

Vidcasting – Revolutionize How You Distribute Your Video Web Content

The internet has always been a dicey proposition for videographers looking to distribute their content. The disciplines that lend themselves to producing the best looking and most engaging content in conventional delivery channels (DVD, television, etc) do not lend themselves to the internet.

The problems are multifold. First and foremost is the issue of bandwidth - or the lack of it. High quality video generally means huge files, and consequently more time required to download the files to be played on the client's computer. While the state of internet bandwidth is nowhere near as abysmal as it was just a few years ago - however even with current advances in bandwidth - the delivery of a file several hundred megabytes can be trying to even the most patient of potential viewers.

The second problem is the lack of an accepted video standard and assurance that your client has the proper software required to view the video in the format you've chosen to present it. For example - Quicktime is a wonderful technology and is embraced by most video producers due to it's basis in Mac/Final Cut - however there's a good percentage of Windows machines out there that don't have Quicktime installed. Windows Media Player is dicey, and unless you install a few third party plugins cannot be viewed on the Macintosh. Flash video is a godsend for cross platform acceptance - especially with the advent of Flash 8 video and the most recent codecs - but there are sacrifices in quality.

...then you have to develop your web presence.

It's easy to see why so many talented video producers have such bad web presences, with videos that work sporadically, or don't work on a good percentage of client's computers. Trying to account for all of the variables in content delivery usually falls well outside of their realm of expertise.

About a year ago, I was facing this dilemma, when I found what I believe to be the perfect solution. I found podcasting, or vidcasting (video podcasting) to be a perfect solution to the bulk of these problems. Podcasting enabled me to simplify how I delivered my content through the utilization of iTunes as a delivery vehicle, ensured that anyone viewing my content had the appropriate software, allowed me to keep the quality of my content high by utilizing the most current codecs, and also enabled me to keep my viewers notified of the newest additions to my library via subscriptions!

By simply placing a link within my website, and emails, pointing to my Podcast inside of the apple iTunes store, I could very easily utilize well established distribution channels to get my work out there. Millions of people have iTunes, and access to the music store. By default, they have everything they need to see my content. It's just a matter of creating the content and pointing them in the right direction! It couldn't be easier.

From this point, it was simply a matter of learning how to podcast.

The hardest part of getting the podcast up and running was understanding exactly how a podcast works, and getting everything properly prepared. I hope to help you through that learning curve, by explaining everything in simple language. The concept isn't difficult whatsoever.

First, let's define what a podcast is.

A podcast is a text file located on the internet that points to a group of media files. This text file is called a newsfeed (or an RSS feed), and acts like a roadmap to media files that are also located on the internet. When someone views a podcast, what they are actually doing is reading this text file, and being pointed to the appropriate media files.

The program that reads the text file (newsfeed) is called an aggregator. The aggregator reads the text file, and grabs the media files that it is being pointed to. All of this is done in the background, giving you the illusion of "single" show that has multiple episodes. In reality, however, it's just a bunch

of files located on the internet tied together via this text file.

This text file must follow a certain format, in order to assure compatibility across the range of aggregators out there (e.g., iTunes). The structure of the text file defines the details of the show (the show's title, description, etc), and where to find the show's episodes. It's done in a pretty straightforward manner.

For an example of how a newsfeed looks, check out Apple's technical document on podcast structure.

http://www.apple.com/itunes/store/podcaststechspecs.html#_Toc526931673

"Channel" defines the shows, and "item" defines the episodes. Once you have the file created, to add more episodes, you simply add another "item" pointing to a new file.

That's how a podcast is structured.

Next, we're going to tell you what you need to get your podcast up and running. There are two options. The first is what you will need if you want to do it all yourself. The second (and our preference) is the simpler route, which is to get a podcast host. These instructions presume that you already have your video converted into M4V format and ready to go.

To set up a podcast by yourself, you will need to do the following:

1: Find web space available for you to upload your media files to.

