit rate	Best for
32 kbps	Talk shows (mono). Minimal bandwidth and storage requirements
64 kbps	Talk shows (stereo). With some music and sound effects
128 kbps	A balance of talk and quality music without breaking the bandwidth and storage bank
320 kbps	Music-oriented podcasts requiring near CD-quality sound (file size and bandwidth demand is significantly increased)

Create a podcast feed. A podcast isn't a podcast unless you provide users with a content feed that automatically delivers new content to their computer. You could manually write the code for your feed, but there are much quicker and easier ways to accomplish this. There are freely available client- and web-based feed creators that can generate the code for you.

Promote and advertise your podcast. How you present your podcast to the world is matter of taste. You can simply provide podcast feed links—RSS, Atom, iTunes—on your existing website such as with Lunar Design's Icon-o-Cast, or you can create a dedicated blog to advertise and manage your podcasts like Hay's Rookie Designer and Quicktips.

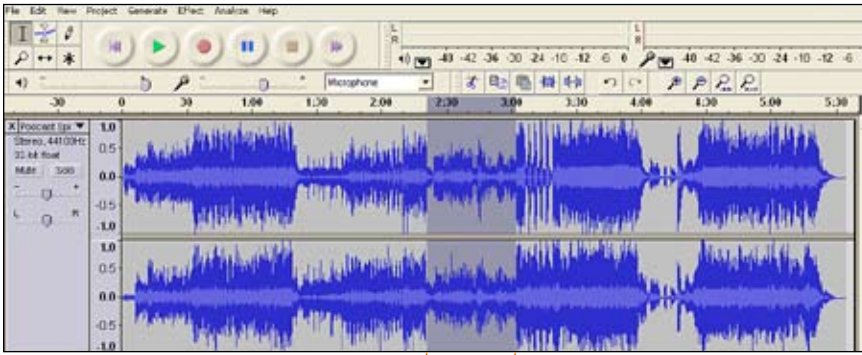
For getting the word out on a podcast, "a blog is very useful," suggests Boag. "For starters, having show notes allows you to post links that you mention in the show. It also gives search engines something to look through. Until Google spiders audio files, I feel that blogs are extremely important."

IT'S ABOUT THE CONTENT

Technology is the medium, but content is the substance. Podcasting isn't about technology. Listeners won't follow your podcast simply because you're there; after all, there are plenty of choices. If they don't find what they're looking for in your podcast, they'll just go somewhere else.

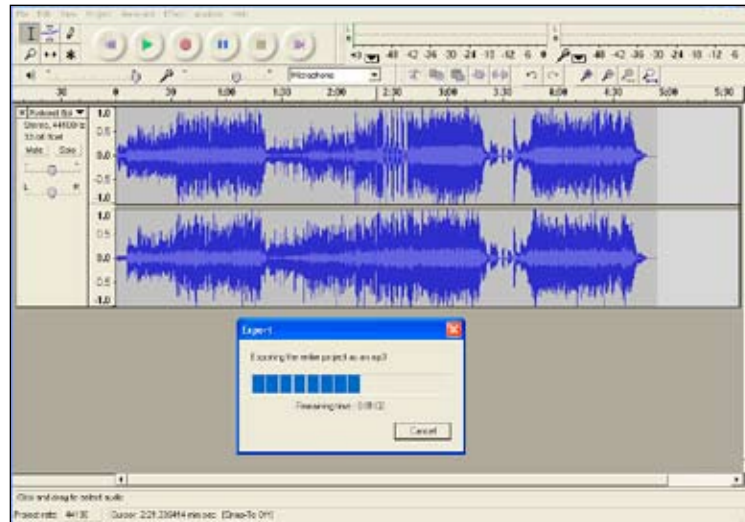
"I was up and running incredibly quickly," admits Boag, "but it has taken much longer to really get the show to work. Audio editing, RSS feeds and the hardware setup are the easy part. The challenge is to make the show entertaining, engaging and informative. Striking that balance has taken much longer."

You can read everything you can get your hands on about setting up a podcast, but it's up to you to create an interesting show—to come up with content that users will want to listen to on a regular basis. Podcasting doesn't require big budgets; it requires big ideas. So, when you're facing a hot mic, what do you have to say? 🎤



