

MELCRUM'S

Special Report on:



# Podcasting

How to get started with  
podcasting in your organization

By Lee Hopkins

Including extracts from the Melcrum report:

**How to use social media to engage employees**

**MELCRUM**

Global research and training for internal communicators



### About the author

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Lee has an honors degree in Psychology and Sociology and has consulted as a management psychologist. He has a passion for employee communications and specializes in “helping companies and fellow professionals discover the almost limitless possibilities for improved business communication that both ‘old fashioned’ and new technology offers.”

A keen and active member of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), Lee is a widely read commentator on communication issues, and regularly showcases and demonstrates to businesses how they can “marry” proven communication practices with new technology.

# Podcasting

## How to get started with podcasting in your organization

By Lee Hopkins

### CONTENTS

#### REPORT:

Introduction .....	3
Why is podcasting so popular? .....	4
What sort of things can you podcast in business? .....	5
How can I get great content? .....	6
What sort of software do I need? .....	7
What sort of equipment do I need? .....	7
What tools do I need to create a podcast? .....	9
Other great reasons to podcast internally .....	10
How do I create a podcast? .....	10
The five “golden rules” for podcasting .....	11
What about “bandwidth” concerns? .....	13
How can I get started? .....	13

#### CASE STUDIES:

<b>University of Southampton:</b> Discovering the speed and ease of podcasts .....	15
<b>ALTANA Pharma Inc.:</b> Using podcasts to connect a remote sales team .....	17
<b>IBM:</b> Driving efficiency with podcasts .....	19
<b>University of Southampton:</b> Using videocasts to engage internally .....	22
<b>IBM:</b> Encouraging employees to videocast .....	26

#### TOP TIPS:

Ten rules of social media strategy .....	28
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<b>ABOUT MELCRUM:</b> .....	30
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### About this report

As a key component of social media, podcasts, be they audio or video, offer huge potential for organizations.

This report describes how you can get started with podcasting in your organization. For those who've gone before you, it's safe to say that most organizations have overwhelmingly positive experiences with podcasting. From small to large organizations there are many examples of podcast initiatives being piloted and going on to become raging successes.

Once you get over your initial fears, you'll see that podcasting is great fun and it's exciting, whether serious, light-hearted or a mixture of both.

In addition to practical advice on how to get started with podcasting and suggestions for how they might be used at work, this report also includes case-study examples of podcasts in action, extracted from the Melcrum report *How to use social media to engage employees*.

### What's RSS?

According to Wikipedia, RSS is a "family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated digital content, such as blogs, news feeds or podcasts."

Users of RSS content use software called "feed readers" or "feed aggregators". The user subscribes to a feed by entering a link to the feed into the reader. The reader can then check the user's feeds to see if any of those feeds have new content since the last time it checked, and if so, retrieve that content and present it to the user.

## INTRODUCTION

A question that I get asked a lot is "what is podcasting?"

Originally defined as an audio file that was delivered to you automatically via really simple syndication (RSS), the term "podcasting" has now come to embody many different facets of audio on the web.

A quick way of explaining them these days is to call them mini radio shows that you can listen to when and where you choose – be that at your computer during lunch, on the commute to work or walking your dog. You also don't need an iPod to listen to a podcast.

As simple MP3 files they play on most digital audio players and desktop media players (although with 110 million iPods sold to date this is rapidly becoming a moot point).

The content of that audio media varies considerably.

Quite often video is also bundled into the "podcast" category. Although this report doesn't go into detail about how to produce video for podcasts, or videocasts as they're also known, we've included a couple of case studies to illustrate how some organizations are adding this to the mix (see pages 22-27).

The early adopters of this new information distribution channel called podcasting used it predominantly as their own music radio station; indeed, you could call podcasting radio with a rewind button. But once the costs of production (almost zero) became known to businesses and consultants it was only a matter of time before all sorts of material became available by RSS subscription.

Today you can subscribe to:

- University lectures
- Comedy shows
- Music shows (focusing on each and every type of music – whatever your taste, you can find a niche specialist who equally shares your passion)
- Industry information

For example, the PR industry has many podcasts, most notably:

- **For Immediate Release** (<http://www.forimmediaterelease.biz>)
- **Six Pixels of Separation** ([www.twistimage.com/blog](http://www.twistimage.com/blog))
- **Inside PR** ([www.insidepr.ca](http://www.insidepr.ca))
- **The Comms Café** (<http://commscafe.com>)

Anything that can be recorded and distributed as a digital audio file can be podcasted (remembering that the podcast isn't the audio file itself, but how it's delivered and distributed, which is via RSS subscription).

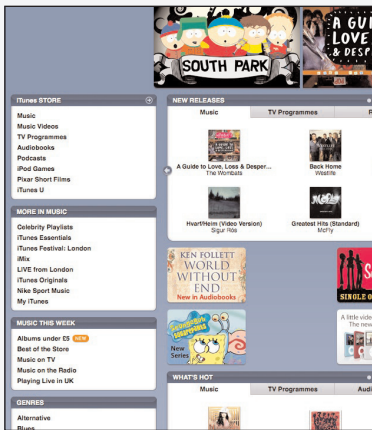
### Juice Receiver

<http://juicereceiver.sourceforge.net/>



### iTunes

<http://itunes.com>



Another question I'm also often asked is "when did podcasting begin?"

The word seems to have been invented some time in 2004. The first podcast-retrieval program (known also as a "podcatcher") seems to have been **iPodder**, now called **Juice Receiver** (<http://juicereceiver.sourceforge.net>), created by Dave Winer and Adam Curry in August 2004.

Through Juice Receiver, or other programs, audio files (MP3 format) are delivered to the users' computer and MP3 player using the RSS (webfeed) process. The podcast capturing program checks your computer and the supplying site to see if there are new audio files; these are then downloaded into **iTunes** (<http://itunes.com>) or a similar program.

The benefit of podcatching programs, as with feeds generally, is that the user is spared the laborious task of finding new updates themselves.

In 2005, a new version of iTunes was issued which allows users to subscribe directly (one-click) through iTunes itself. This led to an exponential growth in podcasting.

## WHY IS PODCASTING SO POPULAR?

Podcasting allows people to listen to what they want when they want. It's ideal for commuting, exercising, traveling and so on.

It also allows you to access material from around the world – for instance, every public broadcaster in the English-speaking world has a significant podcasting presence.

Broadband and bigger hard drives, along with the popularity of Apple's iPod, have also helped. The dissatisfaction with current radio stations, expressed by many ("they play the same old boring songs", "they don't talk about what interests me"), has propelled creative people to start their own "radio shows". The access to high-quality digital sound recording equipment at extremely reasonable prices has also encouraged many thousands of amateurs to join in the fun. Anyone with a modicum of creativity can use a cheap headset microphone, free and freely available recording and mixing software, add a few sound effects and put together their own show based around the content that they would want to listen to.

