

# How to set up a podcast

By Andrew J Chamberlain

Would you like to try your hand at podcasting? This article will explain, in plain easy steps, how to set up a podcast. It will also explain why the hardest part of running a podcast has nothing to do with the technological challenges, but in maintaining the creative content that will continue to attract listeners.

As with many other endeavours, proper preparation is essential.

Here are the steps I recommend you follow to get your podcast started and to sustain it for the long haul.

## 1. Planning and preparation

The first thing you need to do before you get anywhere near a microphone is to think carefully about what you want to achieve. A bit of planning up front will help you to sustain your podcast once it's started. So ask yourself some questions:

- Why do you want to set up a podcast? Is there a gap in the podcast market? Are you trying to communicate a cause or an idea? In my case I decided to set up "The Creative Writer's Toolbelt" because I felt that, whilst there were a lot of podcasts out there that presented books or commented on the writer's life or the publishing market, there were very few that actually gave writing advice that was direct and practical.
- What are you going to talk about? And by this I mean not just in the first or second episodes, but in subsequent ones. This is reflected in my first 'C'. It's important to have an idea of the kind of content that you want to present, not just for the first couple of episodes, but well into the future.
- How often will you release a podcast? Some podcasts are released weekly, but that's a huge commitment if you are doing this on your own, or even with one other person. But if you don't release a regular podcast, you will lose your listeners. I settled on once a fortnight, and that's still a significant commitment. From experience I have learnt that the really important thing is to be consistent with the production of your podcast – hence the second 'C'.
- Next, what is the format of your podcast going to be? Are you just going to be speaking? Are there going to be two or three of you, or a group? Are you going to interview people? The format will guide your thinking on the next question which is:

- How long is your podcast going to be? This might depend on your content. If you are just speaking on your own you might not want to have too long a podcast. I'd recommend not much more than 15 minutes (CWT is about 15-18 minutes if I am just speaking myself). For an interview a longer episode is okay, I think interviews can last for up to an hour.
- Next question – where are you going to record your podcasts? Do you have a space that's relatively quiet, at least some of the time so that you can record your podcast without interruption? Once you have a space worked out, you might need to tell the people that you live with that you are going to be recording your podcast, or interviewing someone, so that when you start speaking they aren't wondering who you are talking to!
- Now equipment. To produce a podcast of reasonable quality you need: a computer, preferably linked to the internet, some recording and editing software, and a microphone. As far as the recording and editing software is concerned you can pick this up for free – I'd recommend Audacity which can be found at [www.audacityteam.org](http://www.audacityteam.org) and you can download the software, for free for PC or Mac. If you already have a PC or laptop then your biggest expense in terms of audio equipment might well be a microphone. From experience I'd recommend that you use the best microphone that you can to get the audio quality of your podcast as high as possible. However, it's perfectly possible for you to record a podcast using a cheap mic, or even the one on your machine. My advice, though, would be to invest in a decent microphone, I use a Blue Yeti mic which is retailing at £110 at the moment on Amazon
- Think about how your equipment will all connect up. Does your Mac/PC have the input ports (USB ports usually) to cope with a microphone and headphones if you want to use them? Think this through before you go and buy any expensive equipment!
- If you intend to interview someone, I recommend you do this remotely and over the internet using a telecoms application like Skype. In fact Skype, which allows people to hold telephone and video calls over the internet for free, is a great piece of software to have anyway. If you use Skype you'll need to get a piece of software to record your conversation. I use something called Free Skype Call recorder, which as the name suggests is free to use, as is Skype.
- One more thing you'll need to think about that won't be obvious at the start is this – you will need to work out how you start and finish your podcast. How will you introduce the podcast? Do you need a jingle? How will you finish an episode? If you listen to an episode of *The Creative Writer's Toolbelt* you'll hear how I start and finish an episode. I recommend you listen to any episode from number 37 onwards. For me the important thing is to keep it as professional as possible, introduce yourself, say in a few words what the podcast is about, and then get into it.
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## 2. Recording, editing, and saving a podcast

Once that's all sorted out, you can go ahead and record your podcast. To facilitate this you might choose to write a few notes, extensive notes to read from, or no notes at all! To record your podcast:

