

5 Steps to Podcasting Success

A Quickstart Guide by Toby Greenwalt

Virtual Services Coordinator at Skokie Public Library

1. Plan.

Before you get started on your podcast, take some time to figure out what you want to discuss in the first place. Do you have a central premise? Are you interviewing people? Will you answer questions submitted by your listeners? It helps to have a plan before you hit "Record."

Don't interpret this to mean that every word on your podcast should be written out beforehand. My favorite podcasts all sound fairly conversational or off-the-cuff. However, if you listen closely to most of them, you'll find a definite sense of structure to the finished product. At the very least, I recommend creating an outline that you share with any of your participants. Having a plan like this can help preserve the flow of your podcast, reduce dead spots in your conversations, and (perhaps most importantly) save you time in the editing booth later on.

2. Equip.

Having good equipment is key to making sure your podcast comes through loud and clear.

Luckily, most equipment is fairly easy to come by. You can start with something as simple as a headset mic. However, you should check all the moving parts. If the adjustable headband has a lot of plastic parts, they will click together as you talk and be audible on your recording. (You'd be surprised how much you move during a podcast!) I've been using the Logitech H390 (\$40) lately, and it's been fairly solid.

If you'd like something more robust, you can try something like Zoom's "Handy" line of portable MP3 recorders. These have variable mic placements that can be used for recording interviews or individual monologues. (You can check out a Zoom H2 from the Library as well.)

Finally, for a more robust podcasting studio setup, I recommend the microphones from Blue (www.bluemic.com). The Snowball (\$99) is a great starter podcasting mic, and the Yeti (\$150 and up) is the podcasting industry standard.

3. Record.

You'll want to find a place that's reasonably free of background noise. You'd be surprised at how much ambient noise exists in a "quiet" room - air conditioning, lights, even outside noise can be picked up by a microphone. You don't have to start putting up acoustic foam in your house, but do a test recording before you start your real podcast to make sure background noise is at a minimum. (I've also heard that a lot of people use their cars as a portable studio. As long as you don't live on a busy street, the vehicle's construction will deaden quite a bit of ambient noise.)

To record, I recommend using something like GarageBand (for Mac), or Audacity (for PC and Mac - free for downloading at www.audacity.sourceforge.net.) You can record directly to one of these programs, or record off an external recorder and upload it afterward.

Don't worry if you can't record everything at the same time! You can always record segments separately, and then patch them together in editing.

4. Edit.

Once you've recorded your podcast audio, it's time to stitch it all together! If you didn't record directly to Audacity or GarageBand, this is the time to do it. Both of these programs give you a nice visual representation of the sound - what they call the waveform. As you get more comfortable with editing podcasts, you'll eventually be able to "read" the waveform, identifying problem areas in your recording without even needing to hear it first.

One way or another, you should listen to your raw audio all the way through to begin. Pay close attention to any pops, extended pauses, or "ums." Using the Split Clip tool in your audio editing software, it's easy to splice these mistakes out - just make sure you're matching silence (a flat waveform) to silence. Your podcast will sound smooth, and no one will be the wiser.

If you'd recorded separate segments that you'd like to splice together, you can paste that in as a separate track. Listen to the volume of each track, and change the native volume so the podcast plays at a consistent volume. If you have external sound effects or theme music, you can add it in as a separate track too - just make sure they all play with a consistent volume.

Once you've got a finished podcast, it's time to Export the project as an MP3.

5. Publish.

There are several places you can upload a finished podcast and get an RSS feed so people can subscribe to it. We recommend services like TalkShoe (www.talkshoe.com, free) or LibSyn (www.libsyn.com, subscription fees start at \$5/month). Both of these sites will help you to create a new series, assign an RSS feed, and get listed in iTunes - by far the most popular way to find podcasts online.

If you have your own web hosting, you can also host it there and use a tool like Feedburner to convert it to RSS.

To make your podcast findable, it's important to have a good description and keywords associated with it. LibSyn and TalkShoe both have built-in fields for you to insert proper metadata.

Listening to podcasts

Now that you've published a podcast, it's time to listen to them! There are a number of tools available to help you manage your podcast subscriptions. (After all, no one can listen to just one.)

On your desktop, the most popular tool is iTunes (www.apple.com/itunes, free for PC and Mac). Their podcast directory is home to an active community of folks rating and reviewing new podcasts, which makes for a great way to make new discoveries.

On mobile, there are several great free apps. iOS has Podcasts, Instacast, and Downcast (\$1.99), while Android offers DoggCatcher, BeyondPod, and PocketCasts. Stitcher Radio is another free app that's available on both platforms.

Questions? Need more help? Email me: tgreenwalt@skokiellibrary.info