

Listen **up**

Think podcasting is just for your teenager? You're missing out on a valuable tool for driving attendance

By Scott Whitney

As her event team began planning their company's biggest conference of the year, Heidi Lorenzen was looking for a way to differentiate their event from others.

"We have always been good at attendee acquisition, but this year we needed to reach out to new audiences and wanted to drive higher attendance as well," she said. "We felt that if potential attendees could actually hear an enthusiastic preview of things to come from the keynote speakers and session leaders themselves, they would have a more personal glimpse into the compelling content we developed just for them; we would separate ourselves from the conferences and activities competing for their time; and our attendance would increase."

To make this idea a reality, Lorenzen's organization turned to podcasting. As a result, attendance went up, and the audience mix moved in the right direction.

No matter where you are in the events industry, you're probably familiar with this conundrum: How do you differentiate yourself from competing events and create enough excitement around it to inspire people to take time out of their busy schedules and/or spend the money to attend?

While most individuals tasked with driving attendee traffic use traditional techniques, doing the same thing as everybody else makes you look like... everybody else. In marketing terms, that means you're "functionally equivalent." Not exactly a selling point that will get attendees to your show.

“There will be **33 million** podcast listeners by the end of 2008.”

This is where a great podcast can make a difference.

Not Just for Young'uns

Chances are, you've already heard about podcasting. For many, it's simply something teenagers listen to on their iPods. Others think that without an iPod, there can be no podcast.

Both assumptions are wrong — and believing them will lead you to miss an opportunity to reach out to your audience in a way that humanizes your conference and generates interest in your content.

For those not familiar with podcasting, a definition: A podcast is an audio or video file that has been recorded and placed on the Internet to be enjoyed at the listener's convenience. According to technology research firm ITG Research, there will be 33 million podcast listeners by the end of 2008. More importantly, it's not just about iPods: If somebody can click a play

button on a Web page, he or she can listen to a podcast. And according to Nielsen/NetRatings and Podtrac, between 58 and 64 percent of podcast listeners are between the ages of 25 and 54.

Potential attendees can also subscribe to your podcast, which means they will automatically receive each episode the moment it becomes available. The ability to send your podcasts to all your subscribers is like being able to run a radio spot with the promise that 100 percent of the audience will care about what you have to say. Not possible in radio — always possible with a podcast.

Say What?

Podcasts aren't just for the iPod-toting masses. You can offer:

- Educational session previews
- Messages from featured speakers
- Previews of keynote sessions
- Conference highlights
- Post-event interviews with keynote speakers

Check out online examples of podcasts used to promote GearUp 2007, a conference put on by content management solutions firm Interwoven, at www.podworx.com/gearup.

The Principles of Podcasting

For conference-specific podcasts, we ask conference speakers questions that create curiosity, the number-one technique in motivating people to take action on your behalf. What questions? Here are a few examples:

- *What's the one thing you plan to talk about that might surprise the listener?*
- *What was it about this event that made you want to come and present to this audience?*

When delivering a podcast, keep in mind these four principles as a guide to doing a show correctly:

- **Plan** — *an episode map to ensure the timely release of new episodes and reduce the risk of "podfading," or the premature conclusion to a podcast series without warning.*
- **Produce** — *Audio and content problems kill credibility. Be sure to work with a firm capable of both audio expertise as well as providing*

“If you can click a play button on a Web page, you can listen to a podcast.”

content that resonates with listeners.

- **Publish** — *Your job is to increase the probability of listenership and reduce the risk of incompatibility. If somebody wants to listen, make sure it's easy for him or her to do so regardless of the chosen method.*
- **Promote** — *There are many ways to promote your podcast beyond placing the show in podcast directories such as iTunes. Use them!*

It Doesn't End with the Event

And what about after the event? If you've recorded each session, distribute those recordings to all attendees via your podcast, saving people the anxiety of missing one session because they selected another instead. You can also take excerpts from sessions and make them available to nonattendees as a means of demonstrating what they missed, motivating them to not miss next year's event.

Next time you're thinking of new ways to increase event attendance, don't forget to research what a podcast can do for you.



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