But it's not just creative individuals who have commenced podcasting – organizations are also podcasting, both internally and externally.

## WHAT SORT OF THINGS CAN YOU PODCAST IN BUSINESS?

Here are just a few examples:

- Meetings
- Executive speeches
- Business updates
- Investor road shows (so employees can have some insight into what outside audiences are hearing)
- Customer trade show presentations (ditto above)
- Presentations by sales executives (so employees can hear how the company's products and services are sold to the outside world)

I can even see different business units offering their own podcasts, allowing employees to subscribe to those that would be useful and ignore those that aren't. The IT department can hard-code those podcasts deemed important to everyone into their podcatcher (say, iTunes), just as they can make the intranet homepage the browser's default homepage. Access to external podcasts could easily be restricted, protecting the company's precious and costly bandwidth.

As many commentators are now saying, considering the low-to-no-cost entry into podcasting, its acceptance into the internal communication mix should happen sooner rather than later.

### **Save your busy executive from the tedium of countless non-productive hours. Here's how...**

Let's consider the average manager or executive.

They receive 60-70 e-mails a day, links to spreadsheets and pages on the company intranet, links to other websites. Then they take a trip to another city. Hop on a plane... but now what?

If they're in "cattle class" (economy class) there's not enough room to swing a cat, let alone open their laptop.

They could probably read some of the material their colleagues sent them, but there's no printer available so unless they printed off the equivalent of *War and Peace* before they left, they're stuck with the airline magazine.

But if they brought their MP3 player with them they can listen to that. And on that MP3 player they could listen to:

- A recent presentation the CEO gave to the investment community.
- An update on sales figures from an affiliate organization.
- A synopsis of performance by the executive's own division.
- News and commentary from leading online broadcasters relevant to the executive's own industry.
- A few really nice tunes to help take your mind off your troubles!

## HOW CAN I GET GREAT CONTENT?

Another question I'm often asked is "how can I get great content without having to hire a professional radio announcer (or pretend to be one)?" Here are a few simple examples:

- Ask the sound guy at the CEO's presentation to save the speech as a digital file.
- Adam in finance can read the sales figures into a cheap microphone attached to his computer. A few clicks of his mouse and he's saved the file as an MP3.
- Rob in admin can read the performance stats into a cheap microphone attached to his computer with a few clicks of his mouse.

## How do I get the podcast delivered to the people I want to hear it?

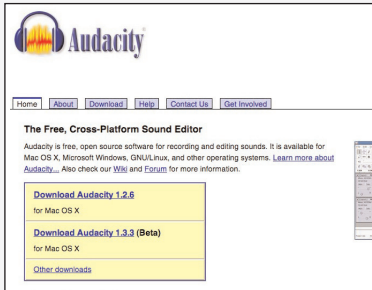
1. Your executives have some inexpensive podcasting software on their desktop, which, with a few clicks of their mouse, automatically collects relevant sound files and downloads them onto their MP3 player.
2. You e-mail everyone to let them know you have a podcast available (and give them a link to the download page on your website or intranet).
3. You have your IT department "enable" RSS technology across the enterprise and on the intranet and internet (and extranet if you have one) so that anyone who has iTunes on their desktop (or Outlook 2007) can "subscribe" and download each new edition automatically.
4. You ensure that on every webpage where there's a link to the podcast you also have the ubiquitous orange radar button so that tech-savvy folk know that they can subscribe via iTunes or Outlook 2007 or any of the many other RSS subscription tools they will no doubt know about.
5. You also give visitors to your download page the ability to subscribe to each episode via e-mail (it can be included as an attachment, as long as it's not too big to be blocked by their e-mail server or IT department).

There are several third-party services that allow such e-mail subscription – the best known and most reliable are services offered by **Feedburner** ([www.feedburner.com](http://www.feedburner.com)) and **Feedblitz** ([www.feedblitz.com](http://www.feedblitz.com)) where, for a small monthly fee, you can even add your own company logos, banners, advertising and so on, making the e-mail look as though it has come directly from your desk. In these days of spam e-mail that's a worthwhile and minor cost to give your e-mail subscribers peace of mind that the e-mail really is from you, not some virus-spreading spammer.

**Feedburner**  
[www.feedburner.com](http://www.feedburner.com)

**Feedblitz**  
[www.feedblitz.com](http://www.feedblitz.com)

**Audacity**  
(<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>)



### Note regarding Audacity

You will need to download an MP3 conversion file that Audacity will need if you want to save your audio masterpieces into the standard podcast file format. You can download the file as a zip file from:

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/help/faq?s=install&item=lame-mp3>. Double click on the zip file to open it, "extract" the .dll file to somewhere on your computer (remember where!), then when you save your audio masterpiece, save it as an MP3. Audacity will ask you where the .dll file is – you only need to tell it once and it remembers (just don't move the file from that location, that's all!).

## WHAT SORT OF SOFTWARE DO I NEED?

For recording the speech files and converting them to MP3 format: **Audacity** (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>) – it comes with a "how to edit audio files" manual (pdf) in the download. Look for it in the "Programs" folder after you've installed it.

For downloading the MP3 files: **iTunes** is really the standard downloader these days. Microsoft Windows Media Player also does a fantastic job, but for me nothing beats the simplicity and design/layout of iTunes.

That's all you need in the way of software – it really is as simple as that!

You might want to consider adding some extra "color" to your podcasts with music, sound effects and so on. There are plenty of companies who sell royalty-free professionally recorded music for use as background music, introductory and farewell music, and so on. Do an online search for "royalty free music" and follow the links, trust your ears and stick to your budget. I have no personal favorite companies myself, I shop around to find the music I want for podcasting projects.

There are also plenty of sites that will sell you sound effects snippets – again, do an online search for "sound effects audio" and follow your ears and budget.

## WHAT EQUIPMENT DO I NEED?

### "What's the best equipment to buy for podcasting?"

As I said earlier, you don't need expensive equipment – you can do this stuff on a shoestring. It's the content that's important, not the technology.

But for those of you who refuse to believe that a \$20 headset microphone and a few sound effect MP3s can create a podcast that will make people come back for more, here's some equipment to blow your budget on.

### Microphones

You can spend thousands on a microphone and you'd be perfectly justified to think you'd be rewarded with an equally expensive and delicious sound. But, the compression technology of MP3 means that expensive microphones are a waste of money for the purpose of a podcast.

