Chapter **5**

GETTING STARTED

The first few minutes you share with your listeners are the most important time you have, but so many podcasters treat it as the least important. They dawdle, they thank their friends, they play promos (of other shows), they talk about things that new listeners won't know or care about. Always give your listeners what they came for within the first 5 minutes. Remember that on every show, someone's going to be listening who's never heard you before. Make them care.

—Steve Eley, from Escape Pod

Choosing a Title

In the last chapter, we talked about picking a subject you are passionate about, which is clearly the number-one piece of advice from current podcasters. In this chapter, we are going to talk about first impressions. The old saying is, you only get one chance to make a first impression. With over 30,000 (soon to be over 100,000) podcasts to compete with, listeners will have less and less time to spend when looking at a new podcast. And they almost certainly will not give you a second chance with so many others to yet explore.

The very first thing any potential listener will ever learn about your show is the title of your show. How you choose a name will go very far in setting up that first impression. Let's look at some great names:

- Catholic Insider
- Chess Is Cool Podcast
- K9Cast

112   Tricks of the Podcasting Masters

- MacCast

- MommyCast

- RaidersCast

- The Kansas City Weather Podcast

We bet most people can tell what each of these podcasts is about as soon as they see the titles. It is often important to pick a title that clearly lets potential listeners know what your show is about. This is especially true for niche shows and shows that are about a specific subject. You want to make sure people looking for that subject can easily connect your show with the subject (see Figure 5.1).

FIGURE 5.1

Searching for "Comedy" podcasts in iTunes narrows the pack a bit, but there's still a huge number of podcasts from which to choose.

Chris at Tips from the Top Floor, a podcast about Digital Photography, renamed his show Digital Photography: Tips from the Top Floor, after the release of iTunes. That simple change helped his subscriber numbers to increase drastically from about 1,000 to over 10,000.

The English as a Second Language (ESL) Podcast launched in July of 2005, and by October of that year had over 10,000 subscribers. Jeff, the host of the ESL Podcast, did

not do any promoting of his show; he simply listed it in iTunes and people searching for that subject signed up in droves. His only real marketing was the name of his podcast.

For shows where the subject matter is a little more gray (comedy or entertainment), a catchy unique title may be more appropriate. Yeast Radio, The Twisted Pickle, and The Evil Genius Chronicles really tell you nothing about the content, other than that the creators of these shows at least have some creativity. And if a listener is searching around the Comedy section of a directory, a name that jumps out at them may be more likely to be clicked than a boring name like The John Doe Show.

Let's try something: You are looking for a show that is likely to make you laugh and entertain you. You are also looking for something a little different than standard fare. Which of the following would you click?

- Mutant Cheese Doodle Podcast
- KCRW's Le Show

Granted, if you are French and don't like puffy orange junk food, you may go with the latter. But most people would go for the former.

If you already have a blog or a website with some sort of following, oftentimes you are best served to play off the name of the site or blog. Some great examples are TheForce.Net Podcast, Suicide Girls Podcast, iLounge.com Podcast, and, of course, The Diggnation Podcast. All these used the popularity and traffic from their sites to spur traffic to their podcasts. But this really only works if you have established traffic. If your blog has a strange name and no traffic and you are looking for the podcast to help bring traffic to the blog, you may be better suited picking a new name for the podcast that might attract attention.

Once you have some potential names picked out, go into iTunes, Yahoo!, Odeo, and Podcast Alley and do a search for those names and derivatives of those names. Early on in podcasting there were podcasts with the following names:

- She Said, He Said Podcast
- He Said, She Said Podcast
- She Said, She Said Podcast

Talk about confusing! You can practically hear the potential listener base dropping through the floor. It is very important to look at the other names of podcasts out there so you don't create unwanted confusion. The couple of hours of work you spend now researching good names and looking at what is out there will save you tenfold that amount of time and frustration later on if you have to change your podcast's name.

