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In Practice



Podcasting A Wide Net Lawyers Turn To The Digital Airwaves

By Jaclyn Jaeger

In a rapidly changing sea of technology, an increasing number of lawyers are casting their nets into the digital airwaves.

Podcasting—a term popularized by Apple Computer Inc.'s iPod portable audio players—is one techno-step above the blogging phenomenon that has swept the legal community in recent years.

Marketing

Distributed through the same RSS really simple syndication—“feeds” that power blogs, podcasts are online audio files, which listeners can download and automatically transfer to an iPod or other MP3 player.

And because it's as easy and inexpensive as blogging, more lawyers are catching the digital wave.

“My podcast is simply a [broadcast] of what I write on my blog,” said J. Craig Williams, a lawyer in Newport Beach, Calif.

Williams, whose five-lawyer firm specializes in complex business litigation, estimated that his blog—www.mayitpleasethetourt.net—gets 5,000 downloads a week on podcasts alone.

“What's interesting about podcasting—and another way it relates to blogging—is that you can present yourself to prospective clients and to others in the profession on a much more

personal level,” said Robert Ambrogio, a Rockport, Mass., lawyer who co-hosts a weekly talk show, “Coast to Coast,” with Williams.

“They get to hear your voice. They get to hear what you have to say about an issue or topic,” Ambrogio added. “It's comforting to people, I think. When people are looking for whatever reason to hire one person over another, especially in the legal field, and you can make a connection with the potential client, it's going to help.”

Williams agreed. “It's a marketing benefit,” he said. “It's like being able to reach out of the computer with a handshake to the world. It's a way for me to greet people and say ‘hello,’ without actually being with them personally.”

Explosive Growth
Podcasting—like blogging—is predicted to have an explosive growth in coming years.

“It is a big deal and it will be a bigger deal,” said lawyer Denise Howell of the firm Reed Smith in Los Angeles.

Just last month, Apple's chief executive Steve Jobs told the Macworld Expo in San Francisco the company sold a record 14 million iPods during the 2005 holiday season alone—up from 4.5 million during the same period in 2004. That comes to a rate of 100 iPods sold each minute, and brings the total number sold to more than 42 million.

And that doesn't include all of the owners of other MP3 players who can also tap into podcasts.

However, “Podcasting is not for everybody, just as blogging is not for everybody,” said Ambrogio. “Any kind of legal marketing is going to be contingent on the nature of your practice, what audience you're trying to reach and what you're trying to say about yourself.”

“Podcasting is best suited for lawyers who want to appear to be on the cutting edge in some way, or who have a practice that is some way related to or focused on technology,” he said.

That said, the benefits of podcasting are not limited to tech lawyers. (See the accompanying list for a sampling of useful podcast sites.)

According to Howell, podcasting is particularly useful to lawyers because the

mainstream media don't always understand legal matters and, therefore, don't always get the story right.

“So if you're a lawyer and you want to produce something related to your work, there is a huge thirst to learn more about the law and complicated legal issues,” she said.

“It's a great way to distribute your work for an audience that has pretty strong demands for this stuff.”

It's also a great way to have a little fun with your career.

“When I was in college, I had a commercial radio program, so it's a lot of fun because it gets me back into something I used to love to do,” said Williams. “I don't have the time now to do a commercial radio show, but it's kind of like that in a small way.”

Casting Your Legal Net
Starting your own podcast is “actually really easy,” said Williams.

“You can start by simply going to RadioShack, buying an inexpensive microphone, plugging it into your computer and recording your voice,” he said.

Howell advises taking it one step further. “A lot of people think a podcast is just making the recording available on the Web,” she said. “I would say in order for it to be qualified as a true podcast, it needs to be associated with a syndication feed, so

that people can subscribe and automatically have the latest podcast downloaded to their computer.”

And if you're really tech savvy, there are a bunch of free sites like Odeo.com—<http://www.odeo.com/>—that also allow you to edit your voice and add in sounds, said Ambrogio.

The second most important step after producing your podcast is, of course, marketing it.

“First and foremost, you want to make sure your podcast is available from the iTunes music store, because I think that is probably the primary way that people are learning about podcasts,” said Howell.

It is also important to make sure your podcast is listed on other big directories such as iPodder.org and dopplerradio.net, said Howell.

Williams also advises making a reference to it on list serves and in each of the e-mails you send out, as well as promoting it on your blog and displaying it on your firm's website.

Having your podcast listed on search engines is also beneficial, although the system for cataloguing audio files still needs improvement.

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Denise Howell

J. Craig Williams

Massachusetts attorney Robert Ambrogio delivers a weekly podcast, “Coast to Coast,” with California attorney Craig Williams.



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Legal Podcast

New podcasts are popping up daily on the Internet. This list provides a small selection of the wide variety of podcasts available for and by lawyers:

- www.internetcases.com
Chicago lawyer Evan Brown produces this series of podcasts focused on Internet law issues.
- <http://allianceforjustice.libsyn.com>
Produced by the American Center for Law and Justice, this podcast covers news, views and insight on the future of the Supreme Court.
- <http://debtpodcast.blogspot.com>
New York bankruptcy lawyer Jay Fleischman produces a series of consumer-oriented podcasts that tackle topics such as bankruptcy reform, credit reporting and balance transfers.
- www.crimlaw.blogspot.com
Virginia criminal defense attorney Ken Lammers covers a variety of criminal law issues.
- www.legalunderground.com/podcasts
Illinois lawyer Evan Schaeffer offers his thoughts and observations on various legal news stories.
- <http://familylawnewsandviews.blogspot.com>
Texas family law attorney Jimmy Verner Jr. discusses topics such as alimony and maintenance, antidepressants and family law, pre-

marital agreements, child support and community property.

• www.legaltalknetwork.com
This website features the podcast “Coast to Coast,” a half-hour weekly legal news program hosted by Rockport, Mass., lawyer Robert Ambrogio and California lawyer J. Craig Williams, who interview other lawyers on hot legal topics.

• www.mayitpleasethetourt.net
An extension of J. Craig Williams' blog, this legal news and commentary podcast gets 5,000 downloads a week.

• www.soundpolicy.net
A podcast hosted by Denise Howell covering a wide range of legal topics.

• <http://bgbg.blogspot.com/bgbg-cast.html>
Another podcast hosted by Denise Howell, which is an extension of her blog, “Bag and Baggage.”