

HOW TO PODCAST

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OPEN THE POD BAY DOORS, HAL

By Norman Weinberg

In case you haven't noticed, we're in the middle of some hard economic times. There's really no way to know how long this current economic slump is going to continue or how deep it will ultimately get before the choppy waters begin to recede. But one thing's for sure: it's not a bad idea to revisit what you do and how you do it in order to better serve your own profession now and in the future.

No matter what your place in the music business: beginner, enthusiast, or professional, it's vitally important to use every tool at your disposal to increase your visibility and potential. You might be asking: How can I get my musical ideas out to a larger audience? How can I get more people to come out to the clubs to hear my band? What can I do to get more students and to create a better educational experience for them? What can I do to help generate more income from my recordings? How can I get more session work?

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There's obviously no single answer to any of these questions, but a partial answer to all of them might come from podcasting. In case you haven't experienced one before, a podcast is really nothing more than a short radio or TV show that's stored on the Net. Many people listen to the radio or watch TV simply for its entertainment value. Others access media to get news, information on products and services, or to learn

Net so that people can find it and subscribe to it.

What's It All About?

If you get creative, you'll quickly discover there is an infinite number of ways to create a podcast that will get you noticed and let your audience become more familiar with who you are and what you do. Below are just a couple of examples that you might think of as a springboard for your own ideas.

PODCASTS COULD BE A GREAT WAY TO GET YOUR PLAYING OUT TO A LARGER AUDIENCE

about a particular topic that interests them. Your podcasts can offer all of these things to your listeners.

What makes a podcast so special is the way that it is delivered to a target audience. While it's possible to create audio and/or video content to post on your web site as a regular file or upload to YouTube, people who are interested in your information can choose to subscribe to your podcasts so they can hear or view your programs anytime they choose. Whenever you add new podcasts, your subscribers' podcast program will "feed" the information to them.

Working with podcasts is actually a simple two-step process. First, you need to create the podcast. Then you need to post it somewhere on the

If you teach private drum lessons, you create podcasts to get additional information out to your students. Short podcast lessons could be just the thing to keep your current students engaged, and perhaps encourage other drummers to come study with you. Podcasting software lets you combine different types of audio files and edit them individually, making it a snap to have a song playing in the background with an informative voiceover explaining a particular concept or technical idea. For example, you might point out "how cleanly and crisply the tom patterns come through the mix," just as the fill moves from the verse to the chorus. Or "notice that moving between the top and edge of the cowbell really gives the

impression of two different instruments." Your students could receive these lessons automatically via podcast and could listen to them and review them anytime they wanted.

If you play in a band, your fans would love to hear or see clips from some of your recent performances. By getting your best performances out on the Web, you'll strengthen your support base and quite possibly recruit new fans. How about using the podcasts to highlight the group's newest songs, publicize upcoming gigs, or offer interviews with the group's members or fans.

As a private drum teacher, you could create podcasts that feature different students from your studio. Each podcast might include a short interview with the student talking about his or her school band program, the kind of music they enjoy, or even hobbies or other interests that they have along with drumming. The podcasts could culminate with the performance of an etude, song, or exercise that they have been working on. A podcast like this would serve to sharpen a number of important skills for the student as well as help your business. The student would benefit by taking part in the experience of the interview process, while the preparation for the performance portion of the podcast would be an important goal for which to prepare. Chances are good your students would want to share this podcast with their friends and family, who then might be interested in taking lessons with you or recommending you to their friends.

If you're a freelance drummer, podcasts could be a great way to get your playing out to a larger audience. Your podcasts might include examples of your drumming in various musical styles or performance settings. If you're a group drummer looking to work with a new band, getting your drumming podcasts in front of the right eyes and ears might just lead to that perfect relationship.

The exact content of your own podcasts is variable and entirely up to you. But the end result should be the same: getting your information and your skills out in front of a larger audience.