Once you have narrowed down potential names, go to your favorite registrar and see if you can register, at a minimum, the .com, .net, and .org web domain names. You want to make sure you protect your namespace. There is nothing worse than having a podcast about religion located at www.*yourdomain*.com and then having a porn site register www.*yourdomain*.net or .org. And if your podcast/website takes off and those names are available, trust us, someone will register them and you'll end up wishing you had done it when you had the chance.

Your Intro

If your potential listeners like the name of your show and have decided to check it out, we have now reached phase two of what affects your podcast's first impression—the show itself. At this point you can assume that the person listening has some sort of interest in what you are podcasting about. It is not like with channel surfing on the TV. The listener actually had to take the time to download your show (chances are they are not yet subscribed, so they are listening as the show is webcasted or played on a flash player). This means you should have a little more than the 5 to 10 seconds a typical channel suffer would spend evaluating a show before moving on. You probably have as much as 45 seconds to a minute to make a good first impression. No pressure.

In the next few sections, we'll take a look at some of the ways you can lead off your podcast, starting with the pre-intro.

Pre-Intro

Before the intro, many podcasters have a "pre-intro" for lack of a better term. This is usually something where they state one or more of the following: the date, the show number, the guest star, the cast's rating, or something else specific for that episode. This is done for numerous reasons, and it's considered in good "podiquette" to do so.

One of the most important reasons this is done has to do with playing the device on a mobile MP3 player and not being able to see the screen for one reason or another. These notes are important especially if the listener has a player without a screen (for example, iPod shuffle) or if they're using it in a car (driving and trying to navigate through the menus on an iPod are a big no-no). Having this information at the beginning of the show lets the listeners know right away if they are playing the correct episode. Another important reason to do this is to help those who are sight impaired. Audio podcasts are very attractive to this segment of the population, and having a pre-intro helps in their listening experience.

A pre-intro can be done many different ways—such as Adam Curry's "Delta Sierra Charlie One Niner Niner" to signify DSC-199, or the show name and date, as is done on the MacCast. podCast411 does the date, show number, and the guest's name. For interview shows, we would suggest including the guest's name up front. But no matter how you decide to do it, the pre-intro is the very first thing the listener hears and usually is no more than 5 to 10 seconds. Although the pre-intro is not intended to set the tone for your show, this does not mean it has be so monotone that it sounds like something from the Emergency Podcasting System.

Celebrity/Guest Show ID

Celebrity/guest show IDs at the beginnings of a podcast are also very common—for example, "This is Jane from the Jane Doe podcast and you are listening to John Smith on my favorite show, the ACME Crowbar Podcast." The use of celebrity show IDs are a great way to let potential listeners know what type of person listens to your show. If you are able to get someone who is very popular to do a show ID for you, it gives a nice message that your show is essentially endorsed by that person and helps bring credibility to your show. Sending an email to other podcasters asking for a show ID and telling them to be creative will often result in some great sound clips.

Message

When it comes to your introduction, you need to ask yourself the following questions: What type of tone am I trying to set? What type of information do I want to convey to a new listener? Knowing the answers to these questions will greatly improve the quality and effectiveness of your introduction. Many times your title itself will already convey the message of the content so it is fine to have an introduction that just sets a tone. For other shows, especially ones focused on a specific subject, but where the title is not very clear on what that subject might be, you need an introduction that not only conveys the tone and feel of the show, but also clearly spells out what the show is about. Now, that does not mean if the title is clear you are forbidden from spelling it out for the listeners. The MommyCast has a very well produced 40-second intro that conveys the feel of the show while also introducing what the show is about.

This brings us to the question of whether you should get outside help to produce your introduction. With some hard work and help from your significant other, friends, or family, chances are you can produce a very good introduction on your own. That said, Tips from the Top Floor and the Kansas City Weather Podcast both turned to Scott Fletcher for help with their introductions. Scott Fletcher, from Podcheck Review, has probably

helped more podcasters with introductions, bumpers, sweepers, and promos (see Chapter 14, "Using Promos to Hype Your Podcast,") than any other podcaster. Wichita Rutherford and Paul with Barefoot Radio would probably come in a close second. Using outside help from any of these three will clearly give your introduction a professional, but yet very fun feel.

