

# THE SOUND OF NEWSPAPERS

It's more than just the roar of the presses.

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The digital revolution is making it possible to break the silence of print. We have known for years that you don't need a radio station to broadcast sound, and many newspapers and magazines are taking up the challenge. One of the trail blazers is *The Guardian* in the UK.

*The Guardian* and its sister paper, *The Observer*, provide 10 weekly podcasts and a daily news update.

With 2.5 million audio downloads between them in October 2008 (advertisers love click through statistics), these newspapers are proving that sound can not only enhance a reader's experience but it could well be profitable too.

Guardian News and Media – which operates the titles – has confidentially predicted that its podcasts will start to make money in 2009.

It has become the first media company in the UK to start selling advertisements around its audio.

San Francisco based company Kiptronic inserts a commercial spot at the moment a consumer downloads a podcast, with the ad geo-targeted to his or her location.

Another publication capitalizing on its audio is *The Economist*. At the time of writing, it has a sponsor for its online multi-media section, and a video ad plays first when content is downloaded.

Statistics suggest publications like *The Guardian* and *The Economist* are on the right track.

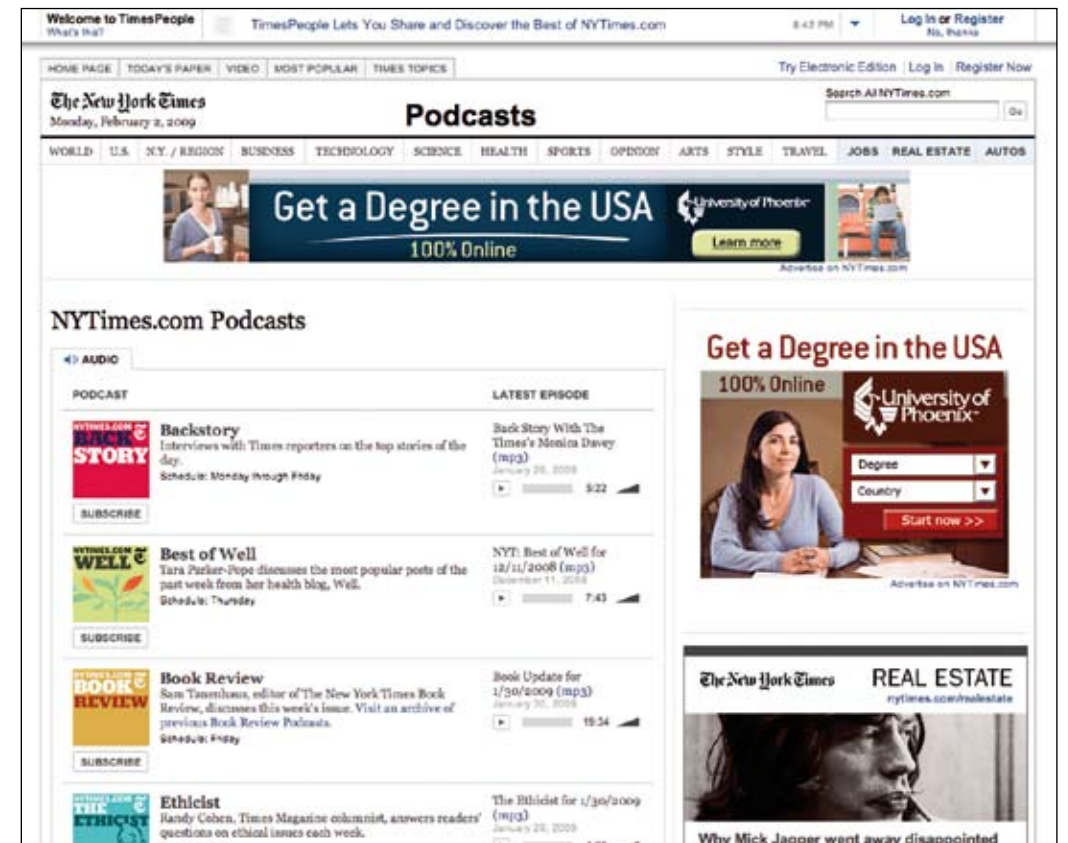
According to a survey for the UK radio industry's listening research company, RAJAR, in April / May 2008, 9.4 million people – 18% of the population – listened to radio on-line in any given week. This was up from 8.1 million in October / November 2007, just six months earlier.

The research also showed 3.7 million people listening to a podcast each week, up from 1.87 million.

Yes, you can become a radio broadcaster in the digital world and be heard.

Matt Gilbert, Business Development Manager of Guardian News and Media said:

*“At The Guardian, unlocking the full revenue*



<http://www.nytimes.com/ref/multimedia/podcasts.html>

*potential of our internet distributed content is critical as consumers enjoy our content on more devices and software applications than ever before.”*

Indeed, the sound of the paper can reach consumers on a growing number of platforms including MP3 players, enabled mobile phones and PCs.

Newspapers and other print media enjoy a huge head start on independent audio productions online: they have a consumer base and established brands which can be developed further in sound.

