

Podcasts Deliver Fresh, Authentic Audio Content to Target Audiences

To stay competitive in today's business-to-business world, marketers know they have to embrace technologies and tactics such as search engine optimization, social media press releases, blogs, podcasts, RSS feeds and webcasts. Compared to traditional marketing tools, these technologies and tactics enable B-to-B marketers to create deeper, richer two-way communications with their target audiences.

A podcast is a multimedia file that is distributed by subscription (paid or unpaid) over the Internet using syndication feeds. The podcast is then played back at the listener's convenience on a personal computer or other device featuring MP3 capability, such as a car stereo system, a home entertainment system, an iPhone or an iPod. (Hence, the name "podcast.")

Why are podcasts important? First, podcasts are another innovative way for B-to-B marketers to communicate directly with their target audiences. Second, podcasts allow marketers to deliver fresh, authentic content, to humanize their companies, to position their companies as thought leaders and to encourage creative thinking. And third, podcasts are becoming the *medium of choice* for customers and prospects who want information fast—in an easily digestible format.

According to a joint research survey conducted by KnowledgeStorm and Universal McCann, 65 percent of business and IT professionals said they listen to podcasts for both personal and business reasons. What's more, 60 percent of respondents said white papers and analyst reports would be more interesting if they were delivered as podcasts. Ideally, podcasts should be offered in addition to white papers because audio content isn't very searchable right now. That will likely change, however, as technology advances.

The following guidelines will serve as best practices for getting your podcast program up and running:

- Podcasts should focus on content that's relevant to your target audiences. Content should be educational and entertaining—this isn't a sales pitch. Think of yourself as a broadcast journalist. What are the key topics and issues affecting your customers, their markets and their industry? Each topic or issue can serve as the subject matter for one podcast episode.
- What's the ideal length for an episode? Seven to ten minutes should do it. After ten minutes, the listener's attention span will start to wane.
- Wisely choose your interview experts and host/interviewer. The host/interviewer can be the broadcast journalist—asking probing questions, playing devil's advocate, engaging the interview experts in a free-flowing discussion. The best interview experts are those who completely understand the topic or issue at hand and can help listeners solve their business challenges.
- Podcasts are best left unscripted. Why? Because scripted podcasts come across as too slick, too stilted and too boring. Instead, develop talking points for your interview experts. Make sure they know how to deliver the talking points in an easy, conversational style.
- To produce each episode, you will need some basic equipment such as microphones, a computer and podcasting software. Recording should be done in a quiet, nearly sound-proof room. If you don't have one at your company, rent space from an audio production company; it's relatively inexpensive. Finally, you should *tag* (add text-based information) the audio file to increase the online searchability of your episode.

- After production is complete, post the episode on your company's web site, making sure the site has RSS capability. This will ensure that listeners can subscribe to updates in your podcasting series. Also, hire a hosting service to syndicate the episode. Syndication allows organizations such as iTunes to easily distribute the episode.

It's also important to promote the episode and your podcasting series. First, make sure the episode is prominently displayed on your web site. Let your customers and prospects know it's online via an E-mail link. Create and distribute a social media press release, which would include links to multimedia elements such as the episode, relevant white papers, photos of your interview experts and your company's logo. Mention the episode in company, industry and subject matter blogs. And promote the episode in your pay-per-click, search engine marketing (SEM) campaign.

How will you know if the episode is successful? Feedback from your customers, prospects and other *influentials* is one good yardstick. But, there are other ways to measure an episode's effectiveness—web trends and analytics, web site click-throughs, downloads, blog activity and online surveys, to name a few.

For a minimal investment of time and equipment, many B-to-B marketers are finding that podcasts provide a solid return. They not only position your company as a thought leader, they also allow you to create an effective, two-way communication channel with your target audiences. Just remember: If you commit to a podcasting program, make each episode fresh and engaging, and produce the podcasts in a frequent, timely fashion. That will help ensure the success of your podcasting program.

PODCASTING: IDEAS THAT CONNECT

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2. Podcasts allow B-to-B marketers to deliver fresh, authentic content, to humanize their companies, to position their companies as thought leaders and to encourage creative thinking.
3. Sixty percent of business and IT professionals say white papers and analyst reports would be more interesting if they were delivered as podcasts.
4. Seven to ten minutes is the ideal length for a podcast episode.
5. Use your web site, E-mail marketing, a social media press release, blogs, search engine marketing, etc. to promote each episode and your podcasting series.

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