



Podcasts

Songs are only one type of audio file you can listen to on your iPod. Your iPod is also a great device for listening to podcasts—those online audio programs that help you keep up with current news and opinions.

Understanding Podcasts

Despite the name, a podcast doesn't necessarily have anything to do with Apple's iPod. A podcast is essentially a homegrown radio program, distributed over the Internet, that you can play on any portable audio player—iPods included.

Anyone with a microphone and a computer can create her own podcasts. That's because a podcast is nothing more than a digital audio file (typically in MP3 format) posted to the Internet. Most podcasters deliver their content via an RSS feed, which enables users to easily find future podcasts by subscribing to the podcaster's feed. The pod-

casts are then downloaded to the listener's portable audio player and listened to at the listener's convenience.

What kinds of podcasts are out there? It's an interesting world, full of all sorts of basement and garage productions and more professional recordings. Probably the most common form of podcast is the amateur radio show, where the podcaster assembles a mixture of personally selected music and commentary. But, there are also professional podcasts by real radio stations and broadcasters, interviews and exposés, and true audio blogs that consist of running commentary and ravings. The variety is staggering, and the quality level ranges from embarrassingly amateurish to surprisingly professional.

note Many blogs offer a *feed* of their posts, to which users can subscribe. This is an updated list of all new posts; a feed subscription uses Real Simple Syndication (RSS) technology to notify subscribers of all new posts made to that blog.

Finding and Downloading Podcasts from the iTunes Store

Podcasting hit the mainstream in 2005 when Apple released version 4.9 of its iTunes software, which added podcast capability to the iPod. Now you can browse for and subscribe to podcasts directly from iTunes, and then easily sync them to your iPod.

All current iPods and iPod nanos have a Podcasts item on the main menu. This lets you dial up all your stored podcasts, and then play them back in any order, just as you can with music tracks.

Browsing the iTunes Podcast Directory

The easiest way to find podcasts is to use the Podcast Directory in the iTunes Store. Unlike everything else in the iTunes Store, all podcasts are free to download.

To access the Podcast Directory, click iTunes Store in the Source pane of the iTunes software, and then click the Podcasts link. As you can see in Figure 8.1, you can browse or search through the available podcasts, download the ones you like, and subscribe to the ones you want to hear again. Most of the podcasts here are relatively professional, including programs from ABC News, ESPN, and podcast guru Adam Curry.



FIGURE 8.1
Browsing the iTunes Podcast Directory.

When browsing for podcasts (which is probably the best way to get started), you can browse by the following:

- **New Releases.** Today's newest podcasts
- **What's Hot.** The most buzzworthy podcasts on iTunes
- **Staff Favorites.** Some of the favorite podcasts from the iTunes staff
- **Top Podcasts.** iTunes' 30 most popular podcasts
- **Categories.** Arts, Business, Comedy, Games & Hobbies, Government & Organizations, Health, Kids & Family, Music, News & Politics, Religion & Spirituality, Science & Medicine, Society & Culture, Sports & Recreation, Technology, and TV & Film
- **Featured Providers.** ABC News, American Public Media, BBC, BusinessWeek, CBC Radio, CBS News, CNN, Comedy Central, Discovery Networks, ESPN, G4, HBO, Indiefed.com Community, KCRW, Mondo Mini Shows, MTV News, National Geographic, NBC News, The New York Times, NPR, PBS, PRI, Revision3, TPN The Podcast Network, TWiT TV, The Wall Street Journal, VH1, and WNYC
- **Video Podcasts.** Links to video (not audio) podcasts, which we discuss in the "Watching Video Podcasts" section, later in this chapter

In addition, the center portion of the Podcasts page offers quick links to special categories. For example, a recent page had two special sections, one for Macworld Expo coverage and the other for Iraq War coverage.

Of course, you can also search for podcasts as you can search for any item on iTunes. Use either the search box at the upper-right corner of the iTunes window or click the Power Search link (in the Quick Links box) for more advanced searching by podcast title or author.

caution You don't always know what you're getting until you listen to a podcast. That said, podcasts with known explicit language are listed with an "EXPLICIT" icon; those with known nonexplicit language are listed with a "CLEAN" icon.

Downloading and Subscribing to Podcasts

When you find a podcast you like, you can easily download it to your computer, and then transfer it to your iPod. Each podcast "series" has its own page, like the one shown in Figure 8.2. To download a specific episode, just click the Get Episode link. Podcast downloads work just like music downloads, except without the charge to your credit card. (All podcast downloads are free, remember.)



