Chapter
12

The Juice: A Podcast Aggregator

For those who may not be familiar, podcasts are audio programs, generally provided in a format that is convenient for handheld media players. The name is a play on Apple's popular iPod multimedia player, but podcasts work with any number of compatible devices. You can even play them on your home computer. Because they are portable, however, podcasts are great diversions on trains or while sitting in waiting rooms.

Podcasts can be music programs, news programs, or just some gal talking about whatever floats into her mind at the time. In terms of subject matter, you can probably find a podcast that covers just about any subject imaginable. There are slick, professional podcasts, and there are strictly amateur presentations. In the previous chapter on Audacity, I gave you some tips on joining the legion of podcasters by creating your own audio program.

What generally sets a podcast apart from any other audio program you can download on the Internet is that you can subscribe to podcasts using an RSS aggregator. I introduced you to Internet news feeds using RSS when I covered Firefox and Thunderbird. You could think of podcasts as audio news programs, although news may be the least of it when it comes to podcasts.

When you really start to get into podcasts, you need some way to effectively download and collect them. Chasing down podcasts, looking for new programs, and downloading them can take a frightful amount of time. That's why podcast aggregators are such a great idea. In this chapter, I'm going to cover one of the best podcast aggregators out there.

The Juice on the Juice

For starters, the perfect podcast aggregator would contain its own directory of podcasts categorized into an easy-to-search list of topics. Add to that an easy one-button system to add feeds, a new show scanning feature so you don't have to go looking for the latest shows, and a system of automatic scheduled downloads running in the background, and you've got the makings of a great program. As it turns out, the Juice does all those things.

When you start Juice for the first time, it creates a folder in your My Documents folder called My Received Podcasts. You can override this default by selecting Preferences from the File menu. I'll discuss preferences a little later, but let's start with a little tour first.

The Juice interface has the usual menu bar running along the top offering access to all the program's features. There are four main tabs: Downloads, Subscriptions, Podcast Directory, and Cleanup (see Figure 12-1). You most likely will find the Subscriptions tab selected by default. The larger portion of the interface under this tab is a two-paned view that shows a list of subscribed podcasts in the upper pane. If you click one of these shows, the bottom pane loads the latest episodes for those shows and lists them in the bottom pane.
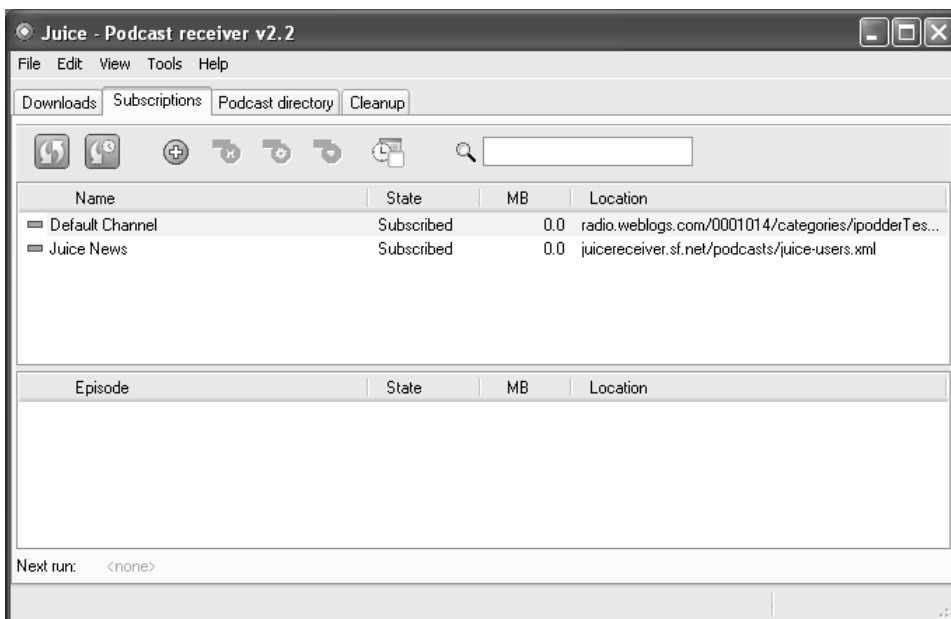
Figure 12–1   The Juice podcast receiver starts with a couple of default podcasts in its subscription list.