Sure, you can get lovely results from microphones with professional, high-end products from the likes of Shure, Sennheiser, Audio Technica, Beyerdynamic, Neumann, RODE and a score of others, but save your dollars for portable digital recorders (below) and satisfy your DJ and Ace-Interviewer urges with mics from the low- to middle-ranges of these manufacturers. Microphones definitely suffer from the Law of Diminishing Returns: more expenditure does not necessarily make for greater audio end product.

### Who is podcasting?

- ABC Australia
- Adobe
- The Age
- Amazon
- Auburn University
- Australian Flexible Learning Framework
- Australian National University (ANU)
- Bloomberg
- BMW
- Computerworld
- Cisco
- Deloitte
- Disneyland
- Gartner
- General Motors
- Georgetown University
- Harvard Business School
- Hewlett Packard
- IBM
- iPressRoom
- Jupiter Research
- McDonalds
- Mercedes Benz
- NASA
- National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), US Department of Commerce
- New Jersey Bankers Association
- Novell
- Oracle
- Ottawa Centre for Research and Innovation
- Peugeot
- Princeton
- Purina
- Renault F1 team
- Rutgers University
- San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
- SAP
- Simon & Schuster
- SkyNews
- Sprint
- St John Ambulance (UK)
- University of California
- Virgin Atlantic
- Whirlpool
- Williams Law Firm

Source: The New PR Wiki  
<http://www.thenewpr.com/wiki/pmwiki.php>

But for goodness sake, do **not** scrimp on buying a “pop” filter for your microphone – it will be \$20 well spent and your listeners will thank you for it! Consider the sound made when you say the words “pop”, “beer”, “person”, “power” and “tango”. In normal conversation they sound harmless enough, but microphones will pick up on the “plosives” (as they are technically known) and create very audible explosions in the ears of your listeners.

### Mixers

Not everyone needs a mixer; in fact even though I have one I still can’t figure out how to use it! But there are times when you need to use a mixer to bring in different inputs into your recording and you don’t have the time to spend in lots of post-production.

Mixers allow you to introduce more individual elements into the one audio recording. For example, you “mix” in the sounds from one, two, three or more microphones, you can add sound effects and pre-recorded tracks from something such as an iPod and blend it all together, fading the individual elements in and out as appropriate.

For a real-life example, Shel Holtz and Neville Hobson record their industry-standard PR and technology podcast **For Immediate Release (FIR)** “live” with Shel adding extra sound material on the fly via his iPod and mixer (<http://www.forimmediaterelease.biz>).

If Shel had to add in all the correspondent reports and listener comments after he and Neville had recorded the main part of the show, poor Shel would never get any work done. As it is, by having his own mic on one channel of his mixer, feeding Neville (based just outside of London and talking via Skype) through another channel and his iPod nano on a third channel, Shel (who is based in California) is able to balance all his sound levels and equaliser settings before recording live to the hard drive.

At the other end of the spectrum – and this may surprise you – my own six-to-eight minute correspondent reports for FIR quite often take me over three hours to create, because I spend a lot of time selecting and adding in sound effects, balancing them in the audio mix, and so on.

### Portable digital recorders

There was a time when these types of recorders cost a month’s salary and had the size, shape and weight of a telephone directory. Thankfully those days are over.

Today’s digital recorders can produce a sound of broadcast quality, and are about the size, shape and weight of a pack of cigarettes.

I’ve recorded politicians, business leaders, senior managers and fellow communicators on several digital recorders, but have settled on my two favorite recorders – one for the recording, one for the never-leave-home-without-it back-up machine.



My “recorder of choice” is the Roland Edirol R-09 and my back-up machine (which I picked up for a song) is a Sony Mini-Disc recorder, the MZ-NHF800. The Sony uses easily sourced mini discs, the Roland uses the ubiquitous SD memory card (consider buying a 4gb one, as the one it ships with is woefully small and inadequate).

Among my podcasting colleagues, I’ve also heard shining reports about the M-Audio MicroTrack, which is an all-in-one microphone and recorder and also uses memory cards.

### **Other gear**

Sure, you can invest in compressors, equalizers, studio-quality headphones, pre-amps, gates, limiters, expanders...the list is as endless as the smile emanating from your local, friendly music shop manager when you talk to him about your podcasting idea.

But remember, Audacity (and just about every other audio-production software) will have the effects built in that allow you to “professionalize” your sound.

### **Summary of recommended devices**

- M-Audio MicroTrack all-in-one voice recorder
- Sony Mini-Disc MZ-NHF800 (to be used in conjunction with external microphone)
- Roland Edirol R-09 digital recorder

## **WHAT TOOLS DO I NEED TO CREATE A PODCAST?**

You only need a few simple tools and many of them are free.

For a start, a simple laptop or desktop computer, a cheap microphone and some free editing software like Audacity will have you producing podcasts in next to no time.

You can always upgrade your microphone, or record via a digital recorder later, once the podcast has proven itself as valuable – and it will, trust me.

Later on, if you want to get really technical you can, but remember: podcasting is not about the technology you use to record, it’s all about the compelling content you are delivering to your audiences – content they will be eager to listen to and will want to hear more of.

## OTHER GREAT REASONS TO PODCAST INTERNALLY

Remember way back when companies used to keep their sales forces “skilled up” via audio cassettes? The sales force used to listen to the cassettes in their car (on the way to work, home, client visits, etc.). Sales people had the option to listen to the communications at the time and location of their choice, all the while not interfering with their actual sales activities.

The cassettes took time to write and produce, sure, plus you needed to add on duplication and distribution costs and timeframes, but for the dissemination of non-urgent material it was a brilliant solution.

I’ve listened to countless hours of audio material from personal improvement publishers Nightingale-Conant and others over the years in my own “mobile university” (aka my car).

Which brings me back to podcasting.

Podcasting is a brilliant, low-cost way of getting mildly urgent and non-urgent communication out to relevant interest groups. What makes podcasting so cool is that the files can be downloaded to an MP3 player and listened to while walking the dog, sitting on the bus or train, driving the car, sitting under a tree, enduring long and tedious flights, waiting in airport terminals, switching out taxi drivers who could run the country better than the current mob if only given a chance, and so on.

A podcast can be quickly downloaded onto a player manually, or it can be configured using some clever software (a podcatcher) to automatically download onto the recipient’s media player of choice, ready for them to listen to on their way to work in the morning. How cool and efficient is that?

## HOW DO I CREATE A PODCAST?

**Simple – record someone or something, edit it and then publish it.**

- 1. Record:** using a microphone (a \$20 version works just as well as a \$100 version for most podcasts), record an interview, yourself or someone else.
- 2. Edit:** take out the “ums and ahs”, the fluffs, the mispronunciations, the nervous ticks (I have a dreadful habit of sucking in air through my front teeth when breathing between sentences, which I have to laboriously edit out!) and generally tighten up your recording. Software like Audacity (and you can pay up to \$1,000 for some software) allows you to add “compression” and change equalizer settings to make the sound a little more polished, but don’t worry about those bells and whistles at first; all of that stuff can come later as you gain more experience and confidence.