Sometimes with your introduction, you want to bring the listeners up to date with past shows. With the K9Cast, Walter and Tara have a great introduction format where they start with a short show identification, then do a recap of the past show's content, then give a preview of this show's content (see Figure 5.2). They complete this all in typically less than 45 seconds. If you have a podiobook, this is also a good way to recap what has been talked about in previous chapters.

NOTE
Bumpers and sweepers are essentially the same thing. They are prerecorded audio segments consisting of sound effects, voice, or voice over music that serve as a transition between two different sections of a show. They are usually very quick—10 to 15 seconds in length or less. They can be used to transition from one song to another, from a news section to a comedy skit, or anywhere else you might have a hard transition that you want to soften.

FIGURE 5.2
The K9Cast provides listeners with a quick recap of the previous show before setting off on a new topic.

Sponsorship

If your show is sponsored or underwritten by someone else, you really should point that out upfront. First, I am sure your sponsor would appreciate it. But second, you need to think about fair disclosure. Your listeners, by and large, aren't stupid. If you spend your entire show talking about how great XYZ service is and you never mention XYZ paid you to do the show, it will come back to haunt you. There is an issue of trust between a podcast's host(s) and the listeners, and not pointing the sponsorship out will break down any trust your audience had with you. Worse, losing your audience will almost certainly make you less attractive to your sponsor.

It's also a mistake to assume that listeners won't find out if a sponsor supports your podcast. Podcasting is a "community," and people talk and post on forum boards. Listeners will eventually find out if someone is sponsoring you, so make it clear right from the outset.

Commercials

Commercials are a little more formal than quickly mentioning a sponsor, and they usually involve hawking some product or service. There are two main ways to deliver a commercial on your show. One is to play a "canned," pre-produced slick commercial that is supplied to you from your advertiser or is inserted with one of the ad-insertion systems. If you go this route, you need to look out for the "nails on the chalkboard" effect. This happens when the volume levels or general sound of the commercial is so different from that of the rest of podcast, it instantly turns off the listeners. The second one is where you, the podcaster, read the commercial. This is less grating on your listeners and is much less likely to drive away potential listeners.

To learn more about the difference between sponsorships and commercials, **see** "Advertising and Sponsorship," **p. 299** (Chapter 18, "Generating Revenue").

We are not against advertisements in podcasts, but you need to remember not all podcast listeners are going to put up with commercials. Part of the appeal of podcasting is the lack of commercials. We highly suggest for this reason that you not have a commercial in the first 2 minutes of your podcast. There is no reason to risk driving away new potential listeners before they even get a chance to make a decision about your show.

Some advertisers are going to insist that the advertisements be placed early in the show. It is your job to point out to them the differences in podcasting and commercial radio and let them know you want to make sure you have as large a listening base as possible. Hooking new listeners is all about making the best possible first impression, and having a commercial upfront will never achieve that goal.

Length

Given the choice between a 3-minute introduction and no introduction, most listeners, especially those who have subscribed, would pick no introduction. You need to pick some balance between having a full-fledged promo to start your show for the new listeners and the desires of your current listener base. The length of your introduction will vary depending on the type of show you are doing and its overall length. You do not want a 1-minute introduction on a 5-minute show, but for a show that is over an hour long, a 1-minute introduction may not be out of the question.

Looking at over 50 of the more popular podcasts, we noted the following breakdown concerning the length of show introductions (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1   Average Length of Podcast Introductions

Show Length	Avg.	Min.	Max.
<15 min	0:21	0:00	0:47
15 to 30 min	0:33	0:13	1:08
>30 min	0:43	0:15	1:45

As would be expected, the length of the shows correlates to the length of the introductions. Although there is no hard-and-fast rule for what the length of your introduction should be, you should take into consideration that if your introduction is much greater than the averages listed here, you run the risk of turning off potential new listeners and current subscribers. It is always best to err on having an introduction that is too short rather than one that is too long.