> *Note*   A fifth tab labeled Log may also be present. The presence of the Log tab can be turned on or off via Preferences. I'll cover Preferences a little later.

Let's move to the Podcast Directory tab now. You see a list of folders describing various directories and top podcast collections available. Click one of these collections and it downloads the most current list. At any point, you can force a refresh by clicking the Refresh icon on the far left of the icon bar. That's the best way to make sure you are working from a recent list. Click the plus sign beside any of these directories and the directory expands to show you all the programs listed there (see Figure 12-2).
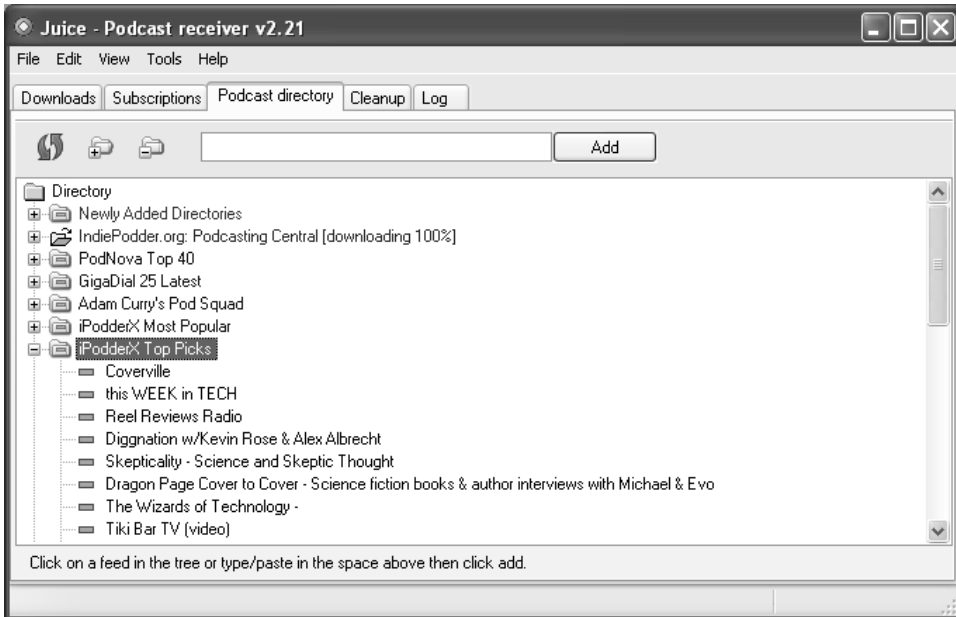
Figure 12–2 No need to go hunting through podcast directories. Juice provides its own, extensive list.

> *Note* As soon as you start downloading content, a new tab, labeled Log, appears. As it sounds, this is a log of the work Juice is doing for you.

Now, let's get back to those podcast directories. Take some time to go through them. Notice that some are organized by popularity, others by the rating of a particular podcast directory service. Others still are listed according to the type of content. Perhaps the most interesting here is the one called Libsyn Podcasts, because it contains a massive list of podcasts.

Subscribing to a Podcast

To subscribe to a podcast, click the title and it appears in the top field to the left of the Add button. Next—you guessed it—click the Add button. If the podcast you want isn't listed here, you can add it manually by clicking Tools on the menu bar and selecting Add a Feed (see Figure 12-3).

Figure 12–3 When you add a feed, a window appears, allowing you to modify some settings on that feed.

The dialog has three tabs: General, Cleanup, and Authentication. The feed's URL is automatically entered for you. The title is filled in for you automatically when the feed is added. Notice the Go to Subscriptions Tab to See This Feed's Episodes check box. If you are adding a lot of feed up front, you may want to uncheck this because it takes you from the directory to the Subscriptions tab.