Add in some music (if your podcast format has music in it as introductory or outgoing "signature" pieces, for example) and sound effects if you want. Listen to the final output several times – you'd be amazed at how the recording you listened to at 4pm and thought was rather good sounds less so at 9.30 the next morning!

- 3. Publish:** depending on your IT department's views, you may be able to host your podcast on the company server, or you may need to host it on a third-party's server (I personally recommend **Libsyn** – [www.libsyn.com](http://www.libsyn.com) – for cost effectiveness and reliability). Once it has been hosted, make sure you let everyone in your world know about it – customers, employees, suppliers – depending, of course, on who your target audience is.

And make sure that the tech-savvy among your audience are able to subscribe to your podcast via RSS feed – your IT department will be able to organize that, or else it comes as "standard" when you host with Libsyn.

Alternatively, find a podcaster within your organization (why not ask via the internal newsletter, or run a competition to find the most creative ideas for your company's podcast?) and have them help you set up the RSS feed, RSS subscription buttons and so on. It may be confusing to you and most of your audience, but the tech-savvy younger employees will thank you, and you'll earn kudos with them for making sure the RSS stuff is there and working.

## THE FIVE GOLDEN RULES FOR PODCASTING

I believe there are five golden rules you need to know about if you are keen to create a great podcast:

- 1. Understand the media.** You do this by downloading and listening to lots of podcasts from all different genres – comedy, other business podcasts, music, chat, special interests and so on. Listen to the podcasts, see what you like in each one and what you don't like, find out if there are some key elements that just work for you and you believe you can incorporate into your own podcast. Take lots of notes.
- 2. Create a script.** Or at least a set of bullet points for yourself or the presenter, so that you/they don't wander too far off the track when the microphone is on.
- 3. Use a template.** By that I mean decide what your format will be (light-hearted articles read by the one person, a two or three person chat, special-interest focused recordings, etc.) and what standard items there will be in each podcast edition (for example, the same intro/outro music, the same way of introducing the podcast edition, the "layout" of the podcast – e.g. intro theme, welcome, item 1, item 2, comments, closing theme).

4. **Edit and polish.** You can always do a number of “takes” when recording, then edit out the ums, ahs, fumbles and mispronunciations later. You can also edit out over-long pauses to liven up an otherwise slow and boring interviewee. Don't go overboard on your edits – you want to keep a natural feeling to your podcast and keep it from sounding too over-produced and slick – but equally don't ruin great content by not wielding the editing mouse firmly but fairly.
5. **Publish it.** Create a publishing schedule for each edition so that listeners will come to unconsciously expect your podcast to appear in their MP3 player or on their computer. And tell the world about your new podcast. Splash it all over your intranet. If it's for the “outside world” to hear then make sure every person in the company who has any interactions with customers, clients or people outside the company lets them know about the new podcast and how they can easily download and listen to it.

### How much participation can you bank on?

As Philippe Borremans, IBM's new media lead in Europe, said in a **recent interview** (<http://www.melcrum.com/about/press/smee.shtml>), “Social media isn't for every company or every employee.” But if you're one of the 60% of communication practitioners who now have some kind of social media program in place, what sort of participation can you expect from the workforce?

Looking at recent social media initiatives, including those featured in Melcrum's report **How to use social media to engage employees** (<http://www.melcrum.com/store/products/product.shtml?id=3495>), the figures look like this:

- Around 4,000 employees of Sun Microsystems blog (11% of the workforce).
- At IBM, 23,000 employees are active on Facebook (6.6% of the workforce, as of August 2007).
- At IBM's “World Jam” – an online multimedia brainstorming session in 2001, 50,000 employees participated (14% of the workforce).
- At the World Bank during a recent leadership crisis, some 4,000 unique visitors visited the internal blogs (40% of the workforce), leaving 300 comments in 10 days.

#### Internal collaboration and knowledge sharing

ING group, a financial organization with 113,000 employees, has an organizationwide wiki – again to develop and enhance global internal collaboration and knowledge sharing.

The ING wiki was officially launched in October 2006. By March 2007 it had 2,200 registered users (2% of the workforce) and over 900 articles. The initial strategic goals of achieving at least 25 unique contributions per week and 400 unique visitors per day had also been met.

#### What does this mean for podcasting?

With a range of percentages from 2-40%, what constitutes a successful social media program? Of course, much depends on how long the program has existed. But considering the above together with more informal research and conversations, if 10-15% of your workforce is involved in any one initiative, it can be considered to be doing very well.

## WHAT ABOUT BANDWIDTH CONCERNS?

This is a standard concern for IT departments, and luckily the answer is a wonderful service called **Libsyn** ([www.libsyn.com](http://www.libsyn.com)) where, for a small fee each month, you can host your podcast on their servers, set up the podcast ready to distribute via RSS and even retrieve download statistics on each edition.

A hosting package on Libsyn also comes complete with all of the essential RSS information that you will want to make sure are present on your download web page.

Podcasting offers all the key advantages associated with social media such as low barriers to entry and established popularity among the general population – in Melcrum's 2007 survey on social media and corporate communication (<http://www.melcrum.com/store/products/product.shtml?id=3495>), 58% of respondents said they were already using, or planning to use podcasts in their organization.

## HOW CAN I GET STARTED WITH PODCASTS?

Here are three quick stages to work through:

### 1. Why podcast?

First of all, consider what it is you want to use podcasting for. For example:

- CEO podcasts
- Daily/weekly team updates, divisional or organizational updates
- Speeches or presentations
- Training and administration purposes
- Specialty podcasts
- Something entirely different

Remember that podcasting is a technology that can greatly enhance collaboration. You could take this one step further and encourage participation and contribution by giving employees opportunities to participate in and develop their own ideas for podcasts.

### 2. What to podcast?

Next up, consider your content and format:

- Will it be a program format?
- Will it be news items, interviews or magazine-style?
- Will you have a single presenter or multiple presenters?
- Will it be in a studio (if you have one) or will it be out and about?
- How often will the podcast run and how long will it run for (a new regular show or just a series of six, for example)?

### 3. And finally...

Don't forget:

- **Keep it simple:** Don't be over-ambitious on your first few attempts.
- **Keep it short:** Aim for around 10-15 minutes.
- **Don't overly fret about production values and technology:** A podcast that sounds like you're in a fishbowl will not work well, but equally, they don't necessarily need to sound like something produced by a professional broadcaster.
- **Look out for best practice:** Always be on the lookout for new ideas and ways to improve the podcast – just as you would do with anything else. That means taking suggestions on board and listening to as many different podcasts as you have time to.
- **Keep them coming:** Don't use up all your energy on the first one and then give up!

