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Sep29

[Mike](#)

[Fun with sound effects](#)

More from behind the scenes of “Dateline: RIT – The Podcast” . . .

My headline might be misleading. Although sound effects can be fun, oftentimes *less is more* (similar to the use of adjectives and exclamation marks in writing).

“Dry voice” recordings, though, can be rather bland. Depending on the circumstances, of course. Back at my college radio station, WGSU-FM, I once produced a 30-second station promo *entirely* in dry voice—with the aim of *cutting through the clutter of noise*. The concept complemented the promo’s message—“We’re easy” (hey, it was the ’80s ;-))—touting a no-frills on-air contest.

In the world of podcasting, the opposite is true. Though some podcasts use sound effects effectively (particularly for opens, closes or transitions), most are otherwise strictly dry-voice productions. Why do you suppose that is?

Answer (caution: the truth may hurt):

Many podcasts are produced by amateurs talking into their iPods (this is, of course, an origin of the word “[podcast](#)”). That’s not necessarily a bad thing. The podcasting world—like the blogosphere, which is overflowing with amateur writers—could be regarded as a forum for citizen journalists (although lack of know-how or incentive tends to filter out some would-be podcasters).

That’s a primary reason why most podcasts are bare-bones productions. So, when a colleague, after listening to the “Dateline: RIT” prototype last month, challenged, “But I’ve *never* heard a podcast that uses sound effects all the way through” (read: “You’re not conforming”), I responded: “Exactly!”

But, even though I’m a proud non-conformist, that’s not the reason I respectfully disagreed with my friend from all the way down the hallway (and around the corner). Rather, in choosing to add production value by using sound effects, my aim was to move away from the amateurish, speaking-into-my-iPod model created by the pioneers (and, like my dry-voice “We’re easy” promo for WGSU two decades earlier, to stand out from the pack through *differentiation*).

To the handful of “Dateline: RIT” listeners who expressed distaste for the background sound effects, I hope you noticed that the sound level was lowered following the first episode. While your opinions are valued, you now know there was reasoning behind the decision to use a sound-effects bed for “Dateline: RIT” (more on the specific choice of the teletype sound effect another time). Be assured, not all our podcasts will use sound effects. And, even though there are no plans to scrap the “Dateline” format after only three episodes, I hope you keep listening. After all, it’s only five minutes. Pretend you’re in a newsroom.

Coming up: More on [swooshes](#), [teletypes](#), [Skype](#), [Sounddogs](#) and [TV cartoons](#)—along with a [chance to win a University News prize package](#).

1. [Birth of a podc](#)

Sep29

[...] Next time: What’s the deal with those sound effects, anyway? Behind the scen Sep22 [...] That’s the “why” behind the purpose of “Dateline: RIT.” Next time, more on the “how” behind the new podcast. Name (required) E-mail (required) Website [...] Name (required) E-mail (required) Website [...]

2. [Jared Lyon](#)

Oct05

I think the podcast is a great idea, and I'm glad RIT has jumped into it. Nothing says "we're a tech school" like having a podcast and a blog. I've brought up the two issues I have with the podcast to you in person before: I don't think there's a reason to put a typewriter sound through the entire podcast. It just adds "static" all the way through the dialogue. Why don't news broadcasts (on TV) have sound effects while people are talking? Because people are there for the NEWS and not to have other stuff compete with their ears to get it. Sometimes doing things the way everyone else does it is a good thing, because it's tried and true. News broadcasts on TV do have some interesting video and audio effects/swooshes, and they do help the production value of the piece. It helps say "this is not done by and amateur." But those effects are not present through the WHOLE news broadcast. They are used between pieces. On another topic: It seems like names are being repeated more than they need to be. "Dateline: RIT" is said twice in the first 5 seconds of the most recent podcast, and P.R. Mukund's, Vienna Carvalho's, and Bob Finnerty's names are all mentioned 3 times during each of their stories. I understand Mukund's repetition a bit more, as the story is about him, but Bob and Vienna are just the conveyors of the story. If I were doing the podcast, I'd fade the typewriter out to silent for most of the podcast (but keep audio effects/swooshes between segments) and cut out a bit of the name-dropping redundancy.

3. [John](#) Oct05

Jared, I understand what you're saying about the repetition of names, but I don't really agree with it. As the "PR" office, we do want Mukund's name out there as often as possible. When people think of electrical engineering, we want them to immediately associate Mukund's name with it. As for Bob, Vienna or any of the writers that are featured, the same logic applies. We want whoever is listening, whether it's the RIT community, a member of the media, or a community member, to associate our names with our responsibilities or beats. Therefore if someone has a story idea, a question or even a comment, they know who would be appropriate to contact. Like I said, I understand where you're coming from and you still may disagree, which is fine. I just figured you'd appreciate knowing some of the logic behind it.

4. [Mike Saffran](#) Oct05

Thanks for your feedback, Jared. Indeed, we've chatted on a number of occasions, and I respect your opinion about the teletype (not typewriter) background sound effect. You can take heart, though, in that, as explained above (in my original post), it's unique to "Dateline: RIT." Not all our podcasts will use sound effects (and certainly not the teletype fx). I'll elaborate about the specific sound effects used in "Dateline: RIT – The Podcast" in a future post. For now, I'll say simply that, in addition to creating differentiation, the teletype effect is part of a broader strategy relating to a "Dateline: RIT" brand, or identity, connecting the podcast, e-newsletter and future Web site. As for the comparison with TV newscasts, I would point out that most TV newscasts are 30 minutes in length—compared with a *five-minute* podcast (a *big* difference). Finally, about the repetition: The first reference to "Dateline: RIT" introduces the name of show; the second reference is the actual [dateline](#) (lowercased "d"), providing the origin and date of the news. (Sure, the location is always going to be RIT, but give me this one ;~) Regarding the "name-dropping," John's explanation is a good one. I'll add, I'd be willing to bet that despite a name being mentioned three times, at least three out of four *casual* listeners *still* couldn't tell you, at the end of the podcast, who was featured. Take it from me, people often can't recall who or what they're hearing, particularly if they're doing something else simultaneously (in this regard, listening to podcasts can be similar to listening to radio). Bottom line: A *primary goal* of ours is to increase the recognition of RIT experts by building them into what we call our "*media stars*."

5. [Name that](#) Oct06

[...] Oct06 Mike Name that 'swoosh' Last time, I addressed, in general terms, the decision to use sound effects in "Dateline: RIT –The Podcast." Now, abit more on the choice of specific sound effects. [...]

6. [The newsroom &#](#) Oct13

[...] Some quibble that the sound effect itself is "noise." Fair enough. After all, music to one person's ears is noise to another. Without restating the entire rationale given in my earlier post, Fun with sound effects, let me simply say: Knowing now what it is, I hope you can conjure in your mind a little 'theater of the mind.' (Heck, if Orson Welles was able to convince listeners that aliens had landed in New Jersey, maybe you can feel—just a little—as though you're eavesdropping on a busy newsroom. Give it a try. Again, it's only five minutes.) [...]

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The Tiger Beat takes you behind the scenes with the members of [RIT University News](#)—the news and public relations division of [Rochester Institute of Technology](#). Get the "story behind the story" and an insider's look at who we are and what we do to publicize RIT news.

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