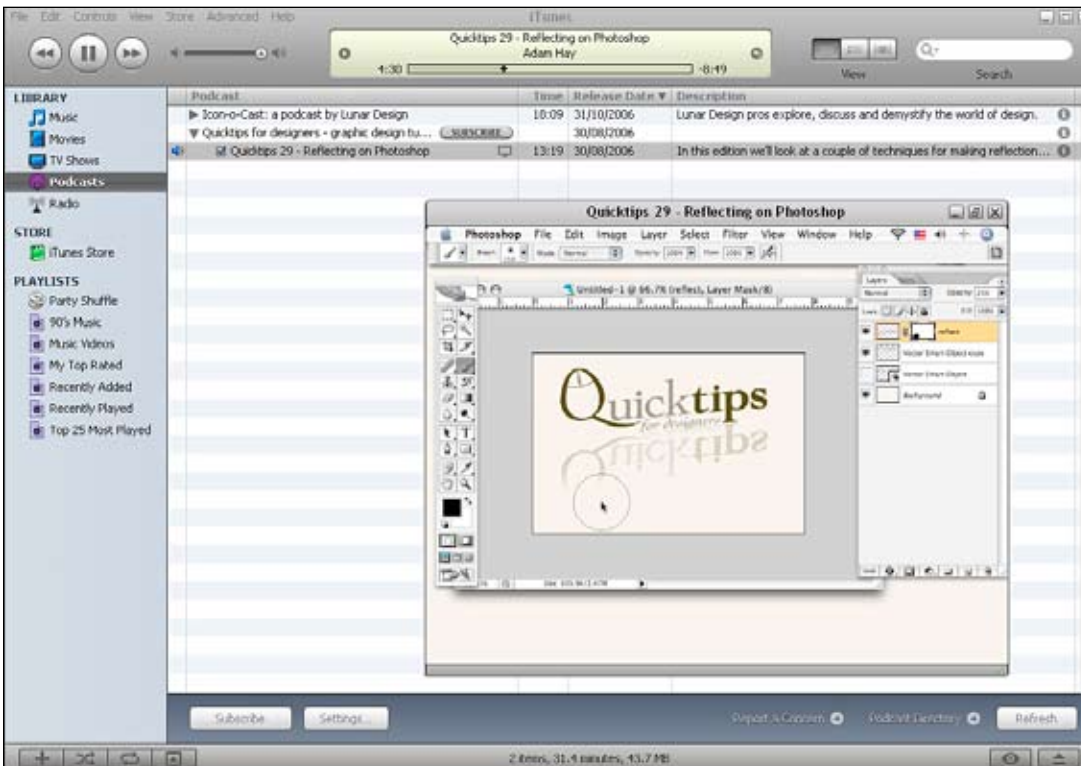
Oops!

Correcting mistakes and splicing out unwanted portions of a recording in Audacity are as simple as deleting a line of text from a word processor. Highlight the portion of the recording you want to splice out, then hit the Play button to listen to the selected audio to ensure that's what you want to erase. Then, hit the Delete key. You're done!



Creating an MP3

Audacity project files (.aup) can't be opened in other applications. In order for listeners to be able to hear your podcast, recordings must be encoded in a widely supported format such as MP3. Audacity accomplishes this with a LAME MP3 encoder add-on. Once downloaded, choose Audacity's File menu and select Export as MP3.

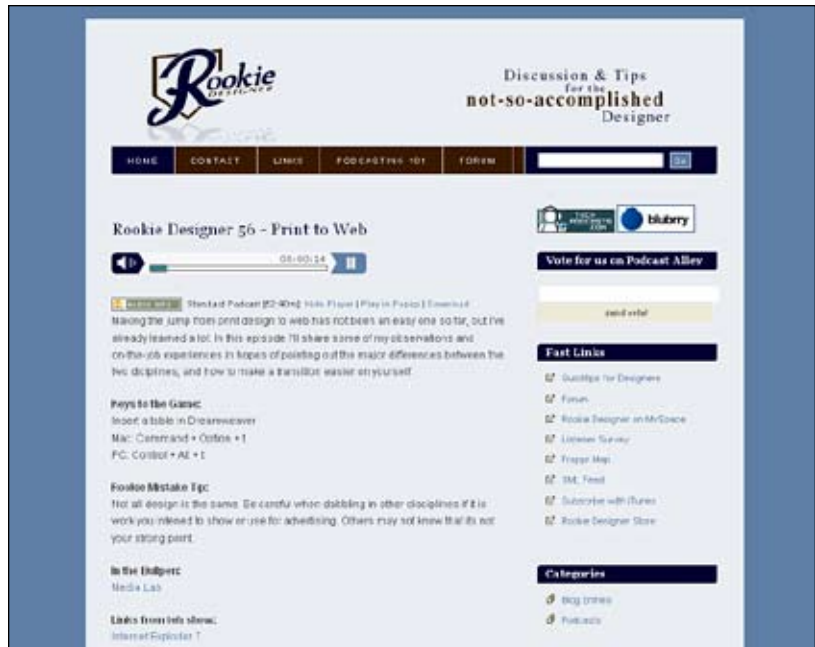


Vodcasting

Although technically the term "podcasting" encompasses both audio and video content, the term "vodcast" or "vidcast" has come into common usage to represent video-based content. Hay uses Snapz Pro X to produce his vodcast Quicktips, a series of video tutorials for designers.

