

Using Podcasting to Promote Your Business

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published on BNET.com 12/04/2007

Businesses use podcasts, a marketing and communication tool, to publish audio content on a variety of topics. Interested listeners can then subscribe to the podcast so they are informed when a new one is posted. Podcasts provide a regular form of communication that can increase marketing reach and visibility, as well as build customer loyalty.

What You Need to Know

Is podcasting important for every business?

Podcasting is a useful communications tool, but it is only worth using if you have something worthwhile to say that justifies the resources needed to produce high-quality content.

Is podcasting a do-it-yourself medium?

With the right recording equipment and basic skills in editing and recording, it is possible to produce podcasts yourself using widely available software for production and distribution. However, results may not be to the standard that you or your customers would like, so it may pay to use the services of a production house or audio engineer.

What to Do

Understand Podcasting

A podcast is an audio file stored on the Internet that your customers can download to their computers or MP3 players and listen to whenever they want. Before podcasting, you could put audio content on your Web Site, but now customers who subscribe can automatically receive new content without having to go to a specific site and download from the Web Site. Every time you create new content, the latest podcast is automatically delivered to subscribers via widely available software, so you will not have to worry about sending them an e-mail to download a new MP3.

Reach a Highly-Targeted Audience

One of the unique characteristics of podcasting is that the listeners subscribe to content that has a specific theme which is of interest to them. This makes it a marketing tool that reaches a highly-targeted, high-value audience.

Podcasting gives you increased visibility in the marketplace, helping to extend brand awareness. By keeping your customers informed, updated, and aware of information that is of value to them, you can increase loyalty and customer satisfaction. Podcasting offers a wide range of business benefits:

- 100% efficiency, since content is only downloaded by listeners on an opt-in basis
- easily accessible to a global audience that is not defined by geographic boundaries
- a highly effective electronic media distribution channel
- increases marketing reach
- provides a regular line of communication with subscribed listeners
- increases loyalty through value-added content
- helps to establish thought leadership

Identify Applications

Podcasting can be used for a wide range of communications tasks, including:

- informing and motivating your employees;
- communicating with your sales force;
- briefing customers on upcoming news and events;
- making product announcements;
- developing thought leadership;
- broadcasting interviews with key people in your company;
- offering in-depth information to niche customers;
- distributing content from conferences or seminars to people who were unable to attend;
- distributing training material.

Improve Internal Marketing

You can use podcasts of important meetings, news, and company updates to communicate with employees or business partners wherever they are located. The relative simplicity of podcasting

means that you can communicate more regularly with employees. For example, content could include a weekly or monthly radio-format program featuring the senior executive team in discussion with employees on important issues, or an expert forum with specialists briefing the company on new technical or marketing developments.

Involve Employees in Product Development

One way of involving employees in product development or customer service initiatives is to create a suggestions forum. Employees phone their suggestions to a voice-mail box that can record their calls. The resulting audio files can be edited to create a regular podcast highlighting the best ideas. This type of program encourages greater employee involvement in new business initiatives and helps to create an environment for innovation. The same “phone-in” approach can be used to create a forum for more detailed discussion and brainstorming of ideas for projects in progress. The content is edited to produce an action list for further research and development.

Integrate Customer Feedback

You can add another dimension to your product or service development programs by creating podcasts based on customer feedback. You can capture customer comments via audio interviews over the phone or in a studio. You may get more realistic feedback by offering customers digital recorders to use on their own time. You can edit the resulting comments into a program that can shape your product development program or customer service initiatives. As well as providing valuable feedback, the involvement can help to strengthen customer relationships and create a collaborative atmosphere.

Keep the Sales Force Updated

A podcast is a useful way of updating the sales force on product information, customer issues, new sales guidelines, or upcoming customer events such as conferences or exhibitions. You could also include third-party audio training material such as top sales tips, or improve prospecting.

Get More Value from Conference Presentations

It can be difficult for delegates to attend all the presentations at a busy conference. There may also be people who miss the entire conference, even if they want to attend. Podcasting can help you “fill in

the gaps” and get more value from live presentations. By recording presentations and editing them to a manageable format, you can release them in a number of ways:

- single presentation
- all presentations on a particular theme
- roundup of the day’s presentation
- highlights of the entire conference.

You can also supplement the traditional postevent feedback forms by recording telephone interviews with delegates and editing their responses into a single podcast that can be distributed to all delegates or used as a promotional tool for future events.

Create Thought Leadership Content

A podcast is an important element in developing thought leadership. If you have experts on particular topics, you can create programs giving advice and guidance or opinions on important industry topics. You can also host discussion groups that might include your own staff, customers, suppliers, and industry consultants. The discussions could again focus on important industry topics. To create a more interactive program, you could invite questions or feedback from customers which could be added to the podcast.

Build Audio into Media Relations

Audio clips or longer podcasts can add extra value to your media relations. You can incorporate quotes from product specialists or senior executives or longer comments, for example, on financial results for the year. This could increase the coverage you get on radio or television and may create interest in more detailed interviews. The material can be distributed automatically to key journalists who subscribe to your news feeds if you run an online press service.

Promote Your Podcast

Although podcasting is essentially a subscriber service, you should aim to increase your subscriber base by promoting your programs. You can submit your podcast service to online directories in the same way that you submit Web Site details to a search engine or directory. You can also send a press release to a news distribution channel which will give you the opportunity to reach a much wider audience.

Follow Podcasting Best Practice

Podcasting is in its relative infancy compared to other communications media, but it is already proving to be a valuable business tool for both internal and external communications. There is a risk in treating podcasting as a “do-it-yourself” medium. That may be acceptable in consumer podcasting, but an amateur production is unlikely to impress prospects and customers. It is essential to provide value-added content that is relevant to your target audience and follow recommended best-practice guidelines.

- Understand the information needs and interests of your target audience.
- Identify possible applications.
- Ensure that the messaging in the podcasts reflects those interests.
- Provide valuable, informative, and entertaining content that your audience cannot get from any other media.
- Edit the podcast for content, quality, and length.
- Ensure good quality audio by using proper recording hardware and software.
- If necessary, involve a production company or audio engineer to ensure sound quality.
- Submit your podcast to directories and search engines so that you can expand your subscriber base.

What to Avoid

You Release Content That Does Not Add Value

Before distributing podcasts, you must analyze the needs of your listeners to ensure that you are producing something that they will want to receive. If the content is not compelling, you should reconsider the program. Content that listeners do not value would have the same effect as spam e-mail.

You Produce a Poor-Quality Product

Producing a podcast can have a positive impact on your brand, as well as customer satisfaction, customer acquisition and customer retention. When customers and prospects subscribe to your podcasts, you have an opportunity to communicate regularly with your target audience. However, if you get the content or the quality wrong, this can have a serious negative impact on your brand, sales, marketing, and public relations activities.

Where to Learn More

Books:

Scott, David Meerman, *The New Rules of Marketing and PR: How to Use News Releases, Blogs, Podcasting, Viral Marketing & Online Media to Reach Buyers Directly* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2007.

Colligan, Paul, and Alex Mandossian *The Business Podcasting Bible: Wherever My Market Is I Am*. Heritage House Publishing, Inc., 2007.

Web Site:

Podcasting News: www.podcastingnews.com