- Plug your microphone into your PC/Mac
- Open Audacity (or whatever sound recording software you've chosen to use)
- Make sure the input and output devices are set to whatever you are choosing to use, the input device will be the microphone of your choice, the output device will be your machine's speakers or headphones if you are using them (and I recommend you do)
- Press the record button and start speaking (!) In the first instance just a couple of sentences. Now play those back and listen to them.
- Experiment with your microphone, where it's placed, how you speak, and sound levels. Explore the noise reduction option in your recording software. If you are using Audacity you certainly want to see if 'noise reduction' can screen out any persistent external noises.
- When you have an optimum environment, record your podcast
- Once you have something recorded, save a copy
- With a second copy you can now start the process of editing. I recommend that you try to remove all of the "umms" and "ahs" in your recording using the edit function. Be prepared to spend some time on this, in my experience you should allow three to five minutes to produce each one minute of finished podcast material.
- Now use the noise reduction options in your software to create the clearest version that you can – you can also use an equalizing tool to clean up your file. I use 'Levelator' <http://www.conversationsnetwork.org/levelator>
- Once you have your recording polished and as good as you can get it, save it as an MP3 file.

### 3. Releasing a podcast

So you've recorded your podcast, edited it, and it's ready to be released into the world, what do you do now?

- First, choose a podcast host. This is a company that will hold the episodes of your podcast on their servers, and provide an interface on the internet for people to download and listen to your podcast. There are a number of organisations that will do this for you for a fee. I use a company called Podomatic, but there's also Libsyn, Archive.org, Ourmedia.org, and Podbean. Be aware that, depending on how much material you produce and how many downloads your podcast generates, this service might cost you anywhere between £75 and £200.
- You will also need to create some artwork for an image to accompany your podcast. This will need to work as a square image, and your podcast host will require a copy of this for each episode you release. This artwork will need to be supplied as a 1400 x 1400

pixel image, and be saved in .jpg or .png file format. You'll also need this image for the next step, which is to connect to a podcast client.

- Your podcast host will give you a web address for your podcast, and also another type of link called an RSS feed – this RSS feed is important because it is the link that you have to give to a podcast client. The podcast client is the organisation that will promote your podcast. The best example, and big daddy of these is iTunes, and it's likely that iTunes will give you the bulk of your audience. There are other podcast clients, or apps for podcasts, like Juice, and Zune, and some prominent ones for android like Beyond Pod, Pocketcasts, and Doggcatcher.
- Once your podcast is hosted, and the rss feed is linked to a number of podcast apps and interfaces, your podcast host should be able to provide you with stats for the number of interactions with your podcast, these could be plays, likes, or downloads.

## 4. Marketing your podcast

So your podcast is hosted and available, but sadly the hard work isn't over at this point, now it's time to tell people about your podcast so that they can give it a try. The challenge you have with marketing your podcast is that there are so many ways to do this. What you do is at least as much about how much work you are prepared to do to keep everything up to date as the things you say. Here are some of the things I'd recommend:

- If you have a website, set up a page on it to tell people about your podcast. If you don't have a website, consider setting up a blog on something like blogpress, or blogger.
- Start a facebook page for your podcast and link episodes to it regularly
- Start a group on goodreads (goodreads.com) and invite people to join this
- Start a group on Google+ for your podcast
- Start a twitter account for your episode and comment on your episodes when they come out

The two main pieces of advice I'd give with regards to promoting your podcast on social media are:

- i) Be social on social media, don't just talk about your podcast, share other amusing and interesting tidbits with your followers
- ii) Choose the platform you enjoy using, you're more likely to keep using it

## 5. Persevere!

Podcasting is a marathon not a sprint. You'll have to keep up the good work over months and even years, that's why it's so important to make sure you are fully prepared before you

start, and only embark on this project if you think you are going to enjoy the process, and you have something to say.

Apart from the preparation, my advice is to focus on the three C's I mentioned at the start of this article: content, consistency, and capturing the audience. Try to maintain the standard of what you are doing in terms of the audio quality and content, these things will be as powerful as your marketing efforts. Don't take too much notice of the numbers you generate, these might be really high to start with, and then go down again as people try out your podcast when it's newly launched. Don't take fluctuations in numbers either way personally, just focus on doing what you do as well as you can.

I hope that's been helpful, my name is Andrew Chamberlain [www.andrewjchamberlain.com](http://www.andrewjchamberlain.com) you can reach me by email [andrew@andrewjchamberlain.com](mailto:andrew@andrewjchamberlain.com) and my podcast is called "The Creative Writer's Toolbelt" you can find out more about the podcast and the accompanying book from [here](#).