

FORETHOUGHT TRAINING

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## Employees Get an Earful

by Anders Gronstedt

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Randall Gressett, an EMC technology executive, uses his video iPod to catch up on company news while flying home from meetings with clients. “After a long day, it’s nice to watch a video instead of reading some white paper or going to headquarters for a training session,” he says. He’s not alone: Worldwide, thousands of sales representatives for the data storage giant are watching five-minute whiteboarding sessions from EMC experts on their video iPods or listening to audio podcasts during their morning commutes.

Portable media players, including video-enabled phones, have rapidly become mainstream tools for internal business communications. EMC cranks out five to ten internal audio podcasts and two to three vodcasts (video podcasts) every week; IBM employees, who can choose from more than 5,000 podcast “episodes,” have surpassed 2 million downloads. National Semiconductor recently equipped all of its 8,500 employees with top-of-the-line video iPods at a cost of \$2.5 million. “The loudest demand is coming from our international constituencies,” says Jan Hellie, a senior manager with National Semiconductor. “If our employees in Asia had their way, everything would be delivered on the mobile device.”

At companies that use internal podcasting

or vodcasting, employees don’t have to stop working to learn, and they can make productive use of their downtime. People can listen while driving to client meetings or watch while waiting in airports. For those who don’t mind blurring the line between free time and work, podcasts enable constructive intrusions into commuting, walking the dog, or running on the treadmill. As part of the training for engineers who are learning to service the company’s largest full-color production machine, Xerox offers instruction via video iPods.

Gressett says there has been a decisive shift: Training is now going to the employees, rather than the other way around. “I want all my product marketing training delivered with podcasting,” he says. “I don’t want to fly in for another training session unless it’s absolutely necessary.”

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## Getting started in internal podcasting.

- **If you’re concerned about the initial investment, start small.** Podcasts can be recorded and produced with free software. For better quality, they can be developed by off-site professionals and recorded in a sound studio.
- **Pilot the initiative with the audience that will be most receptive**—for example, field reps.
- **Promote the podcast idea to employees** (just because you’ve built it doesn’t mean they’ll come).
- **Use a format employees will enjoy.** Most successful podcasts sound more like radio shows than like classes.
- **Keep the episodes short.** Research by EMC shows that 15 minutes is ideal for podcasts, whereas vodcasts are typically around five minutes.
- **Encourage feedback.** Most successful podcasts live on a social platform such as an internal blog.
- **Encourage all employees to produce their own shows,** turning podcasting into a platform for collaboration, community building, and knowledge management.

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