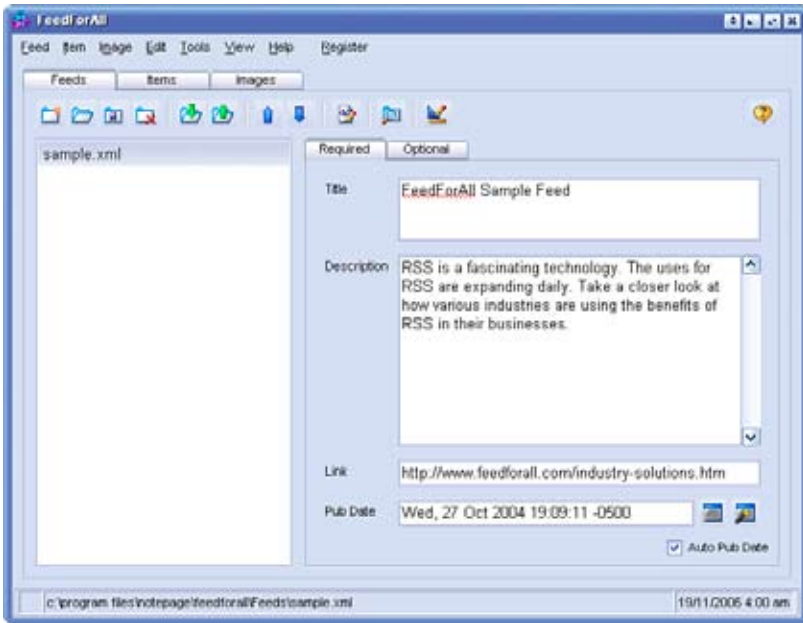
Tag it and bag it
MP3 files contain additional information in the form of an ID3 tag that tells users what they're listening to. When tagging a podcast, the following ID3 fields can be used to represent information about the podcast: NAME, the name and date of the episode; ARTIST, the name(s) of the podcaster(s); ALBUM, the name of the podcast; COMMENTS, a short description of the episode and any special guests; TRACK, the episode number.

Rookie Designer
"People expect their content to be delivered to them instantaneously," says Hay. "At a time when you can carry around your favorite movies and TV shows on a device in your pocket, the podcast is a great way to keep your audience's attention."



Podcaster's Equipment Checklist

Computer	The great thing about podcasting is that it's not computer resource intensive, so you don't need to invest in that Mac Pro. Your existing computer will most likely work.
Microphone	Noise-canceling microphones are preferable because they sample ambient noise that may exist in your recording environment and cancel the noise out so that only your voice comes through in the feed.
Audio editing software	This is the software you'll use to record and edit your podcast.
Headphones	Headphones help you monitor the input—your voice, music and sound effects—and review the podcast once it's completed. If others are working around you, headphones can be used as a matter of courtesy so that your editing and playback don't annoy others. Headphones with a built-in microphone are an excellent option to reduce clutter.
Portable recorder	A digital voice recorder or an MP3 player with voice recording capabilities is useful if you foresee yourself spending a lot of time in the field, away from your computer. You can use the recorder to record your podcast or conduct interviews when lugging a laptop around might not be an option. The audio file(s) can then be uploaded to your workstation and cleaned up with your audio editor.



Create your feed

Client-based software applications such as FeedForAll can generate the RSS code for your podcast. Simply provide the software with a few details about your podcast and the software will do the rest.

List your podcast

To promote your podcast, register your feed on as many directories as possible such as the iTunes Podcast Directory.

Podcasting Resources

Apple iTunes www.apple.com/podcasting/	Digital media player and podcast/vodcast aggregator (Windows and Mac)
Apple GarageBand 3 www.apple.com/ilife/garageband/	Podcast creation tool. Component of Apple's iLife Suite (Mac only)
AudioFeeds.org www.audiofeeds.org	Music-oriented podcast directory
FeedBurner www.feedburner.com	Web-based feed management provider for blogs, podcasts and vodcasts
FeedForAll www.feedforall.com	Client-based RSS creation, editing and publishing tool (Windows and Mac)
indiepodder.org (formerly ipodder.org)	Podcast directory
Juice juicereceiver.sourceforge.net	Podcast aggregator (Windows, Mac and Linux)
Liberated Syndication www.libsyn.com	One-stop-shop multimedia hosting service
Mozilla Thunderbird www.mozilla.com	E-mail client with content aggregator (Windows, Mac and Linux)
Podcast.com	Podcast directory and information portal
Podcast.net	Podcast directory
Podcast Alley www.podcastalley.com	Podcast directory
Podcasting News www.podcastingnews.com	Podcast directory and news
Yahoo! Podcasts podcasts.yahoo.com	Podcast directory