The Cleanup tab is interesting because it provides a means of automatically cleaning up old episodes. Check the Automatically Delete Episodes More Than check box (see Figure 12-4). This activates a field where you can specify the age of the podcast before it is deleted. The default, upon activation, is 14 days. Think of it as a free maid service for your PC.
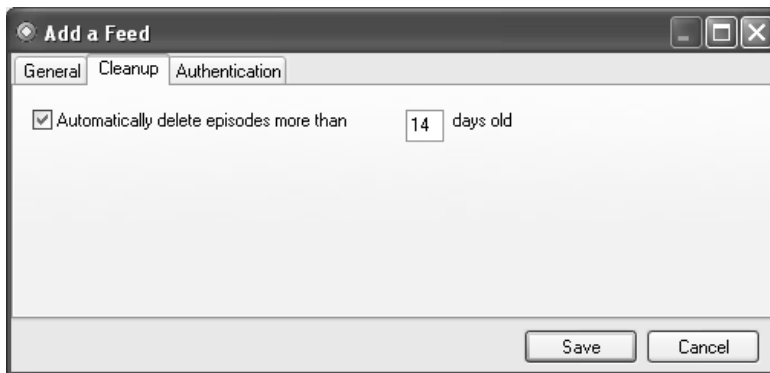

Figure 12–4 No need to worry about cleaning up after yourself. Select the Cleanup tab and tell Juice you want it done automatically.

The Authentication tab is rarely used, but if you subscribe to a podcast that requires you to enter a username and password, this is where you enter this information.

Selecting and Downloading Podcasts

As you subscribe to various podcasts, subfolders with the names of those podcasts are created in your My Received Podcasts folder. For instance, I have folders called Coverville, KFI Tech Guy, and Quirks and Quarks, among others. Each folder holds that particular show's podcasts, so it's a good thing to have lots of disk space. I'll discuss housecleaning shortly.

Let's go back to the Subscriptions tab (see Figure 12-5). A list of all the podcasts to which you have subscribed are in the top half of the main window. Click any of these shows and the bottom pane lists the various episodes, the size of the show, and its location on the Web. Look to the far left next to the episode title and you see a check box. Click this box to flag the episode for download. A little green arrow next to the episode title means it has already been downloaded to your system.
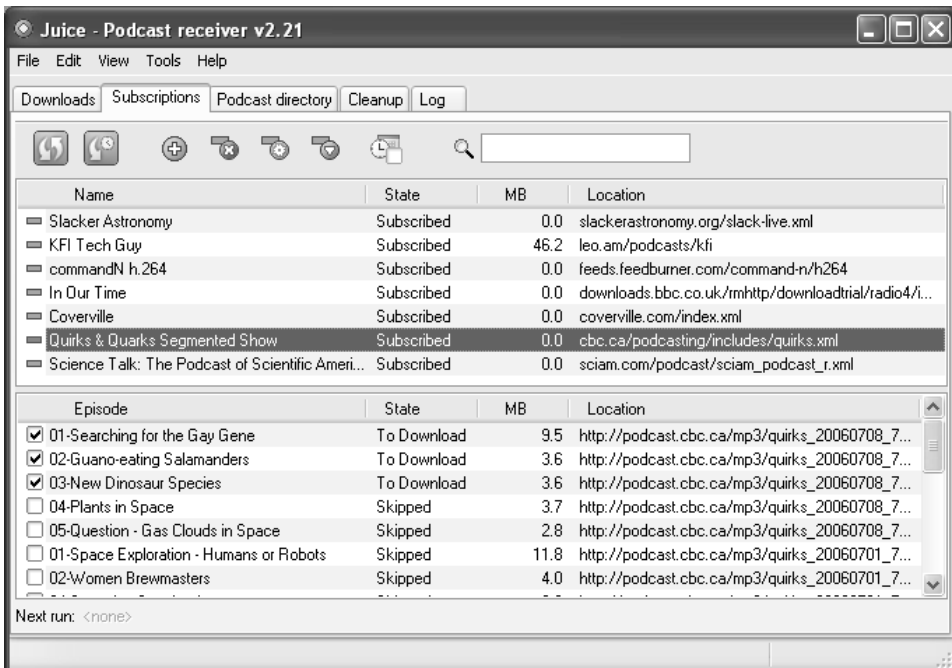

Figure 12–5   *Subscription lists allow you to individually select episodes for download.*

