

# RP radio?

Podcasting has changed the way we listen to the trannie and may even replace it, writes **Andrew Bock**.

Last year marked the tipping point for podcasting: it was the year in which it became mainstream. For the few who are yet to catch on, podcasting enables people to listen to their favourite radio programs whenever they like by downloading them, once they have gone to air, onto their computers.

Some broadcasters, such as the ABC, make entire programs available via podcasts, while others pluck parts. The commercial FM stations generally prefer to select segments from some of their most popular programs.

The broad range of shows listed on the iTunes daily list of most popular podcasts is proof that the practice has morphed from geeksville to mainstream. It is not just switched on IT folk listening to uber-cool, alternative Seattle community radio; now the audience comprises middle-aged gardeners listening to what they want while they pull their weeds.

The ABC is now regularly topping two million podcast downloads a month. Austereo (owner of Triple M and Melbourne's Fox FM) is registering more than 850,000 a month across all its stations, a figure that is increasing by 50,000 each month.

Podcasting is also a boon for individual presenters who are now able to attract audiences beyond their station's reach.

Dennis Truethen produces the Salty Dog Blues N Roots Podcast out of a home studio in the Melbourne bayside suburb of Elwood. He broadcasts his show on community FM in Port Douglas but has more than 25,000 monthly podcast listeners, most in the US, and regularly ranks in pole position internationally in Google searches for podcast blues.

Radio stations are also producing content specifically for podcasts and vodcasts. Mark Strong, Austereo's manager of interactive, says: "We are talking to new talent to make podcasts or vodcasts that won't be available to our radio audiences."

## WHAT IS INTERNET RADIO?

There are three forms of internet radio - podcasts, archived radio shows and internet radio stations. ☐ A **podcast** is an audio show that can be downloaded to an MP3 player, such as an iPod, either manually or automatically (by subscription) whenever you connect to the internet.

☐ An **archived radio show** is a radio show that offers past programs as archives that can be "streamed" at any time via the internet. Some radio shows can also be downloaded as podcasts.

☐ An **internet radio station** can be an umbrella website for a series of podcasts and music lists on a loop. It could even be somebody else's iPod set to shuffle on a server somewhere. Most radio stations offer guides to using podcasts and archived shows. All you need is music file software such as iTunes and a decent internet connection. You can play the shows back through your computer or download them to your MP3 player.

Tony Walker, manager of digital radio at the ABC, points to DIG interactive as an indication of the future of media. "It's a brand that is not defined by the platform," he says. "It exists on the internet as audio services, on free-to-air digital TV and pay TV. We have had DIG-branded programming on ABC local radio, on Radio National and on ABC 2."

Independent podcast producers and internet radio stations have pioneered new ways to listen to audio content. But their right to replay music is being threatened by the Recording Industry Association of America. Commercial stations and the ABC avoid placing music in their podcasts because of the continuing legal debate.

Meanwhile, independent music



podcasters continue to present new ranges of music that may not be played on traditional radio. Ultima Thule, a weekly ambient music program for three community FM radio stations around Australia, is the leading ambient podcast at the iTunes store.

George Cruickshank, IT strategist for classical station 2MBS in Sydney and producer of Ultima Thule, talks about introducing "multiple dedicated channels" for listeners to stream according to their tastes.

He sees this streaming of genres, or "foxtel for radio stations", as the future of radio. "Unless traditional radio stations look at these models, they will quickly find that they are irrelevant because young people just don't listen to the radio any more."

**Next generation**  
...Cameron Reilly claims terrestrial radio has become obsolete.

Perhaps the only obstacle to podcast growth in Australia is our slow and expensive download speed. In a comment echoed by most podcast producers, Truethen says almost half of his Australian listeners stream the show but overseas, everyone downloads the higher-quality, 140MB podcast.

The Podcast Network's Cameron Reilly adds: "Podcasting has made digital terrestrial radio completely unnecessary. With next-generation, high bandwidth wireless networks being rolled out and next generation mobile phones such as the iPhone becoming popular, it should be obvious that these will provide the platform for mobile audio entertainment in the short-term future."