

pressdemocrat.com

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.pressdemocrat.com
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published - Aug 28, 2005

Podcasts catching on

Sonoma County podcasters find niche with online chats on technology, sports

By [Erin Allday](#)
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

A year ago, Greg Louzao was a fireman racing into burning buildings and saving kittens from trees. Today he's a talk-show host and high-tech pioneer.

When the Sebastopol resident was laid up with an on-the-job back injury last fall, he tackled boredom by talking about his beloved Oakland Raiders - on the Internet for an audience of about 1,000 fellow fans.

Louzao, 48, hosts online chats about the Raiders in "podcasts" - radio-style programs that he records with an MP3 player and a microphone on his personal computer and then posts at his Web site (see fact box at right for URL).

"I've never done anything like this. Everybody at work goes, 'Greg's doing what?'" said Louzao, laughing. "I am certainly not a computer technician in any stretch of the word. But I can't stop podcasting. It's a great outlet for me as a fan."

Podcasting - the word combines Apple's popular MP3 player, the iPod, and broadcasting - is an increasingly popular technology that celebrated its first anniversary earlier this month. Podcasters upload their shows to the Internet, where they can be downloaded and listened to on a computer or MP3 player.

Podcasts already are exploding all over the Internet. Last year about 800,000 people listened to podcasts; this year an estimated 4.5 million will listen, according to the Diffusion Group, a consumer technology research firm in Plano, Texas.

There are no complete directories of all the podcasts available worldwide, but experts estimate there are about 7,000 now. iTunes, Apple's popular online music store, has an entire section devoted to downloading free podcasts in 21 different categories.

At least a half-dozen podcasts are based in Sonoma County, although that number could be much higher since most podcasters don't identify where they live. Still, that small number covers a huge range of interests and styles.

In addition to Louzao, there's a former public radio producer who talks about his new life working as a vineyard day laborer. There's a Petaluma college student who just wants to talk about life and philosophy. There are two Santa Rosa brothers who write a show about electronic music, and a Petaluma designer who talks about reggae.

And then there's Leo Laporte, who dipped into podcasting when it was just taking off. Today, he hosts one of the most popular podcasts in the world, "This Week in Tech," out of his tiny Petaluma studio, in addition to four other podcasts.

"This Week in Tech" gets at least 100,000 listeners a week, based on how many people download it from his Web site, Laporte said. It's consistently been in the Top 10 most popular podcasts at iTunes and the online directory Podcast Alley.

Laporte isn't necessarily the typical podcaster - he has decades of radio and TV experience to back up his broadcasting skills and currently hosts a radio show in Los Angeles and a TV program in Toronto.

But the podcasts are his passion.

"It's an exciting medium. I prefer the direct-to-audience thing," Laporte said. "To me, it's what technology is all about, giving people a voice. Literally."

Adam Curry, the former MTV video jockey, is generally credited with creating one of the first podcasts, which are still among the most popular on the Internet. He helped develop a process that allows listeners to subscribe to their favorite podcasts so they'll be automatically downloaded to their computers and MP3 players.

No one can yet say just how significant the podcast movement is, but it's certainly picking up attention. Radio stations especially are nervous about podcasting's potential impact on broadcast markets, and many of them have developed their own online programming.

Experts attribute the growing popularity of podcasts to the "TiVo" generation - people who have grown accustomed to TV-on-demand and watching anything they want, whenever they want it. Now they want similar programming in what they listen to.

It started with MP3 players, which allowed consumers to forego popular radio and control what music they listened to. Now, with podcasts, they can control the rest of their audio content.

"What we'll find is that ultimately entertainment media is going to be delivered over the Internet. Whether it's 10 years from now or 20 years from now, people will think it's odd we waited for a particular broadcast to watch it," said Phil Leigh, president of Inside Digital Media, a technology marketing and consulting company in Tampa, Fla. "All of this is really what podcasting is a prototype of. This is where it's all heading."

Laporte is a believer.

He's not sure how much money is in podcasting - part of the appeal of it, he notes, is that it's anti-commercial and anti-corporate. He's not making a profit from his podcasts, and he supports himself with jobs on a cable TV show, radio and other appearances, and book deals.

"This Week in Tech" is popular enough that AOL offered to host it for free in exchange for sponsorship, and he takes donations that bring in roughly \$8,000 a month.

But even if podcasting itself never makes much money, he thinks the technology is opening a

new field of possibilities.

"In a couple years this is going to topple broadcast radio," Laporte said. "There's a niche that isn't very competitive, and this is when people are driving or gardening or working out. Their only option is radio, and radio has gone down that corporate path. Radio is killing itself. That's where podcasting comes in.

"Some people say it's like blogging, it's the flavor of the month," he said. "But I don't think podcasting is a flash in the pan."

The mainstream media is already catching on. Many newspapers and magazines have podcasts, including MAKE magazine run by O'Reilly Media Inc. in Sebastopol. Major TV networks offer podcasts with short clips from popular TV shows, and sometimes commentary from producers or directors.

Still, the vast majority of podcasts are obviously amateur products, sloppily recorded on MP3 players and providing little content that would appeal to anyone other than the creator.

But part of the charm of podcasts, fans say, is that they allow developers and listeners alike to create niches of specialized broadcasting. Not very many people might be interested in Petaluma resident Donald Pasewark's reggae podcast, for example, but he's determined to showcase the music as best he can.

"I'm trying to generate interest in reggae. That's my intent," said Pasewark, an art designer who podcasts under the name DubWise. "The more obscure the better."

In Santa Rosa, brothers Jared and Shayne White created their first podcast, "Melodious Synth," last month, playing electronic and synthesizer music while Jared talks about the artists.

Like many podcasters, Shayne White, 20, sees podcasting as "democratizing" radio.

"Podcasting is a really good way to promote music that normally wouldn't make it in radio," Shayne said.

Added Jared, 22: "Podcasts are redefining how people interact with radio. You don't need to be affiliated with a radio station and fit in with their programming."

While most podcasters don't spend much time forecasting where the technology is headed, Alan Baker said the future of audio media is exactly why he quit his job as a public radio producer and went online. Baker, 40, sees podcasts as more than simple entertainment.

Last April he moved from St. Paul, Minn., to work part time as a day laborer at two Healdsburg vineyards and create a podcast about his adventure.

"I thought it was time to make a big leap and try to find something brand new," Baker said. "I hate the term paradigm shift, but habits are changing in how people get the content they watch or read or listen to. I felt like this was a turning point, and I wanted to be part of it."

© The Press Democrat. For copyright information view our [User Agreement](#)