After you have selected the episodes you want, click the first button on the left of the icon bar, the one that says, "Check for New Podcasts," when you pause your mouse cursor over it. The button turns gray and the download of your podcasts begins. To see the progress of those downloads, click the Downloads tab. You see the current state of the download, as well as the speed and percentage completed of the transfer (see Figure 12-6).
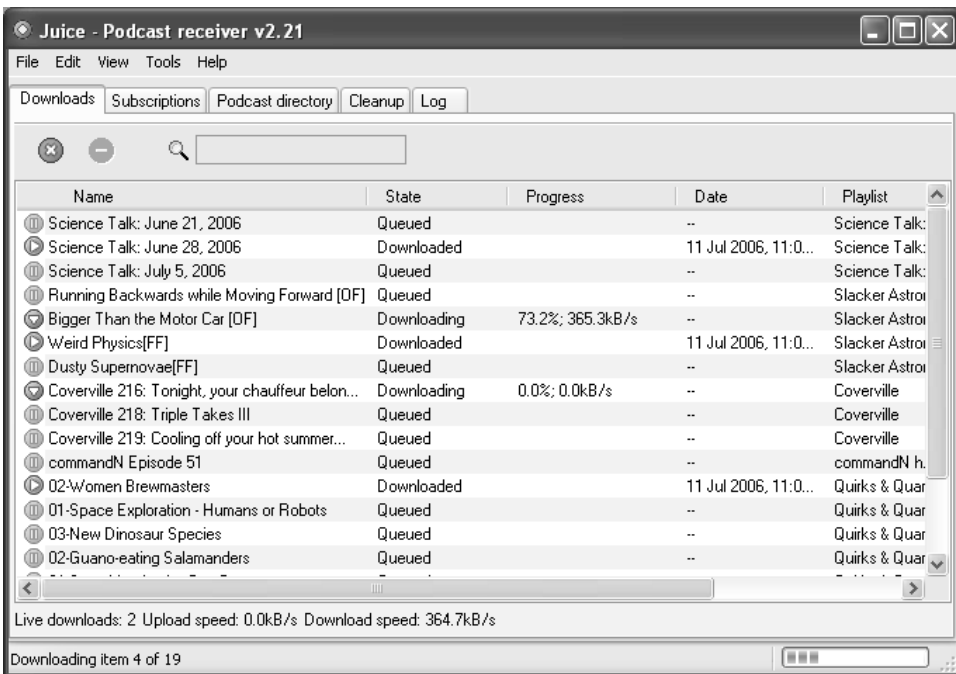

Figure 12–6   As the download progresses, status reports are provided via the Downloads tab.

Finally, we get to the whole point of finding and downloading all these shows, and that's listening to them. Take a look again at that little green arrow to the left of your downloaded episodes (this applies to both the Download and the Subscriptions tab). Either double-click the entry or right-click and select Play Episode in Media Player from the pop-up menu.

By default, Juice uses the iTunes music player, but this is not the only player it supports. The default Microsoft Media Player is supported as is Winamp. To change your player, click File on the menu bar and select Preferences. A multi-

tabbed window appears. (I'll discuss the Preferences dialog a little more shortly.) Select the Player tab, and then click on the radio button to select your favorite player. Looking at Figure 12-7, you'll notice that I switched mine to use Winamp. There is one other choice: to use no player at all.

Figure 12–7   By default, the Juice launches iTunes to play your podcasts, but you can set the configuration to use other players such as WinAmp, as seen here.

Tweaking the Juice

Having just mentioned the Preferences dialog, I feel I should spend just a little more time on it. I had you change the player a moment ago, but there is a lot more to see here. Click File and select Preferences. If you did change the player to something else, the Player tab is selected. Click the General tab and you see a number of start and runtime options (see Figure 12-8).