## PODCASTS IN ACTION

The next section of this report shares case-study examples of podcasts and videocasts in action. These have been extracted from the Melcrum report **How to use social media to engage employees**.

## CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

# Discovering the speed and ease of podcasts

One of the world's leading research faculties in digital media, the Electronics and Computer Science (ECS) school within the UK's **University of Southampton**, is one step ahead of the pack in its application of social media tools for communication. The school counts among its faculty the inventor of the World Wide Web, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, Professor David Payne, the inventor of the optical amplifier, and Professor Tony Hey, now corporate vice-president of Microsoft UK.

Since 2005, the school's lectures and seminars have been podcasted, allowing students to run them again for revision, or for the first time if they've missed them. A dedicated portion of the ECS website, [www.zeplertv.com](http://www.zeplertv.com), was resourced to host the podcasts.

### Experimenting with technology

In early 2006, the ECS communication team began experimenting with turning the technology to its external faculty news. "It seemed a great way to present our research to journalists in a visual and audio format," explains ECS's marketing and communications manager, Joyce Lewis. "It provided an easy and compelling format for them to digest, and a terrific way to provide a cognitive link for them between our research and its potential coverage as a TV or radio news item."

### The benefits of podcasts

The result: "ECS TV" provides a vital link between the university's research work and the outside world. The benefits, says Lewis, are numerous – especially in a department of only one (Lewis herself), plus one web designer:

- **Low on cost, high on simplicity:** "When we first started it, we were able to do it just by using the video-conferencing technology we already had – fixed cameras, operated remotely, and radio mikes," she says. Editing the programs using the iMovie application that came with her computer, the whole production line was cost-free. "That was the principal attraction of it in the first place – you can do this with a very small number of people and very few tools. It's high impact at no cost."
- **Speed:** The ability to turn around content quickly is an incredible advantage over previous forms of communication media, she says, and brings it closer to rivalling print. "We were able to cover a conference last year and podcast about it each morning for the entire four-day duration. Because the production is simple, it's really a case of a quick edit and you can get it out there."
- **Skillset:** With a designer who has a background in TV production and an IT staffer who had already (for the student lecture podcast series) developed the necessary compression tools to make the video RSS-enabled, "We knew we already had the skillset to do a pretty good job," says Lewis.

**CASE STUDY CONTINUED:**

University of Southampton

**Discovering the speed and ease of podcasts**

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**Joyce Lewis: Getting the best from podcast interviewees**

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Podcasts and video podcasts (videocasts) are, very often, dependent on the quality and media-friendliness of their subjects. In a population of non-media trained people, however, this can prove difficult. Joyce Lewis, marketing and communications manager at the University of Southampton's Electronics and Computer Science school (ECS), has advice to share from producing dozens of such broadcasts over the last few years. The trick, she says, is patience and positive reinforcement.

If the interviewee is fine "off camera," she says, one must recognize that their stilted persona in front of the lens must only be a product of nerves and uncertainty, and can therefore be overcome with good, supportive coaching. Here are her tips for getting the best out of interviewees:

**1. Take away the pressure**

"If someone is drying up in front of other participants, I've found it effective just to ask everyone else to leave for a while – the camera person and other interviewees – so that I can sit and talk to the person and walk them through the process in private. That takes away the intensity and the pressure. Some people are shy and introverted and you need to help them relax. Taking away the sense of 'people are watching me' can help enormously."

**2. Prepare them**

In such a situation, Lewis will then often walk the participant through the questions and topics, and engage them in a conversation about the leading topics before filming begins. "If they've had the chance to articulate their thoughts on it out loud to me alone before we start filming, even just once, it helps them feel that at least they know roughly where their sentences are going when we do start filming."

**3. Close the loop**

A vital element of any communication is feedback, and this is doubly important for those who have been nervous about performing in front of camera. "You can do a lot with editing, so you can make them look as good as they possibly can. But I'll then also go through the video with them afterwards – because then they see that they're never as 'bad' as they think they were going to be, or think they were." So it provides a vital opportunity to allay their fears, but also the chance to offer them encouragement. "Simply showing them the footage and saying, 'I think you were really good here,' 'I like the way you said that,' and so on will put them at ease. They'll feel much happier about the process and then they're much more likely to agree to do it again next time."

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**Joyce Lewis**

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## CASE STUDY: ALTANA PHARMA INC.

# Using podcasts to connect a remote sales team

How do you connect with a geographically dispersed audience? iStudio, an interactive agency in Canada, introduced podcasts for one of its pharmaceutical clients as a personal and portable way to communicate with field employees.

In September 2005, Ron Clark assumed the role of vice president, sales of **ALTANA Pharma Inc.**, a Nycomed company. The organization needed a cost-efficient way to introduce the new VP, build rapport between management and their sales team, and provide insights on key business initiatives.

### Introducing "Ron's blog"

The sales team at ALTANA is predominantly a remote workforce, spread across Canada. In pharmaceutical sales, representatives are primarily on the road for most of the work day. Accessing e-mail or the company intranet is often a challenge due to the constraints of traveling. iStudio investigated new online techniques that would be helpful in reaching a remote workforce and suggested a corporate blog/podcast as the solution. They created "Ron's Blog," which allows employees to have an open online dialogue with Ron.

Ron's monthly podcast is available via the blog. The podcast is a 10-15 minute audio file, which has a radio show feel. In each episode, Ron provides sales updates, shares insights and anecdotes and interviews special guests. The podcast can be listened to a computer or can be downloaded onto a portable MP3 player.

### Early adoption success

The response to the podcasts suggests this medium has been a success: 76% of sales staff accessed the first episode and 88% accessed the second episode.

The feedback was also positive, with comments like: "It feels a little more personal than an e-mail, and has much more emotion attached to it than even a voicemail," and "I like it because it's innovative and user-friendly...plus I think it brings you closer to the sales force."

Clearly, employees find the podcasts much more personal than a voicemail or e-mail. In addition, employees like the opportunity to provide input into the content of future podcasts via Ron's Blog.

Even though the podcasts are primarily intended for sales staff, over 80% of all employees access each episode. The podcasting program has been so successful that the company gave iPods to all employees in 2006.

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**TOP TIP:**  
**Use a template to plan podcast content**

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To support the process of planning podcasts, iStudio has produced a customizable template that lets you plan podcast content down to the very minute (see Figure 1, page 18). The template includes elements like "Call to Action" – a method designed to enliven the audio content.

**CASE STUDY CONTINUED:**

ALTANA Pharma Inc.

