

Podcasts gaining on radio's heels

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Kopper, host of weekly rock 'n' roll show "The Wayback Machine" at KDHX-FM 88.1 in St. Louis, Mo., is also the owner of GaragePunk.com, which features a slew of syndicated podcasts updated daily playing garage, punk, and primitive rock 'n' roll including 50s and 60s rock 'n' roll, 60s garage, 70s punk, soul and R&B as well as modern garage.

In short, "anything obscure ... you won't hear anything mainstream," he says, noting that the site that started last August was revamped into a blog earlier this year.

"It was slow at first getting the word out, but we had a pretty large community of 3,000," Kopper explains, which helped with recruiting podcast hosts and listeners. "MySpace also helped out in finding listeners, and recently we were listed in iTunes directory of podcasts and was a featured podcast."

And according to Kopper, subscriptions have been up, as high as 800 with daily downloads of each show between 4,000 to 5,000. "We're a radio station, if you want to call us that."

Indeed, podcasting is starting to dance on traditional radio's turf, suggests the new report "The Economics of Podcasting."

The report signals that individuals, organizations and businesses are tapping into a niche market of consumers who have preferences as to what and who they want to hear from politics to technology, music, financial news and comedy -- and their getting loyal listeners too -- as analysts project the podcast audience could reach between 20 million and 80 million by 2010.

"People, they hear The Strokes, and they think that's garage -- but it's not," Kopper said. "(Our podcasts) are pretty much for a niche market. But that's the great thing about podcasting, they reach a niche market -- whoever digs it, digs it or you can go elsewhere."

The first quarter 2006 study released by the Nielsen Analytics, part of VNU's Media Measurement & Information Group, found that more than 6 percent of U.S. adults or 9 million Web users have downloaded podcasts in the past 30 days.

With more than 1,700 participants surveyed on their podcasting usage, 6 percent described themselves as regular podcast downloaded and more than 75 percent where male. Meanwhile, about 38 percent of active podcast downloaders said they are listening to the radio less often.

"The incredible popularity of podcasting is the latest demonstration of consumers' willingness to take control of their media experiences," said Larry Gerbrandt, general manager and senior vice president of Nielsen Analytics, in a release. "While essentially still in nascent form, podcasts offer free audio and video content that is inexpensive to create, easy to access and on a portable platform that has already reached mass distribution. This exciting new medium has only just begun to stretch its legs." The study however also found that 60 percent said they always fast forward past commercials in their podcasts, and are women more likely to do so than men, with 67 percent saying they "always fast forward."

Moreover, it found that the average length was at 44 minutes, which may change with the growing popularity of video podcasts.

But podcasting is also becoming enticing to advertisers, as advertisers continue to acknowledge the importance of new media to attract potential new customers.

In fact, the most successful podcasts are garnering as many as 2 million downloads a month, and 72 percent of respondents said they regularly download podcasts an average of one to three podcasts a week and about 10 percent of all podcast downloaders could be characterized as "heavy users" -- downloading eight or more a week. This is a good sign for advertisers.

And advertisers have already begun to look into new ways to advertise as a result of individuals fast forwarding commercials including embedding messages within the program content or having podcast hosts endorse their products and services.

But why the momentum of podcasting -- the report from Nielsen Analytics says it's a number of things, among them are that business and other organizations are adopting them too.

According to the report, cable and broadcast networks are converting episodes of some of their linear programs into short audio and video podcasts as previews or promotions, while movie studios are using podcasting to market films and DVDs.

In addition, it also said that financial service firms including McDonald Investments and The Motley Fool were offering financial-specific podcasts, travel agencies such as Orbitz offered audio descriptions of travel destinations as a marketing tool, as well as professors were making lectures and class notes available through podcasts.

"For podcasting to reach its full potential, we will have to find the best ways to keep track of its audiences," added Gerbrandt. "That means developing accurate and comprehensive metrics that will allow podcast producers, distributors and advertisers to answer questions like: 'Who are we reaching?' 'With what kinds of content?' 'When and how often?'"

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