For the Juice to fold nicely into the panel, you need to click the Continue Running in the Background When I Close the Main Window check box. To keep your new settings, you must click the Save button.
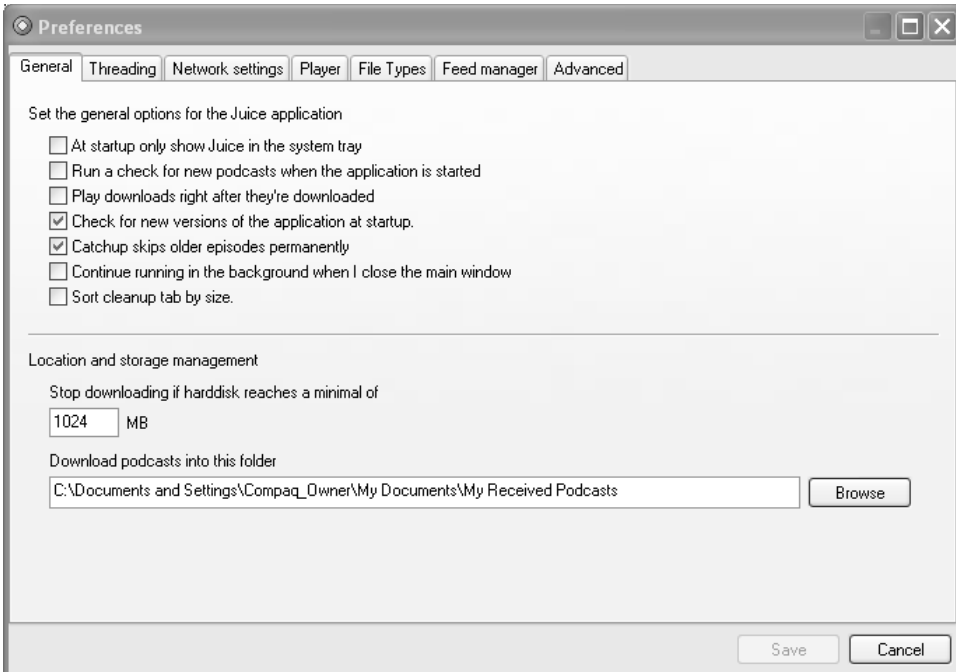
Figure 12–8 The Preferences dialog is worth close examination. There are several settings that will interest you.

There are other settings that are worth looking at as well as tweaking. Under the Threading tab, you may want to change the number of downloads per session, assuming, of course, that your machine or network connection can handle the load. Network Settings are important if you are running behind a proxy server of some kind. I've already covered the Player tab, but there are some iTunes and Winamp specific settings should you choose either of these. The last thing I'll mention here is the Feed Manager tab, where you can enter a URL to synchronize your subscriptions.

Running on Automatic

One of the great things about using Juice is that after you have it set up, it can handle all your podcast needs without you having to lift a finger. Juice swallows down into a nice, lemony applet in your system tray so that the program can keep running out of the way.

This is particularly handy when you consider Juice's scheduling functionality. From the Subscription tab, click the Scheduler button on the icon bar (or click Tools from the menu bar and select Scheduler) to automate your podcast downloads. The Scheduler window appears but the system is not yet running. To activate the Scheduler, click the Enable Scheduler check box (see Figure 12-9).
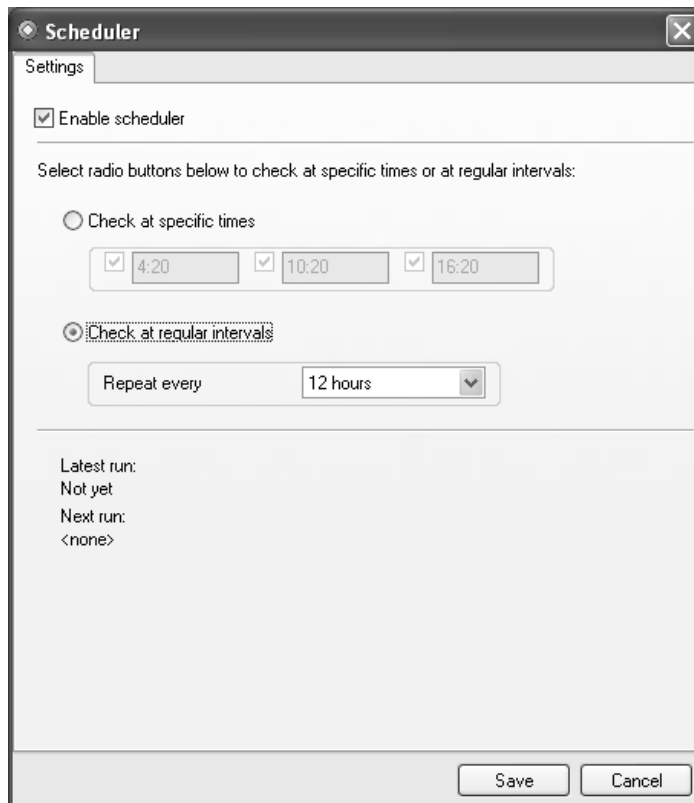

Figure 12–9   By activating the scheduler, Juice will automatically scan for updated podcasts and download them for you unattended.