**Using podcasts to connect a remote sales team**

**Fig 1:** iStudio's customizable podcast template

Section	Time	Content
Standard Introductory Music	____ seconds	Theme music (check out the <a href="http://music.podshow.com/">Podsafe Music Network: http://music.podshow.com/</a> if you need to select a song)
Introduction	____ seconds or minutes	Sample script or key messages (i.e. It's ____ (date) and this is the first episode of ____ (podcast name). Describe focus of podcast and the topic for this episode.
Audio Transition	____ seconds	Theme music
Topic 1: (topic name)	____ minutes	Provide sample script and/or key points to be covered
Audio Transition	____ seconds	Theme music
Topic 2: (topic name) <i>Continue to add topics to fit the length of your podcast.</i>	____ minutes	Provide sample script and/or key points to be covered
Call to Action ( <i>Highly recommended even if you are just asking listeners to provide their comments or ideas for future topics</i> )	____ minutes	Provide sample script and/or key points to be covered
Conclusion	____ minutes	Let listeners know when next episode will be posted
<b>Total Time</b>	<b>____ minutes</b>	

CASE STUDY: IBM

## Driving efficiency with podcasts

"We've seen a huge pick-up in interest in podcasting over the last 18 months," says Philippe Borremans, **IBM's** European new media lead. "Writing can seem such a technical skill, whereas people feel they can talk more freely than they can write." Borremans has overseen the development of a central podcast venue on the organization's website with all the tools, platforms and processes required to upload and share podcasts.

In the 12 months since its launch, it has become home to 304 podcasts, ranging from personal interests to business strategy.

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**TOP TIP:**  
**Use podcasts to connect with off-site staff**

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One of the most consistently popular IBM podcasts, with over 20,000 downloads a week, is "IBM Week in Review" – a digest of the top internal business stories in IBM over the last seven days. Put together in a typical podcast style – a light, conversational interview between two members of the communication team – it's proving to be a particularly vital tool for remote workers, says Borremans.

"Because we have so many people working at client sites, they can't necessarily read all the daily updates on the intranet," he explains. "So, previously they would have missed out. Now, they can subscribe to a simple weekly podcast to give them all the latest news from the company."

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**TOP TIP:**  
**Use podcasts to support busy executives**

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One particular innovation – and lesson learned – from the process came from one of IBM's senior executives. His regular teleconferences with his global teams weren't working as well as he'd hoped – in part due to the time difference, with many of his direct reports having to dial in in the middle of the night; and in part due to the problematic feedback loop.

"On calls like that, it's hard to get true feedback," explains Borremans. "First, people have to respond on the spot, or the opportunity is lost. If something occurs to them after the call, it's too late. Second, it takes a certain kind of person to speak up live on the call, with everyone listening in."

The solution to these issues was for the vice president to launch the call as a podcast instead. The benefits are clear: his team can listen to it in their own time, rather than having to dial in at 3am. In addition, it means they can pause it if they're interrupted, or rewind it if they want to hear something again.

**CASE STUDY CONTINUED:**

IBM

**Driving efficiency with podcasts**

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**Critical benefit: feedback loop**

The most critical benefit however is in the feedback loop. The podcast is hosted as an entry on the executive's blog, which means that his team can post comments underneath the entry, and get into a wide-ranging discussion about its content. And that's exactly what has happened.

"So even though a podcast is, on the face of it, more 'one-way' than a conference call, it has in fact revolutionized the amount of response he's getting," says Borremans. "He's finding it's really stimulating discussion about the content of the calls because his team now has time to listen to the call when their head is in the right place, and because they have a format – the written word – for giving considered feedback, rather than top-of-the-head, meandering thoughts."

**Philippe Borremans: Key points to remember when podcasting**

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Based on his experience implementing podcasts at IBM, Philippe Borremans has learned a number of key lessons. Here he shares some pointers for communicators preparing to introduce podcasts into their organizations:

**1. Understand the concept**

A podcast is not just an audio file that you put online. "If you limit it to that, you're really not understanding it," he says. "The benefit of podcasting, as with a lot of social media, is that you're putting the user in control. If I subscribe to your podcast, I'm going to listen to your content when I find it, and when I have time – not when you upload it." That "time-shifted communication" is a core concept behind the technology for communication professionals to grasp.

**2. Keep it regular**

The most successful podcasts are those that form a series – so that people can subscribe to, and have a sense of continuity with, a new "episode" uploaded on regular diary dates. "It should never be a case of, 'Oh, instead of writing this, I'll just record it and put it online,'" says Borremans. "That doesn't work. People are not compelled by one-off broadcasts. The whole point of podcasting is to create something regular that people will 'get into.'"

**3. Subscription matters**

Feeding from both the first two points, RSS is the vital glue – it's the subscription element that makes a podcast. As Borremans suggests: "So, you announce that every week or month we'll give you an update, which you can subscribe to by RSS – then you have a podcast. Not just because it makes it a series, but also because it will automate the download process – so that, thereafter, every new episode will automatically download to their PC or MP3 player."

**4. You don't need an MP3 player**

According to industry studies, 70% of people listen to podcasts on their computer, not on an MP3 player.

CASE STUDY CONTINUED:

IBM

**Driving efficiency with podcasts**

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"It's a common misconception that your whole staff will need an MP3 player for a podcast series to work. But you actually just need a PC," Borremans adds.

**5. Learn the format**

Listen to podcasts, understand how they work. They should be short (maximum 15 minutes), to-the-point and chatty. Also bear in mind why many of them are two-handers – it's much easier to listen to two people conversing than one person lecturing. "If you have a really good radio voice, you can do it alone," says Borremans, "but few people have that talent, so try to do it in an interview style. And don't script every single word or you'll have a very boring podcast."

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## CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

# Using videocasts to engage internally

The Electronics and Computer Science (ECS) school at the **University of Southampton** has overseen the roll out of a podcasting initiative over the past year. Both podcasts and videocasts were originally used to present research to journalists.

The video element appealed, largely because of the ease with which video clips can be generated. "When we first started, we were able to do it just by using the video-conferencing technology we already had," says Joyce Lewis, marketing and communications manager. Then the programs were edited using the iMovie application that came with her computer. The whole production line was cost-free.

### Using video internally

Lewis realized early on that online video, in the form of video podcasts, had great potential internally. "Because of our core research areas, we have a good high-speed network and a lot of people interested in technology," she explains. "Plus, we realized that we could video things that our staff and students weren't able to see – like the development of our new Mountbatten Building complex that was, at the time, stuck behind a lot of construction fencing – so it had an immediate use as a visual communication tool."

Launched in February 2006, "ECS TV" is a series of semi-regular video podcasts on a variety of topics. One "channel" of ECS TV is reserved for general ECS news (the updates on university research that go out externally to journalists, potential students and alumni), and another for student news (for all students and potential students).

