

Podcasting: It's About 'Being' the Media

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, law firms, like other professional services providers, need to *be* the media. This means not waiting for mainstream news media to seek your firm out for coverage. It means producing your own high-quality radio- and TV-style content to reach important constituencies like clients, prospects, and the general public.

One increasingly popular way to do this is through the creation of Internet radio and TV programs, often called podcasts, which are 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 social media by producing podcasts.

Why is Web Video and Audio Important?

Today, people don't go to the Yellow Pages to find the services they need, and may not search a law firm's website. Prospective clients search through Google (and to a lesser extent other search engines).

Like other providers of business services, law firms need to appear in the first page or so of a Google search. Search engine optimization experts will urge you to use keyword tagging techniques to raise your score in a search.

Rich Media Content Scores Higher From Search Engines

You'll become more visible in search results more quickly if you create compelling, original 'rich media' content like video and audio podcasts, and online presentations and blogs, and if you update the content on a regular 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.

New video technologies enable podcast producers to marry slide presentations, video clips, and other visual aids with video of a seminar presenter, in a single, integrated production. Editing software enables even novice videographers to

produce broadcast-quality special effects like titles, subtitles, and other features typical of network productions.

Get Respect as an Expert in Your Industry from Podcasting

The real value of podcasting is to demonstrate your firm's thought leadership or subject matter expertise in return for



the visibility and credibility you get. Firms that podcast can become the go-to resource for people who want to know more about a particular legal practice area, or how clients in that practice can become better informed about legal issues 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.

Keep in mind that people want strong content and a quality production in a podcast. And throughout development, remember that a podcast is not an online commercial for the law firm; it is designed to impart helpful information and promote your expertise as a result.

Podcasts and Commercial Messaging

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 useful information whether they do business with your organization or not. The podcast can affect your firm's reputation in a positive or negative manner, depending on what you project to your audience.

An Old Bridge bank understood this concept when it produced a podcast to educate the community about a new, internally developed reverse mortgage product aimed at senior citizens. Most reverse mortgage products use the federal model for their structure. This product was designed by the bank, and its closing costs could be significantly lower than costs associated with the federal reverse mortgage products—a competitive advantage for the bank in the highly competitive New Jersey market.

The podcast features two interviews, one with a customer, a retiree who describes how the 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.

Unlike broadcast advertising, which can be expensive to produce and place, or audio and video news release packages, which may be used only by small broadcast stations either late at night or not at all, podcasts are full-length programs that are delivered to a global audience 24/7 through Internet technology. Podcast programs are served via websites; through iTunes; and through syndication technology known as an RSS feed, which alerts podcast listeners automatically when new program content is available.

The following are key tips to podcasting success:

- Use a good quality microphone and digital audio recorder to achieve high-quality recordings. Don't rely on a computer as your only recording device. Position the mic to the side of the face instead of straight-ahead, or use a noise-protection filter.
- Learn how to use the sound editing software and understand the importance of equalization and compression. It is important to keep the volumes equalized so the sound is consistent throughout the entire program. Editing of the recording can provide an opportunity to delete repetitive comments or remove errors.
- Using a second person to interview the subject matter expert makes the podcast more interesting to viewers and gives a summary of the speaker's area of expertise. Use a clip-on mic, such as a stereo lavalier microphone, for any speaker who is being interviewed.
- Lighting is important. Use a professional video light mounted on the camera to provide a more natural color for the video.
- Learn how to use the tools in video

editing software. For example, learn how to create the title at the bottom of the screen, called lower thirds, which names the person who is speaking and may summarize a key point in the discussion.

- With regard to room tone, record the sound of the room without anyone speaking. That recording can then be layered into the finished recording, which helps make the editing more seamless.
- With digital editing, you have the ability to experiment with various approaches to editing the material.
- Invest in a qualified professional to consult on the project, and possibly to assess the strengths and weaknesses of your firm's prior podcasts, as well as the distribution of the content over the Internet. For instance, there may be a way to maximize the visibility of your podcast.

Consider hosting your podcast on an independent content distribution platform rather than trying to do it on your internal network. This will help your firm avoid network congestion and server storage constraints. A professional can recommend which product makes the most sense for the particular event or series of events.

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 that interest them. ☺

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