

'Podcasts' are soaring

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Want to listen to your favorite talk radio at your leisure, and not according to a schedule set by some programming director? Apparently, a lot of people do. Search engine requests for Podcasts -- Internet broadcasts, created for downloading on Apple iPod audio players -- have soared 1,052 percent during the last three months, according to Lycos.

Blogging turned out to be highly influential last year -- particularly during the political campaigns -- but Podcasting figures to be even more potent this year, experts told UPI's The Web. "Everyone is doing it, from NASA scientists to Paris Hilton to church preachers to your next door neighbor," said Dean Tsouvalas, director of content for The Lycos 50, the Internet's authoritative list of the most popular people and places online. According to data provided by Apple, more than 1 million customers subscribed to the latest version of iTunes Version 4.9 in the first two days after it was made available June 29, just so they could listen to Podcasts on their iPods without any additional software.

Podcasting has great potential as a personal communications tool, "a new age, short-wave radio of sorts," said Joseph Tzeng, co-founder and managing director of Crystal Ventures in San Francisco, an investment fund for digital companies. "Podcasting could become more popular than video or mobile blogs."

Experts said professional broadcasters and advertising agencies alike are targeting the field, seeking to promote their clients' products. Instatone Inc., an Internet radio broadcaster, is implementing a Podcasting service for "our Top 40 station," a spokesman said. "We will be officially

launching it shortly."

The Churchill Club in San Francisco -- an economic, technology and public policy forum for executives -- has been broadcasting the club's programs on the CNET/ZDNET Podcast service. "The Podcasts have been great successes," said Fiona Tang, a spokeswoman for the club, whose most recent event, "Outsourcing: Sorting Out the Hype, Reality, Risks and Benefits," is available online at blogs.zdnet.com/BTL/?p=1575.

Even online gambling sites have launched Podcasts, such as BetUS.com. "Everyone has a corporate blog today, but you're hard pressed to find many doing Podcasts yet," said Alan Danzis, a spokesman for the site. Podcasts are basically "do it yourself radio," Tsouvalas said. They enable anyone to create and host his or her own Internet radio show and make it available for others to download to a computer or portable media player. The digital audio files can be accessed anytime, anywhere. Within the Podcasting niche, religious broadcasting currently seems to be the most popular field. "One of the hottest trends in Podcasting is 'Godcasting,'" Tsouvalas noted. "During the past month, searches for Godcasts have risen over 350 percent. At this point, there are no specific pod preachers being queried, but it's only a matter of time before the Billy Graham of Podcasting emerges."

He said preachers of all faiths are converting their weekly sermons into Godcasts to more easily spread the word. "This week, Godcasts were as popular (on Internet search engines) as searches for Lance Armstrong, NBC News and Julia Roberts," Tsouvalas added.

Legal experts said a whole array of legal issues is going to emerge because of the surging popularity of Podcasts.

"One issue Podcasters are just beginning to confront is rights

acquisition," said Jeff Neuburger, chairman of the technology law department at Brown Raysman Millstein Felder & Steiner LLP in New York City. "Although you may have the right to use something on the Web, do you have the right to distribute it via a Podcast?" Another issue, Neuburger said, involves how Podcasters can protect against the re-use of their content without permission. "In light of the Grokster decision," he said, "can you rely solely on copyright law to protect your content?"

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