FIGURE 8.2

Viewing information about a podcast series—and individual episodes.

When you find a podcast series that you like, you can have iTunes automatically download all new podcast episodes. Just go to the podcast page and click the Subscribe button. When you subscribe to a podcast, iTunes automatically checks for updates and downloads new episodes to your computer. (By default, iTunes checks for podcast updates once each day.)

tip To view more podcasts from a given author, click the author's name on the podcast page. This displays a new page with all of that author's podcasts listed.

To access all the podcasts you've downloaded, click Podcasts in the Library section of the iTunes Source pane. (If there's a number next to the Podcasts item, that indicates how many new podcasts are available for you to listen to.)

Finding and Subscribing to Other Podcasts on the Web

Even though the iTunes Store offers many thousands of podcasts, that's still a small fraction of all the podcasts available on the Web. Fortunately, Apple still lets you manage non-iTunes podcasts from the iTunes software.

Finding More Podcasts

First things first. Where can you find more podcasts on the Web?

The best way to find more podcasts is to use a podcast directory. Some of the most useful sites are as follows:

- Digital Podcast (www.digitalpodcast.com)
- iPodder (www.ipodder.org)
- Podcast Alley (www.podcastalley.com)
- Podcast Bunker (www.podcastbunker.com)
- Podcast Directory (www.podcastdirectory.com)
- Podcast.net (www.podcast.net)
- Podcasting News Directory (www.podcastingnews.com/forum/links.php)
- Podcasting Station (www.podcasting-station.com)
- PodCastZoom (www.podcastzoom.com)
- Podfeed.net (www.podfeed.net)
- Syndic8 Podcast Directory (www.syndic8.com/podcasts/)
- Yahoo! Podcasts (podcasts.yahoo.com)

You might have to use more than one podcast directory to find any specific podcast; not all directories list all podcasts from all authors.

Subscribing to Other Podcasts

When you find a podcast you like outside of iTunes, it's relatively easy to add a subscription to that podcast to the iTunes software. iTunes will then track that podcast series and automatically download new episodes as they come available.

The easiest way to subscribe to a non-iTunes podcast is to use your web browser to open the page for that specific podcast. Use your mouse to drag the URL for that page onto the Podcasts item in the Library section of the iTunes Source pane. The podcast is now added to your podcast subscription list.

Alternatively, you can select **Advanced > Subscribe to Podcast** in iTunes. This displays the **Subscribe to Podcast** dialog box, shown in Figure 8.3. Enter the URL for the podcast into the URL box, and then click **OK**.

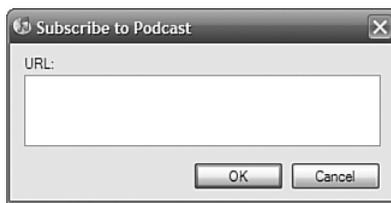


FIGURE 8.3

Subscribing to a non-iTunes podcast.

Playing Podcasts

After you've downloaded a podcast or two, it's time to give them a listen. Read on to learn how.

Listening to—and Managing—Podcasts in iTunes

To listen to podcasts on your computer—and to manage your downloaded podcasts—you use the iTunes software. As you can see in Figure 8.4, all your downloaded podcasts display when you click Podcasts in the Library section of the Source pane. Click the arrow to the left of the podcast title to view all downloaded episodes from a series.

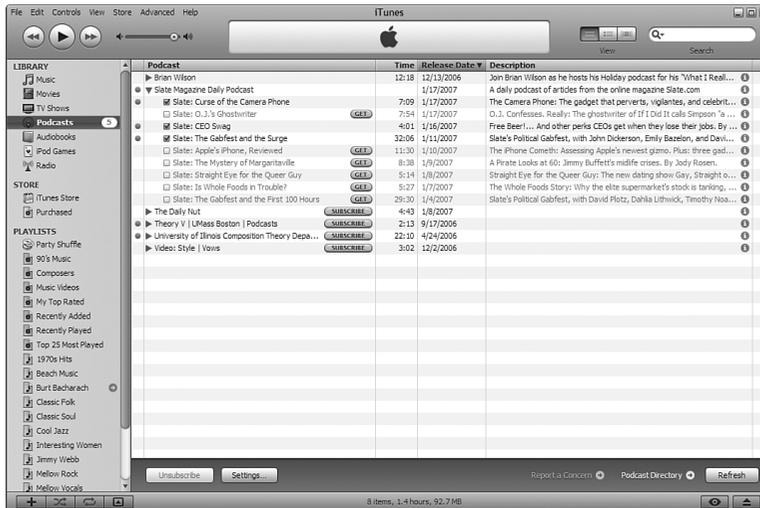


FIGURE 8.4

Viewing—and listening to—downloaded podcasts with the iTunes software.