### Powerful communication

But, of those run so far, Lewis feels none have showcased the medium's value as an internal communication tool quite so well as the third ECS TV series, covering the university's Mountbatten Building – a research facility that was destroyed by fire in October 2005.

"The fire was a hugely traumatic event for everyone in the university," she explains. "Aside from the obvious, many students lost all of their research work in the blaze and the staff who worked there suffered three years' severe disruption of their research – 2005 to 2007 – while the facility was being rebuilt."

One year on from the fire and, after protracted insurance wrangling, October 2006 saw the final demolition of the remains. Lewis recognized an opportunity to use the event, and the anniversary date, to launch a special videocast. Interviewing the head of school on-site as she oversaw the demolition, Lewis captured the raw emotion of what was happening. "By doing it with video – even a simple, handheld video with a small radio microphone – we created this enormously powerful piece of communication on the spot. She just talked very genuinely, unscripted, to the camera about what was going on and how she felt."

### Video versus words on a page

It brought home to Lewis the power of the medium. "No matter how good the writer, words on a page from a communication department will never get close to conveying the sincerity and depth of emotion that one 10-minute video did," she says. "It wasn't staged, it was very intimate, so it felt like you were almost overhearing the head of school talking about it to you privately, and that made it all the more powerful."

**CASE STUDY CONTINUED:**

University of Southampton

**Using videocasts to engage internally**

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It also demonstrated the production benefits – the interview was completed at 2pm on the anniversary day and by 4pm the podcast had been uploaded.

**Learning through development**

It's still a project in its learning phases, but already the response has been impressive – more than 750 individual downloads per videocast from a core faculty community of just over 1,600.

**“No matter how good the writer, words on a page will never get close to conveying the sincerity and depth of emotion that one 10-minute video did.”**

**Joyce Lewis**

University of Southampton

The project has been so successful that it has given Lewis the chance and budget to upscale the production. The toolset she began with – a video camera, a radio microphone and a copy of the iMovie desktop application for editing – has since been upgraded to a high-definition camera, handheld microphones, more complex editing software (FinalCut Pro) and, soon to be added, a professional outdoor broadcast boom microphone.

**Advice for videocasters**

Updating the process as she has gone along, Lewis has some advice for those thinking of venturing into the world of videocasts:

- **Keep it simple:** The simplicity and speed of the format is what makes it appealing to a tight-budgeted department; the problem is that experience breeds a desire to over-complicate the process for more effect, but in the process losing the thing that makes it worthwhile. “The more you do, the more ambitious you become,” she explains. “Every time we run one, it’s very tempting to imagine what more we could do with professional tools. That can be good, if it’s to a purpose, but you have to be aware of not going too mad, because you lose the ability to do it cheaply and with a quick turnaround – which are the main benefits of the process in the first place.

When we began, we could edit a piece in 10 minutes with iMovie. Now, it takes us a much longer, because FinalCut Pro can do so much more! So it’s a trade-off all the time between what would enhance the experience for the audience and what is just an unnecessary ‘nice to have.’”

- **Keep it focused:** The biggest successes, she says, have been for video podcasts on very specific subjects – both because the viewer’s time is focused and limited, and because it gives them a clear idea of what they’ll be giving up their time to watch. For these reasons, too, it’s best to keep each “program” dedicated to a single topic. “People will sit and watch it deliberately when they have a small amount of time,” she says. “Their attention span will be brief, so they’ll watch until the end of the feature but then if you start on a whole new topic after that, they’re quite likely to say, ‘Oh I don’t have time for this’ and turn it off.”
- **Get the format right:** It’s important to match the message with the medium, using it to highlight things that can only really be expressed visually. “When we first started, we were doing most shows along a magazine-style format – me talking and interviewing a few ‘talking heads,’” Lewis explains. “We realized then that we might as well have been just doing them as audio podcasts and we wouldn’t have lost that much. You have to focus on what video will give you that nothing else will.”

**CASE STUDY CONTINUED:**

University of Southampton

**Using videocasts to engage internally**

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**TOP TIP:**  
**Interview employees to encourage involvement**

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One of the benefits of the medium's simplicity (and what allies it to the concepts of social media) is that it can showcase more direct and visible participation from the audience as interviewees. This is not lost on Lewis, who feels that it produces untold side-benefits for internal communication in general.

"If you ask people to be involved as interviewees, we've found they very quickly realize that what they say is going to be part of the school's communications," she explains. The result? You get both increased ambassadorship and a sense of ownership for the process. "So, they will say things like, 'Is this the right thing to say?' or 'Am I putting across the right message?' They clearly feel that they've become part of the communication process themselves, because they're representing the school and there's no intermediary between them and the messages.

"It's a very effective way to move towards a situation where everyone in the organization is a part of the communication culture. And apart from the obvious benefits of creating a more two-way environment, I think that that gives people a feeling of real affinity with the work of the school."

On the production side, Lewis is also looking to roll out more independent video-making around the faculty in 2008, in line with this vision. "At the moment, we still control it. But from next year, anyone on campus will be able to make their own content to go up on the site as well. We'll still post it up, but the actual invention and work will come from them."

**Encouraging contributions**

To increase this participative, knowledge-sharing environment, her team has already been assisting people to contribute to the regular series. Students are encouraged to contribute segments to the ECS student channel since, as Lewis says, they know most about their own way of life.

One further instance on ECS News saw the showcasing of a team that had completed a research study into the future preservation of online media. Rather than produce the requisite written academic paper on the final findings of the work, the study team asked to do it as a video instead. "So it was an ideal match of form and content, because of the subject matter," explains Lewis. Supported by her team, their work will form one episode in the upcoming schedule of video podcasts.

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**TOP TIP:**  
**Use video as a guide to your site**

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Another idea Lewis has been developing is to change the orientation guide on the ECS website



CASE STUDY CONTINUED:

University of Southampton

Using videocasts to engage internally

(see Figure 2, below) from text-based to more video-based. The idea is simple – icons at various points on the site, which, when the user clicks on them, open a small window with a video running of someone actually telling them about the site or some key piece of information, rather than the text-based equivalent. “Doing the video podcasts has shown us just how quick, cheap and easy online video can be now, and also its impact,” she says. “With the way the web is going, things like that could soon be standard.”

It's just one small concept, but part of an overarching theme Lewis sees as crucial to the development of web-based interaction for communication. “Rather than: ‘What kind of things can we put on there?’ I think we should be saying: ‘We've got the web, it's an amazing multimedia source, in what different ways can we use our sites to get our messages across?’

“If you think about it that way, then you think about the web more as one holistic thing, rather than just a place to put content.”

