

Podcasting: A New Way to Create, Capture and Disseminate Intellectual Capital

IN TODAY'S WEB 2.0 WORLD, LEADING-EDGE ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO HARNESS THE MANY DIFFERENT WAYS OF CAPTURING KNOWLEDGE

BY HELEN CLEGG AND SUSAN MONTGOMERY

A year ago, after being inspired by several sessions on podcasting at the 2007 SLA Conference in Denver, we developed a podcast series (named “The Wave of the Future”) at our company, A. T. Kearney Procurement Solutions. We left the conference with one main goal: to incorporate podcasting into our knowledge management program, as an innovative tool to create, capture and disseminate intellectual capital within our own organization.

So what are the benefits of podcasts to an organization? Here's a practical guide to developing and executing a podcast program.

Like many organizations, part of our knowledge management program for A.T. Kearney includes collecting and codifying project documents, with the aim of capturing explicit knowledge to support project teams, while also building a reference knowledge base for future consulting projects. But such an

approach often fails to capture much of the tacit knowledge in people's heads, which can be even more valuable. Additionally, it does not make full use of the new Web 2.0 technologies that are so familiar to Gen X employees, and it does not capitalize on two main ways people learn—through storytelling and

listening. Podcasts are one amazingly simple, but effective solution to these problems. We found a number of benefits when comparing podcasts with more traditional knowledge capture techniques. Here are some of the benefits:

- Podcasts let us capture tacit knowledge “hot off the press,” through interviews with project teams. They can provide the background and contextual information that PowerPoint decks and Word documents often lack, and give participants an opportunity to tell their story.
- Podcasts encourage collaboration and the use of collaboration technology. They can be delivered via RSS feeds so that consultants receive regular updates. Moreover, they are portable and convenient (busy consultants can listen to podcasts on the go); they are “cool,” in the sense that they are a novel way to present ideas and knowledge; and they have global coverage, making it possible to inter-



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view anyone in the firm, regardless of location, and everyone in the firm can listen to podcasts via our intranet.

- Podcasts are an efficient use of resources. They are low cost, as little or no investment is required; they are sustainable, since participants don't have to travel to a recording studio and no paper is used; and they are reusable.

Creating our Podcast Series

In addition to our notes and handouts from SLA, we did some background Web research on podcasting to learn more about it. We then scoped out our podcast project in terms of resources, and put together a simple project plan in order to secure buy-in from our stakeholders.

To assist with the technical side of production, we enlisted help from Tom Kline of our Technical Services team, who became our production engineer. Tom records, edits and mixes the final versions of our podcasts into both mp3 and iPod formats. Those of you who are technically proficient might be able to do this yourselves. In our case, we achieved a much more professional result thanks to Tom.

We chose three core themes—collaboration, globalization and sustainability—so that the podcasts would have a focus and integrate our broader corporate strategy. We decided on a bi-weekly podcast production and publication schedule that was feasible, given the availability of resources, and frequent enough for our podcast series to be taken seriously as an innovative and professional way of disseminating knowledge.

Our podcasts take the form of interviews with participants. We aim to keep them conversational; just like an interview you would see on CNN or CBNC,

for example. Podcasts work best with up to four participants; any more and it becomes difficult to handle from a recording perspective (and can be potentially confusing for listeners). Each podcast lasts 15-20 minutes, which we found to be the ideal listening time, easily fitting into changing planes, driving to work, or working out at the gym.

Together with the participant, we develop talking points or a “script” for each podcast. Most often we use talking points—a list of questions and the main points that we intend to cover in the answer. A few of our interviewees have felt more comfortable with a written script. This works, too, provided that the interviewee can deliver it in a conversational way. A typical script includes:

- A standard “Intro” (opening statement) for every podcast.
- An introduction to our guest(s).
- A statement of what we will cover in this podcast.
- Five to seven questions, with main points to include in the answer.
- A summary of the main points (“and the moral of this story is ...”)
- A standard “Outro” (closing statement) for every podcast.

Encouraging Participation

So how do you get people to participate? We found that the most effective way is to just ask. As an information professional, you're bound to know a lot of people in your organization and what the hot topics are. People like to tell their stories, even though they might be somewhat reticent at first. Remember, everyone has a story to tell. Approach them with an outline of the questions and talking points so that they don't think they have to come up with all the content. Together, you can work out the details. Emphasize that podcasts are fun to do, don't take much time and don't require PowerPoint skills. Typically they only require a few hours on the part of the interviewee in small chunks over a two week period.

Moreover, there's a benefit for everyone who participates in a podcast. For interviewees, participating in a podcast demonstrates knowledge and experience of a topic, and gives people recognition for what they know. This might be a plus when it comes to performance reviews. At the same time, those interviewed gain experience and confidence in presenting their ideas to the media. For interviewers, it's a beneficial experience, too. We are learning to improve our delivery and to make our interviewees feel comfortable and relaxed.

Technology Required

The technology needed to produce podcasts is relatively simple, low cost and, in some cases, free.