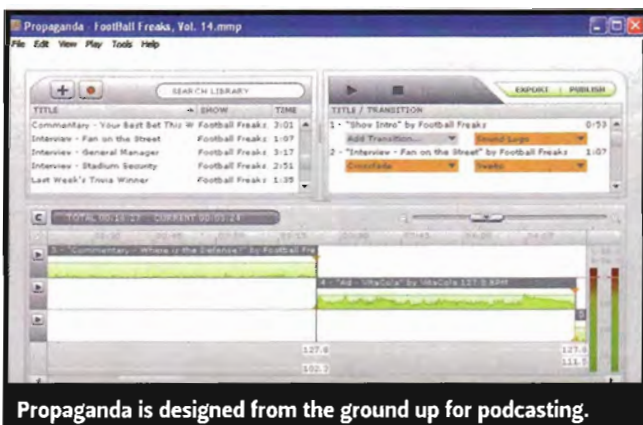
Creating Your First Podcast

To get started, you're going to need some software. While there are many programs available for the major computer platforms, you'll want to be sure that the software you're using supports a number of features that will make your creative process go more smoothly.

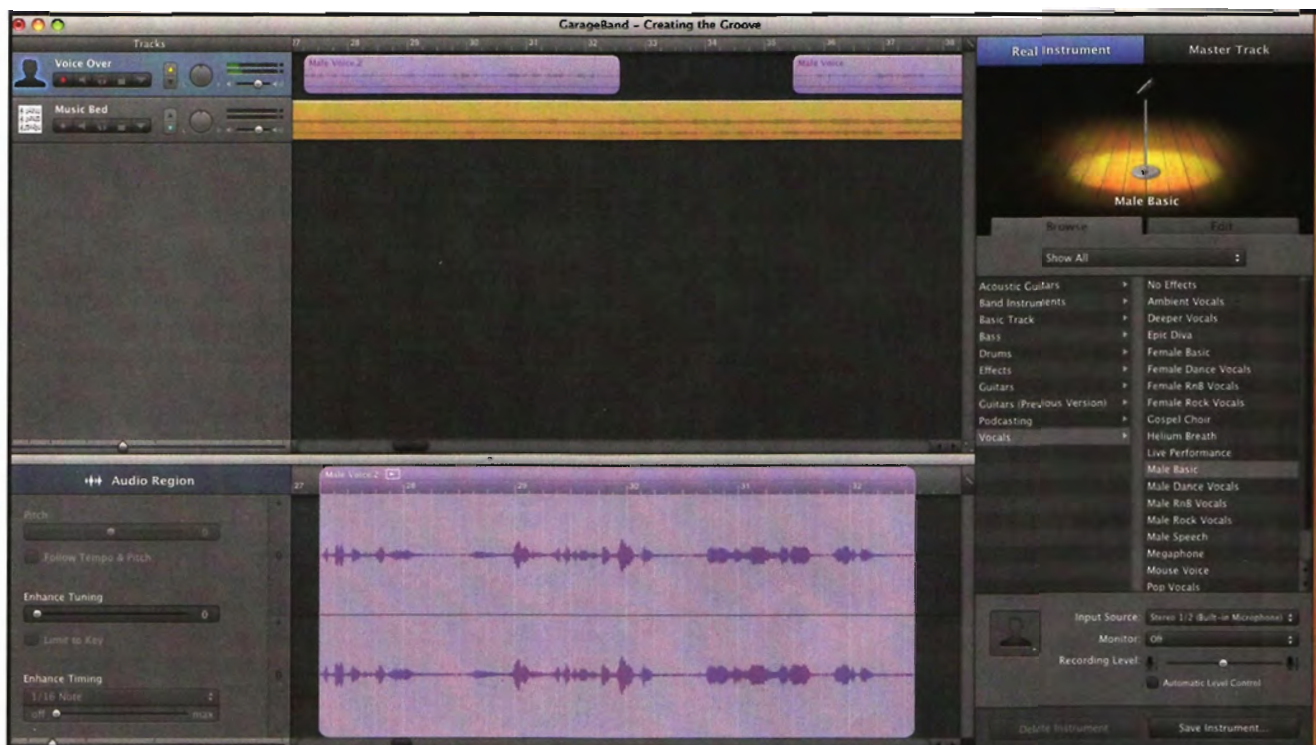
Look for software that's versatile enough to get source audio material into your computer easily. You'll want to have the ability to record from the internal microphone on your computer, an external microphone, a line-in signal, or directly from your computer's sound card. If you plan to include remote interviews, you may also look for software that can record an entire voice-over-Internet session. You'll also want to make sure that the software can import audio files from a CD or mp3. Depending on the materials you want to work with, having the ability to import WAV or AIF files will be very helpful.

