
Getting Started with Your Podcast

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You've come up with a great topic for a daily or weekly [podcast](#). The problem is that you don't know where to begin. Believe it or not, you don't need a lot of high-priced equipment or the expertise of an audio engineer to start podcasting. You can do it with a minimal amount of cash and a bit of work.

So what do you need? The right software, a good microphone, and a place to host your podcast. This TechTip will give you a few suggestions, and look at some of the other factors you should consider when starting a podcast.

Software

While your choice of software won't make or break your podcast, the right program can make recording and editing it easier. You have quite a few choices, regardless of the operating system that you use. Some of the software is free, and some you have to pay for. The choice is yours.

On Windows, there's a good selection of software for recording podcasts. Two popular tools are [WebPod Studio](#) and [Propaganda](#). A lot of MacOS podcasters swear by [Garage Band](#), although [CastEasy](#) is also highly regarded. [Audacity](#) is another extremely popular application for podcasters, mainly because it's free and runs on Windows, MacOS, and Linux. Linux users will also want to check out [Sweep](#).

You don't have to install any software on computer to record your podcast. Several online services, like [Odeo Studio](#) and [AudioBlog](#), enable you to record your audio at their sites. The only drawback is that you can't edit your recordings as you can with the software mentioned earlier.

Microphones

Back in the days of tape, a good microphone was essential for recording audio. The same goes for recording your podcasts. A cheap microphone will make your audio sound tinny.

While my microphone of choice is an old Sony F-VX300 (which I used when doing freelance radio work in the 1990s), there are a lot of microphones specifically for use with computers. Geeks.com has a [good selection of these](#). You might be tempted to use [a headset](#) – like the kind for making Voice Over IP calls – and that's fine. Try to avoid some of the lower-end headsets; if you're serious about podcasting then you really should be ready to spend a few dollars.

No matter what type of microphone you choose, try to find one that cancels background noise. A good microphone won't eliminate all of the background noise, but it will help to keep it to a minimum. Speaking of noise, if you plan to record your podcasts (or even portions of them) with an MP3 player like an [iRiver](#), expect the quality of the sound to be so-so and require [some cleanup](#).

Hosting

You've got your software and microphone picked out. You might even have your first podcast recorded. All you need is a place to host it. There are many ways you can do this.

If you have Web site, or if your Internet Service Provider (ISP) gives you some space, you can host your podcast there. You can link to your podcast from a dedicated Web page or a blog (if you maintain one). Keep in mind, though, that a five minute podcast can weigh in at anywhere from four to seven megabytes. Obviously, the longer the podcast, the bigger it will be. Depending on how much space you get from your ISP or Web host, you might run out of space very quickly. On top of that, most Internet and Web hosting providers have limits to the amount of data that can be transferred from a site each month. Once you hit that limit, no one will be able to access your podcast until the beginning of the following month unless you're willing to pay for more space.

If you don't want to, or don't have the skills to, maintain a podcast in your own space on the Web you

can turn to one of the many podcast hosting services out there. Many of these services offer free and/or low-cost hosting accounts. On top of that, the hosting services also set up a Web page or blog from which your listeners can access your podcast.

Some of the hosting services that have been recommended to me include [Libsyn](#), [Podbean.com](#), [CastPost](#), [PodBlaze](#), and [IcanCast.com](#). I've also heard good things about [Podcast Pickle](#), [BlipMedia](#), and [Odeo](#). But don't take my word for it. Do a [Google search](#) and ask around. That way you can find the host that best suits your needs.

Other Considerations

You have your software and microphone, and a place to put your podcast segments. You're ready to record. But before you do that, there are a few factors you have to consider.

While the idea of just speaking of the cuff and letting witticisms roll off your tongue is fun, it's difficult to speak both spontaneously and fluently. It takes a lot of practice. Until you're able to do that, you're going to get a lot of "umms" and "uhhs" in your recordings. Instead, you should consider using a script or an outline. You don't have to stick to it word for word, but a script or outline is a good guide for what you're going to say. Try not to sound like you're reading from a script, though. Use the speed and tone that you would when talking normally. When recording podcasts, I use the old presenters trick of pretending that I'm talking to my wife or a friend.

The position of your microphone is also important. Try not to have it too far away from you, and not right in front of your mouth. With a handheld microphone, a couple of inches below your chin is best. A headset microphone should be positioned slightly below your lips. And try not to breath into the microphone. Breathing gets picked up when recording and it's difficult to edit out.

Record your podcast in a room with minimal noise. Microphones, no matter how poor their quality, always pick up some background noise -- like an air conditioner or a fan, kids rolling toys across the floor, or whatever. Sure, you can edit out much of the background noise using your software, but why make extra work for yourself?

If you can, make a transcript of the podcast available on the Web -- link to it from your blog or Web site. If you're using a script, then doing this is easy. You just have to save your document as an HTML file and post it somewhere. You can also use an online application like [Google Docs & Spreadsheets](#) or [Writeboard](#) to write your script. Once the script is written, you can publish it on the Web. Here's a sample of a [podcast script](#) that was created using Google Docs & Spreadsheets.

Conclusion

Starting a podcast isn't a huge effort. Sure, you'll need to take some time to investigate software, microphones, and hosting options. And you'll have to do a little planning. But once that's out of the way, you can start recording and sharing your voice and ideas with the wider Web.