

BEING THE MEDIA

GETTING YOUR MESSAGE HEARD

BY STEVEN L. LUBETKIN



Most professional services firms know that it's becoming more difficult than ever to get traditional news media to cover their organizations.

Increasingly, your firm needs to “be the media” and produce high quality radio and TV style content to reach important constituencies like clients, prospects and the general public.

One increasingly popular way to do that is through the creation of Internet radio and TV programs, often called “podcasts” – audio or video programs distributed via the Internet.

Organizations as varied as insurance companies, banks, professional associations, and trade groups all have dipped their toes in the waters of the so-called “social media” by producing podcasts.

WHY IS WEB VIDEO AND AUDIO IMPORTANT?

People don't go to the Yellow Pages to find the services they need. They generally don't

even go to your firm's website. They search in Google (and to a lesser extent other search engines, but pretty much Google).

Your firm needs to show up in the first page or so of a Google search. Search engine optimization (SEO) experts will urge you to keyword tagging techniques to raise your score in a search, but recent changes in Google's search ranking formula have penalized some of these approaches for “gaming the system.”

RICH MEDIA CONTENT SCORES HIGHER FROM SEARCH ENGINES

A better way to do it is to create compelling, original “rich media” content like video and audio podcasts, and online presentations and blogs – and to update the content on a regular, frequent basis. Google and other search robots give higher scores to pages that are frequently updated (like blogs), or have rich content (photos, videos, audio, RSS feeds) and lots of hyperlinks (blogs,

podcast show notes pages, etc.) to other sites and resources.

GET RESPECT AS AN EXPERT IN YOUR INDUSTRY FROM PODCASTING

The real value of podcasting is to demonstrate your thought leadership or subject matter expertise in return for visibility and credibility.

Firms that podcast can become the go-to resource for people who want to know how their particular industry works, or how consumers of that product or service can educate themselves to be more informed about using or comparing products or services in that sector. It's all part of an overall marketing effort that focuses on where your potential audiences are, not where your business owners may want them to be – or think they are.

Look at the top 100 podcasts listed in iTunes, and you'll find the vast majority are professionally produced by major names in traditional broadcast media. People want great content produced with broadcast quality production values, by trusted brands. To the extent that your brand has that goodwill, content produced in podcast form will attract viewers and listeners.

Lots of companies still think they will grow new customers/clients by putting ads in the newspaper. Most people under 35 don't even read a daily newspaper, and a significant percentage of them only watch broadcast television by time-shifting technology (Tivo and DVR) and don't even glance at commercials.

PODCASTS ARE NOT A COMMERCIAL

If your audience believes you are delivering a purely commercial message, you will lose credibility. Effective podcasts should entertain and inform audiences, providing them with information useful to them whether they do business with your organization or not.

Amboy Bank of Old Bridge, N.J., understood this concept when it produced

> VISIT PROFESSIONAL PODCASTS LLC AT WWW.PROFESSIONALPODCASTS.COM

a podcast program to help its community learn about a new, internally developed reverse mortgage product aimed at senior citizens. Most reverse mortgage products use the federal model for their structure. The Amboy product was designed by the bank, and its closing costs can be significantly lower than costs associated with the federal reverse mortgage products – a competitive advantage for Amboy in the heavily banked New Jersey market.

The Amboy podcast (<http://wp.me/p10SEo-mr>) features two interviews, one with customer Bud Addis, a retiree who describes how the Amboy reverse mortgage has helped him manage expenses on a fixed income, and the other with a bank reverse mortgage counselor who describes the terms of the product and the bank's program for educating prospective customers and their families. Seniors frequently involve other family members in the reverse mortgage decision, said Dennis Kane, Amboy's vice president and director of marketing.

"This gives us an opportunity to let one of our satisfied customers speak in detail about

the Amboy Bank reverse mortgage in a medium that's accessible 24 hours a day worldwide," Kane said.

In the professional association world, the National Pest Management Association, a trade association representing pest control professionals, produced a 14-episode series of podcast interviews with a pest expert explaining how to deal with a wide range of household pests (<http://bit.ly/m66EQr>).

Unlike broadcast advertising, which can be expensive to produce and place, or audio- and video-news release packages that may be used only on small broadcast stations late at night or not at all, podcasts are full-length programs that are delivered to a global audience 24 hours a day through Internet technology. Podcast programs are served via websites, through the Apple iTunes Music Store (www.itunes.com) and through syndication technology known as an RSS feed, which alerts podcast listeners automatically when new program content is available.

Podcasts extend the life of a seminar program by making it available to audiences that couldn't attend in person. They

dramatically expand the reach of a professional service firm's marketing dollars at a fraction of the cost of direct mail or advertising expenditures, because they reach pre-qualified audiences that self-select the content to which they listen.

PODCASTS ARE COST-EFFECTIVE FOR MANY KINDS OF FIRMS

Podcasts can bridge the gap between professional consulting firms and widely dispersed consultants who travel frequently. They can be used to deliver news, updates about a firm's activities, or training content for employees or clients, in a format that's easy to manage and disseminate, either by web delivery, burned onto audio CDs, or loaded on digital audio players. ■



Steve Lubetkin is managing partner of Professional Podcasts LLC, a producer of documentary audio and video podcasts for corporate clients, and is a senior research fellow of the Society for New Communications Research. He can be reached at steve@professionalpodcasts.com.

The answers are out there

Every firm has its own set of challenges. If you're looking for individualized support for your firm, CPA Mutual is here for you.

CPA Mutual has provided risk management services to our member-owners for over 23 years. They all enjoy direct contact with us should the need for assistance arise. Whether its pre-claim assistance or avoidance, coverage questions on new services or clients, or engagement assistance, we are just a phone call away. No delays ... no wasted time.

We're ready to join your quest to make your firm a success – and to help you sleep at night.



11801 Research Dr. • Alachua, FL 32615

(386) 418-4003 • (800) 543-3029

Fax: (386) 418-4004 • www.cpamutual.com



let us *help you* find them

Our business is taking care of your business.