One popular piece of podcasting software is called Audacity. While it's not the most full-featured program available, it does have a couple of things going for it: For one thing, it runs on all computer platforms. For another, it's free. A brief Google search will take you to the Audacity web site where you'll be able to download the program, read the user manual, and even work with tutorials that will help you understand the program and the audio-editing process.

Another common PC podcasting tool is Propaganda. More than a simple audio editor, Propaganda is designed from the ground up for podcasting. In fact, once you've created your podcast, a simple



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A simple podcast in the making with GarageBand. The voiceover is in the upper track and in the audio window while the background music is in the lower track. Notice the effects that are available on the right side of the screen.

push of the “Publish” button will create the podcast and publish it to your host site.

If you have a Mac, creating a podcast is especially easy. GarageBand comes with all new Macs. And if you’re using an older Mac, you can get the newest version of GarageBand in iLife 09 for less than a ten spot. This one piece of software will do everything you need. When you first boot the program, you can select a “Podcast” project and get to work. You can import audio files, add still photographs, or upload movies into the podcast. Recording your voiceover material is extremely easy, and like many audio editing programs, GarageBand has a good selection of editing features and audio effects that can be applied to the project.

Once you’ve got audio into your computer, you’ll have to do some editing. Moving audio around the timeline is essential for a professional-quality podcast, as is the ability to cut and paste audio tracks. Other useful features to look for are automatic or programmable gain

controls — for ducking tracks and creating special effects that can give your podcasts some sense of place and style.

There are several good podcast-creation programs available, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Several of the programs have demo versions that you can put through the paces before shelling out any cash. And who knows, maybe one of the free software programs might be perfect for you.

Some Podcasting Tips

You’re a professional. Try your best to produce a podcast that has an air of professionalism around it. Get clean audio (no neighborhood dogs barking or babies crying) that’s recorded at a strong enough level to hear clearly without any digital clipping or distortion. If your laptop’s onboard microphone is giving you a crappy sound, upgrade to an external mike with better audio quality. Even an inexpensive microphone could be a big improvement over a built-in model. If you plan to do a lot of voiceover, especially while

you’re playing, you might consider a headset mike.

Write a script for your podcast. Until you’re a seasoned pro, don’t try to shoot from the hip. Reading off a script will help you avoid the annoying “uhhhh” passages that are sure to intrude once the red light comes on. Although you can usually edit those out if necessary, you’re better off creating a script to help you organize your thoughts into something that stays coherent and on topic. If you want to go the extra mile, I highly recommend teleprompter software. Sure, you can read the script off your computer screen, but teleprompter programs will also help you with your pacing and keep you relaxed and on track. I’ve had a good deal of success using a program called Videocue. It’s easy to use and includes features that can help produce video podcasts too.

Create opening and closing “bumpers.” Short bumpers with a musical theme and introductory information can be very useful to the listener and help create a branding identity for your podcasts. For

the optimal effect, keep them short and focused. And be sure to use original audio material or music that is free of copyright restrictions.

Keep your podcast limited to a single topic. In this age of short attention spans and instant karma, having a five-minute podcast covering a single topic in depth is preferable to a 20-minute session that bounces from one idea to another. However, if it takes 20–30 minutes to thoroughly cover your topic, you shouldn’t shy away from longer productions, though you may think about breaking it up into a series of bite-sized chunks, which have the added benefit of (hopefully) keeping viewers coming back for more.

If your podcast is going to include interviews, plan your questions in advance and share the questions with your guest. That way, they’ll be able to prepare and have a good experience with the process.

Getting into podcasting is making an investment in your future. I strongly recommend that you commit to mak-

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ing podcasts on a somewhat regular basis. Once a week will likely drive you crazy and consume a lot of time. A monthly program is a great way to start. It gets you some exposure and offers variety, and your audience will get used to hearing from you on a regular basis.

When you post your podcast, be sure to include complete and thorough information about your creation. This way, your podcast audience can quickly and easily find you on the Web. It's a big virtual world out there, and you don't want your podcast to get lost in the chaos.