To start with, you need access to a conference call service that allows you to record the call and download the



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PODCAST PRODUCTION CYCLE

Activity	Status	Day					Day				
		1	3	7	10	14	1	3	7	10	14
Podcast planning session (3 hours)		█									
Podcast rehearsal (1 hour)			█								
Podcast recording session (1 hour)				█							
Podcast post -production (2 hours)					█						
Podcast release (1 hour)						█					
Podcast planning session (3 hours)							█				
Podcast rehearsal (1 hour)								█			
Podcast recording session (1 hour)									█		
Podcast post -production (2 hours)										█	
Podcast release (1 hour)											█

recording (we use Cisco MeetingPlace but others are available). MeetingPlace, therefore, becomes our virtual recording venue, bringing participants together from Asia, the United States or Europe, without requiring them to travel to a physical recording location. All that the participants need to do is to ensure that they are in a quiet place and have access to a landline or a VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) service, preferably with a microphone. (Mobile phones generally do not provide satisfactory voice quality.)

Before the recording session begins, we remind our interviewees that the recording session can be stopped at

any time. If someone’s tongue gets tangled, they can simply stop and start over. It doesn’t all have to be one perfect recording. The main thing is to speak up and enjoy the podcast experience. We suggest that interviewees imagine they’re on the morning drive-time show on the radio. We also ask them to mute their phone while they’re not speaking.

When the recording session is over, our production engineer retrieves the audio file from MeetingPlace and imports it into Apple’s GarageBand (Audacity is another product that is available for free) for post-production of the podcast. GarageBand allows us to edit out unwanted content, reduce

noise, equalize the voice tracks, add images, and add intro and outro theme music. The podcast is then mixed down to two formats: mp3 for playback via laptop (or any mp3 player), and m4a for use with Apple’s iPod.

To manage the actual podcast episode, we use Microsoft’s SharePoint collaboration technology platform. (Other companies are also developing collaboration technology, for example, IBM’s Lotus Quickr and Lotus Connections.) This is where we maintain our podcast series production schedule and set up a sub-site for each podcast episode. This provides podcast participants with a virtual collaboration workspace, where they can post the script, check it out for editing and notify the interviewer of any changes. Using SharePoint makes it much easier to control the latest versions of podcast scripts and share the raw audio files before they are mixed down. Participants review the completed podcast in the episode workspace on the SharePoint collaboration site. Once approved by everyone, we post it on our corporate intranet.

SharePoint also enables us to keep

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10 THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN SCOPING OUT YOUR PODCAST PROJECT PLAN

1. Define a podcast and how to produce one – this will help the uninitiated.
2. Look for examples of how competitors are using podcasts.
3. Reach out to your organization’s employees and ask them why they think podcasts are a good idea.
4. Put together examples of topics that could be presented.
5. Work out how much time will be required to produce a podcast (i.e., resource required in terms of people).
6. What equipment will you need?
7. What budget do you need for the series?
8. Put together a timeline for getting the project underway.
9. Outline the key benefits to your organization.
10. Obtain buy-in from major stakeholders.

documentation relating to each episode in one central place, reduce email traffic, and tag podcasts so that they can be retrieved by users when searching across our enterprise-wide SharePoint platform. If your organization doesn't use collaboration technology, you will probably have to rely more on email.

Other Uses for Podcasts

When we started out on this project, we anticipated that podcasts would be a great way to capture and disseminate the more difficult, tacit knowledge within our firm. Now, a year later, we see many other potential uses for our podcasts. A selection of podcasts from our “Wave of the Future” series are now posted on our public Web site, to which listeners can subscribe via an RSS feed, bringing thought leadership to our clients and potential clients using innovative technology.

Currently, we are exploring how we might use podcasts as a way to capture experience from every project, starting with our A.T. Kearney Procurement Solutions unit, through regular “post-project reviews,” which would be similar to the military’s concept of After Action Reviews. We envision ways that we can use podcasts to educate people about our knowledge management services and the possibility for tailoring podcasts for specific clients as a new form of current awareness. Finally, while English is the business language in our firm, we may want to consider multi-lingual podcasts in the future to support our global operations.

Podcasting in the Future

Podcasts are already moving into vodcast (or “vodcasting”), bringing together both the audio and visual elements of communication. We see the opportunity to vodcast presentations and record useful project sessions. This would provide a vivid record of project team experiences and results, which is often lost in written documentation.

In today’s Web 2.0 world, leading-edge organizations need to harness the

many different ways of capturing knowledge. Podcasts that can be tagged and uploaded into an enterprise-wide search system are just another way. While many of our listeners perceive podcasts as an additional type of intellectual capital that is merely disseminated through a new medium, some do not and continue to regard podcasts as separate from traditional types of corporate knowledge.

The challenge for information professionals is to get all employees to see that podcasts are just as authentic as project documentation—and, in some cases, more user-friendly.

The first year of our podcasting adventure has been an exciting one and has opened up new opportunities. Podcasting has proven to be a great way to raise the profile of our knowledge management group. Sharing knowledge is powerful! **SLA**

Additional Resources

Audacity – the free, cross-platform sound editor. Open source software for recording and editing sound. Available from <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/> (Accessed 8 July, 2008).

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