Ripe for revolution

Lewis adds that the time is ripe for revolution: “The IT techie people have brought forward all the technology of the internet, but now we're taking it over as a communication medium. The technology is not that difficult any more, the platforms are much more open to all of us. Now it's less about the technology and more about how we seize the opportunity to use it.”

Fig 2: The ECS website



## CASE STUDY: IBM

# Encouraging employees to videocast

A core part of **IBM's** new-media strategy for the coming 18 months centers on the possibilities for video podcasting (i.e., videocasting). "We've certainly started to feel that there's a lot of emerging interest in videocasting inside the organization," says Philippe Borremans, new media lead in Europe for IBM.

He suggests there are three core reasons the company is moving that way:

- 1. It's how the web is going:** "Our moves to videocast really reflect what's happening on the web generally, where more and more of the content you're seeing these days is video content."
- 2. The technology is already there:** With many departments, and most communicators, already having video recording capability, there is little extra cost to be outlaid. "And mobile technology is fast moving that way too," he adds. "I can take a video with my mobile phone that's good enough for a videocast." The mobile technology – both through cellphones and video iPods – means that there's also an increasingly strong, natural counter to the argument that videocasts require devoted attention, which may mean less general productivity at work: "Just like podcasts," says Borremans, "people will be able to watch them in their own time."
- 3. It offers greater creative potential:** With a podcast, there's a linearity to the content – 15 minutes of material are 15 minutes of material. But, with the right editing software, there are endless possibilities when it comes to creating communications that are inventive, clear and engaging. "Think about how quickly you can splice images, sounds, moving images, pictures and words in a piece of film to get across your message. You could condense the material from that 15-minute podcast into two minutes of video, with the right suite of tools."

As it did with blogs, wikis and podcasts, IBM is in the process of building an enterprisewide videocasting platform so that it can centralize the technology requirements and keep content located in one place.

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**TOP TIP:**  
**Stimulate creativity with an employee competition**

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One of the core principles of the new-media team at IBM has always been to build social media strategy from the ground up – look at what employees are already doing in numbers (blogs, wikis, podcasts) and then respond to it with structure and the building of a central hub. Figure 3, page 27, shows IBM's central podcasting homepage.

With videocasting, the team is a little ahead of the curve, yet it still wants to "keep the social media social." They have therefore launched videocasting with an employee competition – inviting staff to flex their creative muscles.

"One of our core strategy topics is innovation. So we invited all IBMers to create a short video clip to showcase

CASE STUDY CONTINUED:

IBM

**Encouraging employees to videocast**

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how they see IBM innovating, or how they think it might help its clients innovate. They could then upload their clips to a central database, and have all IBMers vote on it for a prize.”

The clips had to be no more than 60 seconds long and, in total, the company saw 512 submissions – ranging from the serious to the interpretive. (For example, one was a simple video about the potential of a paper clip). “It’s one of those nice projects you can do to just have people think about a strategic topic for the company, but at the same time use new technology,” says Borremans.

**Fig 3:** IBM’s Webahead podcasting homepage

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TOP TIPS:

## Ten rules of social media strategy

### Use these 10 rules of social media strategy to ensure success when rolling out social media tools inside the organization.

by Victoria Mellor, CEO, Melcrum Publishing



Before you jump into social media, ask yourself whether your organization is ready. It's the job of the communicator to recognize and understand where and how social media tools might work in your business. So, here's a 10-step checklist to help ensure your social media development goes according to plan:

#### 1. Assess your readiness

Before doing anything, assess your organization's cultural readiness. Will blogs, podcasts, wikis and so on survive in your organization? Do the new tools complement your organization's processes and vision? Remember, social media won't necessarily suit all organizations and employees.

#### 2. Focus on people, not the technology

Don't overlook the needs and preferences of the people who will use the new tools – focus on the human need for the technology and how they're able to adapt to it.

#### 3. Carefully consider the business benefit

Before rushing in, think about the purpose of the tools. Once you're clear on the actual business purpose of the tools, you'll be led by the goals you're trying to achieve, rather than the technology itself. Ask specific questions, such as:

- Who will use these tools?
- How can they support or generate useful conversations?
- How can they give employees better access to leadership?
- How can they help global teams collaborate and communicate better?
- How can they change the culture?

#### 4. Grasp the difference between traditional and social media

Make sure you understand the difference between the two types of media. Without grasping the difference between the two fundamentally different methods of communication, it's unlikely you'll grasp the potential of social media. As a communicator you provide the tools, you shape their use and you set guidelines for use. The audience then decides what's useful and what's not.

#### 5. Prepare to relinquish control and share the process

Social media places all users on an equal footing, so control is reduced for all organizations and leaders. Employees become equal partners in the communication process and are invited to take part in a conversation and share information, rather than have information pushed at them. Also, get

TOP TIPS CONTINUED:

**Ten rules of social media strategy**

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comfortable with ambiguity. Simple person-to-person conversations can turn into large knowledge-sharing exercises if they're allowed to grow in whatever way they need to.

**6. Be experimental and involve employees**

Because social media isn't costly to implement, you can afford to experiment. Involving employees in trial and development encourages acceptance of the tools. It helps familiarize them with the tools so they feel comfortable using them, in their own time. Think about producing "beta" sites for employees to experiment with – this will help iron out glitches before going "live".

**7. Give employees clear guidelines**

However informal, there's no reason why communication taking place via a blog or a wiki should stray from the usual behaviors expected in any workplace interaction – such as professionalism or respect. Spell out the consequences of unacceptable behavior. Think about prohibiting anonymity, so employees will realize they'll be held accountable for their comments. You could also outline a blogging Code of Conduct.

**8. Take a hands-off approach**

People are instinctively fearful of radical change, so resist the urge to market tools aggressively. Social media tools seem to work best when they're allowed to develop and grow organically. Put together platforms and software and then consult employees about how to optimize their use and potential.

**9. Work with what you've got**

Use existing technology wherever possible, learning through trial and error, and develop tools based on what's working and what isn't. Integrate new tools and applications with your existing channels and media, rather than replacing your existing platforms.

**10. Don't obsess about the numbers**

For most organizations using social media tools, it's too early to measure their financial success with reliability or accuracy. Given that social media tools are cheap to implement, our focus should be on what can be gained from making them available, rather than the return on investment in financial terms. Focus on the outcomes rather than the activity surrounding them (e.g., the number of comments on a blog). Also, ask for anecdotal feedback from employees.

To work through these points in more detail, download the Social media strategy worksheet to help you identify the steps you need to take to integrate these tools with your existing communication approach.

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Melcrum is a research and training business, expert in all aspects of internal communication. Through our global networks, we connect more than 25,000 professional communicators in sharing what works. Together, we seek to improve the effectiveness and influence of internal communication.

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