In order to create great podcasts, listen to great podcasts. A good place to start is on iTunes. Once you open iTunes, go the iTunes store and click on the podcasts label. From there, you'll be able to experience some of the most popular podcasts on the Net. Listen to a few of them and take notes about what you liked and what you didn't like and emulate the aspects you feel would work well on your site.

If you wish to get your podcasts out to the maximum number of people, consider submitting them to the iTunes Directory. Not every podcast is available through the iTunes store, but it certainly has the largest inventory of podcasts and the largest number of eyes and ears searching through podcasts for interesting content. It's really pretty easy, and as long as your podcast doesn't contain copyrighted materials that don't belong to you or too many explicit materials, it is likely that your podcast will be accepted into the directory.

STUDIO SECRETS

By Jake Wood



Masterers Of The Universe

WHAT REALLY HAPPENS inside mastering rooms is a murky mystery to most. Ask around, and responses will vary from blank guitarist-lost-in-sheet-music stares to vague open-ended definitions. More imaginative types may fathom darkened dungeons with cloaked engineers chanting in coded tongues and conjuring the spirit of Apollo to impregnate albums with inaudible mystic spells of listener enchantment. The disenchanting opposition, however, simply believes it to be an outright sham.

In actuality, mastering isn't as convoluted and discrete as many fantasize. The engineer's fundamental purpose is to prepare an album for duplication by dancing a delicate tango of artistic and technical maneuvers. Various technical tasks include aligning the volume levels of each song to consistency, arranging the order and spacing of the songs, and creating the PQ codes necessary for duplication. The artistic half, aided by top-shelf equalizers, can fix bandwidth bogarting issues like separating kicks from basses, blending snares and guitars, and highlighting vocals from hi-hats. With these powerful processors, mastering engineers

carry the burden of sculpting consistent "soundscapes" for entire albums.

In the lab, engineers work with two-track stereo files of the songs, not multitrack session files. Surprisingly, this limitation doesn't prohibit the tremendous amount of control they hold over the presentation of a work. With compression, mastering can catapult a song from being a lifeless string of notes to an in-your-face, large-and-in-charge, Rosie O'Donnell-esque demonstration of sonic domination. It is at the compressor's helm where most loudness wars are fought, with some engineers crushing mercilessly and others opting to preserve artistic integrity.

Mastering isn't simply about making things sound better. It is the art of hemming together a body of work, not just a collection of songs, and optimizing it to sound best in any system. This task requires a professional-grade mastering suite with a room tuned for transparency, a stereo system built for accuracy, and an engineer who really knows the room and the system. These elements have a tendency to coax prices into alpine territory, but cost can directly affect fidelity. As uber-producer Ken Lee notes, mastering is just a means to making a record "sound more expensive."

Posting And Hosting

As I mentioned earlier, one big advantage of a podcast is that your audience can subscribe to future productions. Software programs that bring podcasts to your computer, such as iTunes, Juice, and perhaps a dozen others, will query your host location to see if there are any new podcasts. If new ones are found, the software downloads them immediately. This query happens several times a day, so when you create and post a new podcast, your subscribers will be able to check it out moments after its creation.

You can house your podcast on just about any server, but I suggest you try out one of the services that specializes in hosting podcasts. Online services such as Liberated Syndication, PodBus, Podblaze, AudioBlog, and others will not only host your podcast, they'll keep track of the podcast's activity and offer reports on the number of subscribers and other data you might find interesting or helpful.

A great tool for creating your RSS podcast is called Feedburner. Feedburner will manage your RSS feed for you. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication, and it's the brains behind the subscription mechanism. Feedburner was recently acquired by Google, and according to their FAQ, it's designed to "help publishers promote, deliver, and monetize their content on the Web and make feed-based content more accessible and manageable for its end users."

Final Thoughts

While the software and methods covered here apply mainly to audio podcasts, video podcasts are getting more and more popular and easier to create. I would suggest starting with a few audio podcasts before venturing into the video waters, but certainly for some situations, video podcasts would be the way to go.

Creating and publishing podcasts can certainly be a plus for any musician. While getting started might be a little confusing, you'll soon find it fun and rewarding. I might suggest that you search the Web for additional information. There are a number of excellent tutorials and ideas that can make your initial plunge into the podcasting world as smooth as silk. In fact, there are plenty of podcasts about podcasting! Give them a listen and get going. ■

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