To play a particular podcast episode, just double-click it (or select it and then click the Play button). Episodes you've not yet played appear with a blue dot to the left of the title. The blue dot disappears when you start playing the podcast—which is a reminder that the episode will be removed from your iPod the next time you sync your iPod to your PC. If you want that episode to remain on your iPod, you have to manually mark it as not yet played, which you do by right-clicking the episode title and selecting Mark as Unplayed.

One of the neat things about how iTunes handles podcasts is how it handles longish episodes. If you can't get through an entire episode in one sitting, iTunes makes it easy to pick up where you left off. When you pause playback of a podcast, iTunes remembers your playback position. Resume playback at your convenience.

Some podcasts come with text notes or information that accompanies each episode. To view the podcast notes, click the *i* icon in the podcast's description column; this displays a notes window, like the one in Figure 8.5.

tip To disable the blue-dot auto-remove feature for a particular podcast series, right-click one of the podcast episodes and select Do Not Auto Delete from the pop-up menu. This will retain all episodes of the podcast series until you manually delete them.

**FIGURE 8.5**

Viewing podcast show notes.

By default, downloaded podcast episodes are stored indefinitely on your computer. As you might suspect, this could rapidly result in an overwhelmingly large podcast library. To change how long podcasts are stored, click the Settings button at the bottom of the Podcasts window to display the iTunes preferences dialog box, and then select the Podcasts tab. From here, pull down the Keep list and make a new selection—All episodes, All unplayed episodes, Most recent episode, or Last *X* episodes.

As previously noted, iTunes searches for new podcast episodes once a day, which is fine for most podcasts. If you subscribe to a podcast that issues new episodes more frequently, however, you can change iTunes' update frequency. Click the Settings button, select the Podcasts tab, and then pull down the Check for New Episodes list and select Every Hour.

Finally, if you get tired of a podcast series and want to unsubscribe, all you have to do is highlight that podcast and click the Unsubscribe button at the bottom of the iTunes window. To delete stored episodes of a podcast, highlight the episode(s) and press the Del key on your computer keyboard.

Listening to Podcasts on Your iPod

On your iPod, you access all stored podcasts by selecting Music > Podcasts.

tip Want to email a podcast episode to a friend? Start by dragging the podcast episode from the iTunes software to your computer desktop. This creates a .pcst file on your desktop for that podcast. You can then attach this file to an email message and send it to whomever you like. If your email recipient has the iTunes software installed, opening the .pcst file will automatically subscribe them to the podcast and download the most recent episode.

Navigate to and select the podcast you want to listen to, and then press the Play button. It's that simple.

As with the iTunes software, your iPod automatically remembers your playback position when you pause or stop playback of a podcast. Return to the podcast at any future time and press Play, and your iPod resumes playback at the point you previously left off.

Watching Video Podcasts

Not all podcasts are audio podcasts. There is now such a thing as a video podcast, which is—as you might suspect—a short podcast-like video broadcast. Video podcasts are typically a bit more professional than audio ones, due simply to the higher production costs of creating videos. Audio podcasts can be created by anybody with a cheap microphone and a computer; video podcasts require a video camera and video recording and editing equipment.

The iTunes Store includes a good selection of video podcasts, located near the bottom of the Podcasts Directory page. You can download and subscribe to video podcasts the same way as you do their audio siblings; downloaded video podcasts are also stored in the Podcasts section of your iTunes library, and automatically transferred to your iPod—assuming you have a video-capable iPod, that is. (Figure 8.6 shows a series page for a typical video podcast.)



FIGURE 8.6

A video podcast, available from the iTunes Store.

To play a video podcast in iTunes, highlight the podcast and click Play. (Or just double-click the podcast title.) This opens a new playback window, as shown in Figure 8.7, which operates like iTunes' other video playback windows.

caution Video podcasts do not play on iPod nanos or shuffles.



FIGURE 8.7

Viewing a video podcast in iTunes.

tip To find other video podcasts, check out PodGuide.TV (www.podguide.tv), a directory of iPod-compatible video podcasts. Click any link to open a page for the selected podcast in iTunes. You can then download individual episodes or subscribe to the entire video podcast series.