The making of a podcast (part 1): Software

Almost anyone can create a podcast simply by talking into an iPod or some other type of portable recording device and sharing it through iTunes. Producing a more professional sounding podcast, however, requires additional hardware and software. At University News, we chose an upgraded, but still modest, set-up that for now adequately serves our needs. Here’s how it all came together:

Last summer, I was issued a mandate to ‘make it happen.’ I’ve joked that Bob gave me a blank check. Truth be known, I was given the autonomy to research and buy what was needed. I hasten to add, however (lest I scare the institute’s bean counters), that Bob knew with whom he was dealing. I mean, I don’t buy a gallon of milk before first researching it. And, in fact, the great deals that I found have already returned dividends.

One of my first choices was software. From my radio days, I already had audio-editing experience. Nearly all the on-air imaging—including “bumpers,” jingles, montages, promos and “sweepers”—used during the six-year run of my request show, “The Jukebox” (on WKLX-FM/WBBF-FM), was created digitally on an Orban/AKG digital-audio editor. Oh, how I loved it. Skilled at editing audiotape with a razor blade (where you have only one chance to get it right), I quickly fell in love with digital editing—and especially with one button: “Undo.” But as helpful as it was having knowledge of digital-audio editing, equally important was the ability to spot certain shortcomings in some audio-editing software.

First, I experimented with Audacity—freeware that was recommended by a few people—but didn’t find it very user friendly (particularly after it caused my computer to crash on a few occasions). After exploring a few others (including VoxPro, which I was familiar with from radio, but was disappointed to learn is now made for PCs only), I settled on Apple’s GarageBand. “Settled” is the operative word. Although GarageBand is fairly easy to use, I was far from enamored with it. For starters, it lacks some very basic audio-editing capabilities. Nonetheless, it seemed adequate for getting my gills wet. Plus, because University News is Mac-based, we already had GarageBand on our computers (although ultimately we opted to upgrade to iLife ’06, which includes GarageBand 3’s newer podcast creation features).

For additional audio prep work, I also occasionally use QuickTime 7 Pro and Final Vinyl—a neat little program that came bundled with my iMic (more on the iMic in part two).

Next time: Hardware