There are plenty of web hosts available for you to choose from. From Google, do a search for "Web Hosting". I recommend getting a Linux/PHP based host - because they are simpler to configure than Microsoft based hosting. As a general rule, try to find the most web space available, with the greatest amount of traffic allotted for your site. As your podcast grows in popularity - you don't want to get sacked with extra traffic fees.

Before settling for a host, it also is in your best interests to do a little research to make sure they have a decent reputation. Lots of hosts over-sell their plans in order to get more business. There are lots of horror stories I've read of people that found their websites censored for excessive traffic when they were nowhere near the limits their plan advertised. A little research can help you avoid falling victim to an unscrupulous host.

2: Upload your media files (mp3 files, pictures and video files) to your new host.

You will most likely transfer your media files to your host through what's called FTP. FTP is "File Transfer Protocol". On Windows, I like "Wise FTP" by AceBit the best. On Macintosh, my favorite is Cyberduck. You can find both on Google.

One thing to keep in mind is whether or not your media files are supported by your web hosting company. If you're simply podcasting your audio sermons, MP3 is pretty much universally supported. If you're podcasting video files (M4V or MP4), you might need to configure your server to recognize those files. This is done via what's called a "mime type" and is set up in a file called .htaccess on your web server.

To find out more information, if you need it, google ".htaccess mime types" for a detailed explanation.

3: Once you have uploaded the files, and thereby know where the files are located, it's time to create the newsfeed.

Make sure that your newsfeed mimics the format we showed you earlier. If you follow that format, you should be good to go. Create your channel, and add all of your items.

Once you have created your newsfeed file, upload it to your server as well. Test it out by going to feedvalidator.org. If your feed comes back invalid, it will give suggestions as to how to fix your feed. If it comes back saying the feed is valid, then you're good to go! Start submitting it to channels like yahoo, and the iTunes music store.

Those are all of the steps required to get a podcast up and running, if you wish to do it all yourself!

The other alternative is to get what is called a podcast host.

Podcast hosts take care of all of the hosting, newsfeed creation and testing for you. When you contract a podcast host, you don't need to worry about file types, ensuring that your feed is valid, or finding web space. They take care of all of that for you. With a podcast host, you simply upload the media file, give it a name and a description, and you're done. This is the easiest way to make a podcast.

After a few months of maintaining our podcast and constantly updating the feed to reflect new additions to our podcast, this is the direction we chose to go. It really simplified the production process, and actually ended up costing us less per month than what we were paying before. This is an excellent option to consider for someone who doesn't want to bother with the tech side of podcasting.

There are a lot of podcast hosts out there offering different packages. When determining which one to contract - look at the following things:

1. How much do they charge vs. how much space do you get for your podcasts?
2. Do they limit your bandwidth? (This is particularly important. One host we went with charged for bandwidth beyond a certain point, and it cost us a pretty penny.) It's best to get a podcast host with "unmetered bandwidth". This means they don't charge you extra if your podcast becomes popular.
3. Do they support transferring of the podcasts to another domain? This is also very important. If you, for whatever reason, become dis-satisfied with the service or want to transfer it to another location, will they facilitate this for you? We had to recreate two of our podcasts from scratch because one host wouldn't give us the ability to redirect our existing podcast to our new host.
4. Do they have good technical support for questions you may have?

My favorite podcast host is AvMyPodcast.com. They have unmetered bandwidth and great plans available for very reasonable charges. AvMyPodcast is especially great for it's technical support, and includes automatic iTunes and Yahoo submissions. They even offer instructional pages to teach you [how to podcast](#).

Whether you decide to go it yourself, or contract a podcast host, it's definitely worth getting into vidcasting. It has been a godsend for streamlining the distribution of my videos to clients.

Good luck, and happy podcasting!

About the Author

Erich Slipsager is a recovering tech junkie, taking it one day at a time! [Make A Podcast!](#)

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