Audio adds color and it gives a real voice to columnists (didn't many broadcasters start in print anyway?) For example, *New York Times* writer Randy Cohen presents a weekly podcast answering readers' questions on ethical issues. This Q and A format translates well to audio.

Sound enables the newspaper to superserve distinctive audiences in a way that traditional broadcast media might struggle to reach.

The *New York Times* produces fourteen regular podcasts, including programs covering books, health, music and science.

*The Guardian's* topical podcasts include one called “*Islamophonic*”, described at *guardian.co.uk* as “*news and views from the world of Islam, but not as you have heard it before*”. It won the best podcast award at the Association of On-line Publishers Awards in the UK in 2007. The judges called it “*original and interesting. Good brand development and excellent produc-*

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*tion. Great unique content and good production: excellent witty edgy journalism.”*

So, publications can make the most of their brand and their journalistic talent through audio and do it relatively cheaply.

After all, there is no need for the graphics, sets, make-up and lighting of online audio's big brother, the vodcast (video).

In fact, when you already have radio journalists inside your parent company, it can prove very cost effective. That works well for *The Guardian's* parent which also owns the *Manchester Evening News* newspaper in the North West of England, three regional radio stations in the area and a local digital television channel there.

When, I visited the *Manchester Evening News* website recently, I not only read about a serious fire in the city but I was able to hear the emotion in locals' voices in a 90-second



<http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/podcasts/category/islamophonic/>



<http://audiovideo.economist.com/>



**ABOVE:** RECORDING THE GUARDIAN'S 'TECH WEEKLY' PODCAST (PHOTOS COURTESY OF JEMIMIA KISS).  
**BELOW:** THE MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS ADVERTISES MORE INFORMATION ON ITS ASSOCIATE TV AND RADIO STATIONS.

feature recorded by a radio journalist at the scene (and watched images shot for the TV channel).

Editor of Guardian Media Group Radio, James Rea told me audio contributions to the newspaper are non stop:

*"Whenever we have audio that would enhance the Manchester Evening News website's multi-media offering, we'll put it up there."*

Within the paper's newsroom, there is a desk called The Hub at which journalists from the other platforms sit and collaborate.

James says sharing of ideas and information is helping the Group develop cross-platform journalism and, also offers clear cross-promotion opportunities across print, television, on-line and radio.

*"We now come together as editors to decide the best way of breaking a story and keeping it within GMG (the media group). Many exclusives won't wait until the next morning's newspaper - so radio or online are now their home because of the immediacy the platforms offer."*

One recent project involved cross-platform reporting by a journalist who visited Iraq and wrote for the paper, reported on radio and fronted a TV piece.

I have used the above examples and others, to develop ten tips to help bring successful sound to newspapers:

**1. WHAT IS YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE?** It may be broad, like 'readers who enjoy political reporting with attitude', or, it may be very niche. Podcasts are an excellent way of super-serving narrowcast audiences. For example, traditional UK radio couldn't sustain a programme discussing current media industry issues but *The Guardian's Media Talk* can be downloaded very week. In either case, focus

on unique propositions.

**2. WHAT ARE YOUR BRAND VALUES?** Or, more importantly, how will they translate from print to sound? Not only does this relate to the content and journalism but also important production issues. For example: do you need a consistent voiceover to brand all podcasts; what should the podcast be called; should it have theme music and what tone should the presenters adopt?

**3. WHEN SHOULD YOU PUBLISH?** Be realistic about your frequency of podcasting and deadlines. Podcast users like reliability, in terms of delivery time and quality of product.

**4. BUILD LOYALTY.** Exploit the personal nature of sound broadcasting. Send emails describing new podcasts and ask for feedback. You can set up social network pages for podcast fans to communicate and comment.

**5. IN HOUSE OR INDEPENDENT PRODUCER?** Another crucial, practical concern. Your expertise may already sit in-house. Or you may decide to invest in training existing staff. On the other hand, independent podcast or radio producers with appropriate experience may be the answer. With the latter option, this team will have to be introduced to the newspaper's brand and culture.

**6. WRITING FOR BROADCAST, NOT PRINT.** It may be obvious, but many print journalists new to radio keep writing for the eye and not the ear. Reinforce the key attributes of good broadcast writing.

**7. WHO WILL PRESENT?** Again, great journalists can make great broadcasters but not always! Make wise choices and don't give in to ego.

**8. ACT AS A RADIO STATION** Get respect as a sound broadcaster by networking with your peers. It will ensure you keep up with rivals

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on radio or other multi-media. Attend conferences and join trade bodies to give you leverage and power. The Guardian has done all this.

**9. BRING IT BACK TO ONLINE.** It is the home of a newspaper's audio services, so brand it regularly within your broadcast. Remind consumers that it is the best place to get breaking news or the latest showbiz gossip – whatever it is you are selling. There may also be opportunities to co-promote other platforms within your organization such as "the exclusive interview in tomorrow's newspaper."

**10. BE PATIENT.** New ways of thinking and working involve huge change, so it is best to expect resistance and problems you have never experienced before. If you are prepared, with the right support, it will make the journey much smoother.