Automatic updates and downloads to subscribed feeds can be set to run at a specific time of day or at regular intervals throughout the course of the day (e.g., every 12 hours). That way, you don't have to spend time checking up on new episodes. Just let Juice squeeze the fresh podcasts for you.

Cleaning Up

Although you may have set your podcasts for automatic cleanup when you added the feed, it is possible that the sheer number of podcasts on your system may begin taking up more space than you expected. It's time for a little cleanup.

Click the Cleanup tab, and then select one of your feeds from the dropdown list. A list of episodes associated with that feed appears in the lower pane (see Figure 12-10).
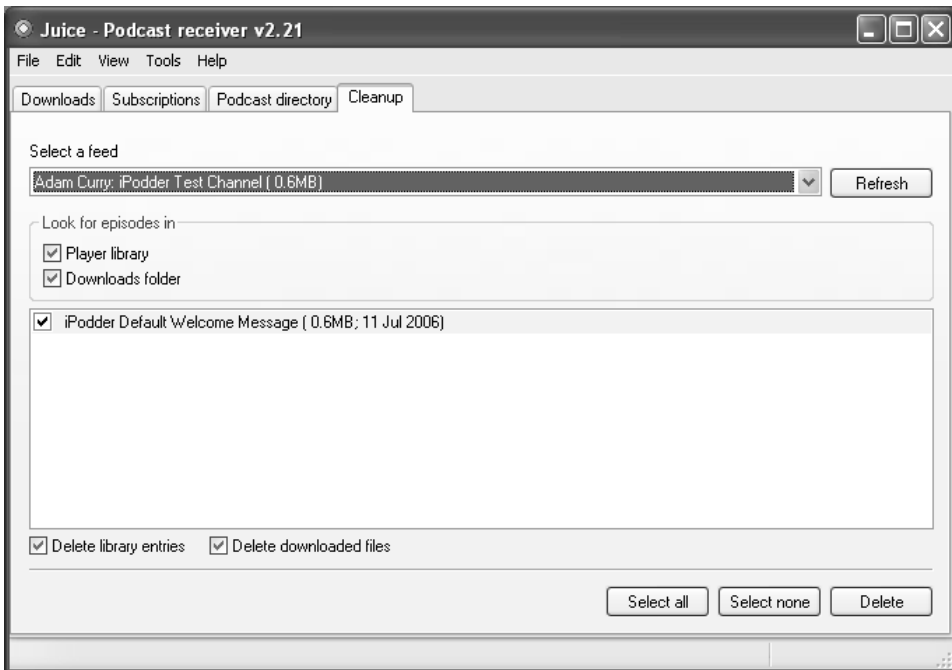

Figure 12–10 From the Cleanup tab, it's easy to select and clean up old podcasts. Select all or choose from individual episodes.

Select the episodes individually or click the Select All button to delete everything. When you are ready, click Delete.

Locating More Podcasts

The built-in directory of podcasts is a nice place to start, but you may find yourself asking for more as the podcast madness takes hold. As I suggested earlier, you can find links to podcasts on a number of sites, then enter them into your subscription list manually. Still, there is something very nice about a large directory, organized by category. On that note, take a look at the following list and you'll find tons of podcasts covering every imaginable subject.

Indiepodder.org	`http://www.ipodder.org/`
Podcast.net	`http://www.podcast.net/`
PodcastDirectory.com	`http://www.podcastdirectory.com/`
Podfeed.net	`http://podfeed.net/`
Yahoo! Podcast Directory	`http://podcasts.yahoo.com/`

All are organized by subject area and most feature a keyword search to help you find exactly what you are looking for. Enjoy!

Resources

Juice
   http://juicereceiver.sourceforge.net
iTunes Music Player
   http://www.apple.com/itunes/
Winamp
   http://www.winamp.com